

ST. THOMAS' REACHES OUT TO THE ST. PETERSBURG FREE CLINIC

By Toni Calabrese in collaboration with Bob Siver

The Outreach Committee of St. Thomas', chaired by Georgia Mattern, is made up of a small group of parishioners who are entrusted with the task of making wise recommendations to the Vestry for spending the Church's money on those who are less fortunate. One of the ongoing projects of our church is to support the St. Petersburg Free Clinic with funds, time, and talent to enhance their non-profit organization. In case you are not acquainted with the work of the Free Clinic, they operate five different services; **The Health Center**, dedicated to providing health care for the uninsured; **We Help Services**, providing temporary assistance with food, water bills, bus passes, and many other necessities of living; a **Food Bank** which provides surplus and donated foods on a regular basis to 60 other community organizations serving those in need; **the Women's Residence**, provides temporary housing and education for women; and **Beacon House**, provides temporary housing for men. The Free Clinic was started by **Warner "Butch" Anderson** in 1970. **Sister Margaret Freeman** was Executive Director from 1975-1992. **Jane Egbert**, the current Executive Director does a monumental job of directing a small paid staff and hundreds of volunteers. There are never enough volunteers so for more complete information and how you can volunteer, go to <http://www.stpetersburgfreeclinic.org>. Several of our long time parishioners are on the Board of the Free Clinic as well.

Father Peter Fleming was kind enough to reminisce with me about the involvement of St. Thomas' with the Free Clinic. He stated that we have made donations of money and time ever since the early 1970's. **Bob Siver**, a long time member of the Free Clinic Board and one of its biggest advocates at St. Thomas' states:

In the late 1970's, as part of a Lenten process to enjoy fellowship over a meal while learning from a guest speaker, Sister Margaret Freeman was invited to speak to a group of about 40 parishioners of St. Thomas' Episcopal Church. While Sr. Margaret did not ask for a thing, she must have been very convincing in describing services provided by St. Petersburg Free Clinic. Within one month, 22 of those 40 members in attendance began to volunteer there!

In 1979, the Free Clinic took over the mortgage of a former Post Office Building at 863 3rd Ave. N. When it became obvious that the layout of the building was not appropriate for the services provided, a parishioner who was an architect generated renovation plans and \$20,000 which had been set aside for remodeling at St. Thomas' was voted to be given to the Free Clinic instead, for its renovation.

During this time, the Clinic depended upon volunteer physicians, many of whom came from the staff at St. Anthony's Hospital. As doctors served the Clinic and then retired, recruiting their replacements was a challenge for the Clinic and the Board. A big boost was felt when Pinellas County Health Dept. agreed to bring volunteer physicians on board there and then assigned them for service at SPFC, thereby allowing them to benefit from the State's sovereign immunity. This especially benefits retired physicians who no longer have to acquire/extend medical malpractice insurance. **Dr. William Baker**, a St. Thomas' member and St. Anthony's physician was very instrumental in recruiting St. Anthony's physicians to donate their services to the clinic in the early years.

Part of the proceeds from the VBS last summer were donated to a project aptly named "**Wee Help**" and furthered our outreach through the children of the church. Financial supporting excess of \$87,000 has been provided to all programs in the time period covered by the SPFC records. Much of this has gone to the Health Center for Assorted

Medical Supplies, Over the Counter Drugs, and Vital Sign Monitors and for the last two years, diabetic test strips. Our Vestry has approved monies every other month to add to that of the Free Clinic so that they can buy these very expensive test strips in bulk. The Diabetic Education Program is free at the Clinic for all those who attend and their monitors, syringes and test strips are free as well as the insulin they need. It is hoped that the educational component will help avoid many diabetes related illnesses.

Bob Siver continues,

Over the years, volunteers from St. Thomas' have donated an immeasurable number of hours in service to the Free Clinic, and just about all have served as members and officers of the Board. This has truly been a partnership responsive to the needs of the Free Clinic, one of love and dedication, for which the St. Petersburg Free Clinic is greatly appreciative.