

Study...Service...Worship

Venezuelan and Colombian Refugees and Internally Displaced



Refugee and Immigration Ministries

A resource for Disciples Women's groups' study of Venezuela and Colombia during 2010-11

Prepared by DHM's Refugee and Immigration Ministries Program



Study

Venezuela

Who are Venezuelan Refugees?

President Hugo Chavez, who came to power in 1999, has implemented socialist policies and threatened to assert greater state control over many parts of the Venezuelan economy. There is admiration by many for his efforts to improve healthcare, education, housing and development, and Chavez is seen as a champion of the poor and a prototype of modern socialism. However, there is also worry about civil protection and vulnerability in a climate of insecurity with private companies and farms being seized and labor unions crushed. This has caused tens of thousands of disillusioned professionals to leave the country. Those who leave are leaving because they fear that Venezuela is becoming more and more like Cuba. They claim that Chavez has established a dictatorship and is trying to control the media in order to do away with democracy.

Venezuela is rich in oil, which used to be its biggest export. Now, the biggest export is talent. Venezuela's oil company used to rank as one of the top five energy companies in the world. Then Chavez named a Marxist university professor with no experience in the industry to head the company. The company's top staff immediately went on strike and paralyzed the country. Chavez responded by firing 22,000 people, including the country's leading oil experts. As many as 4,000 of the company's elite staff have left the country and are now working overseas. They are not the typical refugee that arrives to a new place with a few clothes at most. They are wealthy people who left in order to retain their wealth – much like the first Cubans who left Cuba when Castro came into power.

Venezuelan Refugees in the United States

Between 2004 and 2007, about 4,000 Venezuelans applied for asylum in the United States and nearly half of their cases were approved. In the three years before Chavez took office, there were 328

applications, and fewer than 20 percent were approved. This shows that more people are fleeing Venezuela and that the U.S. government is more receptive to agreeing that they are fleeing persecution. As of 2007, an estimated 300,000 Venezuelan immigrants, students, refugees and their families lived in the United States, many of them in an undocumented status.

Tens of thousands of Venezuelans have built an active and influential enclave in Miami where they work to advocate against the Chavez regime. Most of the Venezuelans who have fled to Miami are from the middle and upper classes. Many have been able to transfer some of their wealth as they have settled in the United States.



Colombia



Venezuela



Colombia

Who are Colombian Refugees?

In 2004-05, Disciples Women focused on a study of Colombia. A Study, Service, and Worship resource (similar to this one) was prepared for that study and can be found at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/PDF/Women/Colombia/ColombiaResource.pdf>. The information in that resource is still appropriate information for your use this year. The UN estimates that there are about 400,000 Colombian refugees outside Colombia and over 3 million Colombians internally displaced, out of a total population of 45 million Colombians.

Who are Colombian Internally Displaced?

Globally there are 26 million people displaced internally within their own countries. Colombia has one of the world's largest internally displaced populations (3 million), along with Iraq (2.6 million), the Congo (1.5 million), and Somalia (1.3 million).

The people of Colombia have suffered four decades of violent internal conflict, which has been exacerbated by an illicit drug trade. The growth and production of illegal drugs in Colombia has been fueled by the guerrilla and paramilitary organizations' need for revenue, the lack of funds for alternative development for farmers, and the collapse of both the International Coffee Agreement and international commodity prices for other crops. With lower prices, and difficulties in reaching the market due to poor roads and fear of violence, farmers increasingly found that income from selling coffee and other crops failed to cover their expenses. In contrast, coca and poppy production provided a relatively higher income.

Colombian Refugees in the United States

The United States has only recently been allowing the resettlement of a handful of refugees from Colombia into the United States. Part of the delay in allowing this resettlement was due to the U.S. Patriot Act that barred the admission of persons who provided material support to terrorist organizations. Colombians, who in many cases were forced to assist the rebel groups or be killed, were judged to have provided material assistance, even if it was against their will. They were therefore prohibited from coming to the United States. The U.S. government has become more flexible on that issue and consequently a few Colombians are now being admitted through the U.S. government's resettlement program.



