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From the Editor's Desk

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The Catholic Physicians' Guild - A Community of Unity and Peace

In an address to the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild about one year ago, the newly appointed Archbishop of Milwaukee, Rembert Weakland, suggested to the Guild that one of its primary goals was to be a deepening of members' spiritual lives. While discussions and debates on medical-moral matters were important, there were deeper concerns on which to focus, viz., a sense of community within the Guild whereby the members would help and sustain one another through the influence and power of Christ within themselves, their wives and family and patients. Those of us who have pondered the purpose of the Guild for many years have gradually, like the apostles during Christ's lifetime, dimly, sluggishly arrived at the same conclusion; like the apostles, we have only lately discovered this "pearl of great price." It was only with the overwhelming Spirit Who descended upon them on Pentecost that the apostles fully understood and loudly proclaimed the meaning of Christ's life upon earth to the cynical, confused world as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles.

In Milwaukee, members of the board of directors, under the leadership of John Grogan, M.D., last year's president, and Donald Chisholm, M.D., this year's president, have taken this message seriously and emphasized it among themselves. Under the gentle, loving, inspirational hand of our spiritual moderator, Father Donald Driscoll, S.J. of Marquette University High School, we have begun a program to deepen the spiritual lives of our members. Initial efforts

along this line have been made through prayers, liturgy and sharing among the board of directors and more recently, through a retreat for the members and their wives. Our first retreat included nine couples and the results were awesome. As my wife, Mrs. Mary Evelyn Mullooly, stated during one of the conferences, "We have dined, danced and had good times together and it is the first time we have spiritually shared together."

As each physician slowly opened up his soul to the group, a profound effect came over us all. Fellows whom we had known for years were suddenly seen in a different perspective and the burdens which so many of us carry in isolation from each other and from our wives, were so much lighter. The healing influence of Christ permeated the group and brought us closer together in a most tangible, joyous way. As we left the retreat, a spirit of elation, joy and inner peace and wholeness was most evident. It was the peace and joy of which Christ spoke and which He promised to us all as recounted in the Gospels. It is the fervent prayer of this writer that this sense of community, closeness to Christ, will spread throughout our entire Guild and also throughout the many guilds of the National Federation.

It is important for all of us in the National Federation to get back to our roots and reason for being, viz., to be, live and exist in and through Christ. Like the early Church, it should be done as a community in Christ. We should be other Christs to one another, mutually sustaining and helping each other in our personal, family and professional obligations. We should realize that we suffer much from our own isolation. We should fulfill in ourselves the richness and reality of the Mystical Body of Christ. It is something we have not done or been trained to do and the process of learning this is a slow one.

Paradigms for this exist all around us. Witness the mutual spiritual help which is occurring among our wives who attend prayer groups in the neighborhood. Women gather together to pray and share with one another. The unbelievable burdens that they carry are not so heavy and they cope with their lives through the grace and power of Christ which come through the group united in prayer — the tale of husbands who have left them or turned to alcohol, or the children who have gone astray on drugs, promiscuous behavior, etc. The illnesses that afflict them or the mental health that has been shattered by misfortune pour out in these meetings to the extent that you wonder how they can bear it at all. And yet they do and it is through the power of prayer and Christ's influence invoked by the community.

What is it about men which impedes them from participating in this type of mutual giving and sharing with each other in the most vital areas of our spiritual and emotional lives? Why is it so difficult for us to share with one another in the spirit of Christ, where we can bare our souls and expose the spiritual pain that afflicts us all? Much of this reluctance and fear begins in our training to be men who do not cry,

who do not show our deep-seated emotions, and who are taught to be strong. As physicians, we are taught to be "professional," competent, to handle medical and surgical crises with clinical detachment, to absorb all of the burdens of our patients and to give them help as best we can. All of this in the face of our own uncertainties, our insecurities, our lack of knowledge, our perpetual state of dealing with complex medical problems and not knowing for certain the ultimate answer or prognosis. Society has placed us in a superior, omniscient role where we see ourselves as the dispensers of good health. Yet deep down in our hearts we know we are, if anything, very fallible and uncertain. This is not to say that as a group physicians do not render excellent medical care. But in our compulsion to ascertain the correct diagnosis and to prescribe a reasonable course of treatment, we know that we can make mistakes, can misdiagnose and/or get poor results. The emotional impact varies with the individual but by and large, we carry the burdens silently, in isolation from each other.

How good it is to hear that your colleagues have the same fears, uncertainties that you have. How do they handle them? Do they handle them by drinking too much, resorting to drugs, pursuing extramarital affairs? Do they handle the emotional and spiritual trauma of their commitment to their profession appropriately? Do they handle well their roles of husband and father? Do they bring an emotional and spiritual balance to their patients day after day? Some do and some do not. One only has to look at the impaired physician statistics that we have seen in recent years to realize that many do not.

What greater role can a Catholic Physicians' Guild play than to help our suffering colleagues when they need it most! What greater preventative of the ravages of being a physician than to deepen the spiritual lives of our colleagues through community prayer and mutual support through sharing! What greater resource to help us in these endeavors than the healing power of Jesus Christ! Those of us who attended this retreat in Milwaukee recently experienced this profound effect and heartily recommend it to our colleagues throughout the nation.

As recounted in the Ephesians, let us hope that all Catholic Physicians' Guilds will be as Paul described — a true spiritual community.

"I plead with you, then, as a prisoner of the Lord, to live a life worthy of the calling you have received with perfect humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another lovingly. Make every effort to preserve the unity which has the Spirit as its origin and peace as its binding force. There is but one body and one Spirit, just as there is but one hope given all of you by your call. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, Who is over all, and *works through all*, and is in all" (Ephesians 4:1-6).

— John P. Mullooly, M.D., Editor