

Redacted from "Christian Chronicle," an international newspaper for Churches of Christ
By Erik Tryggestad
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Note: I include this news item with my mission report because I am blessed to have shared a small role in the development of this church with seminar presentations. I have also been privileged to visit and present seminars in several of the church planting efforts. — Bob Young

Venezuela: An economic crisis in the South American nation creates a flood of refugees — and opportunities to serve

'WE STUDIED, WE ATE, AND GOD PROVIDED'

...the Brentwood Hills Church of Christ in Nashville, Tenn. shares close ties to Venezuela. For nearly a quarter-century the 1,500-member church has supported the work of Leo Rojas, minister for the Barquisimeto Church of Christ, which meets about 200 miles west of Venezuela's capital, Caracas.

Earlier this year, while visiting Nashville, Rojas spoke to the church about his congregation's history and current challenges. "Inflation's been 36 thousand percent so far this year," said Enoch Rinks, a former missionary to Paraguay, as he translated for Rojas. "His wife is a nurse. Her salary each month is enough to buy two kilos of rice. ... There was a little baby at the church who developed cancer. They couldn't get medicine. She died."

Despite the hardships, the Barquisimeto church stays true to its mission, sharing its food and its Savior with the community, Rojas said. A small group of women launched the congregation, which had 17 worshippers meeting in a public square when they invited Rojas to become their minister.

About 350 people worship with the church now, though many families have left, Rojas said. The church has helped establish 35 other Churches of Christ in Venezuela and experienced 410 baptisms last year [in the local work and the church plants—by].

"We work together as a team," Rojas said. We have about 100 preachers in all different parts of the country. We meet together two or three times a year, we talk about how we can start more and more churches." In March and April, the church sponsored gatherings for about 130 preachers. "People had to bring their own sleeping bags and plates," Rojas said. Nonetheless, "we studied, we ate, and God provided everything."

The church sponsored a recent youth conference at a school where a church member serves as principal. The Christians shared what little they had. "If there was a family that had two bags of rice, they gave one of those bags of rice for the youth retreat," Rojas said. "So, little by little, we got all the food together because this is the future of the church. If we don't work with the young people, the world is offering a lot of things that will ruin their lives."