



Saint Josemaria Escriva

Founder of Opus Dei

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The Early Days of Opus Dei in Boston as Recalled by the First Generation (1946-1956)

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This is a documentary account of the first trips members of Opus Dei made to Boston and Cambridge, Mass. (U.S.) and the subsequent development of the apostolate there, primarily among students and professors at Harvard University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology. It covers the period between 1946 and 1956. The primary sources are personal recollections of those who met the Work there. These are supplemented by relevant material from Opus Dei's internal publications and selected secondary works which provide the necessary cultural, intellectual, and religious context. It is an extract from an article first published in [Studia et Documenta, Journal of the Saint Josemaría Escrivá Historical Institute](#), nº. 1, 2007.

The Charles River, scene of recreational and competitive rowing, sculling, and sailing, separates the city of Boston, Massachusetts, from that of Cambridge, a community first settled at the same time as Boston in 1630. It was named for Cambridge, England, where its Puritan founders had studied. In 1950, the population of 120,000 ranged from distinguished professors to recent immigrants and included thousands of international students. Some of those professors and students would play a prominent role in starting Opus Dei centers in the United States and other countries.

The city of Boston was a logical place to “put out into the deep” soon after Opus Dei's approval by the Church made it feasible to expand the apostolate to North America. José María González Barredo (Joseph, as he was known in the United States), was the first of Opus Dei's members to arrive in the Boston, in 1946, and Opus Dei's apostolate first started stably in Boston in 1952. Besides Harvard and Massachusetts Institute of Technology (M.I.T.), eighty more colleges and

universities attract thousands of students from throughout the United States and the world to metropolitan Boston—all the more reason, as Bishop del Portillo later observed, for Opus Dei to work with the young people there. Father Joseph Múzquiz was the first priest of Opus Dei to celebrate Mass in Boston's first center (Trimount House, Christmas Eve, 1953).

The first steps—1946-53

Joseph Barredo

Joseph Barredo arrived in the United States in March 1946. He had obtained a three-year fellowship in theoretical physics granted by the *Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* in Spain, and St. Josemaría had advised him to study in the United States. One of the first people he met after arriving was historian Carlton J.H. Hayes, former U.S. Ambassador to Spain, who alerted him to the Boston area's superior research facilities in his field.

Barredo followed this advice and made a trip to Harvard and M.I.T. He was warmly received and given a research position in the M.I.T. physics department, where he spent the remainder of the spring and summer, residing at Graduate House. Barredo introduced himself to archdiocesan authorities, beginning with the secretary of Archbishop Richard Cushing, Msgr. John J. Wright, who would soon become Auxiliary Bishop (June 1947). What Barredo told Msgr. Wright about Opus Dei struck a chord with him, and the future Cardinal became a loyal friend and supporter of the apostolate in the United States.

In April, 1946 Barredo went to St. Benedict Center, located next to Harvard Square, to meet Father Leonard Feeney, S.J. who at the time had a large following among Catholic students and professors, and was famous for making converts. Through Father Feeney Barredo met Daniel Sargent, a well-known Catholic biographer and lecturer, who took a keen interest in Opus Dei and became one of its earliest friends and benefactors in the U.S. Father Feeney invited Barredo to speak about Isidoro Zorzano (1902-1943), one of the first members of Opus Dei, in the St. Benedict Center's lecture series. This was an occasion to meet Harvard faculty members and students, and to distribute prayer cards for private devotion of Zorzano, whose cause of canonization was about to be introduced in Madrid. Barredo had known Zorzano in the early years of Opus Dei.

On April 18, 1948 Barredo welcomed Don Pedro Casciaro and two companions who had been sent to the U.S. by St. Josemaría to prepare the ground for Opus Dei's permanent apostolate in North America. Barredo accompanied them on some of their visits to various cities, including Boston.

Father Joseph Múzquiz

Fr. José Luis, or Joseph, Múzquiz was the next member of Opus Dei to visit Boston, just a few days after Barredo met him and Salvador Ferigle (known in the United States as Sal, and later Father Sal) upon their arrival in New York, Feb. 17, 1949. While Ferigle remained in New York City, Barredo accompanied Father Múzquiz to Boston, where they spent two days calling on people Barredo had previously met, including Bishop Wright.

