

**Calling All Health Care Professionals:
The White Mass is Coming! The White Mass is Coming!**

Thomas W. McGovern, MD

What is a *White Mass* and why are we beginning this annual tradition in Fort Wayne?

The idea for “colored masses” began in the 13th century when the first Red Mass for legal professionals was held at the Paris Cathedral in 1245. Red was chosen as the color because of its association with the Holy Spirit who is petitioned to grant lawyers and judges wisdom to mete out justice in their daily duties. Our diocese hosts a Red Mass in early October each year for lawyers; at this mass the bishop and priests wear red vestments.

With the rise of the Catholic Medical Association in the 1930s, dioceses began hosting White Masses for those who work in the healing professions. White is the color of the mass based on the color commonly worn by health care professionals. But why *is* white associated with the healing professions?

Until the end of the 19th century, physicians and nurses typically wore black, because medicine in those times offered very sick individuals little hope, and those going to a hospital or a physician were often on death’s door. Also, the idea of a Black Mass in honor of medical professionals just would have stirred up too many negative connotations: black vestments may only be worn for masses for the dead or on All Souls Day.

When the science of healing started to catch up with the laboratory sciences in the late 1800s, physicians and nurses stopped wearing black since black was associated with quacks and frauds. Medical professionals began practicing good hygiene and providing treatments based on sound scientific knowledge, and in order to distance themselves from unsavory practitioners, they started to wear beige coats. But alas, there were no beige vestments in the Catholic Church, and since it wasn’t the 1970s yet, no Beige Masses were ever said.

By 1915, the majority of physicians and nurses working in hospitals were wearing white coats just like well-respected laboratory scientists. Even though white coats have been associated with the healing arts for a century, new studies show that most physicians no longer like wearing white coats, and most young patients prefer that they don’t. Many physicians think that the white coat places a hierarchical barrier between patients and them. However, older patients tend to think that the white coat lends an aura of professionalism and excellence to the wearer.

Fortunately, the color white is liturgically appropriate! This year, our white mass will take place on the feast of Saint Therese of Lisieux, and the bishop and priests will wear white! Typically,

the White Mass is celebrated on or near the October 18 feast of Saint Luke, patron of physicians.

Why should you attend the White Mass? If you are a Catholic health care professional - doctor, nurse practitioner, physician assistant, nurse, medical assistant, pharmacist, etc. - this White Mass will serve as a kickoff for expanding our Doctor Jerome Lejeune Catholic Medical Guild of Northeast Indiana to all interested professionals.

The Culture of Death does not tolerate Catholic beliefs in action. In order to remain true to our faith and to avoid being swallowed up by the secular culture, we need to form a vibrant Catholic medical subculture so that we may be affirmed in our vocations to carry Christ with us wherever we go - especially into our hospitals and offices.

This year's banquet speaker, Sister Dede Byrne, MD is a retired Army Colonel and an active general surgeon, family practitioner, and religious superior who lives and works in Washington, DC - except when she is traveling to the Sudan and Haiti to operate.

Come be inspired and encouraged - **Tuesday, October 1, 6 p.m. - Mass with Bishop Kevin Rhoades followed by \$10 buffet dinner and program featuring Sister Dede at St. Vincent dePaul Catholic Church in Fort Wayne.** Register and pay at www.fortwaynecma.com. White coat optional!

Dr. Thomas McGovern is a dermatologist specializing in skin cancer and reconstructive surgery in Fort Wayne and is the president of the Dr Jerome Lejeune Catholic Medical Guild of Northeast Indiana.

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