



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Spring 2020

Pandemic Lockdown Forces Haitian to Choose: Risk Infection? or Die of Hunger?



Haiti is still recovering from last year's successive waves of civil unrest and paralyzing protests against government corruption and rising prices. Now a government ordered nationwide pandemic lockdown presents Haitians with an impossible dilemma: risk coronavirus infection by defying the government demand for confinement and social distancing or risk death by hunger in areas where people need human contact in order to survive.

Rich in Mercy, together with other NGOs and small, health-oriented groups, has hastened to disseminate flyers, posters, and video clips in Haitian Kreyol to educate people about the pandemic and encourage hand-washing and social-distancing. However in Haiti many people lack regular access to clean water and soap may not always be affordable even if it is available.

The government's quarantine order may not be enforceable given people's day-to-day struggle for survival. Haitian street vendors ("ti machan") are choosing to risk infection with the virus over not working since they need to sell every day and earn money to support their families. **Rich in Mercy** is providing direct support to a small number of families relative to the enormous need. People are demanding food distribution measures from the government, but it is unclear whether the government can secure basic food staples to feed the majority of the population who subsist on just a few dollars a day.

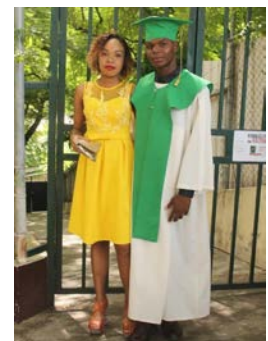
Haiti suffers from a dysfunctional government and a nearly non-existent health care system. There are only an estimated 30 fully functioning ICU beds and no more than 65 ventilators in the entire country of 11 million people. The country has fewer than 1000 doctors. Medical staff at some state-run hospitals appear not to be showing up for work since they lack masks, gloves, and gowns and fear contracting the virus. Local medical experts suggest that the death toll from the virus could be higher than the number who died in the 2010 massive earthquake, the deadly 2010 cholera epidemic, and the devastating 2016 hurricane Matthew combined.

Youth Persevering in Hard Times; "Nou kenbe rev yo!" = "We Cling to our Dreams!"



As a child **Dieunica Moneus** (left) developed a hunger for education. She dreamed of becoming a doctor in order to "help people and contribute positively" to her community of Kenscoff. In 2018 **Rich in Mercy** (RiM) awarded her a merit-based scholarship to study medicine at the **Université Notre Dame d'Haiti**. Last year civil unrest forced the university to close for most of the first semester, but this "odds defying" student held fast to her dream and passed exams in all her courses! The coronavirus pandemic brought university courses to a halt in March, but **Dieunica** steadfastly "clings to her dream", determined to persevere and become a cardiologist.

Raymond Jean Wilkens, 21, from Les Cayes (right), was orphaned as a baby and raised by his grandmother. With **RiM** support he has completed studies to become an electrical technician and is using his skills support his family. He continues to study and save money so that, when circumstances permit, he can pursue his **other** dream of attending medical school and become a doctor devoted to the service of his community,



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Civil Unrest and Corona Virus Fear Accelerate Efforts to Promote Food Sovereignty.



The “**Operation Hummingbird**” environmental learning center, founded by **Lamothe Lormier**, with support from **Rich in Mercy** and generous benefactors, aims to revolutionize community food systems in rural Haiti by creating a low-input, sustainable model of food production. It is a source of hope and inspiration for local farmers and is extending its outreach to other parts of Haiti. It has also attracted the attention of the **Université Notre Dame d’Haïti** (UNDH). Members of the Faculty of Agronomy in Cap Haitian have shown interest in learning principles of permaculture, strategies of bio-intensive gardening, and techniques of worm composting.

Much of rural Haiti suffers from seasonal and sometimes extended drought, so the center has begun construction of a model system of “rainwater harvesting” to capture water during the rainy season and store it in cisterns for later distribution to fields and gardens. A solar-powered water pump and photo-voltaic (solar) electric system add functionality to the center and model an alternative to fossil fuel generated electricity. During the time of COVID-19 the work and outreach of the environmental learning center takes on even greater importance and urgency, because many parts of the country are predicted to experience recurring food crises and increased hunger.



Completed Infirmary Provides “Elder Care” for Little Sisters’ Motherhouse Community



Sr. Denise Desil, general superior of the **Little Sisters of St. Therese**, realized more than three years ago that aging members of her community of more than 200 sisters would need increasing “elder care” at the sisters’ motherhouse in Riviere Froide. With support from numerous benefactors and fiscal sponsorship from **Rich in Mercy**, she inaugurated construction of a new infirmary adjacent to the main sisters’ residence.

Financing the project was only one among many challenges to realizing its completion. Soaring inflation and rising material costs, more than 18 months of civil unrest protesting government corruption, and periodic eruptions of gang violence and resulting nationwide lockdown caused long delays and challenged both the patience and the faith of the sisters. In spite of all the obstacles the infirmary construction is complete! Elderly sisters will take up residence in the new facility following an inaugural blessing during the Easter season,



International Solidarity Finances Communal Latrines to Advance Datcha Development



Rich in Mercy extended its mission of promoting global solidarity with the poor to **Togo** (West Africa) in 2017 by providing fiscal sponsorship for the construction of a water well in the village of Datcha in collaboration with **Kimberly Baker, PhD**, a professor at St. Meinrad **Seminary** (Indiana), and **Fr. Odilon Kofi, SMA**, who ministers in the village. Building on the strong community support for the well project and responding to the need for environmentally friendly sanitation, Dr. Baker raised funds for construction of composting latrines for the local elementary school. That project was completed in the spring of 2019.

Fundraising for a second phase of improved sanitation for the whole community began almost immediately. Members of the community supported the project with enthusiasm. The local chief of the Zongo Obi community contributed land. Members of the community contributed labor. Each latrine is a waterless, composting toilet connected to two septic tanks which allow for successive collection and composting of waste material over a two-year cycle, producing manure suitable for agricultural use.