



Dr. Tony Torres, who serves as pastor of Cleburne Seventh Day Adventist Church, stood outside the church on Tuesday morning gazing toward an empty spot of land near the parking lot. "Lord willing, we will have a church school over there one day, kindergarten thru eighth grade" Torres said. "That will free up that whole wing of the church building to expand the clinic. We can have room for ophthalmology and other specialties."

'Plans and funding for the school have developed slower than hoped." Torres said. "We had a five year plan," Torres laughed. "But it looks like it's going to take a bit longer. We have our dreams and goals. Without those you have no direction in life, but we'll get there."

The future of the school, and the church, will soon pass on to the leadership of others. Though he plans to stay involved to some degree, Torres plans to retire on July 31st. A Brooklyn native, Torres, 67, moved to Johnson County 14 years ago and has served as the church 's pastor for 12 years.

Torres earned a masters of divinity from Andrews University and went on to serve as a minister for 35 plus years. That same calling led him to take a break to enter medical school in the Dominican Republic. "I fell in love with medical missionary work there and doing what I can to help the poor," Torres said.

That passion played a huge role in the founding of the Hope Medical & Dental Clinic in Cleburne five years ago. "My wife asked me why I go to foreign counties to take care of the sick when there's so much need in our own backyard." Torres said. "That got me to thinking. Texas has the highest rate of uninsured people in the country," Torres said. "27.6 percent and uninsured for dental is double that, more than 50 percent of the state." Which led Torres to found Hope Clinic-Healing Outreach Professional

Endeavor– in 2007, followed by the dental clinic in 2009. "We started it to meet the needs of the uninsured in Johnson County," Torres said. The clinic, located in the Cleburne First Seventh Day Adventist Church at 111 Meadowview Drive, reflects Torres' twin passions. Having served as a minister and an OB/Gyn, Torres said he has long worked to combine his medical and spiritual callings.

"Uninsured county residents previously had to depend largely on the emergency room of Texas Health Resources Hospital Cleburne", Torres said. "They would go there, but then, of course, didn't have the money to pay. Which would put a strain on the hospital. There were not a lot of other services then or now for people who've lost their jobs or have no insurance. Some physicians in the county still do charitable work, but not on a consistent basis. Which is where Hope clinic comes in". Torres said. "We're not here to make money," Torres said. "To us medicine is not a business, it's a ministry. The clinic asks that the patients make a five dollar donation, if able. otherwise the clinic operates on funding and donations large and small. We do things to raise money." Torres said. "We also are helped by United Way and donations by the Marti Foundation , Stretch Smith and the Mustang Foundation. The Cleburne Firefighters Association held a tournament to benefit us, the Lions and Rotary Clubs and the Black & White Gala support us, then we get a lot of individual donations. "

"At the clinic 12 physicians, 9 dentists, and 2 dental hygienists' volunteer," Torres said. "Some still work their day jobs while others are retired." Torres said. "Dr Steve Johnson is one of our retired physicians." Torres said. "He practiced for more than thirty years before retiring and had been medical director of a hospital. Now he's our medical director for the clinic. We're also blessed with a tremendous staff of four people who are paid and a lot of volunteer s. That's the key to continuity, the quality of our paid staff who are so committed and skilled that they can keep on fine without me." Torres said.

"We have had about 24,000 pt visits since we opened the clinic" Torres said, which is open four to five days a week. We're open depending on our volunteer physicians, " Torres said. "When they can get in, we'll see patients. I wish we could hire someone to have more of a 9 to 5, five day a week schedule, maybe even some evening hours. But in five years, we started small and now we're up to four and five days a week. We've had steady growth."

The area the clinic occupies in the church has in fact expanded over time. Leading a tour of the clinic, Torres points out three dental chairs, several exam rooms, a waiting room and other amenities. One room is dedicated to diabetes treatment and counseling. "We work not only to treat people, but also to teach and motivate them to take care of themselves, watch their diet and so forth. Diabetes being a problem not just in Johnson County, but everywhere" said Diane Westcott, Hope Clinic Executive Director. "I haven't calculated it for Johnson County but know it's a huge number," Westcott said. "I would estimate that 60% of the patients we see are diabetic or pre-

diabetic". "Obesity and sedentary life styles appear to be the two biggest culprits. Fast foods." Westcott said. "It's easier, cheaper, to get a .99 hamburger than fruit and vegetables."

"An Ophthalmologist, scheduled to begin volunteering later this summer will be a big help," Torres said. "Lots of diabetics have vision problems," Torres said. "We have a counselor right now to help them deal with foot problems and this will expand our care."

"Sustaining the current level of services offered and still hoping to expand services isn't easy given recent economic conditions," Torres said. "We've been hurting on donations, but God has always been good to us. Uncertainty about President Obama's health care reform legislation plays in as well." Torres said. Given that segments of the plan are scheduled to go into effect in the next few years, not to mention the upcoming presidential election and Supreme Court case addressing portions of the bill. Health care's in a flux because we don't know how things are going to go." Torres said. "But, we still have people in need. The high rate of unemployment, people losing their jobs and insurance. Help is needed at the clinic as well," he said. "Nonetheless, the clinic benefits greatly from both physicians and dentists who volunteer as well as students. Dental students from Baylor Dental University in Dallas, nursing students from Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, Hill College, and Tarleton State University also volunteer. It's great both for the students and our patients." Torres said. "Our dental services have to be at the highest level because we're serving as a teaching health care at meager or nothing cost. We want to be charitable."

Assistant Pastor, Harly Charles, will assume the role of pastor beginning August 1. The 35 year old Rio Grande Valley native earned his degree at Southwestern and has been with Cleburne SDA Church since November. "It's been a blessing for me to work with Torres." Charles said. "Not just for what he's done for the church, but also the difference he's made in the community and showing how God can bless a community."

Although he is retiring from his position as pastor, Torres hardly plans to kick back and take it easy. "I'll continue to work at the clinic even though I'm retiring as pastor," Torres said. He also plans to continue pursuing his other civic and volunteer activities, including hopes to build a hospital in the Dominican Republic.

With or without him, Torres said the mission of Hope Clinic remains straightforward and consistent.

"We want every patient that comes in to have dignity and respect" Torres said. "To not feel bad or ashamed just because they don't have money. We offer our services because everyone of them are sons and daughters of God."

