

## **SCHOOL LUNCH PROGRAM AT ST. JOSEPH PARISH**

Medor's school lunch program began in 2004, shortly after Tropical Storm Jeanne hit the community, decimating the crops. Père Leroy, pastor at St. Joseph at the time, visited OLQP. He told the parish that the storm caused many of the school children, already poorly nourished, to go for days without a meal. He asked if OLQP would consider supporting a lunch program for the children in Medor's primary and secondary schools.

The generosity of OLQP poured forth. An outdoor kitchen was constructed near the primary and the secondary schools. Cooks were hired. Food was purchased and the school lunch program began.

Each child brings his/her own dish and spoon. The children deliver the food from the kitchen to each classroom, assist in serving it to their classmates, clean the serving bowls, and transport firewood in preparation of the next day's meal.



Kitchen at Medor's primary school

The meals consist of beans or millet and rice. The serving sizes are plentiful. Père Leroy and his successors, Père Luckson, and now Père Frantz, have told OLQP that the school lunch program is an incentive to keep the children coming to school. Some students walk up to four hours to get to school. The meal enables them to make the trek back and forth each day. The teachers report that the meal helps the children concentrate on their schoolwork. Photos of schoolchildren before and after the lunch program began exemplify the health benefits the school lunches provide.



Students deliver the meal to their classroom.

In January 2014 the Pastor of St. Joseph and the OLQP Haiti Committee leadership met with the Haitian Director of the United Nations World Food Program's (WFP) school lunch program in Port au Prince. Medor's primary school and the three outlying parish chapel schools were enrolled in this program after the meeting. The WFP does not provide school lunches to secondary schools, so OLQP continues providing the funds for the Medor's secondary school's lunch program.

In the fall of 2014, the Haitian government instructed the WFP to provide food only to public schools. WFP food deliveries for lunches were halted at all private and religious schools, including the four primary schools in St. Joseph parish. After many phone calls, e-mails, and prayers, the Government granted a waiver for three of the four primary schools in St. Joseph parish, due to the extreme poverty in the community. Père Luckson, the pastor at the time, was instructed to choose which of the four schools would be excluded. He chose the Our Lady of Fatima chapel school in La Source because it had the fewest students. Hence, fewer students would go hungry.

Again, OLQP rose to the occasion. Seeing it as a matter of justice, OLQP began supporting the lunch program in La Source as well as Medor's secondary school. As the pastor and head of the WFP also believed, if one of the parish schools has a lunch program, they all should.

In 2017, WFP re-enrolled the La Source primary school in its lunch program. Now, OLQP only needs to cover the expenses of the lunch program for the Medor secondary school.

The cost of the lunch program comes to \$4.00 US/student/month. That's a real bargain! However, the total cost of the program for the 3,000 students in the parish for the 10-month school year is \$120,000 US! All are extremely grateful to the WFP for providing the meals for four of the parish's primary schools, or approximately 80% of the students educated by the parish. The WFP's support for meals at St. Joseph schools is a step toward long-term program sustainability.



The school lunch program enhances the health of the children.