

Emergency CRS Food for PAP Displaced Families in Gros Morne

At least 20,000 persons displaced by the January 12 earthquake in PAP have returned to their families in the Commune of Gros Morne, 16 miles north of Gonaives. Before the quake the town had a population of about 25,000 and the surrounding eight communal sections had 100,000 in numerous mountain communities. Catholic Relief Services (CRS) responded to the request of Fr. Wilner Donécia, SMM, pastor of the Catholic parish of Gros Morne for emergency food by sending **a hundred metric tons** of wheat, corn-soy flour, lentils and cooking oil. The three Catholic parishes are working with the town coordinating committee made up of the mayors, Episcopal and Protestant churches, representatives for health and education, the Vice-Delegate, CARE, etc.

At the time of the request for emergency food, the committee thought there were 15,000 displaced but by the time the food arrived on Jan. 30 and 31, the number had risen to 20,000. The original direct distribution plan to the churches had to be scrapped because the 20-ton trucks available to CRS were too big for Gros Morne's poor secondary roads. Even the national highway was too much for one 20-ton truck that broke down a half hour from Gros Morne. Mayor Daméus, Tiden, Barak, Ti Chou and their team transferred 20 tons of food into Ti Chou's truck. The Mayor and several pastors enlisted the help of Erick Tide, the owner of a secure warehouse, so that the food could be stored until it was all there and a new distribution plan in place.

Starting on February 3, the day after the parish/town feast of Notre Dame de la Chandeleur, seventy-seven churches picked up food, proportional to the number of displaced persons in their congregations, and distributed it through church groups. The Catholic Church has eleven parish organizations in town which used Jean XXIII High School as their distribution point. The fifteen Catholic chapels dependent on the town parish sent pickup trucks for their portions. The Parish of Decostiere in the seventh communal section had Ti Chou's truck bring the food for the main church and four chapels. Those who do not belong to any church or whose church is not represented and those who are followers of Voodoo are under the responsibility of Mayors Daméus and Beauger who will begin distribution by neighborhood on Monday, Feb. 7.

Two large Protestant churches which have several outlying churches and the Catholic parish of Riviere Mancelle and its four dependent chapels declined to take the amount of food offered because they felt the amount available was too small to meet the needs of the number of displaced persons in their congregations. Fr. Wilner has asked CRS to send an emergency portion for an additional 5,000 displaced persons.

On behalf of the families who have received food and their churches, Fr. Wilner and Marcel Garcon, logistics committee coordinator, send gratitude to CRS and the Catholic community in the United States for making food available. This relieved some of the hunger increased by the PAP quake victims' return to their families in Gros Morne. The parishes hope to continue discussion with CRS on projects to make agriculture more sustainable in the near future so that people are more able to feed themselves.

Report by Patricia Dillon, rjm February 7, 2010