

# FLORIDACatholic

## Catholic Charities helps form affordable health care

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ORLANDO — A woman walked through the door of the Lazarus Free Medical Clinic this year, desperately seeking help after giving birth to her child at home. She was bleeding severely and her look of fear and desperation was evident. Medical volunteers at the clinic arranged for this woman, living below the federal poverty level, to be transported to a hospital and receive emergency care to save her life. Like so many now living and working in the United States, she was uninsured and affording health care was not a financial option she could afford.

“It was a very serious situation where the afterbirth had not separated from the womb and she knew well that she was in trouble,” said Brenda Loyal, marketing and public affairs director for Catholic Charities of Central Florida, which runs the Lazarus Free Medical Clinic program in the Diocese of Orlando.

Besides the Lazarus Free Medical Clinic located in Wildwood, Catholic Charities of Central Florida has also established the St. Thomas Aquinas Medical Clinic in St. Cloud. A third clinic will open soon in Eustis.

“The working poor are our primary audience and they are very grateful for the clinics,” said Loyal.

In the Diocese of Palm Beach, Catholic Charities’ Parish Nurse Program is designed to enhance the ability of the parish community to promote good health through education, information and resources in the areas of disease prevention and wellness promotion. The program is run through the Interfaith Health and Wellness Association of Catholic Charities.

“Our parish nurses take the time to educate, and this can mean all the difference for someone with little education to understand something like using a glucometer correctly for monitoring their diabetes,” said Bernadette Macy, associate program administrator for the wellness association. “In all cases we have documented an increase in health literacy, which in turn has lessened trips to the emergency room.”

While parish nurse programs at Holy Cross in Indiantown and Notre Dame Mission in Fort Pierce help those who are underinsured, Connie Fahey, parish nurse at St. Jude in Boca Raton, serves those who can afford health insurance.

“It’s an interesting ministry and somewhat hard to explain as it is very multifaceted,” said Fahey. “Often I am dealing with people who are in the end-stages of cancer and just need someone to talk to as they are alone. I also became an extraordinary minister of holy Communion when I became the parish nurse, so I could bring them the Eucharist.”

Since the establishment of Catholic Charities in Florida, the organization has worked to bridge the gap between the pain of poverty

and the declared human rights of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. In today’s world, according to Peter Routsis-Arroyo, director of Catholic Charities in the Diocese of Venice, many of our working poor are clinging only to life and living “pretty much on the edge at all times.” People, according to Routsis-Arroyo, have to make hard decisions today.

“Do they feed the family or go to the doctor? Do they pay the rent or have needed surgery? Let me tell you, they are going to pay the rent and feed the family,” he said.

While Routsis-Arroyo sees the pending health care reform bill as a means to alleviate such toss-up decision-making, he stands solidly with the bishops in adopting a truly universal health policy with respect for human life and dignity; allowing access for all with a special concern for the poor and inclusion of immigrants; pursuing the common good and preserving pluralism including freedom of conscience and variety of options; and restraining costs and applying them equitably across the spectrum of payers.

“While we want to see good affordable health care for all,” said Routsis-Arroyo, “there are some pieces that are just not negotiable.”