



THE Missionary

December 2020

A publication of Central Union Mission missiondc.org

*No one
should live
hungry and
homeless*

Mission Helps a Mother Find Her Way *by Marc O'Brien*

ILSIA SANTAMARIA AND HER FOUR CHILDREN just moved into a five-room house in Washington, DC, and the possibilities seem endless! Not that long ago, she was an impoverished and struggling single mother, but now her and her family's lives are on an upward trajectory. Many of those positive new developments came about because of her special relationship with Central Union Mission.

Potential Denied

Ilsia's introduction to the Mission began a few years back. At the time, she was working for Together We Bake, a women's empowerment baking program



Mrs. Johnson (left) with Ilsia and her family in front of their new home.

in Alexandria, VA, and she was referred to Mission Muffins for possible employment. From the time she arrived for her employment interview, the Mission found a vibrant young mother devoted to her children and eager to learn, but she was also struggling to escape a cycle of poverty and its inherent depression.

Once hired, Ilsia's work habits and dedication to her job proved to be excellent. After a few months, Mission Muffins Manager Tony Casson described her as "one of the most hardworking employees I've ever met." For her part, Ilsia became enamored with the Mission. She said, "Everyone was so kind and truly seemed to care

about me. They bought gifts for my kids and constantly showed me kindness. I loved going to work."

However, Ilsia's personal struggles were limiting her potential. She was referred to the Mission's Senior Director of Social Work Shirley Johnson for guidance. Over a period of several months Mrs. Johnson was able to work intensely with Ilsia to resolve her anger and frustration issues. With hard work on both sides, matters of the heart were confronted and resolved. During their time together, Mrs. Johnson became a primary figure in Ilsia and her family's lives.

New Hope for the Family

Once the pandemic hit and altered the children's school schedules, Ilsia had to say goodbye to the Mission. However, God has provided for her again; she is currently employed by Kahak Healthcare Services as a nurse's aide. Ilsia and Mrs. Johnson maintained their professional relationship. Working together with the proper authorities, they found food, clothing, household items and furniture to help lessen the financial, psychological and emotional difficulties Ilsia faced.

Ultimately, Mrs. Johnson was able to refer Ilsia to the Virginia Williams Center for housing assistance. The Center assisted Ilsia with her rent payments for the small inadequate property she and her children occupied, then they referred her to a contract program that enabled Ilsia to actually get the housing she and her children desperately needed.

Now, Ilsia is able to provide her children with resources that are so necessary for strong, positive families. In no small way, the Mission has irrevocably changed this family's life. ■

Marc O'Brien is a journalist and the Mission's volunteer coordinator.

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From Your Grateful Community

Because of you, struggling neighbors were fed, sheltered, trained, housed, employed, protected and encouraged this year. Thank you for your compassion.



Weathering the Storms of Adversity

WHEN A 150-YEAR-OLD TREE near the entrance of Calvin University recently crashed to the ground during a storm, it was a shock to many, including the grounds director, Charlie Huizinga. But he knew what to do.

"More than a decade earlier, underneath the oak I discovered little trees coming up with acorns still attached to the root." Huizinga transplanted some of the seedlings onto his property, and ten years later they had grown to become 20-foot trees. Today one fills the hole the original oak left behind (from an article by Matt Kucinski.)

Unexpected storms in life can be frightening, but God's plan doesn't waver. Psalm 9:9 says, "The Lord is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble." Here are three ways you can rise up in the face of difficulty:

- **Pray.** It sounds like a simple "Christian" answer, but bringing our fears to God is the first step toward discovering His strength to face adversity.
- **Serve.** Sometimes an unexpected storm can loom so large we can't see beyond it. Caring for someone else can help shift our focus. Volunteer your time or choose someone to bless today, and see how it blesses you, too.
- **Practice generosity.** Consider exploring creative ways you can impact someone else through giving. When you give a legacy gift to Central Union Mission you can be certain it will dig deep roots and spring up strong. ■

For the full version of this article, request a FREE copy of *Trusting God Through the Storms of Life* by contacting Rev. Deborah Chambers at 202-745-7118, ext. 227, or dchambers@missiondc.org, or bless your family today with a God-honoring will at christianwill.org/missiondc.

