



Wabank Witness

March 2021

LIFE CONTRASTS

I was born in Venezuela, which was considered one of the richest countries in Latin America because it had the largest oil reserves in the world. Many people from neighboring countries emigrated to Venezuela in the golden years to live in that earthly paradise. Sadly, things have changed so dramatically that one US dollar that used to exchange for 4.3 bolívars (currency of Venezuela) now is exchanged for 1,875,001 bolívars. Currently, the minimum wage of a



Venezuelan worker (490,000 Bs) is barely enough to buy half a carton of eggs. This explains the reason for the historical diaspora of around five million Venezuelans who have left Venezuela for other countries in search of a decent life for themselves and their families and to support relatives who cannot do the same.

Nothing that happens in the United States economically is comparable to that financial, social, and political debacle that occurs in the country where I was born. Yet according to the latest USDA Household Food Insecurity Report, more than 35 million people in the United States struggled with hunger in 2019. In 2018, 14.3 million American households were food insecure with limited or uncertain access to enough food.

Feeding America, the nation's largest national network of hunger relief organizations, says that "in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, unemployment has skyrocketed and food insecurity is on the rise. More than 50 million people in the USA can go hungry because of the coronavirus." That is why one of the most important services that the Alpha and Omega Community Center provides is the distribution of food to help families of the community so that no one goes hungry. We are working with others to end hunger in America.

As an organization we are committed to sharing God's love every time we offer our social and educational services to the community. We want to impact the lives of those who come to us in a holistic way, including spiritually and emotionally. We desire that our testimony, our words of encouragement, and our faith bring peace and relief to the afflicted heart.

God has placed us on top of this Cabbage Hill for the purpose of being light and an influence for good in this beautiful city of Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

Joel Peña, Director

WEBSITE HAS NEW LOOK

Thanks to director Joel Peña and webmaster Miguel Gil, the Community Center has an updated website, available in both English and Spanish. Please take a look at <https://alphayomega.us/>. And while you are there consider making a donation or signing up to receive the digital version of the *Wabank Witness* to save us some postage.

MINISTRY UPDATES

Each program of the Community Center exists “to share God’s love by providing education and social services that empower the local Latino Community.”

The Food Bank served 544 persons in November, 193 in December, and 435 in January. Construction of the new retaining wall and the use of a metal ramp have made getting the food from the Center’s box truck into the lower level of the building much easier for the volunteers. (See photos on page three.)

Counselor Angela Arce provides counseling in Spanish remotely, serving 260 persons in 2020. A large number of her clients (45%) deal with anguish and despair. An additional 36% seek help with relationship issues, including family and marital problems. In her counseling, Angela emphasizes the power of prayer and tries to bring people closer to God.

In January, **Danny Gingrich, the Center’s English teacher**, served 25 students in 52 sessions, mostly remotely. He continues to participate in an online Medical English class and with International Healthcare Professionals Program, following through with his students by helping them complete applications and prepare for employment.

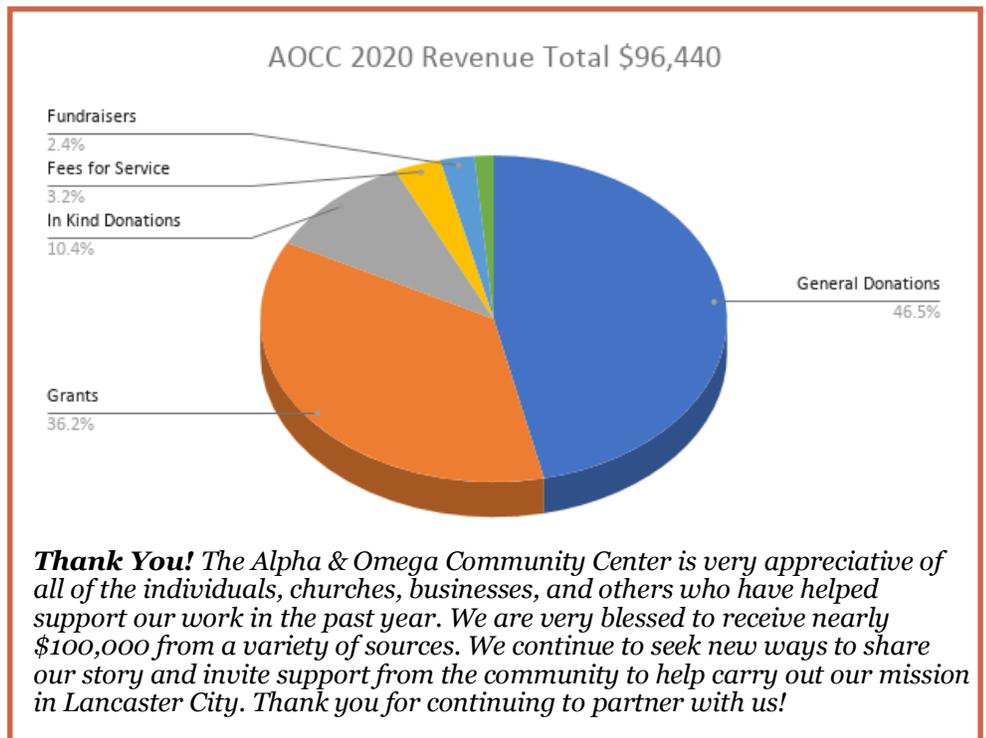
He has many success stories!

God continues to open doors for the expansion of the **Computers for Refugees** Program. Through contact with CareerLink, Danny provided three desktops, two laptops, a printer, and a big screen TV monitor to be used as a Language Lab in the Franklin Terrace Community Center.

