

Fr. Al Pehrsson Testimony 1996

This testimony concerning the alleged visions of our Blessed Lady in Emmitsburg, Maryland, to Dr. Gianna Talone-Sullivan is in **two** parts. The first part was completed in June, 1996, the month before I left Emmitsburg after being there for seven years, to be Retreat Master in Spring Lake, Michigan; and the **second part** was done today, May 1, 2006.

My name is Father Alfred Pehrsson. I am the Pastor of St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church in Emmitsburg, Maryland. This is June of 1996. In 1992 someone sent me an audiotape done by Father Jack Spaulding, Pastor of St. Maria Goretti Catholic Church in Scottsdale, Arizona. He spoke of what had been happening there in his parish involving nine young adults and their spiritual, mystical experiences with our Blessed Lady. He explained how these experiences had truly changed their lives and had brought about a conversion in their lives. He also spoke about the fact that these alleged visions/locutions had been investigated by the Diocese of Phoenix, Arizona. The Diocese felt that these people were very sincere, and they did not question their veracity. However the Diocese couldn't as yet find anything that was truly supernatural about their experiences.

On January 31, 1993, the Feast of St. Dom Bosco, I had just finished the 11:45 Mass at St. Joseph's, when a man and a woman approached me and asked if they could see me. I brought them over to the Rectory parlor and the gentleman started the conversation. He said, "My name is Dr. Michael Sullivan. I am an internist at Geisinger Medical Center in Philipsburg, Pennsylvania (a branch of the Danville, PA center)." Among many other things, he said, "Several months ago I returned from Croatia and Bosnia where I volunteered for 3 months with the Croatian Army helping to improve the function of hospital ICU units on the front lines during the ongoing war. While there I surrendered my passport for 24 hours to enemy Serbian soldiers in order to visit a Franciscan priest behind enemy lines who had courageously refused to abandon his parishioners. When the Serbian army found out I was an American doctor, they let me return because the United States had not yet sided against Serbia in the war. I also had a beautiful experience in Medjugorje during my two visits there in my 3-month army stint."

Then after a while he asked me, "Father, do you know anything about Scottsdale, Arizona?" And I said, "Yes, I received a tape recently from someone made by Father Jack Spaulding. He explained what was happening there; and so if you want to know, I will tell you all about it." He said, "No, Father, we know all about it." He said, "This is my fiance, Gianna Talone. She is the principal visionary of Scottsdale, Arizona." I said to her, "Oh, very good! I am pleased to meet you, Gianna, and how can I help you?"

Then Dr. Michael went on to say, "We had just spent the weekend on our marriage preparation Engagement Encounter. On the way back to Philipsburg, Pennsylvania, we decided to stop off here at the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto in Emmitsburg to consecrate our future marriage to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and to the Immaculate Heart of Mary. While we were visiting the Grotto, we decided to walk up to the Crucifixion scene and there knelt consecrating our future marriage to Our Lord and Our Lady, when Our Blessed Lady appeared to Gianna."

"And our Blessed Lady made an invitation. The invitation is this: after our marriage, she is inviting Gianna and me to come and live here in this section of the country so that our Lord through our Blessed Lady would be able to do many good works. You see this was an invitation. And then our Blessed Lady said, 'Now I would like you to go down to town and introduce yourself to the Pastor of the parish church there and tell him of this invitation.'" Then Gianna added, "So, Father, that's why we're here."

Of course I was a little stunned. We talked a little while. Then Gianna said, "You know this just happened a couple hours ago, and we don't know whether we're going to accept this invitation. It would be very hard for us to accept the invitation because my mother is very sick. She has a terminal illness, and it would also mean that I would have to give up a very good job. I am a clinical pharmacist in the Phoenix/Scottsdale area. Frankly, Father, we don't know whether we're going to accept this invitation. There would be a lot of sacrifices in this. Michael would have to also give up his job at the Geisinger Medical Center."

We talked a little bit more. Then Gianna said to me when she was leaving, "By the way, if we do accept this invitation to come and live here and be parishioners at St. Joseph's, are you prepared to hear all the many confessions that Our Lord is going to be sending you?" I said, *not* in a flippant way, "Yes, I think we can handle them, Gianna, because as Vincentians, dedicated to the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we hear anywhere from 2-3 hours of confessions every week." Later I realized that she at that moment was more or less prophetic, because when they did come nine months later, the crowds also began to come. We had about three to four hours of confessions every Thursday (the day of the Marian Prayer Group) with three, sometimes four priests hearing these confessions.

When they were leaving, I asked Gianna for Father Jack Spaulding's telephone number. Since Father Jack was her pastor, she of course had it memorized. I wrote it down. Then we said "goodbye." About three days later I called Father Jack and introduced myself by saying, "This is Father Al Pehrsson, Pastor of St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg." And before I could say anything else, Father Jack said, "Oh, you're Gianna and Mike's new Pastor." And I said, "Oh, are they coming?"

He said, "Yes, they are. They decided to take the invitation of our Blessed Lady, and I am going to miss them very much. I am going to miss her because I consider her a daughter." I then asked him whether he considered Gianna's experiences of Our Blessed Lady to be valid. And he said, "Yes, I do."

I asked him for suggestions for the prayer group. He said, "Do not make it charismatic. Keep it Marian with the Rosary, Mass, and a healing service." Interestingly, there already had been a Marian Prayer Cenacle started by two Daughters of Charity the year before. There were 12 people who belonged to it, and it was held every week in our Rectory. Father Jack and I spoke about 10 minutes during which time I asked for more suggestions, and he gave them to me. Then I asked him again, "Do you *really* believe in the validity of Gianna's experiences?" And he said, "Yes, I certainly do!"

On June 19, 1993, Gianna and Michael were married at St. Maria Goretti Church in

Scottsdale, Arizona. During their wedding in Phoenix, Arizona, on the Feast of the Immaculate Heart of Mary, we had a frightening rain storm here in Emmitsburg. It was so bad that during afternoon 4:30 Saturday Mass as Father Louis Storms was lifting up the host at the Consecration, just a minute before 5:00, the Church was struck by lightning. The lights went out briefly and came right back on. Then as Father raised the Chalice at the Consecration, the power went out completely. The lightning did \$13,000 worth of damage. It pulverized the light bulbs in the church. It burned out the organ completely, knocked out the bell tower system, and completely destroyed the amplifier system and the air conditioner. All of the electric lights in the church and sanctuary were out except one, and that one was frozen in the "on" position. That was the spotlight that lit up the statue of Our Blessed Lady. It remained on all day and night until 11:00am on Monday when the electrician came in order to fix all of the problems.

