



## Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Spring 2021

### Emergency Food Aid Reduces Risk to Highly Vulnerable Families Facing Acute Hunger



Haiti has one of the highest levels of food insecurity in the world and ranks 169<sup>th</sup> out of 189 countries on the Human Development Index. For more than two years an unprecedented and uninterrupted socio-political crisis has raged in Haiti. Even before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, Haiti experienced violent demonstrations, roadblocks, fuel shortages, economic paralysis, limited services, and high inflation rates. The cost of a food basket rose by nearly 30% in the past year. More than 40% of the population are experiencing increased hunger and many vulnerable families faced acute food emergencies last fall.

**Rich in Mercy**, in collaboration with the **Sisters of St. Antoine** of Fondwa and **Spiritan religious** in four parishes, provided more than \$10,000 in emergency funding for food distribution to vulnerable families at extreme risk. In Fondwa, Gotiron, and Kafelompri the Sisters distributed rice, beans, sugar, salt and cooking oil to over 100 adults with more than 300 children. The Spiritan religious priests distributed additional emergency relief in Furcy, Bokozel, Pon Sonde, and Kotplaj. Funding for relief was provided by individual donors and the **Bozzone Family Foundation**.



### “Transportation for Education” – Social Entrepreneurship to Support Learning in Haiti



The **Rich in Mercy** “Education for Change” fund, successfully managed by **Fr. Jean Patrick Eugene, C.S.Sp.**, provides scholarships, based on merit and need, to more than 150 elementary and secondary students mainly in Port au Prince and rural Ducis village. Individual donations and support from several Catholic parish congregations have made this program possible and enabled hundreds of children and youth to obtain the basic education that would not be available to them otherwise.

In order to offset an expected decline in congregational giving due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to make the program economically more self-sustaining, **Rich in Mercy** funded the purchase of a 16 passenger minibus to launch the **Transportation for Education** “social entrepreneurship” business which will generate monthly income to support educational scholarships. **Fr. Patrick Eugene, C.S.Sp.** who earned an MBA from St. Thomas University in Houston, TX, will manage the business. The social entrepreneurship model will be based on the successful business operated by the **Sisters of St. Antoine of Fondwa**, a long-time **RIM** partner in several successful businesses that integrate entrepreneurship with solutions to social and environmental problems.

The Toyota Hyace minibus will make daily runs between Ducis-Cayes (on the far end of Haiti’s southern peninsula) and Port au Prince, the national hub of economic and political activity, making three trips a day during seasons of peak travel and one trip a day during the off seasons. The minibus will also provide “on demand” service to medical teams and parish delegations visiting Haiti on short-term missions.



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## **Agricultural Innovation and Experimentation Underlie Rural “Hummingbird Revolution”**



In Haiti land available for farming is very limited and often highly degraded, lacking essential plant nutrients. Chemical fertilizers are expensive and can be environmentally harmful. Food for humans and many animals, including poultry, must be imported. The protein rich, nitrogen-fixing, fast-growing **Azolla** (a floating, perennial waterweed) is easily grown in small ponds and can be used directly as a bio-fertilizer and as an accelerator in composting organic waste. Supported by **Rich in Mercy**, the **Operation Hummingbird Environmental Center** is piloting construction of a demonstration

**Azolla pond** as one element in an integrated, “closed loop” system that will include production of “black soldier fly” larvae. The *Azolla* will feed soldier flies and the fly larvae, in combination with *Azolla*, will become a food source for fish and poultry!



**Operation Hummingbird** is a center for education, research, and “hands on” collaboration aimed at developing innovative, low-input, high-yield strategies, such as bio-intensive gardening and worm composting, for growing a lot of food in small spaces. The center offers intensive, customized training in regenerative strategies both on site and, by invitation, throughout Haiti. The center’s mission is to inspire a “hummingbird revolution” of “**each one doing his part**” to revitalize community food systems through low-input, high-yield, environmentally sustainable practices that increase food sovereignty and economic security in areas where agricultural production languishes and populations experience pressure towards urban migration.

## **“Skip a Lunch, Save a Child” Addresses Malnutrition Among High-Risk Pre-Schoolers**



Malnutrition rates in Haiti are among the highest in the Caribbean and urban children under the age of five are particularly at risk for diminished physical and intellectual development. In Haiti three-fourths of children under two years of age are anemic and a third of all pre-schoolers suffer from stunted growth.

The RIM “**Skip a Lunch, Save a Child**” fund supports a “head start” program that focuses on primary nutrition and early education for pre-schoolers in the **St. Louis de Montfort** parish in the Delmas section of Port au Prince who are at high-risk for chronic malnutrition.

Created by **Marlene Shaw** of Republic, PA, following a **Rich in Mercy** “reverse mission pilgrimage” to Haiti, the RIM “Skip a Lunch, Save a Child” fund enables supporters to contribute a minimum of \$5 a month so that the parish can provide a daily, nutritious meal, structured play, and variety of formative educational activities to nearly 100 “high-risk” pre-schoolers.

## **Solidarity in West Africa: Datcha Village Celebrates Elementary School Inauguration**



**Datcha** is a small, rural village in **Togo, West Africa**, which is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world. Building on previously successful public health collaborations to provide a water well and composting latrines, the community undertook construction of a new, structurally sound school building with much needed elementary classrooms as well as office and storage space. It serves grades 1-6, with about 70 students per grade.

Inauguration of the new building occurred in February (2021) with the village Chief, local mayor, teachers, students and their parents participating. Parents offered a letter of thanks for the new building, calling it a “never seen beauty” because it is the first, modern-built school in the entire region! The project was directed **Fr. Odilon Kofi, SMA**, a Society of African Missionary priest, with funding raised by **Dr. Kimberly Baker, Ph.D.** and fiscal sponsorship provided by **Rich in Mercy**.