



# Wabank Witness

Fall 2021

## FOREIGNERS & PILGRIMS

In the Old Testament God told his people to welcome aliens and strangers to their land, and New Testament writers refer to Christians, themselves, as strangers and pilgrims on this earth.

In a 2017 story, BBC News referred to Lancaster as America's refugee capital, noting that people here welcomed 20 times more refugees per capita than the average in the rest of the country. At the Alpha & Omega Community Center we seek to be part of that welcoming community as we meet the needs of immigrants.

Why do people migrate to the United States? I know of three main reasons:

1. To work and therefore improve their current economic situation.
2. To unite with relatives who already are established here.
3. To flee from persecution or violence in their countries of origin.

*Refugees* are those people who flee a country because they suffered persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, or political opinion, or because they are members of a particular social group. Refugees who come to the United States have been vetted and regularly receive their immigrant visa before arriving here.

An *immigrant* is anyone who leaves their country with the intention of permanently moving to another country. In the case of the United States, the immigrant can apply for political asylum, if applicable, or simply maintain an illegal status until some other solution is granted. In Lancaster we have a high number of refugees and other types of immigrants.

Many of these immigrants who have not been granted legal residence in the US are especially vulnerable to crimes and mistreatment, which they cannot report for fear of deportation. Examples include domestic violence/sexual

assault, human trafficking, and/or labor exploitation where they are paid unfair or illegally low wages.

At the Community Center we have compassion for these people who come with dreams and desires for improvement, but who also face many challenges. We help refugees who are here legally through our Computers for Refugees and English programs. Our Counseling department handles cases of people in difficult situations each week in a professional and confidential manner.



Some time ago I was an immigrant here on a visa for English study while serving as a worship and praise director at a church in New Jersey. My visa eventually would have expired, creating uncertainty for me. In the midst of this situation, I met my wife, Mary Jane, who I married in 2004. Not only was this a landmark in my life because I married a wonderful wife, but it also opened for me a range of possibilities that would be impossible to achieve without the status of resident or American citizen. I remain sensitive to others who are not so fortunate as I am to be able to live legally in this great country.

I thank God for placing me as Director of the Alpha & Omega Community Center and pastor of Alpha and Omega Church of the Brethren, from where I have been able to serve many people to this day. —Joel Peña, Director

# SERVICE, FOOD, & FUN!



Two September events directly engaged the neighborhood surrounding the Community Center.

At a yard sale on September 4, tables were full of very reasonably priced items: adult and children's clothing, coats and shoes, books and puzzles, household and decorative items. Members of Alpha & Omega Church made and sold fruity piña coladas and shish kebabs. Volunteers interacted with shoppers.

When a person from the neighborhood shared that his wife was hospitalized in critical condition, Pastor Joel and volunteers prayed with him. Beyond the relational opportunities, this event raised about \$1,000 for the Community Center.

On a beautiful day three weeks later, the Community Center celebrated its yearly Fall Festival, organized by Alpha & Omega Church of the Brethren in collaboration with AOCC. The items left from the yard sale were offered free of charge. Persons were encouraged to fill bags with items they could use.

Food was also free: hot dogs, nachos, salad, chicken, beans, rice, and fruit. Children enjoyed a bouncy house. Lively Christian music was provided by our Latin COB churches "Un Nuevo Renacer," "Evenecer," and Alpha & Omega church. Hector Rivera shared his testimony, and

other pastors and lay persons shared messages, testimonies, and prayers.

The primary purpose of this event was to share God's message of hope

and love through Christ under the slogan of "Jesus in our neighborhood." What a glorious day of celebration and outreach! *—Sherry Eshleman*

## KEEPING IT COOL!

Recipients of food from the Community Center Food Bank especially appreciate meat, fresh vegetables/fruit, and dairy products. When the Center's refrigerator broke down, we no longer had adequate storage for items such as milk, butter, eggs, and cheese. The center's chest freezer also has seen better days; staff must place a box on the lid to keep it closed, and thick layers of frost have accumulated inside as a result.



*Food Bank workers Maria Perez (left) and Petra Castro show off the new fridge.*

Board member Carolyn Fitzkee suggested that the Board check with the Church of the Brethren Global Food Initiative (GFI), where her brother serves as manager. GFI allocates grants to assist hungry people in developing food security. Director Joel Peña submitted an application, requesting funds to replace the refrigerator and freezer.

In July, the Community Center received a \$2,000 grant from GFI, designated for the purchase of a new refrigerator

and freezer. Petra Castro, Food Bank Coordinator, purchased a stainless steel, frost-free, 17-cubic-foot refrigerator and will use remaining funds toward the purchase of a new freezer. These purchases enable the Food Bank to continue to serve families in the community by offering nutritious, much-needed, and much-appreciated food. Thank you, Global Food Initiative! *—Sherry Eshleman*

## SPOTLIGHT ON STAFF: PETRA CASTRO

The Community Center Food Bank relies upon the faithful service, leadership, and organizational skills of Petra Castro. Petra believes that you demonstrate being a Christian by blessing people. Much work and dedication support that blessing.