On numerous subsequent trips to Boston, Father Múzquiz continued to develop and broaden those initial contacts, assist with the apostolate, and become acquainted with the city, its universities, their students and professors. These trips were part of many journeys to meet people and deepen friendships wherever the apostolate would eventually spread.

The Pioneers

When the next members of Opus Dei arrived from Spain to take up residence in Boston at the beginning of 1952, a good number of people had already learned of the Work and were hoping to see it open a center in Boston. Dr. Santiago Polo (who soon became known as Jim) was the first “permanent settler”. He had received a two-year post-doctoral appointment to do research in spectroscopy at Harvard.

A few months later, Luis Garrido (who would be known as Louie) arrived from Spain to study for a doctorate in physics at Harvard. Garrido and Polo rented an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, just across the Charles River from Cambridge. By then, John Loria, a married graduate student at M.I.T., had made friends with Polo, and helped find furnishings for the apartment. Loria was intrigued by how cheerfully these newcomers reacted to the unfamiliar environment. Among other things, “they had very little to eat. Once when I went shopping with Louie, he bought only two large jars of marmalade; later I learned that bread and marmalade was their staple diet.” They were on a limited budget because they were sending as much of their stipends as possible to help relieve the financial needs in Rome where construction of Opus Dei’s international headquarters was under way.

By fall 1952 Polo and Garrido had gotten to know several Harvard students, including Bill Stetson, a junior in pre-law, and Bob Bucciarelli, a first-year history student. Bucciarelli liked to talk with Polo and sometimes visited him in his lab.

Meanwhile, Loria was continuing to meet regularly with Garrido and Polo at their

apartment and in his home. Loria credits his wife Maria, whom he had met on active duty in the Philippines, with having kindled in him a new commitment to practice the faith, thus laying the groundwork for what was to come. He found in his new friends' simple, ordinary path to sanctity exactly what he had been searching for. He said later, "I had a strong feeling that this was the answer to my search... Everything Jim said about Opus Dei seemed so clear and obvious... I was already going to daily Mass, but something was missing—an overall plan for my spiritual life. My wife and I had often spoken about the need for spiritual direction for lay people... It was Our Lady who heard these pleas and answered them."

The Lorias had made their home in Cambridge shortly after he returned from military service in 1947 to complete his program in aeronautical engineering at M.I.T. (B.S., 1950; M.S., 1952). Their third child was on the way. One day in 1953, Loria asked Polo how many supernumerary members there were in the United States. "You would be the first one", Polo responded. By then, Loria had met Father Múzquiz on one of his trips and was encouraged to pursue his formation. A few months later Loria decided to ask for admission to Opus Dei.

The First Residence

Polo and Garrido, assisted by John and Maria Loria, had begun sometime in 1952 to look for a suitable building for a hall of residence for students, but had made little progress, primarily for lack of money. The arrival in Boston of Fr. Guillermo Porras Muñoz, a recently ordained (1951) Mexican member of Opus Dei known in the United States as Father Bill, triggered a series of rapid steps that would lead to the opening of the first center of Opus Dei in the city.

Father Porras contacted Sol Rosenblatt, a Jewish attorney with a warm spot in his heart for Hispanic culture; Father Múzquiz had met him on an earlier trip to New York. In the course of that meeting—the start of a long friendship with Opus Dei—Rosenblatt had offered to be of any help he could.

Father Porras phoned Rosenblatt to ask whether he knew anyone who might be willing to provide a second mortgage in order to buy a house. Rosenblatt asked the obvious question: "How much money do you have to start with?" One can imagine his astonishment on hearing the young priest's reply: "About a hundred dollars." But when Rosenblatt responded: "Father, you can't buy a house for a hundred dollars", Porras retorted: "That's why we need a second mortgage." Recalling Father Múzquiz's similar optimism and daring, and deciding that Opus Dei must really be a work of God if it operated on faith like that, the attorney put Father Porras in touch with a Boston colleague, Mrs. Louise Day Hicks, who might

be able to help.

Mrs. Hicks, who belonged to an Irish Catholic family, was well connected and inclined to assist people in need. She met with Father Porras, was impressed by his seriousness and sincerity and by the importance of his mission, and put him in touch with the chancellor of the Archdiocese, Msgr. Walter Murphy, who the very next day sent a friend of his, Mildred Baird, a realtor, to meet with Father Porras. Miss Baird, too, was ready to help this idealistic young priest who wanted to bring a Catholic presence to the secular life of the community and its universities. She was undaunted by the fact that the members of Opus Dei had so little money. It was enough to see their intentions and to know that they had come with the blessings of the Archbishop.

