

Diocese honors medical vocation through Mass and conference

On Saturday, Sept. 24, the Fort Wayne Catholic Medical Guild will host its first Catholic Medical Conference, MedCon2016, at the University of Saint Francis in Fort Wayne. The day's events will focus on how to incorporate the Catholic faith with the medical vocation as well as the ethical challenges that Catholic medical professionals face today.

In addition to keynote speaker Dr. Thomas Hilgers, other speakers include Dr. Ashley Fernandes, associate director of the Center for Bioethics and Medical Humanities at The Ohio State University and an associate professor of pediatrics at Nationwide Children's Hospital in Columbus, Ohio; as well as Sister Mary Diana Dreger, OP, M.D., the first nun to graduate from Vanderbilt University and a physician at Saint Thomas Medical Partners — The Holy Family Healthcare in Nashville, Tenn.

Sister Dreger believes that this conference will be a dynamic and informative event.

“Many times Catholic healthcare conferences tend to focus on the obvious Catholic concerns. Typically that would be abortion and euthanasia, and related issues,” she said. “But this conference is different as it starts with the basic principles underlying Catholic healthcare. This will give the participants a great opportunity to think about the persons involved in healthcare, namely the patient and the physician and their relationship.”

The day will conclude with the celebration of a White Mass by Bishop Kevin C. Rhoades.

Named after the white coats traditionally worn by medical professionals and recognized as a Catholic Medical Association custom in the U.S. since the 1930s, a White Mass is a Mass intentioned for those working in the medical profession. Traditionally, White Masses have been celebrated around the Feast of St. Luke, patron of health care professionals, on Oct. 18. Though 2016 is the inaugural year for the MedCon conference, the White Mass has become somewhat of a tradition for the Diocese of Fort Wayne-South Bend. Since 2013, the Fort Wayne Catholic Medical Association has hosted a White Mass to pray for those working in the medical profession and for matters related to medicine.

Dr. David Kaminskas, who has practiced medicine in Fort Wayne for nearly 35 years, helped to organize the MedCon event. Like Sister Dreger, he believes that it is important to educate physicians, medical students, nurses, etc., on the various issues affecting health care today and how to practice medicine that aligns with Catholic tradition and ethics.

“... I have never been more concerned about the future of medicine in this country,” said Dr. Kaminskas. “Between governmental regulations and insurance companies

controlling our every step, I pray that we can continue to provide the care that people deserve. We should never be told we cannot practice our Christian values as we bring God and our faith to the people we serve.”

Sister Dreger echoed Kaminskas’ comment on the serving aspect of the medical profession.

“Medicine becomes an act of love for another person. It would be a different world in health care today if every healthcare professional could see our patients the way God sees them.”

Like Sister Dreger, Fernandes strives to integrate his faith and his work.

“... one’s Catholic faith cannot be separated to be ‘balanced’ against medical practice,” he said. “The two should always be integrated, just as we do with other vocations. How does one balance their Catholic faith and their marriage? The two are inextricably linked, or ought to be. Similarly, with medicine.”

Kaminskas believes that this event will remind Catholic healthcare professionals that they are not alone in their fight to align their practice with their Catholic Faith.

“The conference and White Mass will hopefully inspire health care workers to practice their Catholic faith and let them know they are not alone. We want to start a spiritual fire in the hearts of doctors, nurses, and all health care workers.”

Kaminskas went on to explain that the conference will also help those considering medical school to realize that the secular medical world will challenge one’s faith, but there are medical professionals who see their vocation as a way to serve God. He then went on to say that the conference will also encourage those considering a medical career to be resilient in their efforts to adhere to their faith.

“We are not only targeting physicians and healthcare workers, but believe there will be great interest for all Catholics to attend,” he said.

The conference begins at 8 a.m. in the university’s North Auditorium with registration and breakfast beginning at 7:30 a.m. Mass begins at 4 p.m. and will also be held in the auditorium. Those who cannot attend the conference are still welcome to attend Mass. Attendance fees vary. For more information and to preregister, visit www.medconfortwayne.com or www.fortwaynecma.com or call 260- 222-6978.

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