While she and Michael were on their honeymoon, Gianna called me on Wednesday of that week to find out how we were doing. I asked her, "What time did you walk down the aisle in Scottsdale?" And she said, "About two o'clock." Now in the summer there is a 3-hour time difference between Scottsdale and Emmitsburg. I told her, "Just as you were walking down the aisle in Scottsdale, our church was struck by lightning, and it did a lot of damage." There was a pause, and she said, "Do you still want us to come?" And I said, "Yes, Gianna, I still want you to come." Not thinking of herself, she added, "Because this is what Our Blessed Lady wants."

On November 1st, 1993. Drs. Gianna and Michael joined our Parish and began to live in the Emmitsburg/Fairfield area. On November 3rd we had our usual Marian Prayer Cenacle with 12 people. Gianna and Michael also came. It was on that evening in our Rectory chapel that Gianna, during the recitation of the Rosary, went into ecstasy for the first time in our Parish. Afterwards, I explained to the 12 people what had happened and introduced Gianna and Michael to the group. Within three weeks the Prayer Group had to move to the Church because there were so many people who came because of word-of-mouth news of Gianna's experience. After one of the early encounters with Our Blessed Lady in our church, Gianna came up to me and said, "Our Blessed Lady wants you to know something: that which you promised our Lord a few years ago has been accepted and He is pleased with your offer. Does that make any sense to you?" And I said, "Yes it does." No one knew what I had promised our Lord a few years before." And then she went on to tell me what I had promised. I was impressed.

In 1993 Gianna's mother, Tecla Talone, came at Christmas time to visit us and to attend the Prayer Group. She was very sick at that time with terminal cancer. On the Thursday night she came to St. Joseph's Church, Gianna was extremely attentive to her. Her mother Tecla sat next to her. Gianna during the Rosary was watching after her, making sure she was alright. Mrs. Talone was using an oxygen tank. But when we began the third decade of the Rosary, Gianna went into ecstasy. At that instant Gianna completely lost all apparent sense of her sick mother's presence. For those 10 minutes she was so completely engrossed in her conversation with Our Blessed Lady. When Gianna came out of her ecstasy, she immediately turned to her right; and even before writing Our Lady's message, she made sure that her mother was comfortable. Tecla died about two weeks later on January 6, 1994, the Feast of the Epiphany.

Also in December, 1993, Archbishop William William Keeler of Baltimore had a regional meeting of priests. After the meeting I went to him and said, "Archbishop, we have two

people who have become members of our Parish. They are doctors. They would like to set up a Mission of Mercy clinic for the poor traveling by way of an RV van.” Delighted, he responded, “Oh, that’s very interesting, I’d like to hear more about it.” I added, “Well the woman is a visionary, and she has seen Our Blessed Lady.” With that he hesitated, “Well, let’s go very slowly with this. Maybe we could meet sometime in the chancery and talk things over.”

It took about six months before I could get an appointment with Archbishop Keeler, and it was in the first week of June, 1994, when four of us priests went to the Chancery. Dominican Father Fred Jelly, who was Gianna’s spiritual director, accompanied Vincentian Fathers Louis Storms & Charles Jacobs, and myself. The four of us were invited to the Archbishop's office. Present also was Monsignor Malooly. After we sat down, the Archbishop said to me, “Father Pehrsson, what do we have here?” I began to explain to him what was happening in Emmitsburg, beginning with Medjugorje in 1988 where Gianna had had her second experience with Our Lady (the first having been at home in the fall of 1987). He suddenly said, “No, I don’t want to hear about Medjugorje; no, I don’t want to hear about Medjugorje.” I said, “Well, let’s start with Scottsdale.” I explained the beginning of the events in Scottsdale and Dr. Gianna and Mike's coming to Emmitsburg. After I finished my monologue of five minutes, he turned to Father Storms, and he said, “Father Lou, what do you say?” And Father Lou said, “Well, I’ve been hearing confessions many years, over 50 years, and I’ve never heard confessions like the ones in Emmitsburg for the past six months.” He said, “Okay, thank you, Father Storms.” He then turned to Father Charles Jacobs, and Father Jacobs said, “The fruits are here, Archbishop, give it a try. I think something is happening here.” The Archbishop then looked at Father Fred Jelly, a Dominican who is a Mariologist and theologian from Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Emmitsburg. Fr. Jelly said, “Archbishop, give this a green light. There is something here, and I am positive something good will come of it.”

Then Archbishop Keeler turned to me, “Father Al, you have my permission to continue, and please give me a monthly report. Now I want you to go downstairs with Monsignor Malooly to see Mr. Bill Blaul who is our Public Relations man. Bill will tell you what you are to do.” Relative to the secular press, as well as the Archdiocesan Catholic Review press, all reports about Emmitsburg up to this time had been very favorable. Mr. Blaul told us to be very open with the press. He counseled, “If you are open with them and give them all the information you can give them, they will be pleased with that, and you will find that they will treat you very well.” And that’s exactly what happened. When the TV and newspaper reporters came asking questions, I was honest with them; and they were receptive to my eyewitness account.

At that same June 13, 1994 meeting, when I along with the 3 other priests met with Archbishop Keeler, I told him that we did not want to make any money out of this. We just wanted to cover expenses. I told the Archbishop that I would take a collection only once a month, on the first Thursday of every month. He nodded his head and said, “That’s very good; I’m happy to hear that.” For we had been accused of profiting financially by taking up a collection every single Thursday night, but we weren’t! The Archbishop was pleased to hear that we were not out to make money, but to minister to people who came to us at St. Joseph's.

Now returning to the events that took place in our Parish. A few weeks later, during the 3rd the mystery of the Rosary, Gianna was kneeling and praying before she went into ecstasy.

