

Where Does
God
Fit Into This For
You?



By:
Drs. Gianna and Michael Sullivan

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By Dr. Michael T. Sullivan with Dr. Gianna Talone-Sullivan

It would be wonderful if we lived in a world where everyone responded to God's love and goodness with love, goodness, and thanksgiving in return; where pain, disease, suffering, injustice and greed were replaced by good health, peace of heart, justice and generosity. However, our world has yet to reach that point, and many in our world have lost their sense of dignity. This has occurred for a variety of reasons, which include:

- No specific fault or weakness of their own,
- Unjust victimization or harassment,
- Poor personal choices, and
- A conscious or unconscious rejection of any spiritual life founded on truth, faith, and moral principles.

Mission of Mercy is a private, non-profit 501(c)(3), charitable organization founded in 1992 by my wife, Dr. Gianna Talone-Sullivan, and currently operating mobile medical clinics in Arizona, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Texas. Gianna was invited by Our Lord to restore dignity to the poor and broken. Since her professional career had for several years been in the medical field as a clinical pharmacist, it seemed only natural to her to reach out to the poor and broken through medical care.

Although her initial efforts in Arizona were met with many obstacles, and a failure to launch in 1992, with prayer and perseverance (and marrying me) she was able to launch Mission of Mercy in Maryland in 1994. After establishing a three-year track record in Maryland and Pennsylvania, Mission of Mercy did belatedly but joyously launch in October, 1997, in Phoenix, Arizona and then again in Texas in 2007.

Since August, 1994, we have **freely** served over 93,500 patients in nearly 375,000 patient visits in our medical and dental clinics in the three states we serve. Mission of Mercy volunteer dentists have performed over 65,000 dental procedures; and over 629,500 prescription medications have been **freely** given.

HEALING THROUGH LOVE

Our mission statement is to restore dignity, "healing through love." Although a wide variety of medical and dental services for acute and chronic conditions, diagnostic studies and procedures both on site and in conjunction with area hospitals and clinical specialists, and medications are provided FREE of charge to the poor, the homeless, the uninsured and underinsured "working poor" who are "falling through the cracks" in ever increasing numbers; our true product is LOVE, not mere human love, but God's LOVE.

This can often be expressed in a variety of ways, including: the medical and dental care we provide, a kind look, a gentle touch, a sincere smile, a hug, a compassionate tone of voice, or an attentive ear. Since our primary product is LOVE and not just medical/dental care, then each of our volunteers, whether practitioners, pharmacists, nurses, technicians, administrative or hospitality workers, are equally able on any given day to be God's primary instrument of LOVE for any of those we serve. In the same vein, on any given day one of our staff or volunteers may be the recipient of God's LOVE through the poor we serve.

One might ask how we can be so bold as to profess our delivery of God's LOVE. The only answer to this is "PRAYER." The Board of Directors, staff, and volunteers that have been attracted to Mission of Mercy were first people whose own prayer life had led them to seek a greater intimacy with Our Lord. While not all of our volunteer staff are of the one faith, in Mission of Mercy each of us has found an expression of that intimacy and actively try to see the suffering Christ in each of the poor we serve. We are a charitable, not a religious organization, and we specifically do *not* proselytize, yet for the most part we gaze on Our Father and the poor through Christian eyes. For this reason it is not so difficult for us to see the rejection, loneliness, abandonment and suffering that Our Lord endured in the poor He brings to us and allows us to serve.

PRAYER IS ESSENTIAL TO OUR WORK

Yet it is by no means easy for us to maintain a spirit of unconditional love and mercy day after day, patient after patient; and sometimes we fall short. There are times that this LOVE has to be expressed as "tough love," and not infrequently we are met with rudeness and ingratitude. This is why PRAYER has to remain central to our workday.

For many of our staff and volunteers, the day begins with an early morning Mass. The hour in transit to and from our sites in the morning and late afternoon is an hour of community prayer, often the Healing Rosary. We refocus as a team at noon with the traditional prayer, The Angelus. Back home at night, we include that day's work with the poor in our family prayer. All of this helps us to continue to express in our eyes, hearts, words and touch the LOVE God has for each person He brings to us. Were we to get slack in this essential part of our service, we would soon be no different than any other source of conventional healthcare for the poor.

Our work is not out of duty, justice, nor out of simple charity, but out of LOVE and MERCY. Mercy, which is unconditional love in action, seems to be the missing essential ingredient needed to address most of our world's problems. St. Vincent de Paul, a 17th century French priest whose societies even today count over one million religious and lay volunteers serving the poor, taught his young novices that the poor need to see and feel our love before they can forgive us for helping them.

