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We Love Our Moderator

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We Love Our Moderator

JOHN T. SCHMITZ, M.D.

The Milwaukee Guild of the National Federation has been an active chapter with a yearly average of more than 200 members. Quarterly meetings are well attended; 113 were present for our latest one. We convene at 8:00 a.m. Sunday Mass, followed by breakfast, a brief address and adjournment by 10:00 a.m.

The Guild is alive and well because of our moderator, Reverend Francis J. Bisenius. He has been our good friend and advisor since 1955. Father Bisenius, Milwaukee-born, is Professor of Dogmatic and Moral Theology at St. Francis Major Seminary in Milwaukee. (In spite of this imposing title he can out-fish and out-golf most of us.) He received his elementary education in Milwaukee and attended St. Francis Minor Seminary for six years. He spent three years at Milwaukee and attended St. Mary's when he received his elementary education. He then spent three years at the Gregorian University in Rome studying three more years at the major seminary. He is also Pro-synodal Judge of the Archdiocese and a Sor Librorum for magazine articles his good friend and advisor since 1955. He has been instrumental in organizing a work- ing health care program for the religious in the area. Several years ago he called together a committee of the Guild and the Superiors of all the Religious Orders of the city to form an organizational meeting. This session evolved a worthwhile health program. He has celebrated Mass for every Guild meeting since becoming our moderator, concelebrating last year's White Mass with nine Catholic hospital chaplains in the area. Father has visited most of the Guild members in their homes. As a Mother's Day project he had booklets printed in which was provided a page for a Spirituale Bouquet for a doctor and his children to present to their mothers on that special occasion. In his sermon for us, Father Bisenius has listed members who are ill in the hospital, led the rosary at vigils for deceased members; he dropped into the hospital to see my wife or the delivery of our children. He goes fishing in northern Wisconsin with Guild members; he indulged one of those outings and drove 280 miles back to Milwaukee to hold a rosary for a deceased member. He is seldom adverse to a game of golf. He has heard the confession of a doctor on his deathbed.

In these and many other ways Father Bisenius is very close to the members of the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild — and this is why we love our Moderator.

Dr. Schmitz serves the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild as secretary-treasurer. He is in private practice of obstetrics in that city. He is Clinical Instructor of Obstetrics, Marquette University School of Medicine.

A Physician Views His Apostolate

GEORGE E. COLLENTINE, JR., M.D.

I cannot remember a time when I was not going to be a doctor. One of the early recollections of my childhood takes me back to Father O'Keefe's rectory at St. Gall's when I was about eight years old. Archbishop Stritch was vesting there for Confirmation; I was to be his train bearer. He lifted me off the floor and asked, "Son, what are you going to be when you grow up?" "A doctor." "Oho! And are you going to cut up people?" "Sure," I said for I seemed that surgery was always part of my dream.

Now here I stand some 37 years later, a physician viewing his apostolate. In trying to crystallize my thoughts, I have attempted to compose my view of a Catholic physician's mission and to analyze some of the influences that have molded this view. I have not necessarily - unique nor typical nor representative of my profession; certainly not very profound. It has occurred to me that it might be more meaningful if I cited a few of the influences that have been at work through these years as background for the formation of one physician's view of his apostolate.

The locus of my personal apostolate has been very much the little world of St. Mary's Hospital, where I was born and raised, and insecurity during surgery has sometimes resulted. Hence the remarkable and steadfast feeling of trust that I have in my profession; certainly the patient's confidence in surgeons is often the key to successful results in any endeavor. In these and many other ways Father Bisenius is very close to the members of the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild — and this is why we love our Moderator.

The locus of my personal apostolate has been very much the little world of St. Mary's Hospital, where Dr. Schmitz serves the Milwaukee Catholic Physicians' Guild as secretary-treasurer. He is in private practice of obstetrics in that city. He is Clinical Instructor of Obstetrics, Marquette University School of Medicine.

