



A place of help, hope & healing in Philadelphia!

good tidings for the Christmas season

“...and I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord’s holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”
(Ephesians 3: 17-20)

December 2023

Dear Friends,

It is so humbling to consider that **The Place of Refuge** has now been working in the heart of Latino North Philadelphia for 15 years.

Home to over 1.6 million people and with 700,000+ who qualify as low-income and receive Medical Assistance insurance—of the ten (10) major cities in the US, no other city has a higher proportion of poverty than our city. To this day **Refuge** is still the only faith-based, outpatient counseling for adults in Philadelphia that accepts Medical Assistance (Medicaid)—the primary way that people in poverty get help in this country.

From the time that we first formally opened the doors at 2938 N 5th St in Fairhill/West Kensington (19133) in 2009—one of the most impoverished zip codes in our city, state, and in our nation—small as we are, since that time our counselors have now worked with close to 1% of the population of eastern North Philadelphia, which our last census estimates at 165,000—that’s nearly 1% of all the people in our surrounding neighborhoods—even just considering each case as one—and we know what the Lord can do with just one life redeemed.

And when we also consider the training on trauma, parenting, and other mental health topics that we have offered to grassroots partners throughout our region as well as our consultation services to local congregations and the many referrals we have helped coordinate—it is incredible to consider just how many lives have been touched through this work.

It is our honor to represent the heart of our Redeemer in this place.

In Elizabeth’s book [Christ & the Marginalized: Bringing Refuge to the Broken](#), she offers many beautiful illustrations of patience—the endurance, the long-suffering, disappointments, frustration—and hope.

We see this every day in the people we serve. A hand reaches out and is received by one of us—and as we listen to the stories, and we try to piece together what has caused the trauma, we repeat what we believe we’ve heard to be sure that we fully understand and so the people we sit with *know* that we actually do understand. We seek the Lord’s guidance. We speak words of truth that He gives us. We offer hope. We offer healing. We offer the peace that only the Lord can give.

It may take many months, but sometimes we are given the opportunity to see just how deep and wide and high is the love of our God as we see progress moving forward in those we serve. They change before our eyes as shame disappears and they meet our gaze. Perhaps they just remember how to smile—or it may come only very briefly at first. Over time they begin to see goodness in their world and report it to us.

In a beautiful description of patience and hope—in her book Elizabeth shares an old expression in Spanish: *‘Nada es tarde, si la dicha es buena.’* Or in English: *‘It is never late if the outcome is delightful.’*

Despite the many stories of conflict here at home and across the globe—and even with our own neighbors, churches, and even in our own families struggling as they are—truly, sometimes hope is not easy to come by in this world.



Even so, we are encouraged by some of the good things we see today—by God's grace:

- we are on track to serve +19% more people this calendar year than at any point in our history—and still growing stronger with another **+5% more people** served than even in 2022
- our **seven professional counselors** continue to meet every day with people who have experienced untold suffering in this world—many matriarchs and patriarchs within their families
- with our professional graduate training work that resumed in 2022 with Bryan Hollinger, MD, MPH from Missio University (who also recently retired as Medical Director of the Esperanza Health Center after 30 years)—**Bryan successfully completed his graduate internship on-target in May 2023**
- and with the advances we have made in remote work—we are so encouraged that Bryan continues to meet with a handful of Refuge clients part-time—fully approved by Philadelphia city officials (!)—while overseas on his mission assignment in Guatemala City with Serge
- now with more than 20+ graduate students trained, it is so humbling to be adding two more new students again for the year ahead starting in Q1 2024
 - Lise Lucas Benoit from Cairn University, and
 - Brian Savage from the Antiochian House of Studies

And perhaps most notably, now with Carla Contreras, MS from Cairn University—one of our two full-time counselors now joining our four other licensed providers with her own Licensed Professional Counseling (LPC) certification, and with the additional work and training we are doing to make it happen—**please pray with us as we look ahead in 2024 to a new day where we are finally able to accept mainstream insurance coverage.**

With these steps forward, we are perhaps now better positioned to help this entire region than we have ever been. What the good Lord will do with it—we just lay it as his feet.

As it is with each one us, the story of our each gifts are sacred and personal. For the help you have offered us along the way, you have our sincere thanks.

You have given us confidence to look forward in hope again to the year ahead.

May the peace of Christ's glory, which surpasses all understanding meet you where you are and go ahead of you in all things. Merry Christmas! Happy New Year!!

Every blessing to you and yours,

friends and family.
The Place of Refuge

support for the The Place of Refuge

the road ahead | 2024

Our board, our front-line staff, and our clinical leadership—are now encouraging us to look ahead and bring on a third team of (3-4) counselors taking us up to as many as 12 providers (+33%).

Despite our serving more people than ever before, our wait list continues to grow daily (now nearly 50) as though the Lord too is encouraging us to grow as well. Prayerfully, we ask that you will also consider encouraging us to take this important next step too as you're able.

Today, we prayerfully seek combined added support from our partners of \$24,000 for 2024 to help us cover the 3-6 months that it will take to establish these new positions (approximately \$8,000 per counselor) until the positions are viable. What amount you may be able to contribute toward this goal and how, I pray the Lord will bless you with wisdom to see it.

To make a gift, you may use the button below, or visit: www.placeofrefuge.net/give

Donate Now

May God's good blessing find you and meet you where you are—granting you peace and confidence in his good work. May you find it everywhere you look—even these days.

Thank you!! God bless you! Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!!

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The Place of Refuge is a 501(c)3 non-partisan, non-profit organization that seeks to bring redemptive healing through faith-based trauma treatment and training focusing on urban populations and their caregivers.

We consider it a gift to be able to carry out this work. Thank you!

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