



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Winter 2016

Housing Crisis Follows Hurricane Matthew Devastation in Haiti's Southern Interior



In early October Hurricane Matthew ravaged vast landscapes in the southern interior of Haiti. Sustained winds up to 145 mph lasted some 8 hours through the night uprooting trees, ripping off roofs, and collapsing houses. Massive rains produced severe flooding that destroyed every sort of personal property from birth certificates and school uniforms to mattresses and food supplies.

The **Rich in Mercy Institute** (RiM) is targeting recovery assistance through communities of Haitian religious women, the **St. Pius X parish** in the village of Ducis, and the **Foyer de la Misericorde** lay community agricultural center in Fonfred. More than a dozen houses of single mothers, widows, and similar persons who are without resources, have been identified in Ducis and prioritized for repair or reconstruction based on the extent of damage and degree of need. Reconstruction and repairs will proceed as funds become available and 100% of all contributions received towards "Hurricane Matthew Recovery" will be used directly to meet that need. Additionally the "**Education for Change**" scholarship program will be expanded in Ducis to provide assistance to some families who are suffering severe financial hardship as they struggle to recover from the hurricane.

RiM executive director, Dr. Rich Gosser, delivered emergency assistance funds to the **Little Sisters of St. Therese** who had 7 houses damaged or destroyed in their southern missions. Additional emergency funds were delivered to the **Little Sisters of St. Antoine** of Fondwa whose "temporary" house (shown at right) built following the 2010 earthquake was completely destroyed by the recent hurricane.



Rich in Mercy also provided a development grant to the **Foyer de la Misericorde** agricultural center in Fonfred for purchasing a breed of goats that will improve the local goat population and help restore animals lost in the hurricane.

RiM Sponsored Well Provides Life-giving Water to Lassere Village Women and Families



Haiti is ranked as the "most water poor" country in the entire world and water borne diseases such as cholera place whole communities and especially children at risk of illness and even death. Increasing access to "bon dlo" ("good water") is a vitally important public health measure in rural communities and can greatly improve the quality of life for hundreds of villagers.

In collaboration with Maryknoll sister **Susan Nchubiri**, the **Fanm Vayan** ("Women Overcoming") group of single mothers, and the local parish of **Our Lady of Perpetual Help**, (Lassere, Haiti) **Rich in Mercy** helped finance construction of a new well located in the village of Lassere. Funding for this project came from the **Latrobe Rotary Club** (Latrobe, PA), and individuals from the **Ligonier Rotary Club** (Ligonier, PA) and **Mother of Sorrows** parish (Murrysville, PA).

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“Education for Change” Fund Promotes Positive, Systemic Change Through Education



Peterson Alcius (at right in the photo) became orphaned and had to drop out of school after his parents died in the massive earthquake that struck Haiti in January 2010. A RIM “**Education for Change**” scholarship gave him the opportunity to complete his secondary school education. He ranked first among all his peers on the Ministry of Education secondary school graduation exam – an achievement that earned him a full scholarship to study medicine at a premier university in Cuba! To do so he had to learn Spanish – his third language. In June 2016 he completed his first year of medical school, achieving the second highest academic average in his class!

In Haiti only about half of all children complete elementary school through the sixth grade and not more than 1 in 5 youth are able to attend secondary school. Of these latter only about 30% graduate, making high school graduation a major accomplishment in itself!

Sine Ogondo Wislondy (photo left) and **Lindor Schnaider** (photo right) are recent secondary school graduates enrolled in the “**Education for Change**” scholarship program. Sine, 22, has family roots in rural Thomazeau. Her mother died from illness when Sine was a baby and her father died when she was 13. She entered the “**Education for Change**” scholarship in the 6th grade. Lindor, 20, has family roots in Miragoane, but grew up in the Solino neighborhood of Port au Prince where, because of extreme poverty, his parents had to choose between education and food for him and his 4 brothers and sisters. Each of them aspires to study medicine because they are committed to “helping other people” since their own education was made possible because other people helped them.



Funding for “**Education for Change**” comes from generous individual donors and from congregational support from **St. Margaret Mary** parish (Lower Burrell, PA), **Mt. St. Peter** parish (New Kensington, PA), and the annual mission cooperative appeal of the **Diocese of Greensburg** (Greensburg, PA).

Fondwa Vocational School Equips Women with Skills to Earn Independent Livelihoods



Women in Haiti – especially in rural Haiti – have few educational opportunities. Because family resources are limited, parents often give priority to the education of boys over girls and girls have few opportunities to learn practical skills through which they can support themselves and their families as adults.

In rural Fondwa the **Little Sisters of St. Antoine**, a local community of approximately 20 Haitian religious women, are equipping girls and young women with practical education, marketable skills in sewing and culinary arts, and the knowledge and business skills needed to create small, sustainable businesses of their own.

One student, **Zilmie**, used to pay someone to sew her children’s school uniforms. After 6 months of learning to sew, she now says: “This year I am sewing them myself and won’t have to pay someone. I can use that money to buy food for my family and purchase material to make other clothes to sell.”

Another student, **Elcege**, the oldest of five siblings, had to drop out of school when her mother died 6 years ago. After one year of sewing classes, she says: “I have a skill now and I can create a sustainable business to help my younger brothers and sisters and support a family of my own.”



The **Rich in Mercy Institute** provides scholarships for 8 vocational students including 5 from the **Fatima House Orphanage**. The school, which opened in July 2015, currently enrolls 32 students who are learning sewing, cooking, and basic business skills. Along with new skills the students are acquiring new hope that their lives – like those of Zilmie and Elcege – will be better for them and their families.