



The Heart In Hand el corazon en la mano

is Hermandad's first e-newsletter based on our logo.

Mission Statement:

Provide financial assistance to bona fide community organizations benefiting the physical and mental health needs of the underserved in Puerto Rico through community fundraising and educational awareness.

Our Beginnings and Moving Forward

Our story begins in April of 2017. Puerto Rico was a beautiful and relaxing vacation destination. By September, Hurricane Maria had vastly devastated the island with widespread downed and stripped trees and vegetation, destroyed homes, businesses, churches and schools, a severely damaged electrical power grid, a crippled communication system, and extremely limited access to food and water. Residents were isolated and left without basic necessities for days, weeks and months. In some areas, residents had no electricity for over a year.

Our next visit occurred in April of 2018. Knowing of the continued trauma experienced by many of the people of Puerto Rico and the immense need for assistance of basic necessities, Jean and John Knight called several church denominations for suggested agencies accepting donations. We contacted Corporación Milagros del Amor (CorMA) in Caguas, Puerto Rico and brought two suitcases of specifically identified and requested supplies.

Flying into San Juan five months after Maria, we heard the growing stunned silence as our plane drew closer to San Juan and many stared out the windows at a patchwork of blue. We grasped that the blue areas marked tarps covering the roofs of damaged homes and buildings.

A few days after Easter, we visited CorMA and helped collate, sort and box canned goods at the agency and were given a short tour of the nearby rural area greatly in need of their assistance. CorMA has served their community working in the Central Region of Puerto Rico for over 20 years providing services aimed at assisting homeless individuals, those at risk of homelessness, families including single parent families, and elderly persons going through financial crises and hardships. They work cooperatively with helping agencies, churches, and corporations who have provided funds via grants. Supporting organizations include United Way, Comisión Especial Conjunta de Fondos Legislativos (Puerto Rican government), American Baptist Home Mission Societies, a Baltimore area Lutheran Church, Housing and Urban Development, First Baptist Church in Caguas, Santander Bank, Scotiabank, and the Walmart Foundation. CorMA offers clinical training and internships for area university students primarily in the fields of social work and accounting.

Our connection to CorMA, the gratefulness expressed by the Puerto Rican people receiving the supplies, hearing their individual experiences during and after the storm, their fears of family separations, the ongoing lack of food, water, electricity, healthcare, employment and communication within the island and witnessing the overwhelming devastation to the island, prompted a need to do even more. Relating these concerns to many upon returning to Maryland and staying connected with CorMA, we obtained more donated supplies through a “Christmas in July and August” event at our church.

We made our annual trip to Puerto Rico with suitcases of supplies in April of 2019. Descending into San Juan, we saw numerous blue tarps still covering damaged structures. At CorMA, we brainstormed with them as to their future needs and helped distribute food to the most impoverished areas we had ever seen. Their most immediate need was a passenger van to transport clients to medical appointments and distribute food and supplies to area recipients.

Hermandad's Formation and First Project

Upon our return to Maryland in April of 2019, the vision and creation of the nonprofit Hermandad, meaning fraternity, took root. John worked all summer to locate a van. He secured a used passenger van donated by one of the Oglethorpe Inc. hospitals in Florida, who in turn, agreed to donate the van to (CorMA).

Hernandad paid for the shipping of the van from Florida to Puerto Rico and Hernandad's first endeavor was realized!



Happy CorMA staff receiving the van.



Van with CorMA logo.

Each trip has given us a greater understanding of the challenges faced by the Puerto Rican people. We learned many had the added burden of increased complications to their diabetes due to limited availability of fresh fruits and vegetables and were relying on canned food to sustain their diets. With many deaths, displaced friends and family, and isolation, their mental health needs were unaddressed and had escalated. Constant fear stayed with them as hurricane season approached.

At the end of the year and into 2020, earthquakes created another challenge. With the rising number and unpredictability of their occurrence, people remained fearful and displaced again. Many were living outdoors due to newly damaged homes ever mindful of possible death should they stay in their homes. Cement homes generally withstand hurricanes, but collapse during earthquakes.

