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# Mandate for a Change?

**John J. Brennan, M.D.**

*President-Elect N.F.C.P.G.*

"Does the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds speak for the Catholic physicians of America?" That was the question asked by the incoming president, Dr. Charles Bauda of Buffalo, at the recent annual meeting of the Federation in Cincinnati. The following day a proposal to change the name to "American Catholic Physicians' Association" was rejected by the attending delegates.

The impetus to change the name came from the general discontent that accompanied the reversal of ethics on the subject of abortion by the American Medical Association two years previously. Suggestions were made at that time that the whole group withdraw from the A.M.A. That would be of little value unless we had another strong group to join. It seemed the wiser path was to take measures to strengthen our own group.

Many thought that the present name was too cumbersome. Others said that the word "guild" was now used to refer to unions of doctors on the west coast; it no longer carried the desired connotation. Most everyone concerned thought that a name change could help establish an

image and improve our stature to obtain proper recognition from the A.M.A. and the secular press. The hierarchy of the Church might also be more impressed by a name that implied that our group spoke for all Catholic physicians.

At our 1971 meeting in New Orleans, Dr. John Kavanaugh of Kalamazoo, Mich., suggested the name, "Catholic Medical Association." Dr. Joseph A. McDougall of St. John, New Brunswick, Canada, stated that many Canadian doctors were disenchanted with the Canadian Medical Association because it too had given acceptance to a



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permissive abortion policy. Canadian doctors and many thousands of doctors in the United States are isolated in small communities and would be unable to form guilds. They would be likely to join with other American doctors in an association strongly opposed to abortion and identified with traditional Catholic ethics.

On the other hand, the initials C.M.A. would cause conflict with those of the Canadian Medical Association. The same disadvantage would apply to the name "Christian Medical Association." It is also true that while we are Christian, we are more precisely Catholic. We are also closely aligned to the Catholic bishops and the Catholic Hospital Association.

The guilds were duly notified that a name change was being considered. Other suggestions were offered. "Ethical Medical Association" was rejected because many abortionists consider themselves to be ethical. To them it is just a question of who establishes the ethics — "Might means right." The "Quality of Life" movement accepts abortion as an ethical solution to environmental problems.

The name "American Catholic Physicians' Association" was then considered. This would surely be more appropriate if our group became organized on a statewide basis. For example, there are now 11 guilds in the state of New York. While guilds could still exist in Buffalo, the Bronx and Brooklyn, a New York State Catholic Physicians' Association could speak to the state legislature and to the press

for all the Catholic physicians of that state. A North Dakota Catholic Physicians' Association could speak for all the Catholic physicians of North Dakota even though there might not be sufficient numbers in any one city to form a guild. Dr. Clem Cunningham, former National Federation president, feels that the future of the Federation is to form organizations in every state parallel to the pattern of the A.M.A.

Of the 90 guilds in the National Federation, only one, the Bronx guild, expressed itself in writing in opposition to the proposed change in name. It adopted the following resolution:

RESOLVED: That Dr. Eusebius J. Murphy, the delegate to the winter meeting of the Executive Board of the National Federation, be instructed to express the sentiments of the entire membership of the Bronx Guild with regard to the change in name of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds to "American Catholic Physicians' Association."

The Bronx Catholic Physicians' Guild is strongly opposed to any change in the name of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds for the following reasons:

1. The word "guild" expresses the idea of an association of physicians as a professional body, similar to the medieval guilds, under the guidance of the Church.

2. The use of the term "American Catholic Physicians' Association" might appear to be segregation of Catholic physicians as opposed to their identification with American Medical Association, and similar to the segregation of colored physicians under the title of National Medical Association.

3. Father Ignatius Cox, S.O., the founder of the National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds was the initial proposer of the name "National Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds." The

Bronx Guild opposes the change in name because of the tradition of long establishment, and with due respect for Father Cox's memory in acknowledgement of his tremendous efforts in the early days of the Federation.

The foregoing resolution was expressed to the assembled delegates in Cincinnati by Dr. Eusebius J. Murphy.

A constitutional change requires a two-thirds majority of the delegates who attend the annual meeting. The motion to change the name failed to pass.

Dr. Ed Kilroy of Cleveland probably best expressed the feelings of the assembled. He said that there had not been sufficient communication about the reasons for and against the need for a new name.

He suggested that the guilds be contacted again for their consideration and their recommendations. It was his request that the new name be submitted at a later time.

Perhaps we are at the crossroads. If we are to achieve recognition on a statewide and national level it will take more than just a change in name. It will mean more diligence and dedication — and particularly by the many rather than the few.

Does a mandate for a change exist? The Board members are due to discuss this at their next meeting this summer. It would be of great help to them if other guilds submitted resolutions in support of or in opposition to that of the Bronx guild.