Angela and Ricardo Ramos and their three children fled political violence and personal threats in Colombia and were resettled to Miami under the auspices of Church World Service and cosponsor New Horizon United Methodist Church.

Richardo's first U.S. job was in a supermarket deli, where he learned "what's 'thick' and what's 'thin.'" He worked for a department store as a shoe salesman, then for a health care clinic transporting seniors. Eventually, he hopes to get back into journalism. Angela works in the housekeeping department of a local hospital. "We have three good reasons to fight for our dreams," said Ricardo, pointing to their three children.

Photo: Marzo Artime

Colombian Refugees in Venezuela

As of 2009, there were 211,000 Colombian refugees in Venezuela (about 40 percent of them children). However, most of them were unregistered and living in remote areas. Only 1,200 were registered refugees and another 12,000 were seeking asylum and were given provisional documents until their case can be decided. The registered refugees must travel to Caracas to get their identity cards, so those without the resources to travel remain undocumented.

The Venezuelan authorities usually do not harass the registered refugees, but members of Venezuela's national guard frequently extort money from and otherwise threaten unregistered asylum seekers. Due to the lack of security, work, and public services, many refugees who had typically remained in border areas in the past have now begun moving to other parts of the country in order to find jobs. They are often stopped at checkpoints and harassed.

Although the Venezuelan refugee law requires a refugee identification card to register children for school, the Ministry of Education promulgated a resolution in 1999 directing that schools enroll all children, regardless of documentation. Some schools remain unaware of this or resist, however, and some asylum seekers are reluctant to allow their children to attend.

Colombian Internally Displaced Persons

Rural campesinos (farmers and peasants) constitute the majority of the internally displaced. Arriving in urban areas, they have great difficulty finding work and adequate shelter. Most end up living in urban slums where conditions are overcrowded and unsanitary. These communities usually lack most basic public services including water, sewage, and electricity. Streets are unpaved, and most houses are only rudimentary constructions of



cinderblocks, plastic sheets, mud, and tin.

In July 2002, the UN High Commissioner for Refugees reported that 71 percent of all internally displaced persons were women and children. Over 1 million children have been displaced from their homes over the past decade, and only 15 percent of displaced children attend school. The Colombian government provides little assistance to the displaced – most families are eligible for only three months of assistance and many never receive any funds.

Photos: IPS living outside Bogata - UNHCR/B.Heger



Persecution of Afro-Colombians

Approximately 30 percent of Colombians are Afro-Colombian. As with most of the Americas, the Spanish colonists in Colombia used slave labor from Africa to work in gold mines, cattle ranches, and large plantations. Their descendants remained enslaved until Colombia formally abolished the practice in 1851. Colombia's coastal lands provided refuge to those who fled enslavement. Today, most Afro-Colombians live in poverty along the Atlantic and Pacific coasts where their ancestors settled or in urban areas.

Afro-Colombians have faced centuries of disenfranchisement and discrimination. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights estimates that 80 percent of Afro-Colombians live in conditions of extreme poverty. Afro-Colombians also find themselves disproportionately affected by the violence of the country. As a minority, they are one of the most vulnerable sectors of the population. The area where they are most concentrated along the Pacific coast has become a battleground between armed groups vying for economically valuable land and strategic corridors to receive weapons deliveries and ship drugs abroad. Efforts to organize and claim legal rights to their traditional lands have been seen as a threat and have contributed to massive displacement of Afro-Colombians. An Action by Churches Together report notes that Afro-Colombians have a 20 percent higher displacement rate than the country's overall figure.

Massacres, threats, and disappearances have been routinely used to encourage Afro-Colombian communities to leave their homes. One of the worst incidents of political violence against an Afro-

Colombian community in recent years occurred in a May 2002 incident in the town of Bojaya, where 120 civilians were killed in fighting between paramilitaries and guerrillas. Following this attack, five thousand residents – 68 percent of the local population – fled to Quibdo, the departmental capital.

