

**OBITUARY: BOSTON COLLEGE PHILOSOPHY PROFESSOR  
AND LONERGAN INSTITUTE DIRECTOR JOSEPH F.X. FLANAGAN, S.J.**



CHESTNUT HILL, Mass. (5-17-10) - Rev. Joseph F.X. Flanagan, S.J., a beloved Jesuit priest and highly respected professor of philosophy whose seminal programs helped shape both the Philosophy Department and undergraduate education at Boston College, died Friday in the Jesuit residence at St. Mary's Hall on the BC campus. He was 84.

Among the most notable accomplishments of his 47-year tenure at Boston College, Fr. Flanagan used grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities to establish BC's Perspectives Program, a four-year interdisciplinary course of study that integrates the humanities and social and natural sciences through the exploration of the great books of Western Culture.

In an effort to relate classroom learning to actual life experience, he co-founded the Pulse Program in 1969, a popular service-learning program that combines the study of philosophy and theology with weekly volunteer service in more than 40 Boston schools, homeless shelters and community agencies.

Both programs have been widely replicated at colleges and universities throughout the United States.

In addition, Fr. Flanagan founded and directed the Lonergan Institute at Boston College to explore the work of the Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan, considered among the most distinguished philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.

"I don't know anyone who embodied the spirit of wonder that is at the heart of philosophy as did Joe Flanagan," said BC Philosophy Chairman Patrick Byrne who, as a student at Boston College worked with Fr. Flanagan to establish the Pulse Program in 1969. "Fr. Flanagan always thought that philosophy was about transforming the ways we live our lives. He recognized that our encounters with people who had suffered or were in difficult circumstances gave students the greatest opportunity to understand what philosophy had to do with living a full life in a meaningful way."

William B. Neenan, S.J., vice president at Boston College and longtime friend and colleague, described Fr. Flanagan as an individual who had a dramatic and lasting effect on the students he taught and mentored. "It could be said that Fr. Flanagan was as influential in shaping undergraduate education at Boston College as anyone over the past 40 years," said Fr.

Neenan. “Not only was he wonderful with students, he was also a great Jesuit who was very supportive of the personal and academic endeavors of his fellow Jesuits.”

Added Joseph A. Appleyard S.J., BC’s vice president for University mission and ministry who worked with Fr. Flanagan for nearly 50 years, “Joe Flanagan was profoundly convinced that the life of the mind was a way to God and a way to help people, and that thinking about what it means to exist, to know, to create, and to live together brought us deeper into the life of God and showed us how to make the world a better place. These weren’t separate realities for him. He devoted his life to understanding how they fit together and to showing his students—and, really, his colleagues and friends too--why this was such a worthwhile way to live.”

Born in West Roxbury, Massachusetts on the Fourth of July in 1925, Fr. Flanagan attended Boston College High School before joining the U.S. Navy upon the outbreak of World War II. He was sent by the Navy to Brown University for the V12 program and then to Washington University Dental School where he earned a doctorate in oral surgery. He entered the Society of Jesus in 1948 at Shadowbrook Novitiate in Lenox, Mass., and later earned a master’s degree from Boston College, an S.T.L from Weston College and a Ph.D from Fordham University.

Fr. Flanagan joined the faculty at Boston College in 1963, and served as department chairman from 1965-1993 before being named full professor in 1998. He also served as director of the Lonergan Institute from 1993 to the present. He is the author of the book *The Quest of Self-Knowledge: An essay in Understanding Bernard Lonergan’s Philosophy*, and dozens of scholarly articles and publications on subjects ranging from epistemology to aesthetics.

Fr. Flanagan is survived by four siblings: former Massachusetts Suffolk County District Attorney Newman Flanagan, the Rev. James Flanagan, S.O.L.T., Kevin Flanagan, and Rosemary (Flanagan) Cronin.

Visiting hours will be held Tuesday, May 18, from 4-8 p.m., at St. Mary’s Hall at Boston College. A funeral Mass will be celebrated at 10 a.m. on Wednesday, May 19, at St Ignatius Church in Chestnut Hill, with internment at Campion Center in Weston, Mass.

**Photo by: Gary W. Gilbert/Boston College**

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