Many of the poor carry with them much anger and resentment, and little understanding of forgiveness. A problem that often confronts me as a physician is how can I, without proselytizing and preaching religion in a self-righteous manner, extend God's LOVE to the wounded soul before me as well as do my best with his/her medical and psychological needs. These needs may often be compounded by a severe financial crisis, unemployment, abusive relationships, fear and a sense of hopelessness. Many may already be on guard against anything that looks like formal

religiosity, either due to previous poor experiences or what they perceive as hypocrisy.

WHERE DOES GOD FIT INTO THIS FOR YOU?

As a physician, I have found that a simple question, "And where does God fit into this for you?" can often unlock a door that the person may actually desire to have opened. This question can be met with a profound silence, tears, an expression of prior spiritual belief or practice, an acknowledgment of a void in their lives that God may have once filled, a sense of unworthiness to now approach God in view of their prior behavior and choices, or even a total blank stare of spiritual ignorance.

I often simply say that their problems are way too big and complex for them, for me and my medical colleagues, for all the counselors and social workers, for the medicines I can prescribe, and for the entire social service system. I assure them however, that God loves them dearly and that their problems are not too big for Him, and that He may even use some of us to help them, but that we cannot do it without Him. I encourage them first to pray, however they know how, and offer them a beautiful "Surrender Prayer" which could be used by someone of any faith, or even someone of no faith.

SURRENDER PRAYER

Dear God, I am powerless and my life is unmanageable without Your help and guidance. I come to You today because I believe that You can restore and renew me to meet my needs today. Since I cannot adequately manage my life or affairs, I have decided to give them to You. I put my life, my will, my thoughts, my desires and ambitions into Your hands.

I give You all of me: the good and the bad, the character defects and shortcomings, my selfishness, resentments, and all my problems. I know that You will work them out in accordance with Your plan. Such as I am, take and use me in Your service. Guide and direct my ways and show me what to do for You.

I cannot control or change my friends or loved ones, so I release them into Your care for Your loving hands to do with as You will. Just keep me loving them and free from judging them. If they need changing, God, You will have to do it. I can't. Just make me willing and ready to be of service to You, to have my shortcomings removed, and to do my best.

Help me to see how I have harmed others, and make me willing to make amends to You and to them. Keep me ever mindful of thoughts and actions that harm myself and others, and that separate me from Your light, Your love and Your Spirit. And when I commit these errors, make me aware of them and help me to recognize each one promptly.

I am seeking to know You better and to love You more. I am seeking the knowledge of Your Will for me and the power to carry it out.

Author, anonymous

Most of our patients have a friend, family member, or someone they trust who is actively involved in one of the area churches. I urge each to consider discussing God and faith with them and possibly attending services with them. Finally, I let them

know that our Mission of Mercy team will be praying for them.

This entire interaction occurs in an environment on the mobile clinic characterized by a background of soft, inspirational music, a crucifix, a devotional picture and statue, and an Angel of Hope plaque discreetly adorning various areas of the clinic. This brief extension of God's LOVE takes only a few moments, but often brings about a sincere eye-to-eye expression of gratitude and a firm hand shake or hug. Hopefully, we have unlocked, or even partially opened, the door to someone's heart, a door through which we are confident that Our Lord will continue to draw them home to Him.

INSIGNIFICANT?

Some of our critics might look at what we do as little and insignificant and see our medical care as incomplete and episodic. We, however, find peace and truth in the words of the late Mother Teresa of Calcutta:

We must not drift away from the humble works, because these are the works nobody will do. It is never too small. We are so small and we look at things in a small way. But God, being Almighty, sees every thing great. Small things . . . very humble work, that is where you and I must be. For there are many people who *can* do big things. But there are very few people who *will* do the small things.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta

This approach might appear very simplistic, and we certainly cannot provide impressive conversion statistics, a litany of spiritual success stories or miraculous cures, although we do see and believe that God is continuing to touch many lives with us and through us. This may not satisfy the demands of critics in our success-failure oriented society, but "success" and "failure" are terms whose criteria are defined by men. God has not called us to success or failure, but to faithfulness, to obedience and to love.

Gianna and I hope and pray that when all of our Mission of Mercy team retire at night, they carry with them a sense of Peace and the confidence that they have been obedient and faithful as well as have been examples of God's Love and Mercy to others. Others may point out that it is not practical that so much time and attention be given to PRAYER in our busy family, work and social lives, with all of their cumulative distractions. To this we can only point to the decay of the family, the violence in the world, the loss of respect for life, the suffering, the greed and corruption, and the loss of a sense of truth and morality in our local communities and throughout our world, and ask what will happen if we do not commit this time to prayer. **"Where does God fit into this for you?"** (Rev.8/05)



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