Also contributing to the displacement of many Afro-Colombians is environmental degradation and loss of crops due to herbicides used to eradicate drug crops. As part of its strategy to combat drug production, the United States has promoted and funded routine aerial fumigation of suspected crops. The main ingredient is the chemical glyphosate. It works by eliminating any green vegetation it comes in contact with. Because the pesticides drift as they come to earth and sometimes due to pilot error or negligence, aerial fumigations also have destroyed acres of legal crops, and have contaminated bodies of water.

Persecution of the Colombian Church

Religious leaders have been threatened, kidnapped, and killed. Entire church communities are displaced. The centuries old understanding of the Church as a place of sanctuary has been undermined. These attacks come from all sides of the conflict, and for a variety of reason. Sometimes a church leader is considered too outspoken by a particular faction, other times it is because a church community is seen as harboring or assisting someone another group considers it should not. Attacks even occur because of a church community's attempts to maintain neutrality. According to Human Rights Watch, "Church leaders who spoke out in favor of peace and human rights or who protested abuses were targeted by both sides, often during mass or prayer services." Church communities that are located on strategic tracts of land with desired natural resources have been violently expelled. Also, churches promote values that discourage people from supporting the armed groups and, therefore, have come under attack for keeping their young people out of the ranks of the armed groups.

On May 7, 2003, four leaders of the Sardi Church in the municipality of Tierralta, Cordoba, were assassinated in front of the church by a group of armed men. The armed men ordered the Sardi congregation to close its church, and the church members were displaced to another neighborhood in Tierralta.

Despite the persecution and displacement, the religious community in Colombia is playing an active part in trying to reestablish the peace process and restore stability.

Stories

Venezuelan Student in Untied States

"I want to go back to a country where I am free to criticize and express my thoughts, but the government is trying to change the laws and indoctrinate the population. Venezuela is divided now. Half the people see Cuba as a model, and half see it as a threat. The future is very unclear."

Venezuelan Diplomat in United States

Virginia Contreras, a resident of Germantown, Maryland, is a former Venezuelan judge and diplomat for the Chavez government. In 2001, she quit as Venezuela's representative to the Organization of American States and has become an outspoken critic of Chavez's rule, which she says has steadily eroded democratic freedoms while proclaiming itself to be a champion of the poor and a prototype of modern socialism. "It is not just bad government; it is a totalitarian government," said Contreras, who often visits Miami and Caracas to work with opposition groups. She called Chavez a "snake charmer" who is trying to create a "constitutional dictatorship" but is increasingly alienating the public.



Chavez

Colombian Pastor in Colombia

"The civil population is caught in the middle of the conflict. Kidnapping and extortion are common occurrences. The economy is in shambles. Paramilitary forces use the strategy of killing indiscriminately rather than picking only the real targets in order to spread fear. Rural areas are abandoned because almost everyone has been moved off their land. The cities in the region can't support the displaced people. What is the church doing? Everything! We used to be busy in our churches doing churchy things, but now we must see the reality around us. We are a small church and thought we would open a

little school for children of displaced families, maybe 15 or 20 children. On the first day, we had 567 children! We cried for help. And help came, from the international community, and even from the government. The Roman Catholics also responded generously – [said with a wry smile] this was very hard for us evangelicals.”

