



# HEARTS OF PALM CENTER

A Capital Campaign  
of St. Mark's Episcopal Church

## HOPC News & Notes, December 24, 2024

### Donor Spotlight

At last! We sat down for a chat with Karen Cook, who, along with her husband, The Rev. Jim Cook, founded Hearts of Palm, a mission of St. Mark's. After hearing so much about how she's inspired others to support the mission's work, we knew we had to hear directly from the woman behind the vision for the future Hearts of Palm Center.

#### How did the Hearts of Palm mission begin?

After the new buildings at St. Mark's were completed, Jim and I thought, "*Wouldn't it be amazing if we could create a mission host site right here?*" We envisioned youth groups coming to spend their week locally—tackling projects like fixing code violations, roofing, landscaping, and repairs. Just imagine what we could accomplish. That was the spark.



“ This mission is built on the love and support of everyone at St. Mark's. Thanks to this congregation, we're able to do what we do, and with the Hearts of Palm Center, we'll be able to do it faster, smarter, and better.

Karen Cook

We handled everything — meals, supplies — the groups just needed to show up. Then COVID hit. Last summer was the first year we stopped hosting mission trips. That was tough, but it's allowed us to focus more directly on the mission work being done through our parishioners.

#### Can you explain how the mission works?

It's all through a community network. I mostly rely on emergency referrals from local nonprofits. For example, Faith Deliverance Church in Riviera Beach might call me and say, "I have a family facing eviction—can you help with a light bill or rent?" It's a kind of triage, but still a careful process to help people move to the next phase to get the help they need.

Christmas is when we get to have fun! In September we identify about 8 families we've worked with throughout the year and ask for their wish lists. Then the congregation comes together to purchase the gifts. This year it was 291!

#### It seems like you're really focused on helping people navigate life with as much joy and as little hardship as possible.

When someone comes to me and says, "*We actually slept last night for the first time in years because we have a roof and didn't have to worry about the rain.*" That's why I do this. The people we serve and walk alongside are you and me. The homeless man at the corner—there's no difference. We're all human, created in God's image, and called to care for each other.

#### It's incredible how your journey has inspired a new Center poised to serve the community in such a big way.

It started as the youth group mission and transformed into something truly amazing. I never know what's next. Recently, I got a call from a St. Mark's colleague who also works with The Lord's Place. He said, "*I have a woman who just had surgery and can't afford the supplies for her wounds.*" So, I met her at Walmart and we bought bandages. It's so simple but makes a world of difference to someone who can't afford the basics.

#### It seems like everything you're doing is already so effective. Why create the Hearts of Palm Center?

**Continued.**

## Interview Cont'd

When I first started, I'd meet with local nonprofits, and finding the best way to collaborate was complicated – it still is. The challenge was figuring out how to pool resources without duplicating efforts or spending days navigating systems. Over time, we've built incredible, collaborative partnerships. It will be a game-changer when we can all work closely together in the Center.

Honestly, it's not rocket science. This mission is built on the love and support of everyone at St. Mark's. Thanks to this congregation, we're able to do what we do, and with the Hearts of Palm Center, we'll be able to do it faster, smarter, and better.



Thank you for your support! This is our final newsletter for the campaign "So Others May Live", but our journey is not over.

Your continued support remains crucial to our Ministry. Stay tuned for exciting updates, including the upcoming groundbreaking of the Hearts of Palm Center, scheduled for Spring 2025!

**Together, we are a beacon of faith, hope and light in Riviera Beach.**

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