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Since 1959 a considerable portion of my time has been spent among the unique concentration of suffering humanity that has passed through the Burn Center at St. Mary's. Here, in the drama of hospital life with its story of anguish and relief, courage and cowardice, exaltation and degradation, recovery and death are being acted out on a screen by a projection at triple speed.

But far more important than events and circumstances are the persons. Many of you are familiar with the remarkable and still uncompleted story of my father, the story of an Irishman, destined by the circumstances and conditions of that race to be a physician, almost, as you know, I made rounds at St. Mary's when I was a high school freshman, proudly scrubbed with him as a high school senior, walked into the operating room, dripping hands held high in the grand approved fashion, only to be sent back to the scrub room in disgrace with rather firm instructions to go. Since 1959 a considerable portion of my time has been spent among the unique concentration of suffering humanity that has passed through the Burn Center at St. Mary's. Here, in the drama of hospital life with its story of anguish and relief, courage and cowardice, exaltation and degradation, recovery and death are being acted out on a screen by a projection at triple speed.

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remove my high school sweetheart's class ring from my finger; studied at home under his guidance through college and medical school and finally had the privilege of teaming with him in practice for a few short years before he "retired" to a Benedictine monastery after the death of my mother.

Of course he has been the greatest influence in my life. I shall cite only one example of his advice, because his whole life has been a sermon. "If ever a grateful patient or relative tearfully wrings your hand in gratitude for saving the life of a loved one," he said, "accept it humbly and graciously, because you will know that you couldn't have done it by yourself and you are going to be blamed for an awful lot of things you couldn't possibly help."

There was also the late Father Anthony Berens, S.J., who taught Apologetics in the College of Liberal Arts and who used to conclude a lecture like this: "Either this is Truth and the only important Truth in the world or it's the greatest hoax that was ever perpetrated!" His contribution was the utter conviction that our God-given faith is wholly compatible with an endless pursuit of rational and scientific knowledge of nature and ourselves and that without that Faith all things are meaningless.

My mother was a convert. She never missed a basketball game when we played and she was always pleased but secretly a little irrevocably amused by the universal practice of both teams of little boys kneeling — as separate teams, of course — to pray for victory before the games. She was puzzled, she said, about how God could decide which team's prayer to answer, but it was her own observation that the team with the tallest center almost always won.

Perhaps I may be forgiven for "teaching" for analogy here. To me, the "tallest center" is captain of the team praying to God for victory in the game against disease and death, is the physician who anchors his apostolate, his first duty, beginning in school and continuing through every day of his life in practice; the doctor will cultivate a full and competent knowledge and skill in the science and art of medicine. He knows that he needs the help of his teammates in consultation. He seeks his captain's help on moral and ethical problems, especially today in a scrimmage of seemingly paradoxical and changing concepts still based on changeless moral principles. He knows that his natural remedies will not be completely adequate — that he needs God's help. He knows that if he is incompetent because of culpable inadequacy in his preparation he is guilty of injustice toward his patient and of presumption in asking the Divine Physician to bail him out.

I offer now this view of my apostolate:

To love all men as brothers of Christ, to be cared for as such;

To understand how my science and art can fit in with God's plan for men;

To know that when death eventually and inevitably displaces me at the bedside I have not necessarily failed but have simply had to give way to God's call.

I know that, with God's help, it is not impossible to carry out such an apostolate in the little world in which I move. One of His heroes, has shown us the way in our own time, in the person of Doctor Tom Dooley, the late physician to the people of Laos and the world. At his funeral the eulogist quoted from a poem by Robert Frost some words Tom Dooley loved and lived:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep.
But I have promises to keep.
And miles to go before I sleep.

XI INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS
of
CATHOLIC DOCTORS
Manila, Philippines
November 2-6, 1966

Principal Theme
THE DOCTOR and the POPULATION PROBLEM

Secondary Themes
Fertility and Sterility * Population Control
Genetics * Social Medicine
Food and Nutrition
Socio-Economic Factors

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