U.S. Church Worker in Colombia

“An image is burned in my mind: I went with Jorge, pastor of the Church of God, to pick up the children on Friday at 7:30 a.m. As no one owns a car, we make trips on his motorcycle until all are delivered to the Arms of Mercy house (a free, church-run day care center for orphans of the violence). On our first trip we lurch down a dirt road to pick up three children, ages one, two, and three from a humble home with slat wood walls and a rough cement floor. Across the road a toddler plays in the dirt. As we wait for the children to come out, an elderly woman emerges from her hut and picks up the child with great effort. She shuffles to her stick fence and stares at us, holding the child out in front of her the best she can. This ailing grandmother was left with her two-year-old grandchild when her daughter, a single mother, was murdered. The grandmother has no means and very little energy to care for the child. She was asking us to take the child, as she does each time Jorge picks up the other three. Heart wrenching. But the church decided that they couldn’t take any more children, at least not right now in the early stages of the program. But the woman’s desperation was too great. Jorge promised he would go by on Monday. “It’s one thing to bury the dead, but who is attending to those who depended on the deceased for their survival?”



Photo: Janna Bowman

An Internally Displaced Person in Colombia

“In just a few minutes, I lost everything. My husband and I were managers of a farm a few kilometers from the town. We had a small house right on the farm. One day in early December, a group of paramilitaries came to the farm at about 5 in the afternoon. They told us all to go outside, then told all the seven men who worked on the farm to stand along the wall of the house. Then the paramilitaries, who weren’t even wearing hoods, shot all the men right in front of our eyes. My young daughter became hysterical. She ran towards one of the paramilitaries, grabbed his leg and begged him to stop shooting. My husband was shot several times.

“Then they told us that we had an hour to get out of the village, but another one said no, that we had to leave right now. We had to leave my husband’s body right there, and weren’t allowed to take anything with us. In just a few minutes, I lost everything.

“We walked to Villavicencio with a group of others who were also forced to abandon their homes. The police there put us on an airplane to Bogota...Next, my family was offered a shelter...But I couldn’t find work, and when my money ran out, we lost the room and became homeless.”

A Priest Working with Afro-Colombians

“I am a Roman Catholic priest who lives and works in a region on the Pacific Coast. It is a region of mostly Afro-Colombian and indigenous communities. It is a region that was ignored by both the government and the armed groups until it was designated to be the site of a national mega-project for hydro-electricity. There are now many competing economic interests in the region.

“We live on a river and there are many in our communities who are dependent on the waterways for food and supplies. The paramilitaries blocked the waterways for many months, trying to intercept supplies to the guerrillas. Our Diocesan members were without food. A seminarian working with us went down the river accompanied by community members to deliver food to various communities. The boat was stopped by paramilitaries and documents requested. One of the paramilitaries was rough with a community member; the seminarian interceded to protect the community member. This seminarian, a friend of mine, was young and full of a sense of justice. He was shot in the head by the paramilitary.

“I say to all the armed groups invading our lives – who gave you the right to decide our destiny? Who are you to determine our future; the future of our children? This must end.”

Report of a U.S. Delegation to Internally Displaced Colombians

A Witness for Peace delegation visited a displaced community outside the city of Barraquilla. They reported: “Two hundred eighty-four families were trying to survive there under desperate conditions. The Mayor of Barraquilla promised the families that more aid would be forthcoming, but they never received it. After months of waiting for the promised assistance, a delegation of four leaders went to the Mayor’s office to demand the aid. Those four leaders ended up dead – assassinated because they demanded their rights.”

Report of a Global Ministries Delegation to Internally Displaced Colombians

Tierra Alta, Colombia, July 6, 2008: We met with twenty-seven families who had to flee their lands and their village on June 23rd. One man had been disappeared (the phrase Colombians use when guerrilla or paramilitary death squads take someone) and, in the course of looking for him, the villagers had discovered that eleven other men of the village were also on the hit list. So, they gathered up what they could and left, knowing that none of them were safe. Now they were living in a school temporarily, scared, determined to stay together as a community, and distressed because this is the third time they have been displaced from their village since 1996, with little support or response from the government. (Read the rest of the report at <http://globalministries.org/lac/missionaries/displaced-in-colombia.html>.)