In late November, Baird showed Father Porras two connected town houses at 22 and 24 Marlborough St., well situated in the Back Bay a short distance from the Public Garden and just across the Charles River from Cambridge and M.I.T. Members of Opus Dei had looked at this property earlier but rejected it as too expensive. Now however, Baird herself offered to donate her commission on the sale as part of the down payment, and Msgr. Murphy provided the rest of it. With that, the bank mortgage arranged by Rosenblatt, and a second mortgage from Mrs. Hicks, they were able to purchase the adjoining houses in December 1953.

This first center of Opus Dei in Boston would be called Trimount House. It comprised two 5-storey brownstones with basements that had been in use as a boarding house. The 34 rooms and 15 baths were fully furnished, although many furnishings were so dilapidated they had to be discarded. The first floor had high ceilings, and a long, broad staircase led to the second floor landing that opened into what would become the oratory in front and the study room in back.

The First Mass

Boston's Archbishop, Richard J. Cushing, was "enthusiastic about the project and wrote to say that he saw a 'real need' for the apostolate of the Work and wanted to bless the house and say the first Mass." That ceremony was not to take place until things were better settled—in October 1954, after the oratory was properly installed.

Holy Mass was celebrated for the first time in Trimount House on Christmas Eve, 1953 by Father Múzquiz, who traveled from Chicago for the occasion. It took place in the study room and was attended by several former residents of the boarding house who had stayed on, students from four universities, and early friends and benefactors, some of whom provided sacred vessels and vestments.

The universities represented were Harvard, M.I.T., Boston University, and Tufts University Medical College. As a reredos, John Loria's sister-in-law, Joan Loria, painted a large copy of a classical painting of the Flight into Egypt.

Father Porrás's observations are reported in a written account, which concludes: "Some new fellows are coming around, and the apostolate increases day by day as we are able to give them the attention they deserve. From now on, our work... will be more stable. Among those who are closest, we are thinking we can start days of recollection. We have spoken with them, and soon they will form a select group... It's a great feeling to be getting started in the city of Boston, although we were already here for some time. Trimount House is a great step forward in the apostolate—made possible by everyone's prayers. It won't be long before you hear more news from us, and it will fill you with joy to see how things are developing in the old capital on the three hills".

Getting organized—1954

Trimount House

Acquiring the house was a major step forward, but much remained to be done both to refurbish it and to organize the apostolic activities. José Manuel Barturen (first known in the U.S. as Mel and later as Manolo) arrived from Spain early in 1954 to serve as director. About the same time, Dick Rieman arrived from Chicago to help put the house in order and meet students. A recent graduate of DePaul University and a Navy veteran, Rieman had become the first member of Opus Dei in the United States back in 1950. After six months in Boston, he moved on to Rome to spend three years in Opus Dei's international center of formation, the Roman College of the Holy Cross. After his ordination in 1958 he returned to Trimount as "Father Dick", the second chaplain of the residence. It was the beginning of his long and continuing association with the apostolate in Boston.

It was beyond their means to hire professional labor, except for the most indispensable tasks such as plumbing. To do most of the work, the residents and their friends had to acquire new skills—restoring and repairing used furniture, masonry, painting, and varnishing. Throughout the spring of 1954, Barturen, Father Porrás, Garrido, Polo, and Loria put a number of helpers to work. These included several Harvard students, among them Bucciarelli and Stetson.

The remodeling was well under way by late spring, but greatly hampered, as usual, by lack of money. Fund raising was a high priority. Many people were invited to visit the residence, in the hope that they would become interested enough to help financially. In April a prestigious Boston engineer introduced more

than a dozen business associates to Trimount and encouraged them to help. They gathered in the sparsely furnished living room, shared a meal in the dining room, and before an informal get-together were given a tour of the house. Such “get-acquainted” sessions were repeated several times that year with a growing number of friends and benefactors.

