

Economic Development in Dos-Palais

St. Michael's is responding to the food crisis in our twin parish with an emergency Food Subsidy Program. Thanks to your support the poorest of the poor in Dos-Palais will now be able to purchase rice, beans and oil at the prices they were paying before the dramatic price increases of this past year.

Feeding people is a good thing, but helping them to be self-sufficient is better. Any permanent solution to the problem of food insecurity must overcome two basic challenges: improving agricultural productivity and increasing family incomes. To address the former, the Diocese of Richmond and the Diocese of Hinche are working together on a development farm project. It will develop improved methods which are appropriate for farmers who lack the financial resources to purchase fertilizer, who till increasingly worn out soil and who are using traditional methods unchanged for generations. Results are years in the future, but they will be permanently improve the food security of Haitian farmers.

More immediate results can be achieved by helping Haitians improve their family incomes. Haiti is full of entrepreneurial people hustling to make a living in any way they can. For example, when St. Michael's helped bring water to Dos-Palais, Delice Chausan saw an opportunity, dug a pond and started a fish farming business. Many women help their families as *ti marchan*, "little market" women who sell produce, cooked food and used clothing in local markets. And Fr. Elizier has the idea of using the school, vacant in the afternoons after the children leave, to hold training classes in sewing and cooking.

Individuals who would like to start or expand a small business are often stymied by a lack of funds. A loan of as little as US\$50 could release this entrepreneurial spirit and help people become more self-sufficient.

The key to success in micro-finance is forming and training small groups of borrowers who know each other and agree to be co-responsible for each other's loan payments. We are investigating three micro-finance organizations now operating in Haiti. FONKOZE, the largest and most sophisticated, has over 50 branches and a range of training programs. Caritas Hinche, the Catholic Social Services arm of the diocese, has started a similar program. It was recognized by Caritas Haiti as a model for other dioceses. Fr. Guy has also started a somewhat similar micro-loan program in his parish in Los Palis. We will keep you informed as research progresses.

Does all this seem somehow complicated and slow? Well it is. But Haiti is teaching us that this complex experience we call "life" is not really about solving problems. It is simply about being willing to join with others and engage in the struggle together.