

## Venezuelan Brothers and Sisters Struggling to Help Their Communities

by Mary Stronach, OFS, International Councilor

The situation in Venezuela is critical! With a government that is at best dysfunctional and at worst corrupt, the country is in turmoil. The cost of living has increased to unbelievable proportions. The latest reports say that it has gone up 18,000% in the last 20 years. This has had an impact in all segments of their society – medicines and medical supplies are scarce, if available at all; the food shelves at grocery stores are bare (there are shortages of all the basic products, even toilet paper); blackouts are the rule rather than the exception; the military is in conflict with the government... More than half a million Venezuelans have left the country, hoping to find a safe place to call home in neighboring countries.



The **Atlantic Magazine** describes the situation like this: “In the last two years Venezuela has experienced the kind of implosion that hardly ever occurs in a middle-income country like it outside of war. Mortality rates are skyrocketing; one public service after another is collapsing; triple-digit inflation has left more than 70 percent of the population in poverty; an unmanageable crime wave keeps people locked indoors at night; shoppers have to stand in lines for hours to buy food; babies die in large numbers for lack of simple, inexpensive medicines and equipment in hospitals, as do the elderly and those suffering from chronic illnesses.”

In the midst of all this chaos, our Secular Franciscan brothers and sisters are doing all they can to support their communities, the elderly and the children. Our sister and vice-minister of the order, María (Chelito) Consuelo Nuñez shared some of the horror stories at our National Chapter two years ago. But she also shared how our brothers and sisters from around the world and the United States are making a difference and bringing hope to their community. Thanks to the local efforts of Secular Franciscans and donations from Secular Franciscans from around the world and

the United States, children are getting a wholesome breakfast every day at their local school and hundreds of people are getting their medicines and medical supplies at the local church where our Seculars have their gathering.

Chelito sends us letters regularly thanking our Seculars for caring, but she explains that resources keep dwindling, more people ask for help, more children are hungry.

Article 11 of the Rule reminds us: “Let them be mindful that according to the gospel they are stewards of the good things received for the benefit of God’s children.” Article 25 continues: “Regarding

expenses necessary for the life of the fraternity and the needs of worship, of the apostolate, and of charity, all the brothers and sisters should offer a contribution according to their means.”

The Bible is just as direct: “Each must do as already determined, without sadness or compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.” (2 Cor 9:7) And again, “Each of you must bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you.” (Deut 16:17).

We all have a favorite charity. Please consider our Venezuelan family as one of these.

If you would like to send a donation, please make your check out to **NAFRA** and send it to our National Treasurer with the notation “Venezuela”:

Jerry Rousseau, OFS  
82 Kim Street  
Blairsville, GA 30512

Or, you may send medical supplies to the following address:

OFS de la Chiquinquirá  
a/c María Consuelo Nuñez (Chelito)  
Iglesia de la Chiquinquirá  
Final Avenida Andres Bello  
Parroquia El Recreo, Urb. La Florida  
Caracas 1050 VENEZUELA