Short Internet Video Clips

Colombian Refugees in Venezuela:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gNdx7204M0M>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=g3gY4tS-WzU&NR>

Colombians Internally Displaced in Colombia:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=anI9YZGgMD0>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zpYs77wsG5s>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Jb7UEopzc4A>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j8vJ7ZsPeaM>

Afro-Colombians:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n6tzmVvQvuE>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NI48VjO1yFM>

Venezuelans Leaving because of the Chavez:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRtmhyPRKgw>

Persons moving to Venezuela because of Chavez:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tsXztdEtsuA>

How Disciples are Helping

Through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)

Through our taxes, we support the work of the UNHCR’s micro-credit program for Colombian refugees living in Venezuela near the border with Colombia. The program is part of a “borders of solidarity” strategy UNHCR implements in countries where refugee integration in the country to which the refugees have fled is the most suitable solution for the refugee situation. Most of these refugees do not have Venezuelan identity cards, which limits their access to jobs, funding sources, and ownership possibilities. The first stage of the program granted \$250,000 in micro-credits to 65 projects involving production, trade and services. These benefited 121 families, mostly headed by women.

The UNHCR also has implemented a Psychosocial Assistance Program for Colombian refugees in Venezuela. The aim is to prepare individuals for integration into Venezuelan society and to create the opportunity for a safe and voluntary return to Colombia when that is feasible. The program provides direct psychological services to survivors of torture and trauma in individual and group settings and strives to increase the capacity of Venezuelan service providers and refugee agencies assisting this population through peer trainings by psychologists. During the first year, approximately 900 people received psychosocial attention.

Rosa, who participated in the program, said: “It was a life filled with gunfire. Before we came to Venezuela we only saw armed men with hidden faces walking about. I came over because I got a letter



telling me to leave.” Rosa, a grandmother in her sixties, fled her Colombian home for the safety of neighboring Venezuela along with her husband, two daughters and two granddaughters.

The challenge for UNHCR is to help women like Rosa become involved in the local economy while helping them come to terms with their lives as refugees and informing them of their rights. To help address these needs, a group of twenty refugee women have come together in a UNHCR project which sets out to use their own skills and experience to rebuild their lives and that of family members. They have begun a training course in weaving techniques designed to help them turn their skills into a profitable activity.

“These women have abilities that represent an excellent opportunity to establish themselves and normalize their lives,” says Caribay Vanegas, one of the workshop’s facilitators. In addition to the weaving lessons women are encouraged to explore their own potential through a series of creative activities. “If they are relaxed they can learn more easily,” she says “and activities like ‘Life Stories’ also gives them a chance to get to know each other.”

With “Life Stories” refugee women in the workshop are offered a rare opportunity to reclaim their own story by writing down their most important experiences and share them with the other participants. The idea is to promote team work and strengthen the group. Many of the women want to talk about the violence they have witnessed in Colombia and the impact it’s had on their lives and the lives of those they love.

“My granddaughter could not even go to school, she was always with me and would never hang out on her own,” Rosa remembers. “Now, when she sees the army around her with their weapons, she gets scared remembering those violent people back home.”

As each woman speaks, they begin to know more about each other and recognize what they have in common. One of the women recounts that she liked studying very much but that her mother did not let her continue. Another says she had no childhood because she was forced to work at a very young age. And, yet another says she began to study when she was already an adult. When one of them mentions that she is doing all she can to give her daughters what she could not have, they all agree. Supporting their children through school, they say, is the way to a better life.

With a better understanding of each other, the sense of belonging to a group gets stronger. The women all help one another and the ones with a basic knowledge of weaving techniques share their know-how with the rest. For complete beginners like Carmen, it’s a great bonus. Since she fled to Venezuela with her husband and two daughters, Carmen, like many other refugees, has been working wrapping candies, cleaning lint from clothing or at any other small job she could find.

“I am very happy with this workshop,” she says. “I hope I can learn weaving to make some clothing for my daughters and also sell some pieces. Today I felt totally relaxed, I could follow all of the instructions the facilitator was giving us.”

