

Health clinic will be part of Oakland's new cathedral center

OAKLAND, Calif. – A free medical clinic for uninsured children and adults will open in October as part of the new Christ the Light Cathedral Center in downtown Oakland.

The clinic is being sponsored by the Order of Malta, Western Association USA, and will offer no-cost care in a section of the cathedral's office building.

Oakland Bishop Allen H. Vigneron said the clinic will be a tangible sign of the cathedral's "ministry of charity."

He first envisioned the clinic while on a pilgrimage to Lourdes, France, in 2005 with a local group of Knights and Dames of Malta. Each year members of the international organization take thousands of sick people to Lourdes to pray for physical and spiritual healing.

"I saw the care being given to the sick there and realized that this would be a wonderful service at our new cathedral," Bishop Vigneron said. He proposed the idea of a clinic to the East Bay members of the organization and they have spent the past two years bringing the vision to reality.

It will be named the Order of Malta Oakland Clinic and will be staffed by volunteer doctors and nurses; Oakland orthopedic surgeon Dr. Thomas Schmitz will be the medical director. The clinic, which is leasing the property from the diocese for \$1 per year, will pay all operating expenses, estimated between \$300,000 and \$500,000 annually.

Patients will not be charged for any medical services, including examinations, lab work and prescription drugs. In addition to the clinic doctors, there will be other physicians who agree to see clinic patients for specialized care, also at no cost. To qualify, a patient must be without any health insurance.

The Oakland clinic is modeled after the organization's clinic in Los Angeles, which

has been treating patients for nearly 30 years.

William McInerney, a Knight of Malta who has been spearheading the Oakland project, expects the clinic to start providing services a few days per week and eventually grow into a five-days-a-week operation.

“We expect to treat a lot of children,” McInerney said, noting that there are an estimated 8,400 uninsured children in Oakland. More than 50,000 adults in Oakland are also without health insurance.