From the President Looking Forward to Looking Ahead



2020 IS COMING TO A CLOSE—and not a moment too soon. Who could have anticipated the illness and isolation, the societal unrest and the city's exponential growth in joblessness? I firmly believe, however, that God has sustained Central Union Mission for 136 years for such a time as this.

Response insert describes our methods and results from our battle against coronavirus infection at all of our Mission locations; praise God we have not had any COVID-19 infections at our shelter.

Because of your commitment and our faith in God's provision, we have nothing but hopeful expectations for 2021. Thank you, so much, for the lives you've changed and for your continued compassion. ■

In the face of 2020's challenges, the Mission continued to help people experiencing poverty. The stories we're sharing here about Danny's new life and helping Ilesia's family are just a couple of examples. As well, the special COVID-19

Joe Mettimano

President & CEO

A Whole New World *by Danny O'Neal*

FROM MY EARLIEST MEMORIES, I found myself following a path of self-destruction that developed from mental, physical, sexual and spiritual abuse. This pattern in my life was so depressingly repetitive, and there didn't seem to be any way out. I continuously abused myself looking for an escape.

Finally, at the end of my rope, I decided to take my life. I was rushed to the hospital, where I was placed in a mental health ward and had to face the fact that I was confused,

alone, penniless and homeless. Upon my release from the hospital, I experienced what I now realize was a divine intervention that bound me for Central Union Mission.

My First Night

When I first walked through the doors of the Mission, I asked the front desk attendant if I could get a room. He chuckled and said, "Do you mean a bed?" Embarrassed, I said "yes." That was my first night at the Mission.



Danny studying in his new apartment.

The next morning, I heard wonderful singing coming from across the hall. One of the guys in the room motioned for me to come in. At that moment, I began to feel something uplifting moving inside of me bringing me to tears, and I realized it was memories of singing in the church youth choir

growing up. (My mom had made sure I was active in the church, but I abandoned my faith.)

This was the Restoration & Transformation Program. It was here I was re-introduced to my spiritual foundation. This time I was eager to learn. Every day was filled with biblical and educational activities: chapel every evening plus classes about Christian devotion, financial literacy, critical thinking, "boot camp" preparing us for employment and even art and poetry! At first, I was overwhelmed, but our rigid schedule was there for our success. I began to feel human again, and, with the help of a wonderful social worker, I am coming to terms with the abuse I suffered.

Beyond Wildest Dreams

My experiences opened up a whole new world for me. I could speak confidently and no longer had to worry about my past. I could think clearly using my sober mind. Now, I'm approaching two years of both sobriety and my experience with Central Union Mission. I'm becoming self-sufficient and have moved into transitional housing. My room may be small, but my heart is full, and my soul is overwhelmed. I feel a sense of being blessed beyond my wildest dreams.

I owe tremendous thanks to Central Union Mission and its devoted staff. I still have my ups and downs, but thanks to my spiritual foundation, I can weather the storm. I look forward to getting up every morning to pray, "Lord, what would you have me do for you today?" None of this would have been possible if it had not been for Central Union Mission. ■

Danny O'Neal is a graduate of the Restoration & Transformation Program, is employed at TEND Inc., a hospitality company, and he lives in an apartment in Northeast DC.

Thank You To Our Sponsors

These generous *A Seat at the Table* sponsors helped the Mission to reach our Thanksgiving goal—and to provide help for the coming winter.

Gather at the Table \$25,000

- Van Metre

Come to the Table \$10,000

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- Gaghan Mechanical, Inc.
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- Sally & John Cox
- Joseph & Cam-Vien Mettimano
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- William Riggins



Shout Out to Safeway

*God bless
you for
caring!*



THE MISSION IS GRATEFUL to our valued partner, Safeway, including the Safeway Foundation and the Albertsons Companies Foundation, for over \$48,000 in donations for our shelter and Family Ministry Center (FMC). This fall, four DC Safeway stores col-



Men's Ministry Office Manager Sylvia Johnson (center right) is on hand with Restoration & Transformation program participants to help distribute food, PPE and cold weather supplies.



