

Get motivated to repair body, spirit

B19

Faith & Family

Catholic Courier | Diocese of Rochester, NY | July 2004

Dr. Jim Fitzgerald, a wise and experienced Georgetown physician, said to me about 35 years ago, "To the extent that your medical destiny can be said to be in your own hands, it is largely a matter of weight control."

Remembering his well-chosen words and heeding his advice are two different realities. So I have to admit that repeating his words now is more of a triumph of memory over practice, and not at all a claim to docility and physical fitness. I have, however, been connecting the dots that the medical community is putting out there between weight gain, cardiovascular disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, cancer and other illnesses.

"Obesity in the United States: A Fresh Look at Its High Toll" appeared in the Journal of the American Medical Association in January 2003. The authors, JoAnn Manson, a medical doctor, and Shari Bassuck, a doctor of science, declare obesity "pandemic" in the United States. The article says, "Currently, two in three U.S. adults are classified as overweight or obese, compared with fewer than one in four in the early 1960s."

Journalists are paying increased attention to the habits and measurements of overweight Americans. Recent articles in newspapers across the country are holding the mirror up to anyone sensible enough to see the rise of obesity as a major public health problem. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates that 64 percent of the nation's population is overweight or obese.

A *New York Times* headline last March 10 read: "Death Rate From Obesity Gains Fast on Smoking." That same day *USA Today* spelled it out in a bit more detail: "Obesity on Track as No. 1 Killer — Inactivity, Poor Diet May Overtake Tobacco."



Father William J. Byron

Looking Around

Overeating and underexercising may soon overtake smoking as the lead cause of preventable death in America.

Anyone can eat less (smaller portions) and get more exercise (fewer rides in cars or elevators, more walks on sidewalks and stairs). A substitution of will power for motor power could trigger a revolution in preventive health care.

Positioning the obesity problem over against tobacco is instructive. Dr. Dick Lilly, another physician friend, told me recently that in four decades of general practice he never once succeeded in persuading a patient to stop smoking. He said, "It's an addiction that is just as strong as an addiction to cocaine or heroin." It can be broken, of course, but breaking away from tobacco is never easy.

What, then, might any of us do to break away from overeating and adopt a physical exercise routine? We'll need knowledge and motivation.

You can locate your place on a chart that classifies weight norms by race, age and height. Where are you relative to the mean or median in your age and height category? If you don't like what you see, decide to do something about it.

To get motivated, consider the need for more "prayer and fasting" in a church still reeling from the clergy sex-abuse scandal. Your struggle to eat less and exercise more can be undertaken as reparation for the sins that produced the scandal. Although a relatively few are guilty, all of us in the church are responsible for the repair work. At the present time, year-round fasting might be right for those who love their church and recognize the toll that obesity is taking on their health.

Fitzgerald might say today that your "spiritual" as well as your "medical destiny" is not unrelated to weight control. I suspect he also would want to add a word about smoking.

Father William J. Byron, SJ, is a columnist for Catholic News Service.



CREST MANOR: FOR *state-of-the-heart* CARE. What are you really looking for in a skilled nursing facility? Brand-new buildings are nice...but you want a home for your father, not a hotel. At Crest Manor, you'll find a true family — a caring, experienced staff that adds a personal touch to everything they do...from our nurses and CNAs to our housekeepers and dining staff. We're a close-knit community of 80 residents right here in Fairport. We're family-owned and operated, and have been for 30 years. If it's what's inside that counts, you should tour Crest Manor today.

Get the scoop
about the latest
movie reviews and
daily, national &
international news
updates — at

www.catholiccourier.com/

6745 PITTSFORD-PALMYRA ROAD FAIRPORT NEW YORK 14450
PHONE 585.223.3633 / WWW.BHCG.COM

CREST MANOR
Living and Rehabilitation Center