Then something strange occurred. She stood up and her whole back arched backwards, not in a grotesque way, but in a very beautiful, ballet-type motion. She was standing, and her hands were on the wooden rail in front of her. She leaned back so far that her face was actually looking at the ceiling. It was a very beautiful thing to see. After she had this experience, she continued kneeling and evidently was speaking with Our Blessed Lady. At the end of the evening, I asked her if she realized that she had done this; and she said, "No, but perhaps this was the time when our Blessed Lady kissed me."

Several months after the prayer group had been taking place on Thursday nights I was in the pulpit in front of Gianna during the apparition, watching her face as she was talking with Our Blessed Lady. I thought to myself, "This is my responsibility! I can't put up with any fraud!" I had gone over this thought before in my mind; but again that night, looking at her, I said to myself, "Are you a fraud? Are you a fake? Are you a good actress? Do you deserve the Academy Award?" After the evening service was over, Gianna immediately came to me in the sacristy and said she had a message from the Blessed Mother for me. I then asked, "What is it?" And Gianna told me, "Our Lady said that if I (Gianna) am a fraud or if I'm a fake or if I'm an actress, 'Do you think my Divine Son Who has been exposed on the altar in the Blessed Sacrament (during the apparitions) for all these months would permit a fraud to continue in His Church? Don't you think He would have brought this to a conclusion very quickly?'" She then added, "Does that help you?" and I said, "Yes, it certainly helps me. Thank you very much!"

More and more we began to realize that you can't get good fruit from a bad tree. A good tree gives only good fruit, and we began to see a lot of good fruit and conversions to the Faith: a Lutheran minister becoming a Catholic, a nurse having a total conversion to our Catholic faith from the New Age movement, and many coming back to the church after many years adrift. We priests were hearing the confessions of people who had been away for ten to twenty years, and more.

One Friday morning after the Thursday evening devotions, I was making my thanksgiving after Mass when a lady came up to me and said, "Father, would you please hear my confession? I didn't have the courage to go to confession last night, so I went into a motel nearby and stayed overnight; but I have the courage to say my confession now. Would you hear it?" This lady had been away from church for many years. She testified to the fact, "It is our Blessed Lady who has brought me back to the Catholic faith here in Emmitsburg."

I had quite a few people come into the confessional, but because of their situation, I could not give them absolution. Nevertheless, they came with the hope of being able to receive a blessing, to rectify their situation, and to seek Catholic counseling. They would ask, "Father, where do I go from here?" I would send them to their pastor with a blessing.

On August 11, 1994, a little 5 year-old boy by the name of Christopher Bray was in the parish hall after the Thursday evening prayer group with his mother and a group of friends from Virginia. It was about 10 o'clock at night, just before they were to leave to drive back to Virginia. We were about to close the Parish Hall. Little Christopher Bray had been attacked by the measles virus when he was only two years of age, and it had left him retarded. He could say "boy," "girl," "Mommy," "Daddy", but he could *not* say complete sentences. Before Diane Bray,

his mother, and some friends were leaving the hall, Christopher wandered through the doors leading to the parking lot. However, instead of going left to the parking lot, he turned to the right and looked toward the corner of the vestibule near the statue of St. Joseph. His mother, said, "Christopher, we have to go home, come on!" And he said, "No." Now Christopher had never said "No" about going home. And so she asked, "Why not?" And he said, "Boy, boy looking, boy looking," and he was pointing immediately in front of himself. With that, Diane's neighbor went over to Christopher and knelt down beside him and asked, "Do you see a boy?" He said, "Yes." Then the neighbor asked, "What does he look like?" And he pointed to his head and said, "White." Pointing to his clothing, he said, "Blue. On step, on step." So with that his mother asked, "Is he saying anything to you?" And he said, "Yes." "And what is he saying?" Little Christopher, who had never spoken in complete sentences said, "Jesus says he will heal me, but people must change." Diane, his mother, told me, "It is possible that he could have repeated the words which he had heard so often at nighttime when we put our hands on his chest and say, 'Jesus, heal Christopher.' But Father, no way could my son come up with an abstract thought like 'people must change.' He must have been repeating something that he was hearing."

They went home that night. The next week the people in school called Diane saying, "What has happened to this child? Something marvelous is happening." Today Christopher has become a normal child. His healing began on August 11, 1994, in our Parish Hall at St. Joseph's in Emmitsburg.

Later that year, on a Thursday afternoon, I had been in the confessional box for about an hour, when a gentleman came in and knelt down beside me and said, "Bless me, Father, I'm Jewish." And I said, "You're Jewish?" And he said, "Yes, I'm Jewish." And I said, "Well, I've been a priest for 38 years, and I never heard 'Bless me, Father, I'm Jewish.'" He said, "Yes, I'm a Jewish doctor, and my wife is outside. She's Jewish, and she also is a doctor. We live in upstate Pennsylvania. We have tried to rush down here to see you before you entered the confessional, but we never make it in time; so now I have come to the confessional." So I chuckled and said, "Okay, what's your problem?" We then discussed his ethical problem for about ten minutes, and after the ten minutes were up, he said, "Thank you so much, Father." Leaving he said, "Oh, by the way, this Jewish Mother of *yours* is really getting to *me*." I laughed and I said, "*my* Jewish Mother?" He said, "Yes, *our* Jewish Mother. I've been coming here for quite a while, and now I'm beginning to realize that Jesus, her Son, is indeed the Messiah for whom we Jews have been waiting all these centuries."

A phenomenon common to Marian apparition sites is the *miracle of the sun*. It began in Emmitsburg in June, 1994, when people outside the church witnessed it. On one particular afternoon, young children were the ones who first saw this marvelous phenomenon. The sun was spinning, giving out many different colors, pulsating and going from red, to orange, to purple and to green, spinning, spinning, spinning. Hearing the commotion, I went outside and told the people, "Please, be very careful. Be very, very careful. I don't want you to hurt your eyes." The children and others were saying, "But Father, look, look at the sun. Look, it's as if a big disc has been put in front of it; you can see it pulsating, the colors, they're beautiful!" And I said, "Yes, I know what you are seeing because I saw the same thing in 1987 for a whole hour in Medjugorje. But please, be very careful." Still the children were looking and running around, saying, "Look at the sun, look at the sun!"