On Thanksgiving morning, the Mission gave over 100 box lunches, with turkey sandwiches, apples and cupcakes, to people experiencing poverty in the city.

lected contributions from their customers for Central Union Mission. As well, Safeway Foundation provided a Nourishing Neighbors Breakfast for Kids grant to help feed our FMC families. They also donated 500 Feast of Sharing box lunches we shared with FMC families and with needy people on the street on Thanksgiving Day. Safeway, thanks so much for your compassion! ■

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Unless otherwise noted, photos are from Adobe Stock. A copy of Central Union Mission's current financial report is available upon request by writing to 6811 Kenilworth Ave, 600-B, Riverdale, MD 20737 or by calling 202-745-7118. In Maryland, copies of documents and information submitted by Central Union Mission are available for the cost of copies and postage from the Secretary of State, Statehouse, Annapolis, MD 21410, 401-974-5534. In Virginia, a financial statement for the most recent fiscal year is available upon request from the State Division of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 1163, Richmond, VA 23209, 804-786-1343.



Help Us End the Year Strong

2020 was a difficult year for everyone, but for people experiencing homelessness and hunger in the nation's capital, it was devastating. Your gift today will have a meaningful impact on how hungry men or struggling families survive the winter.

Thank you for sharing the gift of hope.

Please use my donation of:

- ☐ \$20.90 to feed and care for 10 guests
- ☐ \$52.25 for 25 guests
- ☐ \$104.50 for 50 guests
- ☐ \$156.75 for 75 guests
- ☐ \$_____ to help as many as possible

Please make checks payable to **"Central Union Mission."** To donate by credit card, please see our website at missiondc.org, or visit Facebook at **"Central Union Mission, DC."**

Central Union Mission

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COVID-19 Critical Care Fund

Serving the Most Vulnerable Among Us

While COVID-19 has shut down almost every aspect of society, Central Union Mission has continued to serve the most vulnerable in the community.

We are front-line responders providing a safe refuge for people experiencing homelessness. Without us, they would be on the street, without food, shelter or protection. We are serving families and children in need of food. Without us, they would be hungry, their pantries bare and refrigerators empty.

We are serving the most vulnerable, our elderly and ill neighbors. Without us, hundreds of 60+ year-old women and men—seniors living alone and grandparent caretakers of young children—would not be able to put food on the table or have a place to live. Most have underlying health conditions that put them at high risk. Every day we work hard to keep everyone in our care healthy and safe. And despite the odds, we are succeeding. While we are taking considerable precautions, we are called by a higher purpose. We trust in God for the outcome of this situation, and our faith is strong.

Emergency Shelter, Meals and Care

The Mission's Emergency Shelter typically houses and cares for a vulnerable population of 170 men who are experiencing homelessness.

We have not had a single case of COVID-19 in our shelter, all glory to God. We are so grateful that we have so far succeeded in keeping everyone healthy and maintaining a virus-free environment. This is in sharp contrast to the rest of the city, which has tragically seen more than **350** people in shelters test positive for COVID-19 and over **20** who have died from the disease. Since the start of the pandemic, the Mission has cared for homeless guests by providing the following:

- Sheltering in Place to minimize the threat of infection from outside the shelter
- Respiratory masks to keep guests safe and minimize the chance of the spread of the disease.

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“If anything positive has come out of this, it’s that this past month has helped me reflect on who I am as a person and my faith.”



