opusdei.org

FACE OF FAITH Getting personal with Father Fred

Entrevista al vicario regional del Opus Dei de Canadá y reportaje sobre el Opus Dei, publicados en The Toronto Star.

16/06/2006

As the depiction of Opus Dei in *The Da Vinci Code* raises consternation among the Catholic faithful, including a call by the Vatican last week for a boycott of the film, Monsignor Frederick M. Dolan —

Vicar for Canada for the Prelature of the Holy Cross and Opus Dei, and more informally "Father Fred" — sat down with the *Sunday Star* in hopes of demystifying the religious order.

Born in Washington, he was raised in the U.S., the eldest of six children, Dolan was a stockbroker before moving to Rome to study advanced philosophy and theology. He was ordained by Pope John Paul II in 1983.

What is your favourite movie? *The Blues Brothers*. I'm locked into the late 1960s. Also, *A Man for All Seasons*.

What is your favourite music, musical artist or style?

Two different types. Give me Mozart or Beethoven and then if you get me warming up for squash or working out, I'll take Led Zepellin or the Rolling Stones.

What is your favourite cuisine?

I lived for eight years in Italy and just nothing surpasses Italian food. My favourite hangout right here, a block away, is Mercurio's. Right out of Italy.

What is your favourite beverage, spirit and non-alcoholic?

I will readily accept a glass of Creemore beer. Sprite after a squash match.

What was your best/favourite subject in school?

Literature. The best course I ever had (was) at Columbia University studying Shakespeare, an entire year of studying Shakespeare, every word he wrote. I loved that.

What is your favourite author/ book?

Tolstoy ... in *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*, books like that, he's a

master. Nobody has said it any better. He captures the essence of the human heart in a way that just blows you away.

Do you have a favourite maxim in life?

One of them is `Launch out into the deep.' These are words Christ said to Peter. At the very beginning of Peter's mission, Jesus was there on the shore and he said, `You've been in the wading pool for all your life. Now it's time to get out into the big, deep water. Get in the boat and let's head out into the deep water.' I love that because He's saying, `let's be bold, audacious, let's put aside all hesitation and fear, anything that could hold you back and keep you on the shore — let's boogie, let's go for it.'

Have you read *The Da Vinci Code*?

Every word.

How do you feel about its depiction of Opus Dei?

My (first) thought was, `What did we do to deserve this? We're these little guys doing good things in a very quiet way and all of a sudden, we are caricatures.'

I'll never forget making a trip to Hollywood with a couple of colleagues from New York City. We went to see some people that we were introduced to by our lawyers here in Toronto. And this Hollywood person looked at us, he listened and then he said, `Guys, you really could not have paid for this name recognition. Run with the ball.'

So we began to see a great opportunity, a teaching opportunity, a very unexpected way of grabbing the world's attention and saying, `Okay, now that we have your attention, here's who we are.'

It has been hilarious actually watching, because now, for these past few years, (the notoriety) has saved so much time. In the old days, I would say `Opus Dei' and people would say, `How do spell that? I've never heard of it.' Now they say, `Oh, the book' and in half a second, we're talking.

So what is the purpose of Opus Dei?

It's part of the Catholic Church, 98 per cent lay people and a mere 2 per cent priests. More than half are women and there are married people and single people.

It really does come to coaching and how to fuse your faith, your relationship with God and everything you do during the day and bringing together a fusion ...

What is your favourite television show?

The truth be known, I watch scandalously little television. I watch the news about 15 minutes a night. In the old days, it was the *Wide World of Sports* but nowadays, I really don't have time, to be honest.

Spotlight shining on Opus Dei

The Catholic group has been cast as the villain in The Da Vinci Code, but it plans to capitalize on the hype all the same, writes *Martin Patriquin*

MONTREAL

With her silver hoop earrings, silk foulard scarf and shock of curly red hair, Isabelle Saint-Maurice hardly looks like the public face of an ultraconservative Catholic organization that encourages charity and occasionally the self-flagellation of its members.

There's a certain effervescence to her when she bounds into a room, usually with a friendly smile and a ready handshake. She could be someone's really cool mom — except that the 51-year-old took a vow of celibacy more than 35 years ago, and is married only to her life's work as an utterly devout Opus Dei "numerary."

Saint-Maurice, a former teacher and journalist, is also Opus Dei's Canadian press office director and go-to person responding to the unprecedented public interest sparked by *The Da Vinci Code*. The group's Canadian roots and its head office are in Montreal. From here, Saint-Maurice and her team have launched an all-out publicity campaign to counter Opus Dei's negative portrayal in Dan Brown's runaway bestseller.

