



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Winter 2019

Deepening Political and Economic Emergency Inches Haiti Towards Humanitarian Crisis



Waves of civil unrest and paralyzing protests continue to rock the foundations of Haitian society. Spontaneous demonstrations against government increases in fuel prices turned to demanding the resignation of President Jovenel Moïse amidst allegations of government corruption. Escalating protests – sometimes turning violent with demonstrators throwing rocks and bottles, setting fires and firing guns – are now pushing the country towards a full-blown humanitarian crisis. Skyrocketing inflation and severe shortages have caused alarming price increases. Supplies of food, water, and medicines are more and more absent from market shelves. In

Port au Prince and other major towns businesses are closed along with schools and hospitals. Roadblocks have made travel treacherous and sometimes impossible.

Most **Rich in Mercy (RiM)** projects outside Port au Prince and some RiM programs in Port au Prince – such as the preschool nutrition program funded by the RiM “Skip a Lunch, Save a Child” fund – have continued more or less normally with only occasional and mostly minor interruptions. School closings in Port au Prince have occasioned some creative responses from RiM education partners such as the **Centre Action Voluntaire d’Haiti (CAVH)**, which mobilized some 50 “accompaniers” making home visits and multiple phone calls to at least 300 students giving them home assignments and organizing “peer to peer” tutoring!



Garden Innovations and Solar Water Pump Enhance Environmental Learning Center



The **Operation Hummingbird** Environmental Learning Center aims to revolutionize community food systems in rural Haiti by creating a no-waste, low-input alternative model of food production that incorporates principles of permaculture, strategies of bio-intensive gardening, and other innovations based on experimentation and adaptation at the center’s campus in Dubre.

Bio-intensive gardening normally depends on some form of raised garden beds and **Operation Hummingbird** visionary founder, **Lamothe Lormier**, has experimented with various materials for constructing such beds. He recently discovered that the extremely dense clay soil characteristic of the area is better-suited for

constructing three foot deep “sunken” beds. Filled with a mixture of animal manure, carbon-rich organic matter, charcoal, compost, and composting the beds facilitate the continuous regeneration of soil and support the production of a diverse variety of crops! Local farmers, skeptical at first, have begun to embrace this innovative, alternative model of garden production.

The **Operation Hummingbird** center models energy production with a photo-voltaic (solar) electric system and recently added a solar-powered water pump to supply water for irrigation, household use, and local distribution. Selection and installation of the pump was undertaken by **Bruce Goodman**, a volunteer from Madison, WI. Funding came from a **Rich in Mercy** grant made possible through the generous support of friends of Bruce Goodman and other friends of the **Operation Hummingbird** center.



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NEW RIM Website Reflects Expanded Partnerships, Current Priorities, Board Changes



The **Rich in Mercy (RIM)** website (www.rimin.org) recently underwent a facelift and updating to reflect current program priorities, expanded partnerships and changes in its board of directors.

RIM supports projects and initiatives in the areas of education, infrastructure, and the environment – primarily in Haiti, but also the two African countries: where RIM partners with the **Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd** (Uganda) and the **Society of African Missionaries** (Togo).

The RIM board recently honored **Vera Swiergol** as “Board Member Emerita” and welcomed new members **Carol Serafin** (Ligonier) and **Mitch Farrell** (Lower Burrell) who also serves as board treasurer.

“Verdant Haiti” Partnership Supports Little Sisters of St. Therese Reforestation Initiative

Recognizing the urgent need to support reforestation in Haiti, the **Pierre Toussaint and Mother Mary Lange Information and Services Center** inaugurated the **Verdant Haiti** project to raise funds for that purpose. To implement the project the Center chose to partner with **Rich in Mercy** in the US and the **Little Sisters of St. Therese of the Child Jesus (PSST)** in Haiti. The PSST is a Haitian congregation of religious women with more than 200 sisters working in more than 40 remote locations throughout Haiti.

The locale in Haiti for this reforestation effort is “**Our Lady of Life Farm**” (Fort Liberte), a center of agricultural production and formation that aims to increase food security and resilience in the region through new agro-ecological practices, value-added food transformation, and a permanent tree nursery for continuous production of seedlings.

The **Verdant Haiti** project complements the **Rich in Mercy** phase-2, hurricane Matthew recovery project focused on seedling production and distribution in Ducis village.



“Mirembe” Means Peace of Mind for Victims of Human Trafficking in Uganda Slum



The **Mirembe Project** assists women who are at risk for human trafficking in Kampala, the capital of **Uganda (East Africa)**.

Gender roles of women in Uganda – including housekeeping, child rearing, fetching water, and cooking – are subordinate to those of men. Female employment outside the home is stigmatized. Domestic violence against women is common. Often the only hope of poor women for survival in Uganda is prostitution.

MIREMBE is a Swahili word meaning **PEACE**. The **Mirembe Project** is about hope, collaboration, and transformation – women working together to break the cycle of extreme poverty which grips them and freeing themselves from being victims of sex-trafficking, so that they and their families live in peace and enjoy peace of mind.

Initiated by the Sisters of **Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd** the program currently reaches 37 women from Katanga, a Kampala slum marked by hunger, disease, violence, and despair. Women organize into “solidarity groups” and each of them is committed to realizing the hope of a dignified life for all the members of their group and their children.

The **Rich in Mercy Institute** provides fiscal sponsorship for an expanding **micro loan program**. Participating women receive an initial \$20 loan to launch a “micro-business” of their choice. Most women buy and sell in the informal economy. Some grow fresh vegetables in small container gardens. **Sr. Bibian Thuguci** (shown right), meets with the women weekly to provide encouragement and occasional help with medical or other emergencies. She operates a small bank to provide security for the financial resources of the group. Women making a profit on their businesses are eligible for capital expansion loans. Modest profits pay for food, medical care, and school fees.

