

Special Report: Barquisimeto, Venezuela

Dear friend of Venezuela: We have some important news regarding the church building in Barquisimeto!

Though current issues such as coronavirus, the war in Ukraine, and many other topics lead the headlines today, I know that you have a special place in your heart for Venezuela! Many people came to Venezuela on mission trips to help us build and remodel our church property. Guardian Lutheran Church in Dearborn, Michigan was especially involved, sending three mission teams and making a large financial investment. In 1999, with much rejoicing, the building was dedicated to the glory of God! Those were some wonderful times in our lives.



Rev. Jim Tino leads the procession for the dedication of the church.

But before I tell you more about that story...

...let me recap what has been going on in Venezuela over the past few years. First: Inflation. It's in the news. It seems to be happening everywhere – I know I am feeling it in Chile! You feel it, too. The good news from Venezuela is that the inflation rate for 2022 is forecast to be “only” about 150%. That is a dramatic improvement from 2018, when Venezuela's inflation topped 130,000 percent! Last year (2021) it was 686%. In comparison, the highest inflation rate during our years in Venezuela was only 98%, in 1996.



How do people live in a hyper-inflationary environment?

In Venezuela the economy has essentially “dollar-ized”. Prices are published in dollars rather than in bolivares. The sellers accept dollars or bolivares, but the bolivar price is calculated based on that day's exchange rate. Most people survive because one or more family members immigrated to some other country to work and send money back home to their loved ones. About 20% of the population of Venezuela has immigrated over the last five years – that's one in every five people! It is the largest out-migration in the western hemisphere in the history of the world!



So, what about Barquisimeto?

Recently, I have been made aware of a problem in Venezuela which puts our church building at risk. A few years ago, the government of Venezuela removed the “non-profit” designation for buildings. As a result, all buildings are assessed property taxes. Since the economy has dollarized, the tax assessment is now tied to the dollar. If the taxes are not paid within a period of time (usually 5 years), then the building can be confiscated. My friends in Venezuela report that many churches have lost their buildings due to delinquent taxes.

The Barquisimeto church is at risk of being confiscated! The Lutheran church in Venezuela is struggling financially, as we can all imagine. Liisa and I recently sent \$2,500 from our personal funds as a “stop-gap” measure to pay the oldest tax bills and add some time to the clock. However, there are several years that need to be paid. Additionally, due to the challenging economic environment, the building has fallen into disrepair – especially the roof. Funds are needed to make repairs to the roof and to other areas of the building.

One thing that has not changed is the level of corruption in Venezuela! Our friends there tell us that one can’t get anything done without the help of a lawyer who knows the ins-and-outs of the government bureaucracy.



Personally, Liisa and I are committed to doing whatever we can to help the Lutheran Church in Barquisimeto to retain their property now and for future generations, but it’s going to take some money to do so. Here is an approximate cost breakdown provided by our Lutheran friends in Barquisimeto:

Back taxes: \$6,000
Back utilities: \$2,500
Lawyer fees: \$1,500
Repairs & Restoration: \$20,000
Total: \$30,000

As you are able, will you consider making a contribution to the Venezuela Relief Fund to help save the church from confiscation and to ensure a place of worship for future generations?

Give Now!

To make a contribution, click the button above or mail a check to:

Global Lutheran Outreach
6709 Ficus Dr.
Miramar, FL 33023
(put "Venezuela Relief - church" on the memo line of the check)

A Final Word



I am poignantly reminded of an experience I had in Cuba about 20 years ago. I was able to visit the island and the Lutheran churches there. Before my trip, I met with the last Lutheran missionaries to leave Cuba – they left the island in 1962, the year I was born! With great sadness and remorse, the missionaries told me about the church buildings they had left behind. When I went to Cuba, I made it a point to visit those former church buildings. All had been confiscated by the government and were being used for other things. The Lutherans were meeting in cramped, private homes and apartments. No Lutheran church had its own building.

One day, the Venezuelan crisis will be history – will the church in Barquisimeto still stand, or will it go the way of Cuba?

Help us ensure a place of worship for future generations!

Give Now!

Please feel free to share this bulletin with others who might be interested, especially those who were on your Venezuela mission team!



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