

**PROJECT: "VENEZUELA RELIEF"
OCTOBER 2019 REPORT
(6th shipment)**

More than 57,000 pills were sent to Venezuela in this sixth shipment of medicine.

By Elianeth Pineda

translation: Liisa Tino

For someone who is unaware of the current national crisis in Venezuela, he/she might think that the following photograph of smiling people is actually of "grand prize" winners in Venezuela. However, this display of happiness is due to the fact that these individuals have received specific medications - in most cases, for treatment of a chronic illness - through the "Venezuela Relief" project

Since 2017, we have been committed to serving these patients whose lives depend on a variety of medications that are either impossible to find in this Caribbean country or are financially out of reach for their small incomes. Frequently, the combined family income can barely cover the cost of food and items of personal hygiene become a low priority. For this reason, we also include soap, shampoo, toothpaste, etc. in the shipments.

Members, friends and neighbors of Ascensión Lutheran church show the pills they have received through "Venezuela Relief". San Félix, Bolívar State



To date, six shipments of pharmaceuticals have been accomplished. In this particular shipment there were 711 beneficiaries - 495 women and 216 men. This does not include those who will receive aid through the "local dispensary". The local dispensary consists of a set quantity of 7 very

common pharmaceuticals, such as aspirin, which is sent to each congregation so that they can respond quickly to minor ailments.

The exact number of pills in this shipment were 57,650.

Gregorio Pernía was one of those blessed by the most recent delivery. This 73 year old lives alone and suffers from arrhythmia. Using his cane, he braved a hike in stormy weather to arrive at *Corpus Christi* Lutheran church and retrieve his pills. This story was relayed to us by Lusveidis Pinzón. She is one of the members at this church and is the local coordinator in Barinas. Lusveidis commented that she hopes that the project continues because for several members, this is their only option for receiving their medications.

Gregorio Pernía (second from the right) holding the medication for his irregular heartbeat which he has taken for about 10 years. Corpus Christi, Barinas, Barinas State



One of the Lutheran churches in Caracas, *la Santa Trinidad*, also reports on several cases which deserve continued assistance. One such patient is Esteban Lozada, an elderly grandfather, who affirms that since he receives this medication free-of-charge, he is able to allocate what little income he has to taking care of his wife and family.

Esteban Lozada (light blue shirt) with several other recipients. Santa Trinidad. Caracas



According to Pastor Alcides Franco, *La Reforma* Lutheran Church, San Felix, thanks to “Venezuela Relief” his congregation is also able to assist neighbors who have serious health needs. Rigoberta Blanco lives next door to the church and suffers from high blood pressure. When she found out her name was included in the list to receive the pills she needs, her desperation to locate her daily medicine was replaced with peace.

Rigoberta Blanco, San Félix, Bolívar State



Pastor Alcides Franco, La Reforma Lutheran church with some of the beneficiaries. San Félix, Bolívar



Mercedes Hernández suffers from cancer which is rendered more complicated due to her diabetes. She states that this program has been a true blessing to her health.

Mercedes is a member of *Cristo el Camino*, a Lutheran community in Barcelona, Anzoátegui, where Rev. Abel García works tirelessly to help those in very poor neighborhoods receive the pills they need.

Thanks to the efforts of all who participate in “Venezuela Relief”, the number of Christian communities who have received assistance has increased on a national scale.

The map shows how many congregations are helped according in each state.



The number of patients receiving medicine has also increased. The panorama in Venezuela is bleak and people of all ages are affected. Mariannys Arroyo, only 5 years old, depends on the medicine, carbamazepine, which controls her unpredictable convulsions. Recently she was accompanied by her older sister as they arrived to pick up her medication at *Cristo es Amor* Lutheran church in Barquisimeto.

Mariannys, 5 years old, receives medication at Cristo es Amor. Barquisimeto, Lara State



The logistics of this program are very time consuming. Nonetheless, we are able to count on many volunteers who give of their time and energy in the various stages of preparation. Around 80 volunteer hours were dedicated to cutting up the blister packs of pills and re-packaging them in a way to save on the cost of mailing and preserve the integrity of each shipment.

Members and Friends of the Lutheran Mission in Providencia, Santiago, cut thousands of pills and repackage them for mailing to Venezuela.



Brothers and sisters work together on the project. Some even come from outside of Santiago to help.



Venezuelan immigrants living at our temporary housing site help to pack the pills



Members of the Ladies Group at the mission in Providencia help in preparing the shipment.



Liisa, Pastor Tino's wife, dedicates hours to help in the preparations.



It takes many weeks – sometimes months- from the time we receive request forms until the packages are finally on their way to Venezuela. Nevertheless, those benefiting from the medication don't mind waiting because the benefit of the treatments received through this mercy strategy far outweighs the cost of attempting to purchase them locally.

La Epifanía Lutheran Church, La Caramuca, Barinas State



La Fortaleza Lutheran church, Maracay, Aragua State



At the Lutheran Misión Cagua (Aragua State), organizing and repackaging the pills for individuals.



Sometimes, because of difficulties with public transportation, the medication is delivered to individuals by various members of the congregation. El Paraiso Lutheran Church, Barquisimeto, Lara State



Gratefulness is detected in the smiles of these brothers and sisters from the misión in the Core 8 sector of Puerto Ordaz, Bolívar State



Normally, the distribution is part of a worship service specifically planned by the pastor or church leaders which most beneficiaries of the medicine project are able to attend. Some who receive aid are not members, but at the prospect of receiving this needed assistance attend worship and receive spiritual medicine as well. Thus, in addition to placating physical needs, the Venezuela Relief project is also an evangelistic tool.

At *Cristo Rey* Lutheran Church in Maturín, Monagas, the evangelistic results have been “small but effective, resulting in a steady stream of visitors to the congregation” affirms Katherine Ramones, member of this congregation.

At Cristo Rey in Maturín, Monagas State, “Ayuda Venezuela” has been an evangelistic tool.



Another Lutheran Church in the Monagas State, *Cristo Vencedor*, also seeks to accompany the delivery of medicine with the spiritual medicine found in the Word of God. Pastor Félix Zamora and his wife Haymer process the requests for medical help and follow up with visits to those receiving medication.

Pastor Félix of "Cristo Vencedor" smiles beside other members receiving their medication.



Each package contains the maximum amount of medication allowed to be sent as well as other items.





Taking into account how difficult it is for our communities to acquire hygiene products, other items such as soap, toothpaste, sanitary napkins and shampoo are added as a bonus to the packages in order to provide some measure of relief to the many people who are begging for the assistance provided from Chile through this project.