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Message from the Spiritual Advisor

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patients override family obligations. Nevertheless, the family often loses; opportunities for escape are legion and seductive. We daily lose at the hospital, at the office, at meetings and elsewhere. We tend to evade and even fight family. By joining our families, however, we can reap enormous, lifelong rewards, rewards we will not know if we ignore our options: to lovingly imprint ourselves on our children during their early years rather than to be viewed as disinterested, episodic boarders; to joyfully capitalize during their pre-adolescent years on being the only men in our daughters' lives, or the only women in our sons' lives, establishing a parent-filial romance that will not fade away; to become exemplars to our young sons and daughters of what a man or woman, what a father or mother should be — by far, the best heritage we can give them.

Perhaps we physicians would be better off if we had our coronary and cancers earlier in life rather than later so that we could begin early to sift out the trivia from the important. Under the shadow of a limited life span, we might temper our ego needs and excessive ambition drives, and our pursuit of material possessions abnormally stimulated by the economic drought associated with a lengthy education and training — material possessions which we bestow on our families in place of ourselves. With rare exception, we physicians wind up with more money than is good for either ourselves or our families, accumulated at the price of an excessive expenditure of time, time better devoted to the family. Despite all of their apparent advantages, doctors' children, by and large, are not superior to others and, too frequently, are inferior in adult attainments; and doctors' spouses, unfortunately, are too frequently widowed before the actual event.

Ultimately, the inescapable fact is that we are mortal; that terminally ill and the vigil of the deathbed is only tolerable and only capable of conversion into life's last rich experience if we have led worthy lives as physicians, as spouses, and as parents. The solitude of dying is in the remembrance of a dedicated professional life and of grateful patients, in the presence of close ones who love us. Everything else withers by comparison.

Whatever the past, it is never too late to take new bearings.

— Herbert Ratner, M.D.

Message from the Spiritual Advisor

In Matt. 21, vs. 33, Jesus gives us this parable: "There was a land owner, who planted a vineyard, put a fence around it, dug a hole for the winepress and built a tower. Then he rented the vineyard to tenants and left home on a trip. When the time came to harvest the grapes, he sent his slaves to the tenants to receive his share. The tenants grabbed his slaves, beat one, killed another and stoned another. Again the man sent other slaves, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent them his son. 'Surely they will respect my son,' he said. But when the tenants saw the son, they said to themselves, 'This is the owner's son. Come on, let us kill him, and we will get his property!' So they grabbed him, threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.'

The tenants in question were entrusted with a commission to care for the vineyard and be accountable to the owner for their efforts. Having been given the privilege to serve, they felt it was their right to usurp. With greed in their hearts, they proceeded to commit repeated acts of violence for personal gain, rather than to submit to accountability.

All of us have to account to someone. Among those who have the greatest of accountabilities for their professionalism and behavior are physicians, as their office was made possible only through the involvement, encouragement and expense of a given community. It was the determined effort of sincere people to construct schools for the training of medical students so that they and their children could benefit from these services. It is, then, through a due process of selection that
candidates who value life and the sacredness of the individual as a child of God, are nominated and considered for this high office.

Accountability falls to its lowest level when one has to be compelled to do his job well, otherwise face litigation or disgrace from his fellow colleagues.

The most noble level of accountability is when one performs the challenge of his high office because "he loves God with all his heart and his neighbor as himself." In faith, he believes that God sees all things, and that the "recording angel" is reporting his authentic services of healing. When this is taking place, the physician is consciously proving himself to be a "credit" to those people who have put their trust in him. He is looked upon as a "good steward" — giving of his all and performing to the best of his abilities. With his human imperfections, the good works he accomplishes blot out sins, and his life is enriched as he continues his redemptive mission as an extension of Christ. Unlike the unjust steward who needed to manipulate invoices to survive, his accounts are in order. His investments of good works have multiplied a hundredfold, and their certification is audited by the Divine Bookkeeper.

When the authority of Jesus was challenged, He responded that "Even though you do not believe in Me, you should at least believe My works." In other words, the results speak for themselves.

Since all gifts have been given to us, our accountability resides in how these have been shared. For when "I was hungry — thirsty — homeless — sick . . .," Jesus said, "Whenever you did this for one of the least important of these brothers of Mine, you did it for Me!"

"Medical Economics," (investing wisely or profit-making) is something known to most physicians. However, the bottom line of the balance sheet, in fine print, is the warning — "What does it profit a man if he gain the whole world and in the process lose his soul?"

Examination of conscience is difficult and often painful, for in the process, one volunteers to see himself just as he is. It is then with fear and trepidation that one rightly prays for God's mercy, rather than His justice. For accountability has a mathematical formula or equation that demands a balance between what is received and distributed.

The Catholic physician, as a person of faith, believes that God sees all things and, therefore, nothing goes unnoticed. The good performed is not in partnership with the Lord, but in union with Him — just as the branch produces fruit only when it is attached to the vine.

And so the physician continues his vocation with joy, doing good, expecting that when his journey ends he will hear the voice of God. Who has been with him all his days — "Here is my beloved 'physician' in whom I am well pleased — Come into the kingdom that I have prepared for YOU."

— Rev. Monsignor Dino J. Lorenzetti

From the Editor's Desk

A new publication, dealing with an area of critical concern to countless persons today, namely natural family planning, has recently made its debut. Published by the Human Life Center of St. John's College, Collegeville, Minn., it holds great promise of providing invaluable information and assistance to a general readership as well as to physicians whether they be Catholic or not.

Entitled International Review of Natural Family Planning, the quarterly publication presents articles by such noted experts as Drs. Lyn and John Billings; Pastor Daniel Ch. Overduin, Lutheran theologian, lecturer and ecumenist; New Zealand's Dr. H. P. Dunn, well-known obstetrician, gynecologist and colleague of Sir William Liley; Dr. Joseph Roetzer, founder and leader of the Marriage Advisory Service in Vocklabruck, Austria; Switzerland's Dr. Rudolf F. Vollman, renowned author and researcher, and numerous other authors from the United States and abroad.

"Continental Correspondents" from places such as Taiwan, Australia, India and the Philippines provide interesting insights into natural family planning in their respective countries.

In his forward, publisher Paul Marx, O.S.B., Ph.D., notes that current information about ovulation and menstruation makes it possible for informed, motivated couples "to practice natural, human fertility control with an effectiveness rate as good as or better than that of any contraceptive or abortifacient drug or device available on the market today." He points out: "Present trends indicate that in the future there will be three chief kinds of birth control apart from total conscience: (1) very early abortion by means of drugs, other abortifacients and what is known as 'menstrual extraction,' (2) sterilization, and (3) NFP." (Natural Family Planning)

He bemoans the fact that "only a small portion of any national medical profession has interested itself in researching, learning and teaching NFP," yet notes with optimism that more physicians are