

October 2013

Dear Friends,

This month, The Place of Refuge enters its fourth year since becoming credentialed by the city as a professional counseling center providing specialized trauma and faith-based services to the badly underserved neighborhoods of North Philadelphia.

At the time the task was put before us, not one of us failed to see the solemn purpose the Lord had for us here. We were asked to enter in where others had found no success. We were tasked to fill a very deep hole in one of the toughest neighborhoods in this city.

You, our supporters, come from all walks. Many of you have never seen the streets outside our small ministry, while others among you are familiar with what life looks like for so many of the people we serve. In our neighborhood the median household income is around \$13,000 per year. Half earn more than that and half earn less. The high school graduation rate is less than 40 percent.

Recently I met with a young man who, sitting just across from me, reminded me of the reasons our Lord Jesus Christ has raised this body of believers to represent Him in North Philadelphia. Raul (not his real name) is a Latino man in his mid-30s. Born and raised in North Philadelphia—here all of his life, he became a Christian during his sophomore year in high school. Raul was raised in a single parent home by his mother along with his siblings. His mother provided for him as best she could, but life was not easy for them.

For most of his life, Raul was bullied by other kids. He was vulnerable because he did not fit in. He didn't look like the rest of the kids who all looked more Latino. Although he is Hispanic inside, he could pass as any European. Sadly, because of his mother's traumatic history, from an early age he carried her suffering without understanding what was happening. The trauma she had known in her life left a deep mark on her and eventually he grew tired of carrying her. In school, his concentration level was poor and learning became difficult for him. Despite having a deep desire and ambition to grow and have a career, he was unable to finish community college.

The complexity of his mother's traumatic suffering has caused profound difficulties in his life. He is not married. He still has very few friends and is unable to cope with normal stressors that barely affect most of us.

I see in front of me a young man who at this tender age finds himself at a crossroads. I believe God sent Raul to us to protect him and others from the rage that has reached a climax inside him. If you

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met Raul you would see a very decent human being. He is no man's enemy; hardworking, but never far from snapping at any moment.

It is clear to me that Raul could have chosen another path. He could have become a drug dealer, a user, an alcoholic or, as he himself reminds me, he could have fathered a dozen children out of wedlock. Instead, he has chosen to suffer silently, though this has come at great personal expense.

Slowly we have been able to identify what the problem is, getting him the proper referrals to other providers who will be able to help him in additional ways. We have worked on how he can communicate with co-workers and his boss and we have even worked on setting healthier boundaries in his relationship with his mother. But, the accumulation of stress inside him over many years needs much attention and care. I am so aware of the fact that the Lord has spared him in a big way from losing it all if he were to give in to the anger inside. Raul knows this as well. While he still has a way to go, we both trust in the Lord's might to keep him.

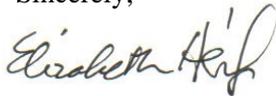
We are all aware of what can happen to angry young men who develop mental health problems and never receive proper, meaningful treatment. We're reminded of what happened in Washington, DC recently when a man struggling with PTSD killed 14 people. The words he etched into the sides of that shotgun make me shiver, familiar echoes of what I hear from men who carry such wounds without relief.

While there is much talk about people having mental health problems, and our country has invested so much money in providing care, young men are still falling into violence and anger. **Unless there is divine intervention as in Raul's case, we can continue to expect nothing but catastrophe to come.**

The Lord has raised The Place of Refuge and His local body of believers to bring hope and stability, not only to the individuals and their families but to the overall community as well.

Won't you help us bring the Light of the World into this darkness? We need your help now more than ever!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Elizabeth Hernandez".

Elizabeth Hernandez, M.A.
Executive Director & Co-Founder

A Message from the Board of Directors

October 1, 2013

Dearest Friends,

I must tell you about something that is very difficult for us at The Place of Refuge at this time. Our financial situation is beyond delicate. We stand at a crossroads.

Since the beginning of this year, as we continue to grow, we have felt the great pinch of this prolonged recession in a very big way. It's painful to say, but **we have not been able to fully meet our financial obligations to our two full-time employees; Bryan, who is our Assistant Operations Manager, and Elizabeth Hernandez, our Executive Director.**

With interest rates remaining low for so long, foundation support and increases in grant writing are proving to be very limited opportunities. By God's grace, these dear staff members both received 66 percent of amount due, but combined to-date, \$30,000 has been unmet—representing around 12 percent of our budget.

Each day, they are fully completing their responsibilities, working into the night many evenings and often working 60 hours each week. We are all laboring harder than ever to get The Place of Refuge on firm financial footing. We find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. On the one hand, the agency program is beginning to flourish. We now have 12 independent contractors and four graduate interns serving the people of this community. On the other hand, our need for strong, regular commitments of support continues to grow each year.

Additionally, just this year The Place of Refuge has provided professional training of our model to 14 outside agencies, serving hundreds of individuals. We even had a group travel from Baltimore for an all-day in-house training alongside a local church from our area. To see the determination in their eyes and the commitment in the words that came out as we dialogued about what it means to walk alongside someone who is broken and hurting in their church—well, it was one of the most joyful events in the history of Refuge.



New Song Community Church of Baltimore with Liberti East Church from Fishtown visiting Refuge staff for an all-day Saturday intensive at Refuge on Lay-Counseling Training for Urban Helpers

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What are we to do when we have this enthusiastic group of believers serving together, many places asking us to guide and train them, testimonies from our clients telling us the esteem with which they hold our services and yet we don't have the strength to serve them?

It is shattering, once they have felt what is here. Even the auditors from the city stated; "In all my years of conducting audits, I have never had the pleasure of being in such a beautiful place and to feel the peace that I have here." In closing our most recent audit last week, they communicated that the infrastructure of the organization, with a few minor technical improvements, is extremely commendable.

Scripture reminds us that we are in a fierce spiritual battle. And we believe that at the root of the matter, spiritual warfare is the only explanation for these financial constraints. We are so close to becoming more financially viable, and with the exception of not paying payroll for the two full time staff, all of our other bills are being paid. We were just informed that we have reached a landmark, 5,000 office visits since we have been open. This is nothing short of God's amazing grace!

Without our two full time staff members, it is impossible to be who we are.

Refuge is truly unique. We are the only organization in all of Philadelphia that has been credentialed and recognized as a faith-based, trauma counseling organization, working in the heart of the urban community. Our credentialing agency recognized that there was a gap that could only be filled by a people of faith and have invested significant amounts of money to provide us with a facility, furniture and technology.

If our agency does not thrive and succeed, this will be a poor testimony about our Lord Jesus Christ and leave the people of North Philadelphia hurting with nowhere to go. Will it not promote unbelief and skepticism about the Lord and continue to give the adversary more of a stronghold in the lives of the people in this community?

We cannot imagine coming this far only to fail. And it is with great humility and hope that we bring our needs to you, many of whom have been with us from the very beginning.

Elizabeth, our staff, and the graduate interns are full of gratitude for you and your sacrificial support of The Place of Refuge. **Would you consider prayerfully how you might contribute to this desperate need?**

Together we look to our risen Lord, who alone is our Refuge and our strength, for His favor.

Sincerely,



Reverend Luis Centeno
Chair of the Board of Directors



Diane Langberg, Ph.D.
Co-Founder
Vice Chair on the Board of Directors