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Why A Catholic Physicians' Guild?

FLOYD M. ZAEPFEL, M.D.

When the Catholic Physicians' Guild was instituted in the Diocese of Buffalo in 1947 under the stimulus of the late Cardinal—then Bishop O'Hara of Buffalo—it had the following purposes:

1. The spiritual edification of its constituent members.
2. To uphold the principles of Catholic faith and morality as related to the science and practice of medicine.
3. To assist the ecclesiastical authorities in the diffusion of Catholic medical ethics.
4. To uphold Catholic hospitals in their enforcement of Catholic moral principles in medical practice.

It became increasingly apparent that to accomplish these purposes a dynamic Guild had to be inaugurated and forceful leadership pushed to accomplish the purposes. A definitive constitution was drawn up and distributed to the membership. Dynamic activity is accomplished by a council meeting four times yearly—working about four major events during the year—namely:

- a. Spring and fall retreat
- b. Spring banquet
- c. White Mass
- d. Fall Communion Mass and breakfast



DR. ZAEPFEL

It was felt that the major effort this year would be communications between our Guild physician and clergy who labor so diligently on various church projects in the diocese. At each council meeting we invite one of our priests who has a specific project in the diocese—e.g., the *Magnificat* editor was invited in order to increase our communications with the newspaper representing the diocese of Buffalo; next we invited the director of our family life program, to communicate with him regarding problems of family life and the pre-Cana project. Subsequently we invited the professor of theology at St. John Vianney Seminary with the specific purpose of continuing our medical education in the light of Catholic teaching. Just as we need medical education on a post-graduate level, so too is moral counsel a necessity.

To further accomplish our purposes, Guild committees were appointed; members of these have contributed to this issue of THE LINACRE QUARTERLY. Each committee

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chairman endeavors to pursue the work with representation in each of the hospitals in the diocese.

But really, why a Physicians' Guild? Are there not retreats in each parish? There are, but do they meet the needs of the practicing Catholic physician? Does the physician know the Church's stand on contraception, birth control, abortion? In a recent survey by *Modern Medicine* answers from 40,089 physician-subscribers, polled from some 200,000 doctors in the United States, were received. Among Catholic physicians (14.5%) 49.1% were for liberalization and 50.9% were against liberalization of the abortion laws; of the total, 86.9% favored reform.

In a recent address to our Guild, Father Maquire of Catholic University stated: "What is going on in theology today is a certain liberalization. The simple truth is, this is a development which is not fully clear yet. We are pilgrims and we are moving, and movement is progress. You should expect movement and you should expect change." Why a Catholic Physicians' Guild? To pursue our medical education, to progress and be aware of what is changing not only in the medical field but also in theology.

When the legislature convened in Albany, New York to consider changes in the abortion laws, not only was communication necessary for our Family Life Department and the Catholic Physicians' Guild but also our group was involved with the Catholic Lawyers' Guild. With pressure exerted the laws were not changed, at least for the present, in

spite of the fact that material for many of the discussions was obtained from statistics on 504 therapeutic abortions performed in two (non-Catholic) teaching hospitals of the State University at Buffalo from 1943 to 1964. Do we need a Catholic Physicians' Guild? We think we do to assist the ecclesiastical authorities in the Diocese of Buffalo in utilizing both their legal and medical Guilds.

The basic tenets of hospitals require the best patient care, education of physicians and research. All Catholic hospitals should strive for these objectives. Some do provide adequate teaching programs. Community hospitals, however, need to offer their resources to medical schools where feasible. Our Guild has established a committee for education and research and hopes to make our resources available to the State Medical School at Buffalo.

In those communities where a pastoral community senate has been established, it behooves the Guild to encourage members to serve. The life sciences will then be represented in the workings of the Council, enabling physicians to accept their role in the renewal along with their fellow lawyers, bankers, business men and other workers.

Too long has there been a "conflict of interest on Boards of Trustees where physicians serve." Can you imagine the Board of Trustees of General Motors with no engineers? So must Catholic Physicians' Guilds press for at least one doctor on such Boards so that someone on the medical staff is aware of patient needs and how best fellow physicians can be encouraged to administer them.

The Catholic physician can no longer ignore political life. Guilds must encourage the interest of physicians in such matters. Recently we were appealing to State legislators to amend Medicaid laws; now our appeals refer to the abortion laws. Ironically enough, the representatives in our New York legislature whom we addressed on Medicaid are the same ones hearing us on abortion this year—and next year it can be something else.

Traditionally, physicians have practiced the ecumenical spirit. No true man of medicine has ever asked a patient his religious creed or made any distinction in therapy because his skin was white, brown or black. Only since Vatican II has such proper re-emphasis been placed on this spirit. It was gratifying indeed to know that in addition to our own Catholic physicians present at our last Guild dinner were several Episcopalians as well as our Hebrew brothers and their wives. Why a Catholic Guild? For more of the ecumenical spirit, not only for our patients but for our non-Catholic brethren.

The economic plight of our hospital nursing schools, Catholic colleges as well as hospitals, is becoming apparent. It behooves us to encourage cooperation between our hospitals and colleges not only to pool resources but to utilize trained personnel, reciprocate materials, laboratories and staffs so that research

laboratories for residents, graduate students and nurses can function under contributive planning. Why a Catholic Physicians' Guild? Catholic physicians are needed in the solution of this problem along with educators, administrators and college authorities.

Medical Health Centers are evolving within the University complex. Catholic hospitals need to establish community medical centers to avoid duplication and to control rising costs. Physicians' Guilds need to provide leadership to aid Catholic institutions in accomplishing their objectives in education and research for the betterment of patient care.

Why a Catholic Physicians' Guild? Here in Buffalo, New York we see a dynamic surge to 1) spiritually edify our members at retreats, 2) boldly suggest that we venture with our fellow brethren into the political, educational and pastoral fields, and 3) feel we should encourage all Guilds to enhance the Catholic physician as a vigorous leader in his community and to make certain he is afforded the opportunity to do God's work in man's total care.

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