One afternoon a crippled man was looking at the spinning sun. He had been a prison guard from Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. During a prison riot a few years earlier, he had been severely injured. Both kneecaps were seriously injured to the point where he had to wear permanent braces. While he was looking at the sun spinning in the summer sky, he heard a woman's voice saying to him, "Now, take off your braces, and walk." He took the braces off; and, to the amazement of his wife and his friends, **he walked!** A month later by telephone he told me, "After walking, I knelt down for the first time since the prison riot." He told me that he had waited a whole month before phoning me because he wanted to make sure that the healing was complete and that it was lasting.

During this same time period, a beautiful three-year-old child by the name of Jennifer Hance became seriously ill. Her grandparents own the Carriage House Restaurant in Emmitsburg. Jennifer, her brother and her sister had eaten some undercooked meat, and the three of them came down with an E-coli intestinal infection. Jennifer was the sickest. When her family rushed her to a local hospital, the doctors said that they couldn't do too much for her. So they sent her to Georgetown University Hospital, where the doctors gave her a few days to live. All her major organs were shutting down. Joanne Hance, her grandmother, refused to accept this. On Thursday evening after the Mass, she went to Gianna and asked her to pray for Jennifer. I believe Gianna prayed a very simple prayer for the child. We gave Joanne one of the blessed rosaries that we normally gave to the people at the prayer group. She took it over to Georgetown University Hospital. There she prayed the rosary and left the rosary on Jennifer's crib. Shortly thereafter, the child's major organs began to "kick in." And instead of being dead in three days, little Jennifer Hance was out of the hospital in eight days and back to us in the Parish within a few weeks with her mother, father, her brother and sister. The doctors said, "This does not happen; she was too far advanced with the E-coli infection." We received written documentation for this marvelous healing.

Shirley Dillon, our parish secretary once told me, "You know, Father, there are so many wonderful things occurring here, and so many reports of good things happening, that we have to be very careful that we are not taking these things for granted." I agreed with her.

One February evening after the Mass, some people came to ask Gianna for prayers. As usual I went into the Priest's Sacristy in order to take off my vestments. Gianna came walking quickly into the Sacristy and excitedly said, "Father, I can't handle this one. I mean I can pray over people with arthritis and cancer, but I can't handle this one. This is *your* problem." There were that night six priests in the Sacristy, one of them being Father Bob Hiltz from Franciscan University in Steubenville, Ohio. At that time I didn't know that Father Bob Hiltz was a priest who was gifted with the ministry of the "deliverance" from evil spirits. I asked, "Gianna, what's wrong?" And she said, "This lady wants to be delivered from the occult, from the gypsy occult. I can't do that! This is your job." And I looked at Fr. Bob and I said, "What about it Bob?" He said, "Okay." So I took the holy oils I had gotten in Jerusalem, and we went over to the next room.

There we met a woman about fifty years of age and her husband. We formed a little circle around her. Dr. Mike was there, along with Gianna, myself, Father Bob, and one of the

gentleman from the Parish. I said to Father Bob Hiltz, "Would you please anoint her?" He said, "Fine." It was dark outside, a cold winter night. Just as Father Bob started to anoint this lady for the deliverance from the occult, suddenly, outside the door which was only about ten feet away, a dog began to bark and howl as if it were being beaten. Initially we didn't pay any attention to it; we just kept on praying. But when Father Bob put his hands on the woman's head and kept them there for about two minutes, the dog seemed to go crazy. When he took his hand off the lady's head, the dog started to whimper; and as if the dog were retreating, the sounds seemed to go back toward the rear of the church into our cemetery. When people inside the church heard the dog howling, they wanted to know what had happened. This was an unusual phenomenon, because in Emmitsburg there are *no* stray dogs. When Father Bob and I went back into the Priest's Sacristy, Gianna came after us and asked, "Father, do you realize what just happened?" And I said, "Yes." She said, "Was that a demonic manifestation?" And I said to her, "I believe it was, Gianna." Father Bob Hiltz just nodded his head. It was probably the result of a deliverance from the evil one. She then asked, "Did you ever experience this before?" I answered, "Yes, during a healing Mass in our parish church in Niagara Falls about 10 years ago."

Sometime in 1995 Stephanie Staub, one of the original nine young people who had experiences with Our Blessed Lady in Scottsdale, AZ, stopped in to see me at the Rectory. She told me that she was on her way with her husband and her baby to Chicago. She also told me that she was very happy that she had had these experiences with Our Blessed Lady; however, she was also very happy that these experiences had stopped, because she said it was getting to be too much for her. She felt as if she wanted to live a normal life. She went on to say something very interesting, "You know, Gianna is the strong one among us. I think that's why Our Blessed Lady chose her to be the main visionary, because with her strong will she will carry out what Our Blessed Lady wants her to carry out."

Later in 1995 I received a letter from a 12-year-old girl by the name of Anna from Virginia. She explained that the week before she had been with her mother and father, and her brothers and sisters, at the Gettysburg National Battlefield Park. While there her mother had said, "I believe there is a Rosary on Thursday nights over in Emmitsburg." So they went to the Rosary. Anna wrote, "I got inside the church, and I was at the end of a pew. Then a pregnant lady came along, and I gave her my seat. I was then kneeling in the aisle. They started the Rosary, but they stopped the Rosary during the third decade. I didn't know why. Then all of a sudden, coming out of the statue of our Blessed Lady, I saw the most beautiful lights." Anna thought it was something like she had seen in the animated video of Our Lady of Lourdes when Our Lady appeared to St. Bernadette in Lourdes, France, in 1858. And she wrote, "For the next ten minutes the lights kept on coming out of the statue of Our Blessed Lady up on the sanctuary, but they stopped as soon as people started the Rosary again. Have you any explanation for this because my mother evidently didn't see it, but I did see it? I don't know why this happened or why no one else saw it or why they stopped saying the Rosary." So I wrote Anna, trying to explain these events to her. The next year Anna visited me and told me the very same story.