Since late last year, the Montreal office has had four press agents fielding calls and emails from across the country. In anticipation of the*Da Vinci Code* movie, the Montreal press office is co-ordinating an additional 11 press officers in Quebec City, Ottawa, Toronto and Vancouver, all of whom have been trained in the art of answering questions from the media. (For example, they are taught to answer in sound bites, and the women are discouraged from wearing shiny jewellery during television interviews.)

In addition, Opus Dei recently unveiled a slick website with revealing details about the movement. (Yes, Opus Dei members "practice small physical mortifications occasionally"; no, Opus Dei doesn't have "views of its own on politics, economics, or social matters.")

The press office is also overseeing Opus Dei information initiatives set up in parishes and universities across the country, where people can get what Saint-Maurice calls the "beautiful, positive things" the Catholic Church does. It is done in part, she says, to counter the negative portrayal of Opus Dei in the book.

"It's because of *The Da Vinci Code*," Ms. Saint-Maurice said from the boardroom of Opus Dei's downtown press office. "We don't want to be grandiose. We aren't going to go to war against the film, or Dan Brown, or the book. We just want to explain what Opus Dei is, and to accentuate the positive."

Interest in the organization grew in this largely Catholic, French-speaking province after the newspaper *La Presse* included a translation of *The*

Da Vinci Code in its book club in June 2003.

The offices themselves are on the fourth floor of a Montreal highrise, across the way from an upscale beauty clinic. Elegantly (if sparsely) appointed, they are remarkable only in their lack of religious decor: there isn't so much as a crucifix on any of the walls. "It's not necessary to have a crucifix anywhere," Saint-Maurice said, adding, "Opus Dei is just an instrument to teach a Christian way of life."

Her description is a far cry from the Opus Dei of *Da Vinci Code* fame, which depicts the group as a secretive and homicidal religious order obsessed with self-mortification and bent on concealing the truth about Jesus. Reality, Saint-Maurice says, is far more mundane — in Canada, anyway. Formed in Spain in 1928, the organization first

came to Montreal in 1957, and there are currently 220 members in Quebec.

In 1968, an MIT-trained chemist named Joe Atkinson became the director of Opus Dei's first Canadian centre for university students. Now known as the Riverview Centre, the residence offers courses on business ethics and literature — as well as Bible readings and prayer meditations — to male university students. (Centre Fonteneige is the women's residence.)

There are a number of Opus Dei-run summer camps primarily in Quebec and Ontario aimed at 12- to 17-year-olds, as well as a yearly motivational course for young men entitled "Big Picture Seminar." The "Big Picture" pamphlet is as discreet as the Opus Dei press office: there is hardly any mention of religion in its pages. Though she says matters of faith are

taught and encouraged at these functions, Saint-Maurice bristles at the suggestion that the camps, residences and seminars are recruiting tools for Opus Dei.

"They get the training about God because they don't get it in school any more," she says. "We help people become good Christians. When you have a relationship with God, the logical thing is that you are happy, and that affects other people."

One Montreal-area woman, contacted by the *Star*, once cooked at Opus Dei residences in Ottawa and Montreal. Speaking on condition of anonymity, the woman, who wasn't an Opus Dei member, described an austere and highly regimented environment where the men and women were segregated from one another.

"We were told that we had to be like little mice," she said. "We weren't

allowed to see the people we cooked for. We'd have to pass the food through a hole in the wall. Some of them would salt their food so that it was practically inedible, as some sort of self-sacrifice."

Saint-Maurice practically laughs off the better-known Opus Dei practice of the "celice," the spiked chain worn around the upper thigh by some Opus Dei members — including Saint-Maurice herself.

"It reminds us of the suffering of Jesus Christ on the cross," she says. She rarely wears it to work, she says, and usually puts it on when she gets home to an Opus Dei residence in nearby Rosemont. "It's a little chafing, that's it. What bothers me more is having to remember to put it on and take it off."

It isn't the only sacrifice she makes. She isn't as forthright about how much she donates to the group,

though says she used to hand over "about 25 per cent" of her salary when she was a teacher.

And yes, she's read *The Da Vinci Code*.

"I actually enjoyed reading it," she says, though admitting she had a problem with the anti-Catholic precepts in the book. "I certainly plan on seeing the movie as well."

BRUCE DEMARA // The Toronto Star

pdf | Documento generado automáticamente desde https://opusdei.org/es-pa/article/face-of-faith-getting-personal-with-father-fred/ (11/12/2025)