



EMBRACE. EQUIP. EMPOWER.

Journey to Jerusalem: from Despair to Hope



March, 2015

Dear Church Family,

Lent is a time when Christians journey toward the miraculous hope of Easter Sunday. But to many individuals, Sunday April 5, 2015 will be no different than any other day of the year. That's because they spend every minute struggling in poverty, their despair so imposing that even the hope of the risen Christ seems like little more than a fantasy.

Meet Maria...

Maria Cruz Fernandez could have concluded that being poor and unemployed was all life offered to her family. But she has always been a person of faith, and she knew there must be a way out of despair and into hope.

She and her husband, Joel, have four children between the ages of 17 and 42, and 8 grandchildren from 4 months to 18 years old. They have an awesome life together today, quite different than when they moved to Southern California.

26 years ago Maria's husband was unemployed, and they did not have enough money to provide for their young children. A friend told Maria about a service agency on Pine Street in Long Beach: Lutheran Social Services of Southern California.

Maria came to LSS the next day and received the groceries she needed to feed her family. She came many times after that, and she always went home with necessary provisions, and a sense that the people at LSS really did care about her and those she loved. Later on Maria took a class on English as a Second Language at our LSS Community Care Center, and that helped her communicate with, and relate to, her friends in the Long Beach neighborhood. That was then. But this is now.

Once her husband found employment, Maria showed up at the Long Beach LSS center and offered to work as a volunteer. They had given to her, and she wanted to give back to others. ***She has been in charge of the LSS food pantry there for the last 24 years, and she never misses a day.*** Her warm smile, her eyes that shine with hope and her heart that overflows with the love of Christ make everybody who comes through the door sense that she was waiting just for them.

Maria stands in the pantry making God's word become flesh and Christ's Love become fresh to everyone she encounters.

Please continue