At that time we also had a parishioner named Jocelyn who was a very good Sunday lector. I asked her if she would please lector on Thursdays. She said, "Oh, no, no, Father, I'm not into that." She said, "No, don't ask me that. Sunday, fine, but not Thursday." I said, "Okay." However, a couple of weeks later she came to me, she said, "Could I come Thursday

and lector?" And I agreed. She sat up front near Gianna. Later that evening after Mass her father asked her, "Jocelyn, how did you enjoy the evening?" And she said, "Fine." Suspecting something, he asked, "Did something happen to you?" And she replied, "Yes." He continued, "Can you tell me about it?" She said, "No." A couple of days later she came to him and said, "Something happened to me, definitely. I knew exactly when Our Blessed Lady was coming to Gianna; because just before Gianna started to kneel, there was a rustling sound of a silken dress coming from the statue of Our Blessed Lady. The sound came across the sanctuary and stopped just within a few feet of Gianna; and with that, Gianna went into ecstasy. I heard the murmur of two women's voices, one voice was a little bit higher than the other, but it was like hearing voices behind a closed door. For ten minutes I could hear soft voices, and I knew exactly when Our Blessed Lady was departing because the voices stopped and the rustling of the silken dress started to go back toward the statue about 25 feet away." Her father asked her, "Do you want to tell that to Father Pehrsson?" She said, "No."

It took about three months for Jocelyn to come to me, and she told me the same story. She wanted to know, "What was the significance of the rustling dress?" I answered her, "Do you know anything about the July 18th & 19th, 1830, when Our Blessed Lady appeared to St. Catherine Laboure' in Paris, France?" She said, "No." I then proceeded to tell her that, "When St. Catherine Laboure was kneeling there in the chapel of the Daughters of Charity in Rue de Bac Paris waiting for Our Blessed Lady---that's what the angel had asked her to do, to wait---coming from the altar was the sound of a rustling dress, like a silken dress. As that sound came across the sanctuary, Our Blessed Lady appeared to Catherine , sat down on the directress' chair, and had a conversation with her for two hours." Jocelyn said, "I didn't know that at all, Father. I'm getting the chills." I said, "Well, that's exactly what happened in 1830 in Paris, France"

We priests would have meditation every evening at 4:45 in our community chapel; and I would tell Shirley Dillon, our secretary, not to disturb us unless it was very important. It was on a Friday evening in December, 1995, when Shirley came into the Chapel and knelt down beside me and said, "Cardinal Keeler would like to talk to you on the phone." So I went to the phone and I said, "Your Eminence." He said, "Father Al, I just want to call you and say that I'm sorry I won't be able to be with you tomorrow when you receive into the Church the Lutheran minister. I would like to be there, but due to another appointment I can't be there. I also want to thank you very much for the portrait of Our Lady done by Peter Bianchi. It's beautiful. And lastly, I want to thank you and the priests for hearing so many confessions on Thursday." He continued, "Thank you all very much!"

Now this to me was very encouraging, and I truly appreciated the Cardinal's phone call. I also appreciated his writing to me on two occasions thanking me for the periodic reports that I sent to him concerning events in Emmitsburg. He also asked me at one time to bless the Mission of Mercy Mobile Clinic in his name. The Auxiliary Bishop for Central Maryland, Bishop Murphy, also sent me a very fine letter of appreciation for the reports that I was giving not only to the Cardinal, but also to himself, concerning the events at our parish in Emmitsburg .

Early in 1995 Archbishop Keeler was made a Cardinal. In May of 1995, he traveled to Rome with seven of us Priests and seventy people from the Baltimore Archdiocese in order to take possession of his Titular Church of St. Mary of the Angels and Martyrs. Before I went with

the Cardinal, I wrote him, "Out of respect for you, I promise you that during our pilgrimage to Rome I will not mention anything about the visions in Emmitsburg. I will not answer any questions. This is a pilgrimage in your honor." I **did** keep that promise." On March 23, 1995, he wrote me a short letter thanking me for my thoughtfulness and sensitivity, and he added, "I am delighted that you will be with us. Blessings. William Cardinal Keeler."

Shortly after we came back from Rome, the Cardinal wrote me a very kind letter saying that he was sorry that I had been transferred to another Diocese. He thanked me for my ministry in the Archdiocese, and he also thanked me for being with him on his very important pilgrimage to Rome.

Whenever Shirley Dillon, our Parish secretary, would speak, I would listen. She is a very gifted woman. Shirley would say, "You will always listen to me. You won't always take my advice, but you will always listen to me." Well, one day, it was twelve o'clock on a Thursday, and she was busy in the office when this couple came into her office. She talked with them a few minutes, and then finding me she said, "Would you want to talk to this couple, Father; I think it will be of interest to you." So I brought them in the parlor and they sat down. I introduced myself. The gentleman said, "Call me Art, and this is Kathleen, my wife." They were about 45 years of age and a handsome couple. Art continued, "I am so pleased to be here because my people have been telling me about the wonderful peace and joy here, and my people have been coming quite often." Then he asked, "Can you tell me a little bit of your own experience here, Father?" I did, and after a while I asked him, "Art, can you tell me about yourself; you know, where do you come from, what do you do?" He said, "Well, I'm from McLean, Virginia; my name is Art Cebrowski. I am the Admiral Commander of the Seventh Fleet. I have 5,000 young men on my flagship, an aircraft carrier; and when we go for a six-month deployment, I make sure that my Catholic Chaplain offers anyone who would want to receive it instructions in the Catholic faith. We average about 50 converts in a 6-month period, thanks to the Catholic Chaplain aboard." Then Admiral Cebrowski said, "I am so pleased to be here. I have the privilege of bringing up the gifts with Kathleen this evening." At this particular moment in time, Rear Admiral Cebrowski is the head of the Naval War Academy in New England.

Later In 1996 I was going over to the church to hear confessions at 3:00pm. A bus from Pittsburgh pulled up, and one of the ladies on the bus got off with a 16-year-old girl and said, "Father, before you go into confessions, I have to speak to you." And she said, "This is my daughter. We came from Pittsburgh with 40 people, and I have to tell you why we are here. Father, I am a housewife, and I never organize anything; but I had to organize this pilgrimage from Pittsburgh. These are people from my parish. About a month ago my daughter and I came to your parish. It was a Sunday afternoon; and after we had gone into the church, we started to say the Rosary. We thought we were all alone in the church. After saying the Rosary in front of the statue of Our Blessed Lady, we were walking back down the aisle toward the front door. It was then that we noticed a very handsome man sitting under the choir loft in the back of the church, a man about 30 years old. As we passed by he looked at us and said, "Do you know that My Mother is appearing here every week?" And I looked at him and I said, "I heard rumors of it." Then I grabbed my daughter's hand and thought maybe I should exit very, very quickly. My daughter and I went immediately out the front door and down the staircase. We turned right

toward the parking lot; and as we looked over to the parking lot across the street, we saw the **same** gentleman standing next to our car. Bewildered and stunned we went over to our car, and He said to us, 'Now, I would like you to bring pilgrims here because those who come will be greatly blessed.'" And the mother said, "I think I will, I think I will." Meanwhile as the mother was telling me this account, her daughter was just nodding her head saying, "Father, this really happened. It really truly, truly happened." Her mother continued, "We got into the car, and I turned the key and started the motor. Then I turned around to make sure I wasn't going to hit Him and He was gone." And she said, "Father, that is why we are here today."

