

Dear Friends,

When we walk with our Lord, He takes us as we are—with all our muck and grime, and what He makes of it is beyond beauty. Recently, I came across Isaiah 43:18, “*See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it?*” As we eagerly anticipate Easter, may each of us take time to contemplate the many times the Lord has done new things for us. And may we rejoice.



Listen to the testimony of this servant of God who came to us for help. She came to Refuge completely poured out. This woman Tara, the wife of a pastor (a church planter) had been married some twenty years, and had endured much instability—moving from city to city, often staying only long enough to get close to the people there before she moved away again—always just close enough for it to really hurt. Though she was well connected with the women in her church, and was greatly blessed by a wise and nurturing group of pastors’ wives who met faithfully each month, hollowness had grown up inside her. For months, she struggled even to get out of bed. She wanted someone to confide in, someone safe who could process with her—she needed to talk about her sadness and her marriage.

Slowly, Tara was able to share many of her hurts and struggles with her counselor. In time, she learned to express pain and anger in ways that invited her husband into a deeper relationship, instead of pushing him away. Out of great pain, she came to love her mother again. We watched as the Lord brought healing and peace to Tara’s life, until she came to say, “*The Lord has healed those broken places in my heart.*” Tara’s weekly sessions became bi-weekly, then monthly.

Tara wanted to share this: “*My husband and I have been blessed to be part of a network of churches with an urban focus. Last fall, we had the opportunity to spend a short time traveling with other pastors and their spouses from this network. The times that the wives were together were very powerful. We all shared our faith journeys. Most of us had endured some type of physical, sexual, or verbal abuse at an early age. Many people fail to realize that pastors’ wives are ordinary women with hurts, scars, and histories of family struggles. The Lord calls us into ministry with all of these things. But many times we find that our church culture is unwilling to acknowledge our pain or share in our struggles. For that reason, I was very hesitant to try talking to someone. But because I felt like I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown, I decided to trust the Lord and get help. I found my counselor to be very kind and warm. At one of my earliest appointments, I remember her telling me that the Lord was using Place of Refuge to minister to the body of Christ. This gave me much peace, knowing that other believers were seeking counseling. I also discovered that the staff prayed over the clients before placing them with a counselor. This was also encouraging to me. I am eternally grateful to the Lord for supplying my needs through His Son and through the body of Christ at Refuge.*”

Tara's story points to just one way the Lord has been faithful to this undertaking as we meet people where they are and come alongside them in compassion.

Even the caregivers, whose work we too often take for granted, can know peace in this place the Lord has raised up in Refuge. With a heart of mercy, He showed us the way. With tenderness He came to the crippled and the lame, the sick and the weak, the very ones the brokenness of this world has made it hardest for us to love.

This work continues in the poorest neighborhood in the city of Philadelphia. Watching it grow and strengthen as He continues to shape this outreach in His wisdom — we remember it has come at a real cost. I thank each of you for the sacrifice that has made it so, and I pray for your continued support.

This year, as He has sent those He would have us serve, and as we have had the capacity to provide this care, our program is growing. Although at no time before have we started the year so hopeful about our annual campaign goal, we must continue to raise funds for this very special work to continue.

If each person who receives this letter were to see the worth of our work and give \$150 — just \$12 each month — this vital outreach would be made whole!! And our three full-time staff and 17 clinicians would not need to go without.

Do I have your support? If that amount is too much, a small donation of even \$30 would be most welcome. Truly, this is a modest ministry, and even small gifts make a real impact.

As you pray, please consider these new projects and partnerships on the horizon.

- **Our first graduate intern from Cairn University, Carla Contreras**, born and raised in northern Chile, is showing a true heart connection with those clients she is already seeing.
- **New undertakings** with the Faith-Based Reentry Coalition, International Visitors Council, and the Department of Behavioral Health's Faith & Spiritual Affairs Conference later this month all promise new opportunities to expand our collaboration with the wider community.
- Pray that our story will continue to be shared!!
- **Now live on Facebook!** Visit us at www.facebook.com/RefugioNorthPhilly
- **Doctorate in Ministry from Westminster Theological Seminary.** I was approved and will graduate May 29!!

May God's blessing be with you this Easter!! Please pray that He would continue to strengthen our outreach to the many hurting people in our community. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Hernandez
Executive Director