And then came the pandemic.

Hermandad Established the Jack and Eunice Knight Memorial Fund in February 2020

Funds have been donated in the memory of Jack and Eunice Knight for the purpose of awarding grants to the youth of Puerto Rico undertaking extraordinary efforts to improve their communities. Jack and Eunice had a long history of supporting youth work in both their churches and the greater community.

First Grant Recipients

In January 2021, Unit 313 of the Boy Scouts of America (Pack, Troop B, Troop G and Crew) of Caguas, Puerto Rico were the first grant recipients. The annual dues to the Boy Scouts of America had increased to \$85.00 per scout. Through their programs in Caguas, scout leaders promote the development of moral and ethical values in a healthy environment, where they learn to develop as positive and effective leaders.

During the pandemic, many parents were not working or worked reduced hours. This financial strain created a possibility that many parents might need to remove their children from the scouting program. Hermandad awarded \$1,000.00 in response to Unit 313.



Second Memorial Fund Grant to be High School Scholarships

In October 2021, Hermandad and CorMA announced eleventh and twelfth grade students at Colegio Bautista de Caguas could apply for scholarship funds to help defray study-related expenses. Hermandad will work with CorMA, in Caguas, Puerto Rico, to complete the selection process.

Students must demonstrate evidence of leadership through participation in community, non-profit, student, civic or religious organizations to improve their community. Additionally, they must provide an application, essay, letters of recommendation and evidence of their participation.

The Evaluation Committee, members of Hermandad's board, CorMA's board and CorMA's staff, will review the candidate's applications and select three.

Grant recipients will receive awards in the amount of \$500.00 first place, \$300.00, second place, and \$200.00, third place in January of 2022. Their deadline for application submissions was set for Friday, November 12, 2021.

Hermandad Gifts to Puerto Rico and Thanks from CorMA

Since the pandemic began, Hermandad has sent needed items to Puerto Rico. Our gifts included soap, toothpaste, tooth brushes, and masks in the hygiene kits for the homeless. Continuous individual donations have helped fund additional hygiene kits. During 2021 Hermandad has also sent funds totaling \$4,000 to assist with needed building modifications to CorMA's bazaar including mold removal, new flooring and air conditioning.

In August 2021, we received a letter from Gladys Rodriguez, Executive Director of Corporación Milagros del Amor (CorMA) expressing their thanks for Hermandad's support. Hermandad secretary, Jean Knight, coordinated with an area Lutheran Church to secure a grant to aid CorMA with the installation of their new air conditioning units and finish their restoration.

Pictures of Progress



Before



After

An air conditioning unit was installed.



A Prayer Room was created.

Lura Johnson in Concert for Hermandad



Pianist Lura Johnson will present a benefit concert on Sunday, April 10, 2022 at 7:00 p.m. in the Steinway Gallery's theater and online. Tickets for fully vaccinated individuals interested in viewing the concert in-person for a minimum donation of \$30.00. Streaming Hermandad supporters can view online with any donation.

In her Masterworks Series Episode 1, she will perform Beethoven's *Appassionata*. Lura delves deep into Beethoven's most famous piano sonata, with the informal and insightful musical commentary that has become her signature style.

Attendees will be able to participate in a question and answer session following the concert. Additionally, viewers will be able to send their questions and comments online. We look forward to your participation in this event and thank you for your support. We extend a special thank you to Matt Bachman for providing use of the performance space.

The Steinway Gallery
118 Shawan Road
Cockeysville, MD 21030

Ms. Johnson's background includes:

Steinway Artist

Regular Guest Pianist at Baltimore Symphony Orchestra

Principal Keyboardist at Delaware Symphony Orchestra

Adjunct Faculty and Coordinator of Chamber Music at Peabody Institute, Conservatory and Preparatory

You can make your donations on the Hermandad website -
www.jkhermandadpr.org.