Sometimes help came from entirely unexpected quarters, apparently chance acquaintances from whom they had no reason to expect help. They referred to these people as “angels”. One owned a plumbing company. Contacted for assistance in stopping leaks, he replaced defective bathroom fixtures at his own expense. Another was the president of an advertising company that maintained billboards along highways and on buildings. When they phoned him he promised to send painters, but then a late August hurricane damaged 340 billboards they had to repair or replace. Nevertheless, three African-American painters volunteered to help at night after their regular hours.

A major source of support was a “ladies’ auxiliary” that formed under the enthusiastic leadership of Mrs. Helen McManus and Mrs. Jim Fitzgerald; eventually it had about forty members, some well known in the city. Among them were those who had found the house and begun furnishing it—Miss Baird and Mrs. Hicks. Bishop Wright’s mother was also among them, and lived out her days as an active cooperator. Each member asked friends for \$50 contributions (the equivalent of \$500 today). One of them approached the owner of a factory and several lumber-yards in Boston. She was a widow supporting the education of ten nieces and nephews, but she generously agreed to make a large contribution for the oratories and sent over an adviser on chapel installations (Mr. Hayes).

Virginia Paine and several other ladies contacted the priests who supplied vestments for Mass and Benediction, sacred vessels, altars and benches. These priests became lifelong friends of Opus Dei: Msgrs. Murphy, Murray, Lawrence Riley, and Thomas Riley. Msgr. Murphy was chancellor, and Msgr. Thomas Riley rector of St. John’s Seminary (Both Thomas and Lawrence Riley subsequently became auxiliary bishops).

Spiritual activities had begun while remodeling was still in progress. A day of recollection took place on Sunday Feb. 7, 1954 for residents and their friends and continued thereafter each month. In midyear, the first American edition of St. Josemaría’s classic *The Way* appeared and immediately became an important resource. Father Múzquiz was the chief translator, and William Doyle Gilligan, first director of Scepter Press, saw it through publication. This first book of St. Josemaría to become available in English was the “primer” of the spirit of Opus

Dei for the young Americans who came into contact with the Work in the early years. A corrected second printing was published in 1956.

Monthly evenings of recollection for married men began in September for people already in touch with the Work. One of the participants was Jacques Bonneville, a graduate of McGill University in Montreal who had come to M.I.T. from Quebec in September 1950 with his wife and young children for doctoral studies in mechanical engineering. “I first learned of Opus Dei when Father Múzquiz gave a talk at M.I.T.’s Newman Club in 1953. A friend who accompanied me, Roger Langlois, spoke for me as well when he commented, ‘I could go for this if I weren’t already married’. I was set straight on that score when I met John Loria in 1954. He invited me to the evening of recollection where I met Father Bill Porras. He was always cheerful, and had a fine sense of humor.”

The Official Opening

The formal beginning of the apostolate in Boston took place on October 19, 1954 when Trimount House was inaugurated and the Blessed Sacrament reserved in the oratory. The events of that day were reported in a written report.

The account is worth reproducing at length: “Opening day had been anticipated with great eagerness. Just a few hours earlier, the house seemed to be in complete disarray. But when the actual moment came, everything was sparkling. The preparation had occupied us for months, but on October 18 a thousand details still awaited attention—even in the oratory, as we moved the altar forward in order to hang a drapery behind the reredos [in the bay window of the former ballroom]. A little later in the day the benches arrived, and a couple of men laid the carpet. A seat and a kneeler for the Archbishop were placed on the Gospel side... Another kneeler was placed on the Epistle side for the Counselor [Father Múzquiz] who came from Chicago to be with us. Carnations and roses graced the oratory, living room, and library—the gift of a Jewish florist. The oratory was resplendent. Above the altar shone our ivory 15th-century Gothic triptych—a gift of Daniel Sargent, one of our first cooperators. He had received it from the previous Archbishop, Cardinal O’Connell, who had received it in his turn from a member of the Spanish royal family. On the upper part, in gold letters outlined in crimson, had been added: “*Sancta Maria*” [Holy Mary] and on the sides “*Spes Nostra, Sedes Sapientiae*” [Our Hope, Seat of Wisdom]”.

The Archbishop had been looking forward to this occasion ever since the house was first acquired. As he was not feeling well, it took a special effort for him to celebrate this Mass for Trimount’s friends and benefactors, especially the ladies’ auxiliary. The doors leading to the hallway were opened, and from there residents

and students attending spiritual activities at Trimount sang the Mass responses.