Perhaps the most important element the women bring to the workshop is hope. Although they all live nearby, many of them had never met each other, yet they are already thinking of setting up a cooperative to sell the products they’ll be making over the next few months.

Through Church World Service (CWS)

Through our giving to Week of Compassion and our participation in CROP walks, we support the work of CWS. CWS works inside Colombia to support alternative development programs and provide food, shelter, and other assistance for the internally displaced. On the national level, CWS has supported human rights education and contributed to protecting social leaders under severe death threats. It has also helped to strengthen efforts of the internally displaced to organize themselves. Internally displaced persons organizations have been developed and leadership strengthened through the National Coordination of Displaced, which includes 53 organizations. They have trained 104 leaders in five regions of the country.

CWS actively accompanied the efforts of several churches and Christian organizations to form the Ecumenical Network of Colombian Churches and Christian Organizations – formed in 2001 to strengthen ecumenical cooperation and planning to achieve justice, defend human rights, and work for peace. CWS also works alongside the Evangelical Council of Colombian Churches (CEDECOL). Its Commission of Restoration, Life, and Peace trains and organizes church people to respond to the



situation, offering humanitarian aid and pastoral accompaniment to those who suffer. Three hundred and fifty women from different churches have been trained so far.

Working with the UN World Food Program, CWS seeks to support the improvement of food production and the elementary conditions of survival for 515 internally displaced families from rural communities in the Province of Bolivar. Of this population, 60 percent are children and 44 percent are women – 25 percent are families with female head of household, many of them widows as a result of the violence. Additionally, 115 of these families are of African ancestry.

CWS has a major program of support for Afro-Colombian internally displaced persons, especially women, through the Colombian Black Women's Council (part of the Afro-Colombian national Conference). In Afro-Colombian culture, women are the center of the family and the family is the center of the community. The family is the vehicle for the maintenance and preservation of Afro-Colombian values.

CWS assists the efforts of Afro-Colombian communities with poultry nurseries and with a food security program that enables women to plant family vegetable gardens, community-operated orchards and medicinal plant beds. CWS also provides them emergency food, water aid, and recreation items for children.

In the United States, CWS works to inform and improve U.S. policies by promoting a deeper understanding of the situation of Colombians. Its advocacy emphasizes protection of refugees and the internally displaced, and supports efforts to bring peace to the troubled region. CWS provides analysis and information to policy makers and constituents, supports delegations to Colombia and brings Colombians to the U.S. to share their perspectives and alternatives for peace.

CWS participated in a Witness for Peace delegation to Colombia to assess the situation of Afro-Colombians. It supported speaking tours of Afro-Colombians to various states across the U.S. to raise greater public attention to their situation. CWS also organized a high level delegation of Congressional Black Caucus members and African American church leaders to go and see the Afro-Colombian reality in Colombia.

CWS also resettles those Colombian refugees admitted to the United States through the U.S. government's resettlement program. Churches work with the local CWS affiliate resettlement offices to make these refugees welcome and help them start their new life.

Through DOM/Global Ministries



The Division of Overseas Ministries/Global Ministries has partners in both Colombia and Venezuela. In Colombia, Global Ministries' partner is CEDECOL. You can read about them, the Global Ministries staff person in Colombia and other information on Colombia at <http://www.globalministries.org/lac/countries/colombia/>. In Venezuela, Global Ministries' partners are PACTO and UEPV. You can read about them, the Global Ministries staff person in Venezuela, and other information on Venezuela at <http://globalministries.org/lac/countries/venezuela/>.

Service

To learn about the official Disciples Women's service project for this Venezuela/Colombia study, see the Disciples Women's Web site at www.discipleswomen.org.

In addition, RIM offers the following ways for Disciples Women's groups to provide for the needs of Venezuelan and Colombian Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

The service of prayer

Prayers are needed for Venezuelan and Colombian refugees and internally displaced persons who are looking for a stable life where they can plan for their futures and determine their own destiny. Pray that they might find a solution to their unstable lives that will provide them protection from harm and the ability to provide for their families.

