



ADVOCACY CONTEXTO

Global Ministries has faced a conundrum in recent months about how best to share the message from our partner in Venezuela, the Evangelical Pentecostal Church of Venezuela (UEPV). What we see on the news in the US about Venezuela is so drastically different from the story we hear from UEPV, political leaders from both the government and the opposition, experts from non-governmental organization, and the people we meet there. We see news stories of citizens fleeing, lack of food and medical care, and a leader who is to blame. In contrast, what we hear from the people in Venezuela is that an economic blockade led by the United States is preventing the Venezuelan government from being able to fund much-needed social services. In hopes of better understanding the situation in Venezuela, leaders from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ engaged in a Pilgrimage of solidarity with the people of Venezuela in September 2019. In their travel, they met key actors in the present situation on the Venezuelan society and had the opportunity to listen to the contextual analysis and challenges faced in the country, as well as mechanisms for our work of solidarity.

Background Information

Global Ministries of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and the United Church of Christ has been engaged in a relationship of solidarity and accompaniment with the Evangelical Pentecostal Union of Venezuela (UEPV) for more than 60 years. Now we watch with deep concern the recent talk of United States military intervention in Venezuela and the humanitarian impact of U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan oil. Every time Venezuela, or any other country in Latin America and the Caribbean, has suffered a military episode in its recent history, the lives of the poorest and the most vulnerable populations have been severely damaged.

International focus has turned to Venezuela over the past year as the U.S. has very publicly backed self-proclaimed president Juan Guaidó in challenging President Nicolás Maduro and much-needed humanitarian aid has been leveraged as a political tool in support of regime change. Simultaneously, the U.S. has supported an economic blockade and economic sanctions against Venezuela and its oil resources, preventing the Venezuelan government from being able to provide social services for its people.

The main reason for the current humanitarian crisis is the decrease in government social programs because of [U.S. sanctions on Venezuelan oil](#). The most recent round of sanctions prohibit corporations under U.S. jurisdiction from purchasing oil from Venezuela's PDVSA (the state-owned oil company) - an estimated loss of \$11 billion in revenues in 2019. In the past, Venezuela has been celebrated for its vast social programs that are largely supported by oil revenue, which accounts for 95% of the country's [export earnings](#). Alfred Maurice de Zayas, the UN Independent Expert on the Promotion of a Democratic and Equitable International Order, said that if Washington's immediate interests are the well-being of the Venezuelan people, it should [lift the sanctions](#). "If we want to help Venezuela, we need to let the country buy and sell like anyone else."

Bishop Gamaliel Lugo, of UEPV, explains: "Food and medicine supply, products that are part of the blockade that the U.S. government has imposed on Venezuela and the high costs that basic items have on the daily market, have resulted in the dramatic decline in the value of the worker's wages. That means that it is practically impossible to survive on only a minimum wage, or about \$2.00 a month. Fuel or gasoline are also scarce, also due to the blockade of our oil company, which further complicates the daily situation of the entire population. In general, we have to fight from our churches against many toxic feelings, such as anger, frustration, resentment, lack of motivation, fear, uncertainty, hopelessness, contained rage, for the injustice that this situation entails. Yet on the other side, the work of pastors, bishops of churches has doubled in many ways, as we have had to engage in many tasks of service and care for the neediest and vulnerable in our churches and communities. These tasks range from the organization of feeding houses in Christian homes, community pots in churches, health fairs in communities, sometimes not only from churches but also from some of our households."

UEPV's creative ways of sharing food in the current food crisis in Venezuela

Bishop Lugo shares: "A large number of families have organized to help each other. Everyone is dedicated to getting food and contributing to what each is able. Through this community pot, family members can eat once or twice a day. Churches also work with the families who are most in need and most vulnerable when they are unable or almost impossible in getting food to meet the needs of their members."

UEPV has implemented the practice of the Community Pot in several churches. Soup is made with vegetables and animal protein for 50, 100, or more people. This task is carried out by families, churches, and communities. The practice of the "Love Basket" or the "Kilo of Love," as it's commonly known through the communities, continues through the church communities. It consists of a Sunday gathering of essential food items such as rice, pasta, cornmeal, and other products, which are then shared with families who are in most urgent need.

Many Christian families in our churches have opened their homes to the Food House experience, to share food with people in greatest need."

Reflection from Rev. Teri Hord Owens following the Global Ministries Leadership Trip to Venezuela

“The church with whom we met was not silent. The Christian leaders with whom we ate, discussed and engaged with government leaders were not afraid to name the challenge and injustices faced by their communities. As my counterpart in the United Church of Christ, John Dorhauer put it: “Here, the church is not an institution; the church is a movement.” The declaration that Jesus is with the oppressed, the poor, the marginalized is a primary tenet of liberation theology. No one labeled their perspective specifically in this way, but for me, a student of liberation theology, it permeated all of our conversations, especially during our gathering of ecumenical leaders in Caracas. From Pentecostal to Methodist, from Baptist to Anglican, we heard leaders speak of the importance of the church to ensure equality for women, economic equality for all Venezuelans, justice for Afro-Venezuelans, the power of the vote, and the injustice of actions taken by countries, including the US. They were not sharing church growth strategies. For them, the church’s power lies in its ability to be a witness to the love of God through Jesus Christ by speaking truth to power, organizing, and supporting policies that provide economic and social justice for all. While they acknowledged that there are Christians who are more reticent about the kind of engagement they practice, I was inspired by the solidarity of those we met, their willingness to speak up as the people of God for economic, social, and racial justice. Micah 6:8 famously reminds us of the Lord’s requirements: do justice, love kindness, walk humbly with your God. Of such are movements made. I am grateful to have witnessed the power of the Christian movement among our Venezuelan partners.”

Prayers for Venezuela

Holy One, We give you thanks for our sisters and brothers in Venezuela and have heard their cries for justice and peace in the midst of a difficult time. Cover them with your peace. Make a way for reconciliation and fresh hope. Help us to be better neighbors to our siblings in Venezuela. We commit to you our solidarity with them. We will continue to listen to and walk with them in the midst of this crisis and in the days beyond. We celebrate, God, that you can make a way where there is no way. We are grateful that your love knows no limits. In Christ’s name, we pray, Amen.

Discussion Questions

- Does this information from partners in Venezuela connect with other stories that you have heard about Venezuela? Why or why not?
- Are there situations in your own community that feel similar to what our partners in Venezuela experience?
- What questions do you still have?

Advocacy

Global Ministries encourages contacting your legislators with the following advocacy messages:

- Support for HR1004 Prohibiting Unauthorized Military Action in Venezuela
- Support for dialogue with no conditions
- Affirm the right of the Venezuelan people to self-determination
- Call for an end to U.S.-imposed economic sanctions on Venezuela

Learn More

- [What We Have Seen and Heard: Testimonies of a Pilgrimage to Venezuela](#)
- Keep up with the latest news on Venezuela: www.venezuelaanalysis.com
- Advocacy backgrounders: [Venezuela- Intervention and the Politicization of International Aid](#)