At the end of Mass, the Archbishop said: “I met Opus Dei in Spain some years ago, in the residence in Santiago de Compostela. I was so impressed that I began to foster a hope that Opus Dei would come to Boston. The reality we see here only increases that hope; it is just a beginning.” Archbishop Cushing went on to speak of the country’s need for a Catholic culture and said to those present, some of them his personal friends: “There is a tremendous urgency for the Work here in America. I am very grateful for the help you have given, and I expect you will continue helping.”

The contemporary account continues: “After Mass we went to the dining room for breakfast. The Archbishop kept speaking of the great mission Opus Dei has begun in the United States. In the afternoon there was an open house for 300 to 400 guests—including officials of the archdiocese and the city. The ladies’ auxiliary arranged everything: the table with its elegant tablecloth, and as a centerpiece an antique silver vase filled with red roses. One of the ladies brought a crystal bowl and encouraged her friends to leave donations; eventually everyone made a contribution. The residents guided our friends through the house in small groups amidst many compliments. That day everyone was drawn closer to the Work. For many days we received phone calls and visits from people wanting to donate articles for the various rooms. One of the callers was Msgr. [Walter] Murphy: “The chalice Mrs. McManus gave you needs a rich ciborium in the same style. Tell me the price; I want it to be in my name.” A retired professor offered books for the library. An article with photos appeared in the press. And so our residence has officially opened with residents from five universities. One of the visitors spoke for all of us when she told her young son, ‘I want you to remember this day well because one day perhaps you will also live in this house when you are older and love God more.’ ”

A New Chaplain for Harvard

In the course of Trimount’s inaugural reception, Archbishop Cushing appointed Father Porras chaplain of Harvard’s Catholic Club. At the time, Harvard had about 400 Catholics among its approximately 4400 undergraduates. Their spiritual care was entrusted to a Catholic Club, Harvard’s equivalent of the Newman Clubs that exist on the campuses of most secular universities in the United States. Several influential Catholics, including Mrs. McManus and Mrs. Fitzgerald had previously observed to the Archbishop that Father Porras would make a good chaplain. Upon the agreement of Father Porras, the Archbishop made the appointment on the spot.

Father Porras lost no time beginning his duties as Harvard's Catholic chaplain, although he had no office on campus at first. He also increased his efforts to acquaint himself with the University. At the December meeting of the Club's officers he helped them lay plans for the new academic year. Among other things it was decided to begin a monthly day of recollection at Trimount, separate from the scheduled activities of the house.

During the chaplaincy of Father Porras, Catholic culture flourished more than at any other time in Harvard's long history; Catholic students in the fifties were less on the defensive than previously, and keen to nourish and fortify their fellow-Catholics in their faith. Father Porras linked student success to the quality of their formation. As everywhere, he observed, students who come to Harvard with poor formation "are influenced by the environment instead of being an influence on it." The solution was to make solid formation more accessible and attractive through the Club's chaplaincy and programs.

Developing the apostolate—1955

The Harvard Front

The pace of the apostolate quickened after the official inauguration of Trimount House, thanks in part to a recently published brochure. The number of residents increased, and each day brought some new development. One day a lady came to the door with \$15 in coins. Her husband (probably John Loria or Jacques Bonneville) had helped to work on the house during the renovation. When their small children and playmates heard about the lack of money to pay workers, they decided to help out by skipping candy bars and saving the money.

In the opening months of 1955 the apostolate was getting into full swing. The few members of the Work began organizing seminars on different topics of spiritual as well as intellectual interest for the members of the Catholic Club. In addition to their intrinsic value, the seminars offered one more occasion to get to know other students and to build friendships. A number of those initially contacted in this way began joining members of the Work on excursions and going to Trimount for the Saturday meditations and get-togethers, as well as days of recollection one Sunday a month. In many cases, they found themselves attracted by the family atmosphere of the residence and by the simple, unpretentious friendship they observed among the residents.

Among the Catholic Club's spring activities, Father Porras inaugurated a weekend retreat during Lent at Campion Hall, North Andover, Mass. Among the forty students who attended was Michael Curtin, a sophomore in physics from southern California. Shortly afterwards, he recognized this as an extraordinary opportunity

to begin speaking with a priest about the direction of his studies and his life. He began attending the family and spiritual activities at Trimount, and a little before the semester ended, he became the first Harvard student to ask for admission as a numerary member of Opus Dei.