On another Thursday night, a nurse from Baltimore called me to tell me that she was in the church with two friends from Montana, a gentleman who had cancer and his wife. The man was jaundiced, and the nurse told me that neither one was a Catholic. He was on the aisle seat; and when Father George Restrepo, the Jesuit Priest, was carrying the Blessed Sacrament around in procession during the healing service, he passed by this gentleman. The jaundiced Protestant man who was in the pew looked up and felt a jolt in his whole body. The nurse noticed it and his wife noticed something strange. After the evening was over, gentleman said to his friend the Catholic nurse, "What was that small white thing in that big gold thing?" And she explained that it was the Eucharist, Jesus present in the Eucharist. He said, "I don't know what happened, but I am healed. I know it. I felt a thrill going through my whole body, I am healed." They went home, and they noticed his jaundice was gone. He felt wonderful and seemed to have no indication of the cancer. Listening to his experience the nurse went on to say to him, "But you still have to take your medicine; you still have to go back to the doctor." So convinced of a cure, he was refusing to do so. All during that weekend, Friday, Saturday, up until Sunday when the couple went back to Montana, they were talking about the Catholic faith. They wanted to know more about it; and the Catholic nurse told me, "I was explaining as much as I could because he was really thrilled with what had happened to him." Sorry to say, I didn't get the nurse's name. I should have been more diligent in doing so.

Concerning Gianna and her visions, when she was pregnant in 1996 with Anne Marie and late in her pregnancy, she appeared very tired and uncomfortable that night during the Prayer Group. She would be half-sitting and half-kneeling during the Rosary; but when Our Blessed Lady would come to her, she would immediately kneel upright and her face would glow. She would hit the wooden front rail of the pew in front of her so hard that I kept thinking, "Oh, little baby, you'll have another headache," in my imagination talking to the baby in Gianna's womb. During her ecstasy Gianna was oblivious of the fact that she was pregnant and that she had hit the wooden front rail of the pew so hard.

I do believe that some people, upon encountering a strong personality in Gianna, were against the alleged mystical events in Emmitsburg, not so much because of the messages, but because of personality clashes. One lady from Baltimore by the name of Sandra wrote me when I was Retreat Master in St. Lazarre Retreat Center in Spring Lake, Michigan, where I had been transferred after leaving Emmitsburg. She was outraged because Gianna had approached her in the church and asked her if it were true that she was going to be married on the following Saturday before her annulment was approved. When Sandra said, "Yes," Gianna asked, "Well, are you going to be married in the Church?" Sandra said, "No, by the Justice of the Peace. We're going to be married because we received a very good sign from St. Therese of Lisieux, the

Little Flower; which meant it will be alright with God.” Gianna was evidently very troubled by this. Sandra wrote me that Gianna said, "You won't be able to receive the sacraments. Do you realize what you're doing? Your happiness may be short-lived." The woman concluded, "I left the church crying."

I think Gianna was trying to ward off an invalid marriage. The two did get married, and shortly thereafter the man suffered a heart attack.. Gianna often told me that she feels responsible for people; and if she doesn't carry out the command of Our Lord regarding fraternal correction of people (fraternal correction being a virtue that has been lost in our "politically correct" world), she will be held responsible for these souls. So, when Our Lord directs her, she has the great burden on her shoulders: that being to correct, in a spirit of charity and humility, those who are erring and going away from Jesus Himself and from His Church.

2006

As I continue my testimony, the present date is May 1, **2006**. There has been a 10 year interval from my last report. Since I left Emmitsburg in 1996, I have continued to follow closely the events there. I am aware of Drs. Gianna and Michael's remarkable meetings with Pope John Paul II, first on October 13, 2000, when they asked for his blessing on Mission of Mercy and when Gianna presented him a poem she had written in commemoration of the Jubilee Year, *Open Wide the Doors of Christ*, along with a picture of Our Lady of Emmitsburg; and then again in October, 2001, when they presented him with a copy of Our Lady's "*Contribution to the Middle East Peace Process*."

Under the direction of world renowned Marian apparition investigator and author Fr. Rene Laurentin', sophisticated scientific neurophysiological testing had been done in 1992 on Gianna during ecstasy at the University of San Francisco. According to Fr. Laurentin', this had been very supportive of an unexplainable ecstatic state. I am aware also that even more sophisticated scientific studies were repeated by an international investigative team in 2004 and were even further conclusive of an ecstatic state and consistent with the findings on other presumed authentic visionaries.

In regards to the statements of the Archdiocesan Commission of Inquiry which convened for 2 days of testimony in June, 2001, and privately released (not publicly) their findings in September, 2002, I have the following concerns. I have been thinking of some of the so-called, possibly **negative** elements that the Archdiocesan Commission brought up concerning the events in Emmitsburg, for instance the coming of the chastisement of the world. The Commission thought that this topic would be too frightening for people to contemplate. They didn't think it was in concordance with the Gospel message of peace and joy. They also included as possibly **negative** elements: the return of Jesus as a Child in a *Spiritual* Eucharistic Reign, plus a prophesied universal revelation of everyone's soul before the Second Coming, and with that, the danger in and possibility of spurring the faithful toward an excessive attachment to the supernatural. Lastly, they minimized the prediction of fish dying in the oceans. The 3-priest Commission said that these elements are not found in Catholic Tradition and **may** be against Catholic teaching. *But are they?*

First, in regards to the return of the Child Jesus. Allegedly Our Blessed Lady spoke about the *Spiritual* Eucharistic Reign of the Child Jesus. She was **not** talking about the Child Jesus walking down Main St. in Emmitsburg (as was *inaccurately* stated by some Church authorities). To quote the actual text, “It will **not** be His Final Judgment and coming. For this next era will be the Covenant of our Two Hearts, the *Spiritual* Eucharistic Reign where the Child Jesus will usher in the Kingdom of Peace.”