The radio program, “Hablemos en Claro,” is aired by Radio

Centro, WLCH 91.3, Monday at 10:30 AM. Host Alberto Hernandez records the programs, which are currently focusing on developing interpersonal relationships. Alberto plans to retire at the end of April.

Education, social services, and empowerment through the ministries of the Alpha & Omega Community Center bless the Latino Community of Lancaster.



CONSIDER SHARING YOUR STIMULUS

Many people currently are receiving stimulus payments from the federal government. While some families need that money to help make ends meet during challenging times, others do not. We invite all who are able to share some or all of their federal payments to help “stimulate” the ministries of the AOCC. Your support blesses us so we can be a blessing to others. Current needs include:

- General operating revenue.
- \$5,400 for paving and sidewalk work to complete the retaining wall/food truck parking area project described on the facing page.

As the Pie Chart above shows, the Community Center relies on generous donations from individuals, churches, businesses, and others for nearly half of annual revenue. After a strong show of support at the end of 2020, gifts that sustain our ministries have slowed during the first quarter.

Thank you for considering a donation to undergird our ministries to the Latino community of Lancaster.

SPOTLIGHT ON STAFF: MARIA PEREZ

Maria Perez has been a faithful volunteer at the Community Center for many years. She previously worked at QVC. Maria has one son and two daughters, all of whom live in the area.

She also has seven grandchildren.



About 30 years ago, Maria heard the Spanish radio program, “Hablemos en Claro.” She was so moved by its message that she called the radio station and was connected to the Pastor of the Alpha &

Omega Church of the Brethren at that time, Guillermo Encarnacion. The pastor reached out to Maria and stopped by to see her, which led to Maria visiting the church. There, she found a loving community and help with family problems with which she was dealing.

Through the church, Maria became involved in its ministries. She was a coordinator not only

of the Food Bank, but also of the Clothing Bank that existed at that time. She coordinated social activities for the church and center for 15 years. She also became a member of the Community Center Board and continues to serve in that capacity, truly a “lifetime member.”

Working with Food Bank co-coordinator, Petra Castro, Maria manages food ordering, oversees volunteers, organizes the food for distribution, and ensures that safe and healthy practices are in place. Maria gives thanks to God for the blessings of church participation in this ministry.

Both Maria and Petra enjoy working with the Food Bank volunteers. Some volunteers are from the church, and others are from the community. In this positive atmosphere, the Spirit of Christ is felt and friendships blossom. There is a sense of unity among the volunteers as they bless all the persons who come through the Food Bank line.

The ministry to Food Bank recipients often goes beyond the basic need for food. Some share their stories and concerns with the pastor and with other volunteers, asking for prayers. When there is a special need in the neighborhood, Maria and Petra put together and deliver boxes of food. Maria says that as a Christian, she is very happy to do the work that she does. She receives the blessing of joy from giving and helping others.



Work in Progress. A hazardous retaining wall has been replaced and the new driveway for the food truck is ready for paving and sidewalk work.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Most of the food for the Food Bank, according to co-coordinator Petra Castro, is bought through a yearly grant allotted by the state through the Central Pennsylvania Food Bank in Harrisburg. We normally order cereal, fruits, vegetables, meats, nutrition bars, pancake mix, and syrup and pay minimal prices. We also receive free food from Community Action Partnership (CAP) and free meat donations from Weis Market on Millersville Pike. Miscellaneous items such as hams, turkeys, personal care items, hats/scarves/gloves, and additional food items are donated through churches.

Recently, one church donated 66 quilts, and another gave personal care kits, gloves, hats, and scarves, as well as hand sanitizers and disinfectants. At this point, the Center needs a refrigerator and a freezer. If there is a church, organization, business, or individual able to donate to meet these needs, call 717-394-3021 or email flc@alphayomega.us.

Address Service Requested

STAFF

Joel Peña
Director
Marisor Diaz
Administrative Assistant
Danny Gingrich
ESL Teacher/Computers
Angela Arce
Professional Counselor
Alberto Hernandez
Radio Producer
Petra Castro
Food Bank Coordinator
Daniel Gonzalez
Music Coordinator

BOARD MEMBERS

Alan Miller, Chair
Sherry Eshleman, Secretary
Jill Nuñez, Treasurer
Ryan Braught
Mayra Calix
Carolyn Fitzkee
Maria Perez

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DRIVE THRU PORK BBQ DINNER TO BENEFIT CENTER

The Community Center invites you to “pig out” for a good cause.

The AOCC is sponsoring a drive thru pork BBQ meal fundraiser on Saturday, May 22, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Lancaster Church of the Brethren. The church is located at 1601 Sunset Ave. (near the Lancaster Shopping Center).

Catered by Peters' Barbecue, the meal will include a pulled pork sandwich with barbecue sauce, a homemade roll (made by Amish), baked potato, and applesauce (drink not included). The cost is \$10 per meal. Please have exact change to pay at pick-up by cash or check made out to AOCC. Extra donations are welcome!



Pre-orders are strongly encouraged, but a limited number of meals will be available for purchase the day of the event. Pre-ordered meals not picked up by 12:30 may be sold to someone else. The only way to guarantee that you won't miss out is to pre-order and pick up by the deadline.

To pre-order, contact Board member Carolyn Fitzkee no later than May 12 at dcfitzkee@gmail.com or 717-682-1762.

Covid-19 resulted in the cancellation of two annual AOCC banquets, so the board is excited to go whole hog on this creative (and tasty) alternative!