As the spring semester drew to a close, students began reserving rooms at Trimount for the following school year, including some from other universities where they were Newman Club leaders. On his application, one of them wrote: “We need a solid interior life in order to raise the tone of our club.”

On Two Fronts

A “two-front” effort got under way that fall to provide students with challenging opportunities for intellectual formation. It also aimed to increase their awareness of notable achievements by Catholic laymen in several fields of endeavor—something many of the faithful were unaware of at the time. One front, a Professional Orientation Course in the residence, was aimed at bright secondary students in Boston schools; the other front was a series of colloquia on the Harvard campus organized by the Catholic Club to supplement its lecture series.

The first front opened at Trimount with a prestigious Harvard professor who surprised the students with his clear ideas and sound judgment, and even more when he remained to pray the Rosary with them. At the Catholic Club, which had often sponsored talks by priests, the surprise was in listening to prominent lay professors. The first speaker was Dr. Heffernan from Tufts University, who spoke on “Doctors and Dogmas”—an exposé of the widespread campaign to promote birth control under way in the United States at that time.

Fruition and promise—1956

An Apartment in Cambridge

The distance of Trimount House from the Harvard campus was becoming an obstacle to regular contact with many Harvard students whose busy lives did not permit them to get to the residence regularly by subway. Someone suggested renting a small apartment in the neighborhood of the campus that could provide a base for the students. They found an apartment on the second floor of a residential hotel, the Ambassador, at 1737 Cambridge St., very near the Harvard campus. It had a living room, and two bedrooms.

A contemporary account describes the first days in this new location, which would play a major role in the flurry of vocations about to take place during spring semester: “On the first day, its living room and two study rooms were nearly

empty— a single table and several chairs. We obtained another table and eight [captain's] chairs from the University at a reasonable price. In spite of these rudimentary conditions, we wanted to begin using the apartment right away when classes resumed after the holidays. As has always happened, we decided to begin with the little we had; the rest would come later as the apostolate grew. Our expectation was not disappointed. When the apartment still lacked nearly everything, the Lord sent what we most wanted"—people.

Little by little, students began to assemble in larger numbers for evening study sessions. One of them, George Rossman, describes the routine as it developed during the semester: "People were given a key to come and go. On weekdays we got good crowds studying there. When the reading period came in May, the place was packed every night. We would take a prayer break for fifteen minutes at 9 p.m. During that time, Father Porras would make a brief comment on some points in *The Way*, read at intervals. This was followed by a short Coke break, and then back to the books. Father Porras usually received people in the other room. It was amazingly simple, but so effective.

Rev. John P. Debicki remembers: "The apartment was convenient to visit because it had a kind of private entrance—a stairway right off the street. Father Bill used one of the rooms many evenings to talk with our friends; when he wasn't there, Louie used it. When it was free, we could use it for group study projects." "The study room was narrow, with room only for the table and four chairs on each side. If someone got up, everybody else had to move to let him out. That was an incentive to keep working until the break."

Besides activities at the apartment, Father Porras continued to celebrate the first Friday Masses in Phillips Brooks, and the Catholic Club continued to sponsor lectures. In the spring semester, the first speaker was John T. Noonan, a prominent attorney and future law professor and judge. Then came Father Martin D'Arcy SJ, whose series on modern philosophers was exceptionally well attended. Dorothy Day followed with a talk on her Catholic Worker Movement. Bishop Wright lectured and also addressed the club's Communion breakfast.

Dr. Schmitt recalls a "memorable (and historic)" spring reception at Phillips Brooks House organized by Father Porras as club chaplain for Archbishop Cushing and Nathan Marsh Pusey, President of Harvard. It was the first time a Harvard president had met an archbishop of Boston.

