

WORLD & NATION

FBI arrest shocks Opus Dei members

By Michael F. Flach
Catholic News Service

ARLINGTON, Va. — Robert Philip Hanssen, the FBI agent arrested Feb. 18 and accused of spying for the Russians, was on the surface a typical suburban father.

He commuted daily to his Washington office from his home in Northern Virginia, struggled to put his six children through Catholic schools and colleges, and attended church in the Arlington Diocese.

At the same time, the U.S. government now claims, Hanssen was a spy for the Russians for 15 years. He reportedly received more than \$1.4 million for revealing the FBI's deepest counterintelligence secrets. He could face the federal death penalty if convicted of treason.

Reports in the secular press said Hanssen, a 56-year-old native of Chicago, and his wife, Bonnie, are members of Opus Dei, a Catholic organization that Pope John Paul II made a personal prelature in 1982. Bonnie Hanssen teaches part time at Oakcrest, a private school operated by Opus Dei in McLean.

Opus Dei is Latin for "work of God." Blessed Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer established the organization of primarily lay Catholics in Madrid, Spain, in 1928. Members promote the church's universal call to holiness through their ordinary professional lives.

"We are shocked and saddened to hear about the news," said Brian Finnerty, U.S. spokesman for Opus Dei. "It was a complete surprise to everyone."

If the allegations about Hanssen are true, "it is a serious violation of his obligations as a Christian," Finnerty told the *Arlington Catholic Herald*, the diocese's newspaper.



Reuters/CNS

Robert Philip Hanssen

asking me do — to become a saint in the middle of the real world," he added.

Blessed Josemaria Escriva died in 1975 and was beatified by the pope in 1992. The organization was given full pontifical approval in 1950. As a personal prelature, it is now an ecclesiastical entity similar to a diocese, with a bishop, clergy and laity all working together.

More than 1,600 priests and 79,000 lay people worldwide reportedly belong to Opus Dei. There are 3,000 U.S. members, evenly divided between men and women. The majority of members are married; only 2 percent are priests.

A person interested in joining Opus

Finnerty said membership in Opus Dei is considered a vocation. After prayerful consideration, an individual who wants to be a member feels that "this is something that God is

Dei must write a letter to Opus Dei's U.S. vicar, Father Arne Panula, telling him that is what God is asking the individual to do, Finnerty said.

During a period of discernment and prayer, the person makes a verbal contract promising to pursue holiness in the middle of the world, he said, and it may eventually become "a lifetime commitment."

It was not clear how long Hanssen and his wife have belonged to Opus Dei. "As a matter of policy, Opus Dei does not release membership information," Finnerty said.

Commonly referred to as a "secret society" within the church, the group in its literature says that "any kind of secrecy is expressly forbidden by the statutes governing Opus Dei."

But Opus Dei members may not publicize their membership, it says, "because a layperson's approach to holiness in Opus Dei is something personal, an aspect of his or her private life."

Colleagues, friends and acquaintances of Opus Dei members "will always know about their membership because they make it known, especially by the way they live their faith," it says.

Bishops invite women to March consultation

WASHINGTON (CNS) — The U.S. bishops' Committee on Women in Society and in the Church will consult with more than 100 women who hold leadership positions in dioceses around the country March 11-13 in Chicago.

Kathleen Cannon, director of the Rochester Diocese's Parish Support Ministries, will be among those women.

The invitation-only consultation will have both "an inward focus and an outward focus," said Sheila Garcia, assistant director of the bishops' Secretariat for Family, Laity, Women and Youth, who is organizing the meeting.

The women, nominated by their bishops, will attend workshops on such "inward" issues as justice in the workplace, recruitment and the implications of working with fewer priests, but also will share their views on "outward" topics such as evangelization of younger women, ways to bring about unity in the church and the impact of violence and economic injustice on women.

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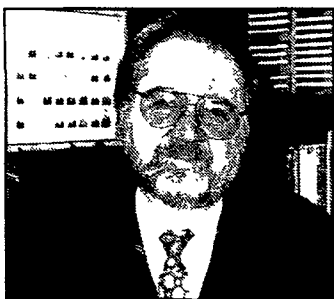
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Thoughts to Consider



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People in early grief often are shocked and unable to believe what has happened. They may feel angry or guilty and have difficulty organizing their life, sleeping or eating. If you wish to help you should encourage expressions of feelings. This means listening to the grieving as they talk about the death and their pain over it. You can also provide practical assistance such as baby-sitting, organizing the household and driving your friend to appointments. Attending the funeral or visitation gives you an opportunity to express your feelings and to give needed support. If you can't go to the funeral or visitation contact your friend and express your feelings as soon as possible after the death.

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