

## 100 pounds and counting - Sister Suanne Flanigan shares her success



“If I can inspire one person to make changes in their life to improve their health by sharing my story, I’ll do it,” said Sister Suanne Flanigan. Sister Suanne, who taught in Baltimore City and Annapolis among other places for more than 40 years, said she has struggled with her weight all of her life. She had tried a range of programs and although she was able to lose weight, the pounds would eventually creep back on.

It was about a year and a half ago when all of that changed. Facing health issues that affected her mobility, being pre-diabetic, and the heaviest she had been, Sister Suanne received exactly the type of no-holds-barred encouragement she needed to ignite the beginning of her own journey to healthier living. At a consultation with her neurologist, the doctor told the medical student doing rounds with her, “When this sister sets her mind to do something, she sticks with it.”

On that vote of confidence, Sister Suanne took action the very next day. “I finally understood that it’s life choices I’m making.” This time her efforts were not for a program or any other external measures, she was taking the necessary steps she needed for herself. Even without an abundance of healthy food choices, she began in the dining room by cutting her meal portions in half and foregoing snacks and sweets between meals. “I don’t feel like I’m denying myself anything.”

Sister Suanne has been averaging a weekly two-pound loss, a healthy pace according to many health experts. As a way to support Sister Suanne in her efforts, an aide in her community asked if she would like her to stop asking if she wanted dessert. Suanne said no because she wanted practice saying “no.” Before she became intentional about what she put in her mouth, Suanne said she would typically eat what was in front of her even if she wasn’t hungry. She has also found new ways to comfort and reward herself – namely books! She loves reading mysteries and treats herself to a new book from time to time.

Sister Suanne also has difficulty with her mobility. Thirteen years ago, she was told by doctors that she had arthritis when her legs inexplicably gave out. Then she was told she would be wheelchair-bound in a matter of months or year because of neurological issues. To cope, she turned to food, her comfort in times of stress. In her darkest days, she remembers watching a lot of television and binge-eating. She had a big sweet tooth then. Once she was properly diagnosed, she found that knowing what she was dealing with it made her health issues easier to embrace. Now, on occasion, such as a jubilee celebration, she will have a half portion of the dessert served but notes, “I don’t feel like I’m missing out – it doesn’t even really taste as good as I thought it would!”

"I praise God every day for being as mobile as I have been." While she stills goes in to the clinic for weekly infusions, she feels she is able to get around much easier with her lighter footprint, and at her current size, is comfortable asking for help when she needs it.

"The thing that has most helped me make better life choices is all of the encouragement and support I receive from my community, family, doctors, nurses and staff." She adds, "I feel very blessed. God has been very good to me. I can't shout praises loud enough for all of the well-wishes and support I receive." She happily embraced some encouragement she received just a few weeks ago to get clothes that fit her new frame!

Sister Suanne is happier now. Lately she has been working at the reception desk. She loves it she says. "My mother used to be a switchboard operator and this work brings me closer to her." She has eight pounds to go to reach her goal – the hardest to lose she says. Once Suanne reaches her goal, she and her friends at the clinic have plans to celebrate her accomplishments with an oversized chocolate chip cookie and of course, fruit choices too.