



ST. ANDREW'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

HIV/AIDS Ministry at St. Andrew's

In the mid 1980s, when the full impact of HIV/AIDS hit the U.S., Bishop Vache initiated a Commission on AIDS for the diocese of Southern Virginia. Charles Joy, Frances Barber, and Llew Roberts were representatives for St. Andrew's. That group started OPERATION AMEN, an AIDS Service Organization to help meet the need of families in our diocese. It still exists today, having changed names when seeking 501© 3 status, to Full Circle Hospice Support. Later it joined with CANDII (the children's AIDS network) to become ACCESS AIDS Care (AIDS Care Center for Education and Support Services).

In the early 1990s St. Andrew's lost two members to the disease in four days. A group of concerned church members decided that we could no longer stand on the sidelines and started an HIV/AIDS committee. Among those involved were Mike Whitehurst, Jim Affeldt, Lynn Earle, Jim Remick, Frances Barber, Al Seeley, Alan Wilson, Llew Roberts, Michael Berry, David Zeljeznjak, Mike Curtis, Steve Fazio, Jerry Hines, Jerry Butler, and Ronn Adkins. We provided emotional and physical support for anyone who contacted us, spending many hours with those dying who couldn't be left alone.

During this time ACCESS began a frozen meals program for families, delivering every two weeks, to give the message that ACCESS was there for them when needed. This has become a major project for St. Andrew's, adding to our own lay Pastoral Care commitment.

Since the inception, leadership roles have been taken by Melanie Buski, Lynn Earle, Mike Whitehurst, Charles Hassell, and Llew Roberts. We hold a "Cook-In" every two months and prepare two separate menus. Each year we make approximately 1200 meals, for a total of 24,000 meals in 20 years. Thanks to the Vestry, we have installed a freezer, which also comes in handy for other occasions, especially Flower Festival.

Through the years, the roles of the group have changed. Generally, we no longer have to provide physical care. In addition to the "Cook-In," we have hosted a number of extravaganza dinners called "Dinner is Served" as a benefit for ACCESS. One attribute that we did not foresee has been the sense of community that has developed within this volunteer group. Many participants are not St. Andrew's parishioners, but faithfully contribute time and money. We have bonded as a family. One of the highlights occurred when we provided a surprise wedding reception for Melanie and her husband Bill shortly before his death from cancer.

In 2003, St Andrew's was the recipient of the Georgine C. Steinbruck Volunteer Award, "in recognition of outstanding support, service, and caring" to Full Circle AIDS Hospice Support. In November 2011, St. Andrew's will receive the Community Award from Equality Virginia, a statewide advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender persons, in thanksgiving for our long-term efforts to support people living with HIV/AIDS. This work has been a continuing blessing for all involved as well as well as an important component of our parish outreach ministry.

Llew Roberts