

Mission First Medical and Dental Clinic

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Life is not about you; rather, it is about the one to the right or left of you, or across town, or even across an ocean. Many people struggle with life when they realize that it is not about them and that they are not irreplaceable. The world can replace most positions within a few days of loss. The world can find another dentist, another husband for your wife or wife for your husband, or another partner for your golf buddies. The world does not need "irreplaceables," because it can replace. With that in mind, what exactly is your mission in life? The world needs you simply for what you can give it while you are here. Everyone is replaceable in whatever capacity; so, you must move past that petty idea and begin to ask yourself, "What does the world need from me, and what am I doing to meet those needs?" This is a question that can be asked of anyone from any profession, any background, and any religious preference. It should serve as a question that daily checks the validity of your life. So, I am asking you as a dentist or future dentist, "Are you reporting to your job/life simply to clock in, or are you attempting to meet the needs of the world?"

Whether you are still making strides in your journey or have already completed your journey toward becoming what the University of Mississippi School of Dentistry handbook calls a "scientifically-minded, clinically competent, community-oriented, ethical dentist to serve the oral health needs of the state of Mississippi," I urge you upon self-examination to list ways in which you can serve the oral health needs of the state of Mississippi through community service. If you are struggling with this list, allow me to offer at least one solution to the equation of promoting the interests of others outside of the confines of your office. When one gets away from the group setting of the dental school and feels hidden away in the solitude of a private practice, it is often difficult to explore resources on avenues to offer skills to the community in an organized and safe manner. The Mission First Medical and Dental Clinic is a non-profit organization whose first mission is to meet the spiritual needs of the uninsured patients of

What is your mission in life?

Mississippi by meeting physical needs, primarily dental needs. That is where you come into the equation. Mission First offers a safe and organized method for scientifically-minded, clinically-competent, ethical Mississippi dentists to serve the oral health needs of hundreds of uninsured patients in the state who would otherwise go untreated. That is a truly successful community-oriented dentist.

Mission First affords you the opportunity to participate in life-enriching and life-changing (for you and the patients) community mission work without having to take time away from your private practice to travel outside of the country or even outside of the state. Mission First will also allow you to use your skills in a clinic environment that parallels any private practice with its new ADEC chairs, units and hand-pieces, 2 Planmeca x-ray machines, Soredex Panographic x-ray machine, new lab equipment, developer, and sterilization center.

Mission First makes community service as easy as showing up and performing the skill that you love. Mission First will schedule patients from its waiting list, provide your resources, take care of set-up and clean-up, and provide a dental assistant if you choose not to bring your own. Since Mission First opened its doors at 275 Roseneath Street (off of West Capitol Street) in February of 2001, volunteer dentists have been able to offer services to more than a thousand patients that would have totaled over \$400,000 in a private practice. However, there are still 500 patients on the ever-growing waiting list. Perhaps, volunteer dentistry at Mission First could be your mission in life. Many dentists are willing to volunteer one morning/one afternoon a month to help us minister to the dental needs of Mississippi; do you wish to join them. If so, please join the Mission First team by contacting Heather Clark, clinic director, or Lee Thigpen, executive director, at 608-0050, or visit Mission First at www.mission-first.org. All volunteer commitments are welcomed whether they be weekly, monthly, or yearly. ■



Dr. Joe Burns (volunteer dentist) and Heather Clark (clinic director/dental assistant) minister to the physical needs of one of the Mission First patients.