The Child Jesus in history has appeared to a few favored people. He appeared as a Child in the arms of St. Joseph in 1917 at Fatima to the 3 shepherd children. He appeared to Sister Lucia of Fatima 2 more times in Pontevedra, Spain, in 1925 and 1926, first directing her to spread the First Saturday devotions in reparation for sins against the Immaculate Heart of His Mother, and then later asking “:why” the devotion to the Immaculate Heart of Mary was not spreading. The Child Jesus appeared to Saint Faustina Kowalska on many occasions, especially emanating from the Holy Eucharist during Mass. In her diary, Divine Mercy In My Soul, the diary of Saint Faustina Kowalska, she writes on December 25th of 1936 at Midnight Mass, “Before the elevation I saw the Mother of God and the Infant Jesus. The Most Holy Mother spoke these words to me, ‘My daughter Faustina, take this most precious treasure;’ and she gave me the Infant Jesus.”

On December 22, 1934, Faustina writes, “At Mass I saw the Infant Jesus, a little smaller than usual and with this difference, that he was wearing a violet tunic. He usually wears a white one.” So this was a rather common experience that Saint Faustina had with the Child Jesus. God was calling to mind that the world had grown cold to the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist and the example of humility and Love He expresses as a Child.

Second, in regards to the coming period of a chastisement. I don’t believe the Archdiocesan Commission of Inquiry took into account all the times Our Blessed Lady as a good Mother has warned us of possible chastisements due to unrepentant sinners. A mother who does not warn her children of imminent dangers is not a good mother. A father who does not warn His children of imminent dangers is not a good father. God the Father is a good Father! Our Blessed Lady is a good Mother! Constantly have they warned us!

At Fatima, Our Blessed Lady in 1917 talked about a chastisement if men did not convert, when she prophesied World War II. One of the Commission’s statements was that these threats of chastisement were going to frighten people. Our Blessed Lady showed the three visionaries of Fatima the very pits of Hell. She did it for a purpose. As a loving Mother she was showing them a frightening reality. If men and women do not convert, and instead die with unrepentant hearts, they will go to Hell! That thought might be scary, but it is a reality that Our Lady continues to warn us about. Contrary to modern thought, **not** everyone is going to Heaven!

Furthermore, in Akita, Japan, in 1973, Our Blessed Mother was very precise in her warnings. If men do not repent and better themselves, she said to Sister Agnes Sasagawa, “The Father will inflict a terrible punishment on all humanity. It will be a punishment greater than the flood, such as one we’ll have never seen before. Fire will fall from the sky and wipe out a great part of humanity, the good as well as the bad, sparing neither priests nor faithful.” And then she went on to predict something almost unthinkable. “The work of the devil will infiltrate even the

Church in such a way that one will see Cardinals opposing Cardinals, Bishops against other Bishops." Just three years ago in one of the national newspapers, three American Cardinals were pictured on one side of a page, opposing three others on the other side of the page. Cardinals were opposing Cardinals.

The Statue of Our Lady in Akita, Japan, began to weep for the first time on the Feast of Saint Elizabeth Ann Seton, January 4, 1975. These spiritual experiences and visions of Sister Agnes Sasagawa have been accepted and approved by Bishop Ito, the Bishop of the Akita Diocese in Japan.

Third, in regards to the **illumination** of the conscience. With respect to the revelation of the state of everyone's soul before the Final Coming, how is this contrary to the Catholic Faith? Hasn't it often been said that a special grace has been given to some people who are dying, that they may see their whole life flash in front of them? This grace is meant to bring them to a state of contrition.

According to Our Blessed Lady of Fatima, the Immaculate Heart of Mary *will* triumph one day over evil. Is it going to be in secret, or is it going to be so that everyone will know that the Immaculate Heart of Mary, destined by our God to be the crusher of Satan's head, will have defeated Satan? (Gen 3:15) Is it going to be in secret, or will it be a type of revelation where people will see themselves before God as God sees them? Some have called this the **illumination** of conscience.

Let me tell you a story. Back in 1995, on a Monday evening when we had the Miraculous Medal Novena, I went over to the church to hear the usual confessions. I saw one person near the confessional. At first glance this woman appeared to be about 30 years of age, and she appeared to have had a difficult life. I went into the confessional, and she came in after me, knelt down and said, "Father, before I start my confession, I want you to know that this will be my first confession in about 15 years. I have to tell you why I'm here. I was up at the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto this evening, and I wanted to go out on Lookout Rock. (This jutting rock is a lookout point up on the mountain, about a good half-mile from the Grotto itself, from which there is a commanding view of the whole valley.) She said, "I started out to the rock, and then I said to myself, 'No I haven't got time;' but to my surprise it was just as if a huge hand *was* pushing me, pushing me, pushing me." She continued, "I started to get scared, and something was pushing me and pushing me to the very edge of the rock. With that I looked up at the blue sky, and amazingly before my eyes my whole life flashed in front of me, everything that I had done, the terrible things that I had done. It so scared me that I turned around and ran down from the rock after viewing this for about five minutes. I got into my car, and I said to myself that I hope there's a priest to hear my confession. I came down to your church, walked in and waited until you came; and Father, this is my confession after 15 years."

That young woman had had an **illumination** of conscience. Isn't it possible for the Lord to allow us to have an illumination of conscience for a greater appreciation of His Mercy and Love for us and to allow each of us to see how we have offended Him? Could this grace not be given to all people, if God so chooses, at the time of the Triumph of the Immaculate Heart of Mary? It's **not** impossible, and it is **not** against the Faith!

Fourth, in regards to the fish prophecy. The Commission of Inquiry was also very critical about the death of "*all*" fish as spoken by Our Lady on July 19, 1989. But they were mistaken in saying that Our Lady said "**all**" fish. Gianna didn't say that at all. They misquoted her! In the film **Unbridled Mercy**, Gianna said that one of the signs of the times will be when we see many fish dying. In the ancient Church, the *fish* was a symbol of Jesus Christ.

