

Dentist divides professional skill between career, ministry

By Teresa A. Parsons

Joseph L. Dulski, DDS, leads something of a double life.

On most weekdays, you can find him at the center of a thriving dental practice located just off Mt. Hope Avenue. But every other Tuesday morning, he turns up in a different role at Corpus Christi Neighborhood Health Center. He's still a dentist, but at Corpus Christi, Dulski donates his skills to people who would otherwise not be able to afford dental care.

His Tuesday patients are not the very poor, who are eligible for dental care through welfare benefits. Nor are they people whose dental care is covered by private insurance.

They are those whom Dulski terms the working poor — single parents and their children, retirees, struggling young families and owners of fledgling businesses.

"There is a portion of the population for whom the economic barrier is so great that dental care is essentially not available," he explained. "We are not trying to duplicate services that are already offered. These patients really couldn't go to a private dentist because of the cost ... and they don't qualify for third-party payments."

Often, the economic barrier such people face is compounded by fear. "There were some people who simply weren't getting dental care because they were so frightened," said Sister Sharon Bailey, co-director of the health center. "But people in the neighborhood have gotten to know and trust us, and (Dulski's) own style was a big selling point. He is just very, very gentle."

Offering dental care had been a dream of staff members ever since the health center opened in 1981. "From the very beginning, the neighborhood people on our board had asked about dental care," Sister Bailey said. "But our style has never really been to recruit people, because there's a certain kind of commitment that just has to be there. Most people have to come to us."

In Dulski's case, she said, the arrangement was a mutual thing.

A native of Hamburg, N.Y., Dulski graduated from the University of Buffalo Dental School in 1980. After spending two years in residency at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, he returned to upstate New York with his wife, Wanda, and settled in Rochester.

In April, 1985, Dulski purchased his own dental practice. He and his wife had already



Jeff Goulding/Courier-Journal

Patients at Corpus Christi Health Center don't hesitate to 'open wide' for Dr. Joseph Dulski, DDS. His gentle manner calms their fears and they pay only what they can afford for his services. Most patients at the health center are not eligible for Medicaid benefits because they work, but do not earn enough to pay for private dental care and aren't covered by dental insurance.

begin attending Corpus Christi's Thursday night folk Mass. Gradually, he said, they began looking for ways to become more involved in the Corpus Christi community. Late in the summer of 1985, Dulski and one of his two daughters attended an activities fair at which each of the outreach programs at Corpus Christi was represented. As he passed the health center's display, Dulski noticed that the staff was seeking volunteers. He signed his name and noted his profession. Not long afterward, Sister Bailey called him.

"Things just seemed to come together after that," he said. "I had a garage full of equipment. They set aside a room for a

dental suite."

While a handyman installed his spare dental equipment at the health center, Dulski canvassed dental suppliers for donations of instruments and supplies. In June, 1986, even though the dental center was not yet completely equipped, Dulski began doing routine cleaning and examinations. Patients were asked to donate whatever they could afford in return for his services.

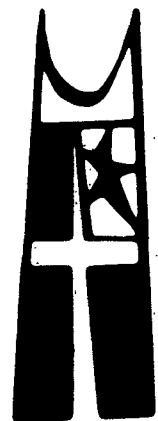
"We started out by introducing ourselves to people," he recalled. "Looking back, it was a good decision to start before we had everything we needed. Once people saw there was a serious commitment there, we started

to get some serious donations of equipment. It just started to snowball."

After he obtained an X-ray machine from St. Mary's Hospital and an offer of free services from the owner of a local dental laboratory, Dulski began doing routine tooth extractions and filling cavities, in the fall of 1986.

Sister Bailey believes that patients are drawn to the dental clinic not only because of economic need, but also by the quality of care that Dulski offers.

"He's a kind person and he's a good person — that just comes through," she said. **Continued on Page 12**

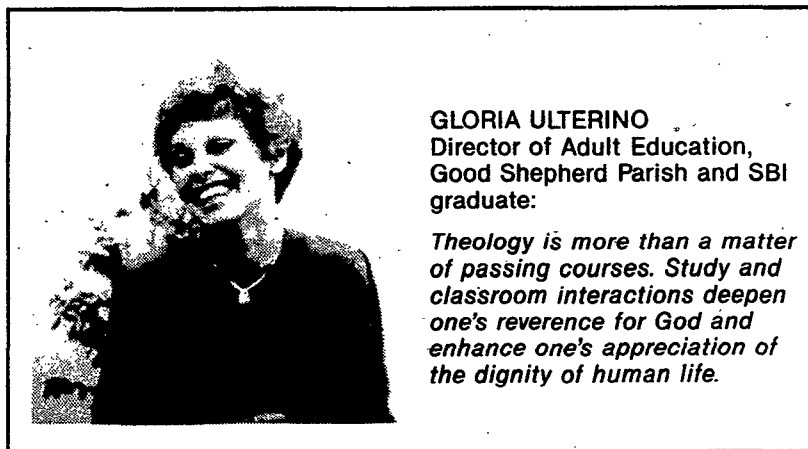


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No two people react in exactly the same way to the death of a loved one! Some people do well by plunging into old routines or setting up new ones. Others need time to adjust to life without the deceased. They need time to express feelings, to learn new ways of doing things and to put affairs in order. The critical matter is that the grieving person be aware of and willing to deal with the changes death has created. Activity solely for the purpose of escaping feelings and running from the pain will not work. On the other hand inactivity can further depression. The newly bereaved should take time to deal with feelings and then begin the tasks necessary to make life meaningful.

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