May 1958

Doctor! ... There IS a Father in the House

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Recommended Citation
Maillew, Nage (1958) "Doctor! ... There IS a Father in the House," The Linacre Quarterly: Vol. 25 : No. 2 , Article 2.
Available at: http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol25/iss2/2
The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds "comes of age" at the San Francisco meeting during the A.M.A. convention in June. Through the hapless years of adolescence, only the nurturing by and the strength of The Catholic Hospital Association kept it alive. A few short years ago, there were only twelve (12) Guilds: THE LINACRE QUARTERLY was running a year behind schedule in publication; indebtedness to The Catholic Hospital Association surpassed $6,000. Father J. P. Flanagan, S.J., Executive Director of The Catholic Hospital Association and Msgr. Donald A. McGowan, Director of Health and Hospitals of N.C.W.C., inherited the cadaveric vestige of an idealistic dream of physicians united in Catholic Action. These two wonderful priests—amazing in their contrasting personalities and inspiring in their unified pursuit of "Good Medicine is Good Catholic Action"—have effected a miraculous convalescence.

This organization now has a roster of seventy-three (73) affiliated Guilds representing thirty-one (31) States, Puerto Rico, and Canada. It has liaison with many more Guilds not at present affiliated. The membership of physicians has now reached the five-thousand (5,000) mark. THE LINACRE QUARTERLY is approaching a distribution of ten thousand (10,000) copies per issue to doctors, priests, librarians, hospitals and others in the health field. This journal is being quoted constantly for authoritative Catholic thought—and most recently, in a new textbook on Artificial Insemination by Schellen. This author devotes a page to the Catholic medical opinion as stated by the Executive Board of the Federation in June and reported in the August, 1952 issue. The booth in Exhibition Hall at each A.M.A. convention proclaims "What your Catholic patient believes" and is staffed by members of the Executive Board and the various Guilds. The response to this booth project has been most edifying and elevating experience to every doctor who has serviced it during the convention days. Annually, a 'Catholic Physician of the Year' is honored. The Thomas Linacre Award is also presented for the best article contributed by a physician.

Through all the executive meetings that have effected this growth and activity, Msgr. McGowan and Father Flanagan, with their devoted executive secretaries, Mr. Ray Kneifl and Miss Jean Read, have been at the right shoulder of your officers to counsel, to aid, to encourage. This year, however, our guardian angels are flying East while we are flying West. The Catholic Hospital Association, of necessity, is meeting in Atlantic City the same week that the Federation is meeting in San Francisco. So, for the first time, the Executive Board will meet without its Moderator and central office staff. How well it does will depend entirely on the number of Guilds having delegate representation.

In this era of Catholic Action—and that your Federation may continue to play an important part in the promotion of Catholic thought in medicine—I urge you to send a delegate from your Guild to San Francisco for the Executive Board meeting on June 25.

WILLIAM J. EGAN, M.D.

LINACRE QUARTERLY

Doctor!...

There IS a Father in the House

Nage Mulhall, M.D.

The February 1957 issue of The Linacre Quarterly published an interesting article by Father Edward D. Roche, C.M., entitled "Doctor! Is There a Father in the House?" As the theme indicated, the need for the doctor to be "a father in his house" is a demanding problem in these days of the busy practice of physicians. One doctor whose true identity is withheld at his request has given utterance to his solution of the situation. His words appear here for thoughtful consideration.

From the mouths of babes! My oldest son was only eight when he was first asked if he were going to be a doctor. He quickly replied, "No! Daddy is never home." Forthwith, came the realization of what had been my problem for some time. In endeavoring to fulfill what I had always considered my true vocation, I had failed to realize that, in the blinding glow of wedded bliss, I had vowed to assume a far more basic vocation—that of a father.

Immediately, corrections had to be made. There were many younger doctors anxious to make calls that would give them entree to new acquaintances. The lion of practice that I had by the tail did not have to subsidize me. Even the patient who would see no one but me was surprised to find that he or she could transfer confidence to a younger physician in whom I had confidence. In promoting other physicians, I had the wonderful satisfaction of being magnified by their success, as a father reflects the success of his sons. Patients, who formerly felt frustrated by their dependence upon me, now were secure in the close contact of several physicians.

Meanwhile, "Daddy could be home"—and home took on a new meaning for Mother, the children and Daddy. Most dramatic of the changing times was the dinner hour. Formerly, I had rushed into a frantic meal with all children howling at that five-thirty hour, when children—deprived of motherly attention by the distraction of meal preparation—take a fiendish delight in howling. Now I was the man who came to dinner—and stayed. Daddy was not in a hurry, so that there was attention and affection available for each child's hurt of the day. Because the meal was leisurely, the children took time to eat, and in turn, to express their hopes, desires, and worries to an attentive table. Even guessing games could be played as we waited for the slowest eaters to finish. With the meal concluded,
Mother was free to take the toddlers off to bed with time for a pleasant bath, a good story, and that marvelous nightly talk with God and their guardian angel. Clearing the tables and doing kitchen chores became an eagerly awaited pleasure; Daddy was home with the older children. As kitchen foreman, I was available for intimate questioning, problem solving, toy repairing, aid on the heavier chores and, most of all, companionship. With the kitchen spic and span, it was game time—and games, it turned out, are far less complicated and much more fun when an older head is present to referee and supervise as he joins in the fun.

It turned out that Daddy could be a tremendous crutch to eager little fellows. He knew Latin and, surprisingly to his children, could help them learn their altar-boy card much more quickly for he, too, had served for the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Studying was not nearly the grind that it had been when, to memorize, you repeated aloud your lessons seven times in honor of the Holy Ghost—for that was the way Daddy had learned to study. It was easy to learn the arithmetic facts (tables to Daddy) as they were chanted while drying the dishes and if you didn’t say them quickly enough, one of the others would. Even fractions, geography, Latin, French and physics became more real when you found that Daddy and Mother knew them almost as well as teacher.

More important, however, were the family outings. With a physician available to cover the telephone and the hospital, I was free to organize a Sunday jaunt to a picnic area. In Spring and Fall, Sunday became the day of days. Following Mass, the baskets were packed and the entire family crowded into the car for an adventure in exploration. New areas were constantly found by a lake, in a mountain retreat, by the seaside, beside the highway where children could run off and be cowboys, Indians or just plain WOJs—and have a good story, and a guardian angel. With the kitchen spic and span, it was game time—and games, it turned out, are far less complicated and much more fun when an older head is present to referee and supervise as he joins in the fun.

So, from the "mouths of babes" came a whole new way of life in which I have come to accept my dual vocation: basically, a Father and by choice, a Doctor. God, alone, will give the final accounting. To the best of my ability, however, I can say "Yes, doctor, there is a father in the house."