



Solidarity News Notes...

News from the Rich in Mercy Institute – Spring 2025

Gang Violence and Skyrocketing Inflation Push Haiti to “Worst Hunger Emergency”

Nearly half of all Haitians – some 5 million people – are struggling every day to find food as gang violence and a skyrocketing inflation rate of 40% for food items cause what the **UN World Food Programme** calls “the worst hunger emergency in the hemisphere” and among the worst in the world. Increasing gang violence in 2024 brought shipping and airport operations for Haiti’s capital of Port au Prince to a halt, preventing food getting into the import-dependent country.



Shortages of essential commodities including fertilizers and farm tools have caused a sharp decline in agricultural productivity. Gangs control key regions including the Artibonite region known as Haiti’s “rice basket”. Gang-imposed toll fees and disputes over territorial control further restrict production and accessible farmland. Climate shocks, droughts, and floods have further eroded the once-reliable safety net of local agricultural production.

Nearly one million people, displaced from their homes by violence, have migrated to rural communities outside of Port au Prince causing an increase in demand for locally produced food and a corresponding increase in prices. Nearly two million Haitians – mainly women and children – face a threat of extreme hunger or starvation.

“Skip a Lunch” Fund and Emergency Relief Mitigate Hunger for Children and Refugees

The Rich in Mercy “**Skip a Lunch, Save a Child**” fund was created almost 20 years ago by Marlene Shaw after traveling to Haiti with a Rich in Mercy “reverse mission pilgrimage”. Donors contribute \$5 a month – about what a fast food lunch cost at the time. The fund provides food for nearly 300 “at risk” preschool children and other family members in rural Gotiron and Kafelompere.



The preschools are operated by the **Sisters of St. Antoine** of Fondwa and their superior, **Sr. Claudette Prevot**, reports that “eating has become a privilege” in Haiti today because “not everyone can eat every day”. She, the children, and their parents express gratitude to “Skip a Lunch” donors and pray that God continues to bless their support to increase food security in the region.



The population of rural Fondwa, like that of many rural communities, continues to swell because hundreds of refugees fleeing gang violence in Port au Prince arrive in the area “*ak de men vid*” – “*with two empty hands*”. Emergency funding from Rich in Mercy helps the **Sisters of St. Antoine** provide basic food supplies such as rice and beans, cooking oil, corn meal, and spices – sourced locally whenever possible.

Similar disbursements of **Rich in Mercy** emergency relief funds have lessened the impact of food insecurity on several hundred highly vulnerable families in rural Ducis as well as in Fonfred where alternating periods of flooding and drought have disrupted the lives and livelihoods of farmers. **Rich in Mercy** relies on a network of reliable contacts – mainly Catholic diocesan and religious order priests – to distribute emergency funds and food supplies.

RICH IN MERCY is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt, non-profit corporation with tax ID #.47-1591567

All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

The official registration and financial information of Partners in Progress may be obtained from the Pennsylvania Department of State by calling, toll-free within Pennsylvania, 1-800-732-0999. Registration does not imply endorsement.

“Food Security Initiative” Aims at Reducing Chronic Food Insecurity in Rural Fondwa

The **Food Security Initiative** is a bold initiative launched by the **Sisters of St. Antoine** and supported by **Rich in Mercy** to develop agricultural production on land close to their Motherhouse. The initiative will lay a foundation for long-term “food sovereignty” for their community, the 60+ children at their **Fatima House Orphanage**, the more than 300 preschool children enrolled in their Gotiron and Kafelompres preschools, and scores of vulnerable families originating in or having recently relocated to the area.



The initiative includes wells for irrigation and drinking water and equipment to process grain. It will also provide jobs for underemployed and landless farm workers and offer internships to agronomy students from the **University of Fondwa**, a rural university launched in 2004 with support from **Rich in Mercy**.

Although the farm is producing plantains, mangos, corn, beans, and even rice it is estimated that it will take 3-4 years before the land is sufficiently developed to be fully productive.

“Odds-Defying” Haitian Youth Keep Hope Alive Through Education and Business



Mideline Exilien grew up far from the gang violence of Haiti’s capital in the town of Les Cayes, located along Haiti’s southern peninsula. She is the oldest of three siblings and grew up motivated to care for her younger brothers and other family members. With scholarship support from **Rich in Mercy**, Mideline attended the **University Fondation Aristide** and realized her dream of becoming a nurse. She graduated with honors and was invited by the faculty to deliver the December 2024 student commencement address.

After graduating two years ago from the rural **University of Fondwa** (UNIF) with a degree in business management, **Jeff Josephs** started his own business selling sodas and snacks to school children and university students and providing solar electric to charge cell phones. Despite the great challenge of operating a business in Haiti, he has managed to support himself and to help support his extended family. Most recently he has been able to expand his business to include photo-copying, printing and other office services for both students and school teachers. In the evenings his business provides entertainment for the wider Tom Gato community via internet streaming of movies. \



Leadership Program Challenges Youth to Develop Skills, Confidence, and Courage



Most schools in rural Haiti struggle to provide basic education to growing numbers of children including refugee children whose families have fled the continuing gang violence in Haiti’s capital. Teachers are sometimes underprepared and often underpaid. Chronic food shortages impact children’s ability to learn and undermine the process of education that, ideally, should provide the foundation for positive and systemic change in countries like Haiti.

With support from **Rich in Mercy**, Spiritan priest and educator **Fr. Patrick Eugene** (shown left) has designed an innovative leadership enrichment program for students in his home town of Ducis located in the Western end of Haiti’s southern peninsula.

The extracurricular program provides a light breakfast and full mid-day meal and is designed to encourage potential leaders by challenging students to develop skills in critical thinking and oral and written communication, particularly in French and also English. Emphasis on these skills builds confidence and helps prepare highly motivated youth whose talent and commitment offer hope for Haiti’s future.