Restoration & Transformation Program applicant
José takes a break to pray



Rick, a former homeless guest and current Mission employee, helps safely prepare up to 500 meals per day

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- Three hot meals per day to in-house guests and sandwiches to-go for up to 100 people each day who come searching for food.
- A sanitized environment—all trafficked areas are sanitized multiple times per day, and we are using the latest, state-of-the-art technologies to kill any virus.
- Clean bedding and towels nightly.
- Sun and exercise—time outside on the Mission property to get some fresh air and exercise. We are using Camp Bennett in Maryland for getaways.
- Indoor entertainment with ping pong, foosball, special guest webinars, movies and more.
- Counseling and social services to help people cope with the challenge of the situation, as well as AA classes, mentoring, educational development and other resources.
- Spiritual Discipleship to help folks learn more about God and develop their relationship with Christ.
- Educational classes for personal development—both on-line and in-person—from Internet use and MS Office skills to tax filing, financial literacy and census completion.

- Workforce Development classes in job preparation, résumé creation, cover letter writing and interview skills.

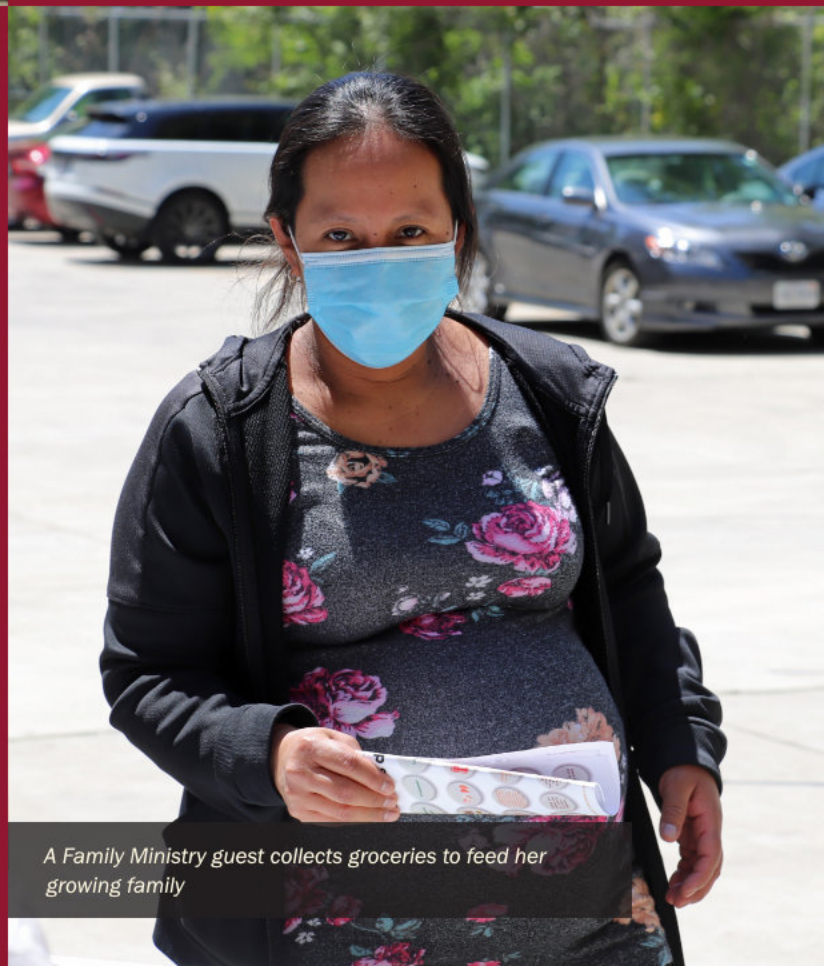
As we open up more and more, we will continue to take extraordinary precautions to prevent the virus from entering the shelter. To manage the risk, we have dedicated a section of the shelter as a quarantine zone—where five men in need of shelter can isolate from the rest of the shelter community to ensure they are healthy.

Emergency Groceries for Those in Need


COVID-19 is impacting the community we serve in devastating ways. In fact, we are experiencing 50 percent more requests for emergency groceries from the Mission today than before the crisis.

The significant increase in demand is primarily from the Hispanic and African American communities. Those that turn to the Mission in these times do not have a safety net to fall back on when they are out of work.