The "Explosion" of the Apostolate

Bob Bucciarelli had been friends with Carl Schmitt since Carl returned to Harvard

in the fall of 1954. During the following academic year, Bucciarelli turned to him for help with his senior thesis in history. In late January 1956, Schmitt accompanied Bucciarelli to Trimount for dinner and get-together. “On that first visit I wasn’t impressed by the ‘non-Harvard’ style of the residents... But when Louie took me aside to explain Opus Dei, I was completely taken by what he said; it was exactly what our times needed and completely in line with everything I believed in and hoped for. I learned of plans for the apartment when Louie and Peter drove Bob and me back to Harvard. I was reluctant at first when they asked me to help select it. But this enabled them to explain its purpose more fully. What was going through my mind was ‘holy envy’ that these guys were actually doing such a thing with holy conviction and determination. Unlike my previous retreats, when this one ended, I was eager to start living what it had been about. In place of the subtle pessimism of previous retreats, here was a new optimism and confidence. I immediately looked for Bob to inform him of my enthusiasm, and the same day he told me Louie wanted to speak to me. The next day, February 22, I went to see him in the new apartment—the very day the rent started. By then it had a foldout sofa bed; there we sat as Louie put the question [of my vocation as a numerary member of Opus Dei]... I resisted (I was going with a girl at the time)... [but eventually] I said OK. The only writing surface was the small glass table at the base of a lamp. As it was close to the floor, I had to kneel in order to use it. We drove over to Trimount, where I spoke to Peter and stayed overnight. In a day or so I informed my girl and kissed her goodbye when she responded, “Any good Catholic girl knows very well that she has one Rival that she must yield to.”

Less than a week later, the next person to request admission as a numerary member was Bucciarelli himself. He attended a retreat given by Father Cormac Burke at the Passionist retreat house in Brighton. During the retreat, he spoke with Fr. Burke about becoming a numerary member, and did so on the last day of February.

About the same time, Schmitt wrote to his younger brother, Chris, a graduate of Syracuse University (where he had studied geography), now back home in Connecticut following a stint in the Army. “I had been encouraging Chris to begin a graduate program in cartography (his main interest) at the University of Wisconsin, where Randall House, an Opus Dei student residence, had just opened. But as I planned to spend the Easter break at Trimount, I invited him to come and spend the week with me there. He did, and after only a few days—on [March 25], Palm Sunday—decided to join the Work. He wrote our parents that he was going to stay a while and look for a job in Boston”.

The next person to join Opus Dei was John Debicki, a Harvard freshman.

Bucciarelli “met John one morning after Mass at St. Paul’s. He lived in Wigglesworth, in the Yard. Shortly afterwards, he went with me to Trimount House and started coming to the apartment. It was in March or April when I spoke with him about the Work—a cold afternoon or early evening. We walked around the block near the apartment. He was ready from the start to give himself to God.”

Debicki “had returned early from Christmas break and decided to begin attending daily Mass. There I saw Bob Bucciarelli, Mike Curtin, and a couple of other people I had already met.” At first, Debicki declined Bucciarelli’s invitation to visit the apartment, but “sometimes I would join him and Carl for breakfast at the Union.” Occasionally Bucciarelli invited him to Eliot House to listen to music.

The turning point in Debicki’s story appears to have been the Catholic Club’s regular Lenten retreat at Campion Hall where he shared a room with Rossman.

The new members of the Work needed to learn more about the details of their vocation and to acquire a deeper life of piety. As a small step in that direction, a weekly meditation for them began in May. As one of them recalled, “We began going to Trimount on Wednesday mornings for a preached meditation and Mass. It was very early, long before the usual rising hour for students even at that time. We used Bill’s car. At first there were Mike, Carl, Bill, and I [Bob]. But when Chris, John, and George started to attend, a portable altar was set up in the apartment so the meditation and Mass could take place there. Sometimes one of us would stay overnight on the sofa, when we had to study late—as when I was working on my senior thesis with Carl’s help.”

The fullest opportunity for the new members of Opus Dei to develop their understanding and practice of the vocation came in the summer when they joined older members at several family-style courses lasting between three weeks and two months, depending on their availability. Emphasis was on piety, family life, and study.

Second Wind

The departure of three members of the Work to study in Rome in 1956-7 was only a temporary setback to the apostolate at Harvard, and the new academic year began with ambitious plans there and at M.I.T. Returning Harvard students looked forward to resuming the apostolate in a second Ambassador Hotel apartment, a little more accommodating than the first (which was vacated in June). “In September we rented a furnished apartment on the fifth floor and followed the same routine as before.” George Rossman, a junior and resident of Lowell House, looked after the apartment. President Jim Murphy and Father Porrás planned the

Catholic Club program; the chaplain saw students every Tuesday and Thursday in his office.