Recently, at the beginning of 2006, Reuters, UPI, CNN news services, as well as several news magazines, released statements about a global survey spanning nearly half a century. This scientific study revealed a 90% plunge in the population of large ocean fish from tuna to cod, with their numbers decreasing by as much as another 80% over the next 15 years. Science is backing up what Our Blessed Lady allegedly had predicted. When I was in Ireland just about seven years ago, there was a report in the Irish Daily Press that entire lakes in Ireland had lost their fish population. Countless thousands of fish were dying due to the extreme heat.

It is my opinion that the Commission did not allow enough time for things to develop. I also believe that the three priests appointed by Cardinal Keeler to be on the Commission of Inquiry were **not** Mariologists who were really up to date as to what was happening in the Marian world: such as those warnings of both Fatima, Portugal, and Akita, Japan, both approved by their respective Bishops; and the events related to St. Faustina Kowalska over in Poland, including Our Lord appearing to her many times as the Child Jesus, and Our Blessed Lady appearing to her from time to time with serious warnings.

One of the warnings was given to St. Faustina during a period of meditation on March 25, 1936. She received a visit from Our Blessed Lady, and she writes, "And I saw the Mother of God who said to me, 'Oh how pleasing to God is the soul that follows faithfully the inspirations of His grace. I gave the Savior to the world. As for you, you have to speak to the world about His great Mercy and prepare the world for His Second Coming. At the Second Coming Our Lord will come, **not** as a Merciful Savior but as a Just Judge. How terrible is that day, the day of Justice, the day of Divine wrath, that the angels tremble before it! Speak to souls about this great Mercy while it is still the time for granting Mercy. If you keep silent now, you will be answering for a great number of souls on that terrible day. Fear nothing, be faithful to the end.'"

Furthermore, when St. Faustina refers to the "second" coming, she is referring to the second *physical* coming of the Lord, which is at the Final Judgment as the Just Judge. When Our Lady in Emmitsburg uses that same term "second," she is **not** referring to the Final Judgment or second *physical* coming, but rather to a *Spiritual* Eucharistic Reign which will precede the Final Judgment.

One of the things Our Blessed Lady very interestingly said to St. Faustina was, "If you keep silent now, you will be answering for a great number of souls on that terrible day." Isn't it possible that this is what Gianna is feeling---that same responsibility for warning people. Could this not be what is motivating her to keep on going? It would have been very simple for Gianna, even a few years ago, to say, "The visions of Our Blessed Mother have ended. Her messages have ceased coming to me." But something is driving this woman. I believe that her experiences with Our Lady are so real to her that she is continually motivated, often in a heroic

way, to relate the words of Our Lady, who, as at Fatima calls for our total conversion to Jesus. Could it not be that Gianna feels this same responsibility for the salvation of souls before God, Jesus the Savior, and that at the prompting of Our Lady, she too is being used by Our Lord in a special way as an instrument to help people come to the Savior?

One of the objections we often hear concerning the events in Emmitsburg as well as those in Medjugorje is the amount of visitations---the number of times---Our Lady is appearing to her messengers. Some say that this shows that these visions are very questionable. It is noted by these same critics that Our Lady appeared only 18 times to St. Bernadette in Lourdes in 1858, and only 6 times to the three shepherd children in Fatima in 1917, followed by 3 more times to Sister Lucy in Pontevedra, Spain, over the next decade. However, in those days the world did **not** have the "*Trojan horse*" in its living rooms in the form of the *television*.

As long as the "Jerry Springers" and the "Howard Sterns" of the world are supported by large corporations in order, as a modern-day "*Trojan horse*", to bring filth and obscenities into our homes many times every week, as long as Jesus Christ's Church is daily being maligned and ridiculed by many in the media, as long as "soft-porn" on TV and "hard-porn" on the internet are glamorized daily, so even **more** often will Our Lord send His Mother to us in order to help us deal with these modern-day threats to our salvation. Why do so many good people hurry to try to handcuff God by saying, "God, this can't be from You. You couldn't possibly allow so many Marian appearances?"

St. Paul reminds us that,

"Where sin abounds, grace all the more abounds!"

On June 12 of 2003, international HIV/AIDS researcher and Marian scholar and author, Prof. Courtney Bartholomew, MD, sent a letter to Cardinal Keeler, and in it he said, "Dear Cardinal Keeler. As you know there are thousands of people worldwide who seriously question the legitimacy of the report of the Commission of Inquiry set up by you in order to investigate the authenticity of the apparitions of Our Blessed Lady to Dr. Gianna Talone-Sullivan. Among them is the highly experienced French Mariologist and investigator of Marian apparitions, Father Rene Laurentin', who is a prolific author and indisputably has much more experience than anyone worldwide with respect to investigating the authenticity of alleged seers of the Blessed Virgin Mary." Dr. Bartholomew continued by saying that there has been a distortion of the Marian messages, and that this distortion was submitted to Cardinal Ratzinger in Rome; and so he goes on to ask that there should be an "inquiry" into the Commission of Inquiry and the appointment of a new appropriately-qualified commission, especially those who are qualified in Mariology.

There are also many other prominent Mariologists and mystical theologians and scholars in the world besides Father Rene Laurentin', who support the authenticity of these mystical events, including: Father Robert Faricy of the Gregorian University in Rome, Father Joseph Ianuzzi of Rome, Father Edward O'Connor of Notre Dame University, Fr. Jacques Daley, OSB, Carmelite theologian Fr. Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD, Canon Lawyer Father John Wang and Father Oliver Mohan, OMI (just to name a few)---all who believe in the apparitions and are certainly

very qualified to pass judgment on them.

Finally, it is important to emphasize that over the years I, as a Vincentian Roman Catholic Priest, have written and spoken in detail to the Vincentian Superior General in Rome, Italy, as well as to my Provincial Superior in Philadelphia concerning these events in Emmitsburg, Maryland

This is the end of my eyewitness testimony given this first day of May, 2006, at St. Vincent's Seminary in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, at St. Vincent's Seminary. Based on my personal observation,

I firmly believe that Our Blessed Lady was appearing to Gianna during the time that I was there at St. Joseph's Church; and from all reports, that she *continues* to appear as Our Lady of Emmitsburg.

God bless you all!

Father Alfred R. Pehrsson, CM