These communities are also particularly vulnerable to COVID-19. While many are now out of work, the African American and Hispanic communities are also disproportio-



A Family Ministry guest collects groceries to feed her growing family



**“I just want to
say ‘thank you.’
This is saving
our lives.”**

Many seniors depend on the Mission for essential groceries

tionally employed in what are now considered essential jobs, and their exposure to the disease is notably high. Tragically, African Americans are dying of COVID-19 at two times the rate of Caucasians. And almost three times the number of Hispanics are being infected.

To meet the significant increase in the number of emergency referrals for food, the Mission has expanded its emergency food distribution to 5,750 people every month. To do this, the Mission is operating two refrigerator trucks that daily collect food from grocery stores, restaurants and businesses; safely storing perishables and dried goods; packaging groceries; maintaining a 20,000-square-foot warehouse; and employing the staff that is keeping the operation going throughout this crisis.

To keep clients and staff safe, all food is prepared and packed into grocery carts in advance and distributed outdoors. Staff wear masks and gloves whenever they engage with the public. And we are also providing personal protective equipment and sanitizing products to clients so they can best protect themselves.

Extraordinary Measures for Critical Staff

Critical operations staff have been working on-site every day since the start of the pandemic. These include directors, chaplains, social workers, educators, counselors and more. Other staff support them behind the scenes, operating from home as they are able in order to minimize exposure to those we serve.

The Mission has also utilized its transition home for essential workers in our care, some of whom work at the Mission’s Family Ministry Center and others in essential jobs in the community. In this way, they can easily reach their jobs without putting themselves and shelter guests at risk, or, in the case of an outbreak, endangering others by exposing them to the disease.

Closed to Volunteers

Before the pandemic, volunteers dedicated 7,153 hours of service during the year—that’s equivalent to 178 weeks

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of labor. Now, for their own safety and that of our homeless guests, we have no in-house volunteer support. Volunteers usually help prepare meals, serve food, mentor homeless guests, teach classes, pack groceries, lead prayers and clean dormitories. Without them, our staff is stretched to maintain basic services. Adapting to the reality of the pandemic, the Mission has identified many needs that can be fulfilled by remote volunteers.

Minimizing the Risk

We are putting tremendous effort into preventing the virus from entering the shelter and our Family Ministry Center. If it gets in, it could be catastrophic, given the dormitory-style accommodations, limited space for social distancing and the fact that many of those we serve are especially vulnerable due to existing chronic illnesses or weakened immune systems.

We continue to urge shelter guests to follow the basic protocols of hand washing, covering their mouths when sneezing or coughing and maintaining some social distance. We are also taking the body temperature of each guest daily; those who have a fever or symptoms are sent out for a health evaluation. The same applies for all staff.

As COVID-19 is transmitted on surfaces and through close contact, special procedures have been instituted to maintain a clean and safe environment. Every part of the shelter is cleaned daily: floors are mopped, kitchens scrubbed, door handles sanitized and bedding laundered. We also are using far UVC light technology and needle-point bipolar ionization systems to kill viruses. All trafficked areas of the Family Ministry Center and Lambert House are regularly disinfected.

The Mission is using significantly more cleaning products. We are now using more than twice the usual amount in the important effort to maintain a clean environment. And we have a critical shortage of hand sanitizer, isopropyl alcohol, Clorox wipes, Lysol, tissues and N95 masks. All this adds considerably to the Mission's expenses.

A Crisis of Funding

The economic forecast for many in our region is dire. Unemployment is at an all-time high. Local businesses are faltering. We expect to see our income decline as the full negative impact of the pandemic hits the economy. At the same time, the Mission is bracing for an expected spike in homelessness among individuals and families in the DC metropolitan area.

To meet this challenge, the Mission needs to shore up its financial health so that it can deepen and expand its services for our most vulnerable neighbors.

With your help, we will not only meet the immediate need, but together we will overcome the dual challenges of poverty and disease.



Mission guest Jonathan takes part in deep cleaning the shelter

No one should live hungry and homeless

Matthew 25: 35-40

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