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Catholic Clubs in Boston Medical Schools

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CATHOLIC students at Boston University, Harvard and Tufts medical schools had actively participated in the various activities sponsored by the undergraduate or university Catholic and Newman Clubs at these universities since their inception. However, in 1946 a group of students at Harvard and Tufts medical schools felt a strong need for a separate organization where problems of interest to them as Catholic medical students in a non-Catholic medical school could be regularly discussed and where more favorable opportunities of knowing each other could be realized through a smaller and more closely knit organization. With the permission of diocesan authorities and the approval of the chaplains of the university clubs, they formed their own distinct constitutions, elected their own officers, were assigned a separate chaplain and in that year held meetings open only to medical students and their guests.

The club at Tufts medical school was called the Louis Pasteur Society and the one at Harvard was named the Dwight Club after the famous Catholic anatomist who taught for many years at Harvard. Because the students in the dental school at Harvard are few in number and take their basic science courses with the medical students, they were invited to become members of the Dwight Club. The dental students at Tufts, however, formed their own separate Catholic club two years later. In 1950, the Catholic students at Boston University medical school organized a club similar to those already established at the other two schools.

The purpose of each club, as the constitutions indicate, is to foster, develop and intensify the spiritual life of its members through the elucidation of the philosophy and cultural traditions of the Church and to apply its teachings to the problems arising in modern medical practice. The clubs also afford through their informal meetings an opportunity for the Catholic students to become better acquainted and to discuss problems of a general or personal nature among themselves, with the faculty adviser and the chaplain.

Each club has a president, vice-president, treasurer and secretary,

usually elected from the second or third year classes. It is the function of the president to call meetings, preside at the sessions, and with the assistance of the secretary to post and mail notices of future meetings. A member of each class not represented by an officer is chosen to contact the members of his class regarding meetings and serve as liaison with the officers of the club. A Catholic doctor from each faculty is selected by the officers to be their faculty adviser. It has been the privilege of the author to act as chaplain to all three groups.

The meetings are open to non-Catholic medical students and other guests of the Catholic students. At Harvard, it has been the custom for the Dwight Club to meet on the first Thursday evening of every month from October to May in the faculty club room of the medical students' dormitory. Coffee and cookies are served before and after the formal part of the meeting. At Tufts, evening meetings are held four or five times a year in one of the classrooms of the medical school. At Boston University, the regular evening meetings are conducted monthly from October to April in one of the medical school classrooms. At the latter two schools, an evening is chosen when the demands of studies and examinations are less than usual. The deans at the schools have been most cooperative in furnishing facilities for the meetings. Attendance at the meetings varies with the pressure of the students' work. In general, however, attendance has been most satisfactory and encouraging. As it is with most organizations of this kind, the vitality of the clubs depends to a great degree on the president and secretary and the sacrifice of time and ingenuity they are willing to give in order to develop the activities and increase the membership.

At each meeting, a priest or doctor discusses a topic suggested at a previous session that develops some aspect of Catholicism. A wide variety of subjects has been covered in recent years. Although one or two meetings each year are devoted to a discussion of medico-moral problems, many other subjects such as Church history, the papal encyclicals on social justice, the liturgy, the bible, Catholic literature, scholastic philosophy, evolution, marriage. Catholic asceticism have been included. It has been found through experience that purely clinical subjects are not attractive and that a varied program of subjects will keep the interest of the members through their four years. First year students are usually more interested in medico-moral problems, but as they advance, their interest is apt to wane with too many classroom discussions of similar problems. This is especially true of Catholic college graduates who have had courses in ethics and theology. It is the function of the chaplain to enlist the services of other local priests to speak before these groups. Members of Boston College faculty and

other clergy of the Boston Archdiocese have been most generous and cooperative in lecturing to these students without remuneration. The faculty adviser usually assumes the responsibility of bringing a doctor as a speaker whenever this is requested. One of the most stimulating and informative types of sessions thus far, has been a panel discussion on medico-moral problems and other subjects of interest to a prospective Catholic practitioner, with a Catholic obstetrician, psychiatrist, internist and surgeon answering questions.

In December and May the three clubs attend Mass together, followed by a Communion Breakfast at one of the local hotels. In February, during the first week-end after mid-year examinations, a closed retreat is conducted for the medical students of the three schools at the local Jesuit retreat house, Campion Hall. The retreat begins on Friday evening, concluding on Sunday afternoon. Students with Saturday morning classes begin the retreat that afternoon. Since its first observance in 1949, the annual retreat has been the most outstanding event of the year with a capacity attendance. A few non-Catholic medical students come each year. Members of the Dwight Club spend one mid-night hour each month in Nocturnal Adoration at St. Clement's Shrine.

In recent years the three clubs have been closely affiliated with the Boston chapter of the St. Luke's Guild. The Guild has contributed generously towards the expenses of the annual retreat and the regular meetings of the Dwight Club. During the past year subscriptions to LINACRE QUARTERLY and copies of a manual on medico-moral problems were purchased for each student by members of the Guild. In January these students were guests at the Guild's dinner and in May were present at the annual Communion Breakfast. Members of the Guild have participated frequently in the meetings of the club and the president of the local chapter is always invited to speak at the medical students' Communion Breakfast. With such a close relationship, the Catholic medical students become better acquainted with the activities of the Guild and Guild members, in turn, get to know the students. Without the wholehearted cooperation and generous financial support of this Catholic Physicians' Guild, it would have been impossible to achieve the success and growth these three clubs have enjoyed in recent years. To the officers and members of this Guild is due no small debt of gratitude for their interest and help. It is hoped that other Guilds throughout the country might find similar apostolic outlets by assisting and encouraging the establishment and development of Catholic clubs in medical schools. Certainly there are few other activities which are more deserving of support and from which both immediate and long lasting good will come.