More M.I.T. students came to live at Trimount, which was under “new management”. Peter Ejarque moved to Chicago in August, and after some months would return to Spain. Having completed his post-doc, Jim Polo took a position at Princeton University. In their place, Carl Schmitt and Bill Stetson assumed major responsibility for the residence, with the partial assistance of Louie Garrido, now nearing completion of his doctorate and planning to take a position in Barcelona. “The only real continuity was Father Bill, who practically single-handedly had to educate Carl and Bill in their tasks.”

Carl Schmitt remembers: “Father Bill was a solid rock behind both of us at every turn. That September I began tutoring on the committee overseeing the honors program in history and literature. Besides group tutorials with sophomores and individual tutorials with juniors, we directed senior theses. What a great encouragement Bill was [busy himself with the final year of law school] in moments when I felt overwhelmed as director of a residence of 35 people and being young in the Work.” Mike Curtin, a senior in physics, could also be relied on for assistance, as well as Trimount’s first director, Manolo Barturen, who visited regularly from New York.

For the first time Trimount reached its capacity. Among the newcomers were John Debicki, entering his sophomore year, Dom Fortunato, and his brother, Enrico (Rico), a freshman at M.I.T. Stetson organized a choir for residents and friends from several universities. Sal Ferigle spent a few days at Trimount in early September on his way to Rome to prepare for ordination after directing Woodlawn since it opened in 1949, completing his doctorate, and teaching physics at Illinois Institute of Technology in Chicago.

New denizens of the apartment in Cambridge included David Sperling, a graduate student in Arabic Studies. He had entered the Church the previous Easter at St. Paul’s. At that “historic” spring reception, Father Porras had introduced Sperling to Carl Schmitt. “We became friends and began having lunch together fairly regularly.” Another newcomer was an unusually “fresh” Harvard freshman from North Dakota, Dennis Helming: “My first knowledge of the Work came in late October when I went to see the Catholic chaplain with some troubles. Father Bill was an impressive man, owing to his age [34 in 1956], stolid appearance, discretion and authority. He heard me out without saying much. When he asked if I had met the Work, my negative response drew from him a few broad brushstrokes and an encouragement to meet some congenial students at an

apartment nearby. That night I visited it, but without any books. Bill Stetson took me aside prior to the prayer break, and for an hour told me about Opus Dei and the vocation, ending with encouragement to consider it for myself. I begged off, saying that it seemed like a fine idea, but I didn't know if it was for me or not; there was a lurking possibility of the priesthood. I stayed for the meditation and break, and returned to my room with the thought of further rubbing elbows with those like-souled young men. I started to frequent the apartment; the study atmosphere was winning and very helpful, as were the quickie meditations. Most impressive was the fellowship and the interest put forth by older students in a small-town greenhorn [someone lacking experience].”

Fortunato, now a senior, embarked upon his studies with renewed vigor and turned a dismal junior year into dean's list quality in one semester. About mid-term he started work as secretary at Trimount as well. Noticing his brother's increased involvement in the residence, Rico began asking questions about Opus Dei, and on October 11 he asked to be admitted to the Work. “As soon as I decided to stay at Trimount, I started attending daily Mass and Saturday meditations, but knew nothing about Opus Dei. After a couple of weeks Bill Stetson had a long conversation with me, explaining the Work and inviting me to join. I resolved the ‘vocational crisis’ in three days after a couple of conversations with Father Bill.”

In late November the Trimount apostolate received pastoral reinforcement with the arrival of recently ordained Ignasi Segarra, who immediately assumed his “American” name of Father Nick. Besides his duties in the residence and at M.I.T., he assisted at the apartment. During his first Mass, on arrival in New York, “I reminded the Virgin that we are ready for everything, with her constant help, knowing that she will always open to us new fields among the activities of these people.”

By Christmas, another new priest had arrived at Trimount from Spain, Fr. Fernando Acaso (known as Father Mark). Taking stock of the increasing pace of life in Boston and Cambridge as the year drew to a close, Stetson simply remarked, “It was an exciting time.” The following August, he himself would be moving to Rome with Paul Donlan and Dennis Helming.

The departure for Rome of these first new members of the Work left more work for the others, but already in the next academic year, the apostolate continued to grow and produce fruit. By 1959 the Cambridge apartment gave way to a new student residence in Cambridge—Elmbrook Residence. But the story of these developments would take a further article to relate.

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