Serving with Maria Perez, Petra orders food from Central Pennsylvania Food Bank and coordinates other donations. Each Monday prior to distribution days, which occur the first and third Tuesday of each month, the Center's box truck delivers what has been ordered, and Petra supervises unloading and storage.

During distribution, Petra coordinates volunteers and registers recipients. Through this interaction and service, she blesses the community.

Petra was born in Puerto Rico and raised during her school years in various areas of New Jersey. She fell in love with Lancaster and moved here, appreciative of the slower, quieter pace. Petra worked for 38 years, until her retirement, as office manager for the Lancaster City Fire Department. She has two daughters, three grandsons, and one granddaughter.

Petra visited the Alpha & Omega Church with her neighbor, Maria Perez, for about two years. When the church to which Petra belonged changed location, she made the decision to join Alpha & Omega. Loving the church's vision for helping the community, Petra knew she had found a home. She cares deeply for others and prays faithfully and sincerely for their needs.

In addition to serving through the Food Bank, Petra teaches, goes with persons to appointments, translates, cooks and bakes for church functions, and generally serves wherever she is needed. (Her cookies are legendary!) For Petra, serving the community and helping others not only is gratifying but also enables her to demonstrate her love for Jesus. —*Sherry Eshleman*

## FOCUSING ON VALUES

It is evident that, in the midst of the 21st century, the loss of values in our society turns darker and darker. The decay and decline of society's base, which is the family, contributes to a loss of values. Why have I decided to talk about values in the *Hablemos en Claro* radio program? I believe we can use media to reinforce and affirm the values that are being lost.



The three bases of communication are: information, entertainment, and education. It is precisely this final concept of education that concerns us as a radio program. We believe it is of utmost importance to disseminate and affirm important values. We are doing this by examining topics such as respect, love, freedom, justice, tolerance, equity, peace, and honesty—topics that are broken down in a fun and engaging style. Sometimes it is by way of a monologue, while other times I interview a Hispanic opinion leader who contributes generously to the development of each theme.

A discussion of happiness with the doctor and psychologist Daniz Pastrán was one of the many topics addressed on the program that brought tangible results. The program was heard, not only in the City of Lancaster, but also in other places through the Ivoox app, a platform for radio programs and podcasts that we are using to extend our reach into other parts of the world. We heard several positive comments on this program, including one from the Radio Centro Director Claudia Galdámez, who said the topic helped her in her personal life. We were so glad to hear this from Claudia, especially since she is an important point of reference within the radio station and also in the City of Lancaster.

For this and many more reasons, *Hablemos en Claro* will continue to focus on values until the end of 2021 with the purpose of contributing something positive and practical for our society, and especially for the City of Lancaster. —*Ever Sandoval*

**COMPUTERS FOR REFUGEES**

**FOR YOU, IT IS ONLY AN OLD LAPTOP OR TABLET BUT, FOR THEM IT IS THEIR ONLY OPPORTUNITY**

Please donate used laptop, computers, tablets, monitors, mouse, keyboard and used technology that works

Alpha & Omega Community Center

708 Wabank Street Lancaster, PA 17603 / TLF: 717-394-3021 / Email: [dgingriches1@gmail.com](mailto:dgingriches1@gmail.com)

<https://alphayomega.us>



**Alpha & Omega**  
Community Center

708 Wabank St.  
Lancaster, PA 17603

**Address Service Requested**

**STAFF**

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

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Eric Landram  
Maria Perez  
Ever Sandoval

708 Wabank St.  
Lancaster, PA 17603  
Phone: 717-394-3021  
E-mail: flc@alphayomega.us  
Website: alphayomega.us



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**CONSIDER A GIFT ON ‘GIVING TUESDAY’**

We know that the day after Thanksgiving has been dubbed “Black Friday,” a day that Christmas shopping begins in earnest for some. Not to be outdone, online retailers claimed the following Monday as Cyber Monday, encouraging us to shop online that day. But have you heard about Giving Tuesday?

Now a global movement to encourage generosity, Giving Tuesday this year falls on November 30. We invite you to use this occasion to support the ministries of the Community Center. Here are some ways you can help:

- ◆ Last year we began an improvement project next to the center, replacing a hazardous retaining wall and beginning work on a driveway/ parking space for our box truck on food delivery days. We now have a gravel parking space but need additional funds for paving and sidewalk work. Our gravel driveway currently is out of compliance with

city codes. We have \$5,000 toward this project and need \$9,000 more to complete it.

- ◆ The Center is in constant need of donations to support operating expenses that sustain our ongoing ministries. We need your help to pay the bills.
- ◆ If you donate used clothing or furniture to Community Aid of Lancaster, you can support the AOCC at the same time. Part of the ministry of Community Aid is to give back to local non-profits. Instead of getting a personal receipt for your donation, ask them to support the Center and mention the code #40060.

Of course, you don’t need to wait until Tuesday, November 30, to give. The center welcomes—and needs—your generous support any day of the week. Please consider giving as generously as you can as 2021 draws to a close. Thanks in advance for helping us to finish the year strong! –Carolyn Fitzkee