The service of giving

Church World Service continues to respond to the needs of Colombian refugees and internally displaced persons. Your Disciples Women's group can play an important part in continuing to make that possible. You can make a contribution to Church World Service through Week of Compassion, P.O. Box 1986, Indianapolis, IN, by designating your contribution for Colombia, or you can send your check directly to Church World Service at 28606 Phillips Street, P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN, 46515, also designating it for Colombia.

Worship

Worship Center

Ideas of things to place on your worship center include: a Bible opened to Luke 16:19-26, a globe of the world (with South America facing those gathered), a candle, your offering basket, and a loaf of bread.

Call to Worship

We gather in worship to stand with those who have been torn from their homes and communities by violence, poverty, and the ruin of God's good earth. "They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be and my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands." (Isaiah 65:21-22)



Scripture reading – Luke 16:19-26

Reflection on scripture

Some or all of the following thoughts could be shared as a reflection on the scripture reading. Consider breaking the bread on you worship center and sharing it during your reflection on this scripture.



In first century Palestine, food was eaten primarily with the fingers. Wealthy families baked extra bread to be used to wipe their fingers. That bread would be thrown to the household pets for them to eat. Lazarus waited and wanted nothing more than to eat the scraps from the rich man's table - the "napkins" which were normally thrown to the dogs. The rich man died and went to live in fiery torment in Gehenna – the location of the Jerusalem garbage dump. Why was the rich man in the fiery torment? Was it because of his inattention to Lazarus? He did not see Lazarus. Lazarus was of no more importance to the rich man than were the dogs that ate his bread napkins. He never recognized Lazarus as one of his brothers who was in pain. Like the rich man of scripture, is our sight more focused on wealth and bread napkins? Is

our sight more focused on the things we desire to feel rich? What is precious to us – the wealth we have, or all the people of the world? We are the wealthy of this world. We are those who have enough to afford bread napkins. And because of all that we have – because of God's blessings in our lives – we are called to respond to those who are in need, like the persecuted people of Colombia. As Colombians flee their homes to find a safe place, they hunger. As Colombians patch together a house made of cardboard, tarps, and tin in the cities to which they have fled, they hunger. As Colombians try to live without identity cards in Venezuela, they hunger. With one of the largest internally displaced persons population in the world, Colombians want nothing more than to eat the scraps from the tables of the rich. God is calling us to respond – not with scraps, but with understanding, with generosity, and with advocacy on behalf of those who suffer.

Prayer

Leader: For our failure to feel the sufferings of others, and our tendency to live comfortably with injustice,

People: God forgive us.

Leader: For the self-righteousness which denies guilt, and the self-interest which strangles compassion,

People: God forgive us.

Leader: For those who live their lives in careless unconcern, who cry "Peace, peace" when there is no peace,

People: We ask your mercy.

Leader: For our failings in community, our lack of understanding,

People: We ask your mercy.

Leader: For times when we are too eager to be better than others, when we are too rushed to care, when we are too tired to bother, when we don't really listen, when we are too quick to act from motives other than love,

People: God forgive us.



Offering

As the offering is received, invite the women to visualize themselves as a Colombian woman trying to care for herself and her children in the mist of conflict that daily threatens their lives. Then invite the women to visualize themselves reaching out to that woman offering bread, comfort, and security.

Offering Prayer

God, open our eyes that they may see the deepest needs of our Colombian sisters and brothers. Move our hands that we may feed the hungry. Touch our hearts that we may bring comfort to the despairing. Teach us the generosity that welcomes those who are forced to flee. Let us share our possessions and participate in the quest to provide security and set the prisoners free. In our sharing may we partake of your divine presence. Amen.

How to Contact RIM

Please feel free to contact us for any further information you may need, or look us up on the Internet at <http://www.discipleshomemissions.org/RIM/>. You will find a lot of material about various refugee and immigration issues on our Web site.

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