

Lifeway donates 30,000 Bibles for Venezuelans during effort to place Gospel where needed in struggling country

NASHVILLE, Tenn. – Somewhere in a Venezuelan prison, Luis (not his real name) recently received new life after placing His trust in Christ. His newfound faith has been bolstered in large part due to a new Bible he received through a partnership formed by Lifeway Christian Resources of the Southern Baptist Convention and an organization mobilized to distribute copies of God's Word throughout the country.

In August 2020, Lifeway donated nearly 30,000 copies of Spanish "Reina Valera" (RVR) Bibles of nine different types for distribution across Venezuela through the global ministry partner. Some of these types of RVR Bibles include large print, reference and Colormax – a more visually dynamic version suited for students.

This mission wasn't without its challenges. Fuel shortages and COVID-19 coronavirus lockdowns hindered the distribution, but hundreds of ministry partners mobilized to transport the Bibles through 2,200 churches in 19 Venezuelan states between October and December 2020 – primarily to citizens like Luis who did not previously own a Bible.

Because of the varied economic vulnerabilities Venezuela faces, most of its citizens can't afford a Bible. The cost of a single Bible can set the average Venezuelan back about six months' worth of wages.

"A very important part of our work since the beginning of Lifeway as an organization has been serving the church wherever the church is located, searching for the best way to

serve their needs and to help with the realities of the local communities,” said César Custodio, LifeWay’s Spanish sales and marketing director.

“Over the years we have served countries such as Venezuela through our commercial partners. However, this has been a mission that has been complicated because of the situation that this beautiful country has gone through in the last few years.”

This mission to get Bibles into the hands of Venezuelans began by selecting trusted local church partners in consultation with the Evangelical Council of Venezuela (CEV). Church leaders from the states that received Bibles compiled lists of beneficiaries divided into five categories:

- Church members who did not own a Bible and new believers who didn’t own a Bible.
- Elderly church members, who received large-print Bibles.
- Pastors who did not own a reference or study Bible.
- Colormax Bibles for youth ages 10-18 from economically-vulnerable, believing families or new believers who did not own a Bible.

Local church leaders distributed the Bibles to beneficiaries in their respective churches and parishes using Bible fairs and special Bible Month events. Thousands of church leaders who had never owned a reference Bible, and those whose old Bibles were well worn after years of use, received new ones to assist them with their sermon preparation and personal discipleship.

Teens reportedly walked miles due to lack of transportation to receive their first Bibles. In the States of Zulia and Amazonas, the Wayuu and Piaroa indigenous groups were able to receive Bibles.

Church leaders from all states expressed their appreciation for the Bibles that arrived as the humanitarian crisis deepens in strife-torn Venezuela and inflation rates there are skyrocketing.

“We can see the current worldwide crisis, such as COVID-19 and the way it has expanded throughout the country of Venezuela, imposing great challenges that grow every day and affect the local churches,” said Custodio.

“We pray the church in Venezuela knows that LifeWay supports the great mission they undertake during these difficult times. It is with great joy that LifeWay and the Spanish resource team get to know that our work out of Nashville, Tenn., can bless the lives of the Venezuelan people. Our hearts and our prayers are united with the church in Venezuela.”

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César Custodio, LifeWay’s Spanish sales and marketing director

As the economic crisis deepens and the COVID-19 pandemic spreads in the country, the Bibles will provide churches with a tool to reach their neighbors and friends with the hope that can only be found in Jesus Christ – the same hope that will sustain Luis as he begins his personal ministry in a Venezuelan prison.