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Twenty-five Years of Catholic Action

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The period through which the Catholic Church in America has been passing may well be called the Catholic Action era. It is one which has witnessed the development of many organizations of Catholic laymen and women. These have played an important part in the growth and understanding of the Church in America. It was only natural and logical that Catholic physicians should become a part of this great movement.

On the occasion of the Twenty-Fifth Anniversary of The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds, it is a pleasure to review the status of Catholic Physicians' Guilds. Like so many good movements the number of Guilds grew slowly and the Federation had its years of discouragement. It is quite evident, however, that the founders of the Guilds and the Federation had sound ideas and planned wisely.

When the Federation was established in 1932, there were only seven Guilds. Today there are sixty, scattered across the country from Vancouver to New York and from Minnesota to Puerto Rico. Members are now number 4,300. Membership in individual Guilds ranges from twelve to six hundred. More than 1,000 physicians who do not belong to Guilds subscribe to The Linacre Quarterly, the Federation's official journal.

It is interesting to note that subscriptions to The Linacre Quarterly now total 8,500. This means that the Federation is now extending its influence beyond the ranks of Guild members; its journal goes to many seminaries, to hundreds of priests, to many Catholic hospitals and libraries, and to hundreds of individual Catholic physicians, many of whom are practicing in small towns and rural areas.

A quarter of a century may not seem a large segment when dates and events are arrayed in sequence of time. But oftimes antiquity in name is last to be sought and vitality of purpose is the renewing spirit to keep fast hold on the present. Thus may we speak of The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds.

The organization, in a manner of speaking, emerged from the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius. It was in 1927 that the late Dr. Richard A. Rendich, a prominent roentgenologist, made plans for the first Retreat of Brooklyn physicians. The credit is his for the arrangement of this retreat held at Mount Manresa Retreat House, out of which emerged the Guild movement. At an organization meeting Dr. Rendich was elected president. The "retreat group" rapidly changed into "The Guild.

The transformation was a fundamental one. In reality, it was simply carrying over into the daily life of the physician, into his professional interests and attitudes and his philosophy of life, the thinking, the inspiration, and determination on the retreat meditations of the Kingdom of Christ.

Brooklyn led the way. In the next few years the spirit caught on; other groups in the area were formed, as well as in Boston and the middle-west. By 1932 those dreaming of an organization of Catholic physicians who might put their scientific and professional standing solidly behind the defense and advocacy of Catholic moral and religious teaching united to found a national organization called The Federation of Catholic Physicians' Guilds. The number of groups has fluctuated through the years: the depression years and World War II took toll on promotion. But it survived.

Almost simultaneously with the foundation of the Federation, The Linacre Quarterly came into being as its official organ, under the inspiration of and splendid editing by Dr. Anthony Bassler of New York. Its name is symbolic of the aims of the Federation and was chosen by Dr. James J. Walsh whose erudite contributions to the journal in those early years lent high character to the publication.

Thomas Linacre was the physician to Henry the Eighth. He founded the Royal College of Physicians and through it regulated the practice of medicine in England. He was looked upon as one of the great scholars of his day. Having become a priest in his later life, he united in himself the ideals of classical scholarship, scientific medicine, and practical Catholicism.

For a decade and a half, the Federation was under the able