

Peace and Thanksgiving

November 11, 2011

“And in this place I will give peace...”
-Haggai 2:9

Thanksgiving is just around the corner. When I count my blessings, I am so very thankful for you!

Your prayers and continued financial support for *The Place of Refuge* are enabling us to impact our North Philadelphia community—and we’re experiencing daily the wonder of what God can do! We are so grateful to God for what He has done in our own lives and in the lives of our clients.



Bernardo (not his real name) is a fantastic example. In July, 2010, this man, who is in his forties, walked into *The Place of Refuge* for the first time, having been referred for counseling.

He was clearly unbalanced mentally and emotionally, spoke loudly—at about 100 miles an hour—and made me somewhat uncomfortable. Truly I know, though, the Lord has placed us here to help people like Bernardo. But I needed to be cautious. “If you sent him, Lord, I’ll work with him,” I thought.

I soon learned that this highly-charged man had spent more than half his life in prison. For part of it, he was locked up in maximum security. His life had been one crisis after another, in and out of unhealthy relationships, and on top of that instability, he was dealing with a rare, chronic illness.

As weeks passed, he slowly assumed a more normal tone of voice and was able to make eye contact with me while we spoke together. That’s when I realized I was no longer afraid of him.

In just a little over a year, Bernardo has made remarkable progress. It’s worth asking, “Why is he better? What has made the difference in his life?”

First of all, he always asked for prayer—and wanted to end his sessions with a prayer of his own. Secondly, our staff psychiatrist, Dr. Job Lin, evaluated Bernardo and found that he suffers from a very serious mental illness that had not been identified during his years in prison. Today, he is receiving proper psychiatric care and the counseling he needs, for body, soul and mind.

Bernardo, who was profoundly impacted by his prison experience, has shared with me that he is struck by the contrast between the care he experiences at Refuge and the experience of his friend who receives counseling from another center. I asked him why he thought Refuge is different—in his opinion, better—and he said, “Elizabeth, I walk into this place and find a peace that I can find nowhere else. I am treated with dignity and respect by everyone, starting at the front desk. This is why my life has improved. Thank God.”

While the impact we're making in the lives of our clients is clear—and gratifying—I must tell you that these dear people are struggling. Many cannot afford things as basic as enough food to feed their families, much less counseling sessions.

That's why your gifts are so important! Your financial support allows us to help people like Bernardo who have been living lives of hopelessness. I wish that you could see—as we do—the difference your contribution makes!

In order to keep our doors open—and pay our dedicated staff—we need your help. This Thanksgiving, please consider making a donation to *The Place of Refuge* and by doing so help us to meet our most critical needs, including:

- Hiring additional, seasoned bilingual counselors to our dynamic staff
- Promoting our current part-time intake coordinator to full-time status by January 2012

We long to maximize our outreach, to reach the most vulnerable in our community.

Your help is making this possible!

Reaching Out

- ❑ As of the end of October, clearly, we are having our busiest year—**1000 appointments so far!**
- ❑ Each week we are seeing new families come to receive care from our counselors. Increasingly we're seeing many more widows and orphans.
- ❑ In September one of our most experienced counselors, Sheila Staley, spoke at the Fellowship Mission Outreach Conference hosted by True Light Fellowship Church in Mt. Airy.
- ❑ Our community welcomed Joseph Randall, as the new pastor at Olney Baptist Church. Pastor Randall came to visit Refuge and we look forward to serving as a resource for his congregation.

Everyone we share these stories with seems to come away with at least a small amount of peace—that there are good works being done for those who need it.

Every Dollar Counts

As you celebrate Thanksgiving, please know that you are an encouragement, a support and truly a gift to us as we carry on this work. Thank you for all of your support and prayers.

Respectfully,

Elizabeth Hernandez, M.A.R.
Executive Director