



## For the Christmas Season

December 2012

*“They will be called oaks of righteousness,  
a planting of the Lord for the display of His splendor.”  
-Isaiah 61:3*

Dear Friends of Refuge,

**This Christmas season I’d like to share – with permission –  
a remarkable story of forgiveness and transformation.**

The story is about a Refuge client who I’ll call Mila. Mila has been an orphan since the tender age of five, when her mother died. She then suffered through years of neglect as a pre-teen and teen.

Mila also lives with several serious, incurable chronic illnesses. For years she has struggled with her health and with the many issues experienced by survivors of trauma.



Her sister told her she was “just a bad person.” Her boyfriend gave her continuous negative feedback. “We’ve only been together a short time and you’re always fighting with me.”

Mila was perplexed and tried in vain to cope. She engaged in self-destructive behavior, seeking a temporary relief from emotional pain. She was referred by her primary physician to Refuge for help, and we came alongside helping her to find healthy ways to feel comforted.

The work of healing happens slowly, over time. As the weeks went by, she would take two steps forward and one step back, sometimes into a very precarious state of mind. We worked together bit by bit, and gradually she became more stable as she was able to connect in our relationship. As we prayed together, the Spirit began to do a work in her heart.

She found prayer, breathing exercises, and reading the Psalms all to be helpful, as well as talking about the difficult things in her life. She would cry out to God for mercy.

Mila recently went on an evangelistic retreat with her church. During that time away, she says that God began to deal with her heart issues.

“I prayed for all the people who hurt me when I was younger. I forgave my mother for dying when I was just a little girl; the family member who sexually assaulted me when I was a pre-teen; other family members as well. I had to forgive the man who raped me. I chose to forgive. I know God wants to lift me out of being a victim.”

In order for the Lord to deliver her, she had to be led by Him in the area of forgiveness.

“It’s a miracle,” she says. “You know, just years of junk taken out in two days. And even though I know there’s more stuff, I see God uses people, circumstances – good or bad – and he turns it around for His glory. We can let it destroy us, but purely by the grace of God we can be transformed and healed.”

For Mila, forgiveness was a way of being released from the pain. Prayer was the alternative to harming herself. I helped her understand that even though deception is still a temptation – that’s where she’s already been in the past. Now, for the first time in three years of counseling, her eyes are clear. You can hear the transformation in her voice. Listen.

“Unforgiveness is like a prison,” she says. “You cannot move. It’s like being in a very small room. But God gives us the gift of forgiveness.”

“Unforgiveness makes you feel like you are in control, in charge. But when you release it and give it to God, there is a joy, a peace, and unimaginable freedom.”

Mila faces uncertainty on the road ahead. She still has serious health problems. She will need a lot of spiritual encouragement and mentoring. Forgiveness is a process and must be practiced again and again. But I’m encouraged because she has a firm foundation. No matter what storms she may still face, I feel hope for her as she perseveres through difficulties that many of us have trouble imagining.

Mila’s transformation includes a desire to give back, to live a life of faith in community. She has a thankful heart knowing, as the Spirit reminds her, that by His stripes, we are healed.

Forgiveness and transformation are gifts that Jesus came to give us. What a privilege it is to watch Him bestow these gifts on those He loves. Only He can transform the ashes of terrible tragedy into the beauty of redemption.

## **O come let us adore Him.**

**Thanks to our partners in the area that make it possible for us to have optimal impact in the lives of the people we serve.**

### **Successful City Audit for Refuge**

The Place of Refuge was recently audited by our accrediting agency with the City of Philadelphia. Auditors reviewed charts, met with clients, staff, and conducted “living interviews” with clients, therapists and supervisors. One of the city auditors, at the debriefing interview with me remarked, *“I cannot imagine one person in this city, who could come for an appointment or simply come in contact with this place and not feel they have been lifted up, even if they came for just one visit here.”*

I have always felt that what we do here, from cleaning the steps to dealing with a crisis, represents small steps of obedience. But the overwhelmingly positive commendation of the auditors was a great encouragement. As another reviewer said, *“Refuge has the heart for all of Philadelphia.”* Leaders from the faith-based area of the city agency have heard such positive reports that they’ve asked us to present our faith-based trauma recovery model in an upcoming conference. Praise God for that opportunity!

We are also pleased to welcome Dr. Rosilyn Smith, M.D., as staff psychiatrist. Please pray that the Lord would preserve our team. **Your prayers and your financial support are making a difference in inner-city Philadelphia.**



**Patsy Emery, Volunteer**

*“I count it an honor and a privilege to be a volunteer at The Place of Refuge. I have lived in this inner-city neighborhood*

*for 28 years, and I have*

*seen the physical, emotional and spiritual suffering of the people who live here. The Place of Refuge is a place where many can come and find love and true healing for their body, soul and spirit through Jesus Christ. I’m glad that in my years of retirement I can have a small part in this great ministry.”*

*- Pat Emery, Volunteer*



**Michelle Bonilla, Intake Coordinator at her baby shower on December 12/12/12**

We are so pleased that Pat Emery will be helping us while Michelle Bonilla, intake coordinator, is on maternity leave.

## **Funding Update**

Financial support from three foundations has been discontinued this year due to shifting priorities and financial difficulties. This presents us with a serious challenge. We have a development consultant who will work with us to find additional sources of funding. But right now your gifts to The Place of Refuge are needed more than ever. Please give generously so that we can continue this important Kingdom work.

Merry Christmas,

Elizabeth Hernandez  
Executive Director