



# grace!

SPRING 2006

AT WORK IN HAITI &amp; THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

**And to think you were midwife at my birth, setting me at my mother's breasts! When I left the womb you cradled me; since the moment of birth you've been my God.**

**Psalm 22:9-10**  
*(The Message)*

## Infant Mortality :



**Haiti = 73.45 deaths per 1,000 live births**



**Dominican Republic = 32.38 deaths per 1,000 live births**



**US = 6.5 deaths per 1,000 live births**



**Canada = 4.75 deaths per 1,000 live births**



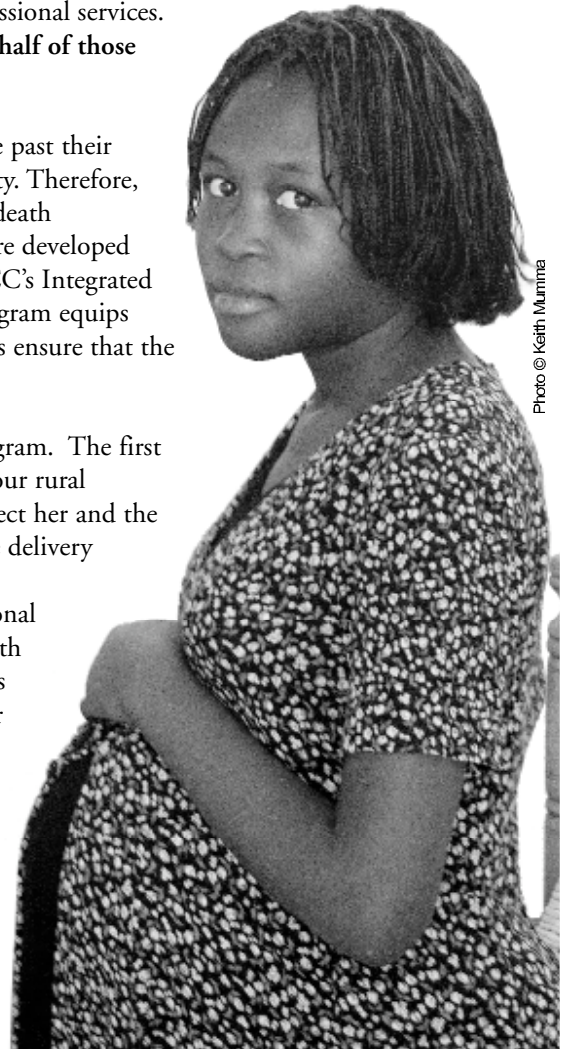
**= 10 babies**

A healthy entry into this life is the birthright of every child. Yet in Haiti, a healthy birth is not something taken for granted. Haiti has one of the highest infant and maternal mortality rates in the world.

In developing countries like Haiti, infant and maternal mortality is most frequently caused by infectious disease, pregnancy-related complications and delivery-related complications. Lack of proper immunization during pregnancy increases deaths from tetanus, as does unsanitary delivery and umbilical cord care. An indirect cause of infant and maternal mortality is inadequate access to quality medical care. Most Haitian women lack the finances for an institutional delivery and do not have access to professional services. **Over 80% of all births in Haiti occur at home and half of those without any outside assistance.**

In a country where one in eight children will not live past their fifth birthday, a healthy birth is a precious commodity. Therefore, in an effort to reduce the unnecessary suffering and death associated with childbearing, International Child Care developed the Healthy Birth Program. An innovative part of ICC's Integrated Community Health initiative, the Healthy Birth Program equips expectant mothers to deliver healthy babies and helps ensure that the babies grow up in a healthy family and community.

There are two components of the Healthy Birth Program. The first component is to provide every expectant mother in our rural program area with a Healthy Birth Kit that will protect her and the newborn against common causes of death during the delivery process. Low social status and level of education, complicated by beliefs in taboos and harmful traditional practices, lead to dangerous deliveries in Haiti for both mothers and infants. For lack of a better option, it is not unusual for a Haitian woman to use a dirty razor blade, rusty tin can lid or even a sharp rock to cut the umbilical cord. A scrap of soiled, worn string might serve to tie the ends of the umbilical cord or a contaminated compress might be placed on the cut end of the cord. Many women wouldn't even have the basic health knowledge to wash with soap prior to their delivery. Some Haitian women, due to cultural superstitions, fear they will catch a cold if they bathe while pregnant. ►



Although our hope is that every mother will deliver her baby with trained support and professional care, the reality is that many will struggle with their delivery isolated and alone. With a birth kit, each mother has the rudimentary tools to complete a healthy birth. **Healthy Birth Kits contain five items to encourage hygienic practices surrounding the delivery and care of a newborn: a clean razor blade to cut the umbilical cord, gauze pads, umbilical tape, soap and a nail brush.** These few simple items can mean the difference between life and death for new mothers and their babies.

Just as critical as the kits, the second component of the Healthy Birth Program is the “health family” of neighbors, relatives and professionals that ICC builds around the new mother and baby. This health family helps ensure that the baby will grow

up healthy by encouraging pre- and post-natal visits to monitor the mother and baby for diseases, malnutrition and diarrhea. It also provides nutrition classes to learn about the importance of a well-balanced diet during pregnancy and to be educated on the importance of breast feeding, and makes sure the baby gets vaccinations, birth monitoring and accurate and complete birth records.

Each health family, along with a birth kit, represents one child who will enjoy a better chance of becoming a “ti chapé,” or little escapee... one who has lived past his or her fifth birthday. Haiti’s staggering infant and maternal mortality rates can be alleviated by intervention during an expectant mother’s pregnancy, labor and delivery and in the first months of an infant’s life. ●

## Mothers’ Club: Breast Feeding Basics

Each month, in the shantytowns surrounding Grace Children’s Hospital, Mothers’ Club meetings are held as a part of ICC’s Urban Community Health program. These well-attended gatherings are organized and led by ICC staff members and used to educate new moms on various topics including nutrition, family planning and HIV/AIDS.

On this particular day, the Mothers’ Club meeting is being held in a community building, used as both a school and church, in Citè Hatt. Today’s lesson is on the value of breast feeding.

Jolène Sainvil, an ICC employee since 2003, begins the class by stressing the importance of a well-balanced diet. She encourages good dietary habits while nursing as the baby will get his or her nutrition from the mother. Ms. Sainvil shares that it is best for the baby to be breast fed exclusively during the first six months of life.

This teaching is important because in Haiti it is not uncommon for mothers to feed their babies traditional substances, in addition to breast milk, which can be harmful to the baby’s health.

For instance, it is a standard practice for Haitian women to feed their babies “lock.” Lock is a mixture of oil, garlic and nutmeg that new mothers believe will clean out the baby’s system after birth. Ms. Sainvil teaches the women that their bodies produce something called colostrum, or first milk, that does this naturally. Colostrum is high in carbohydrates, protein and antibodies, and has a mild laxative effect which clears excess waste from the infant’s body and helps prevent jaundice.

Nursing also helps protect infants from bacteria and infectious diseases including respiratory illnesses and diarrhea – the number one killer of children in Haiti. Ms. Sanvil shares that with breast feeding the risk of infection is greatly diminished since mothers don’t need to worry

about using contaminated water, sterilizing bottles or refrigeration. In addition, breast milk is free. Considering that a majority of Haitians live on less than \$1.00 per day, the cost of formula is often beyond their means.

Through Mothers’ Club meetings, International Child Care is reaching out to women in the slums of Port-au-Prince and improving the lives and health of their children. ●

**Jolène Sainvil (pictured right) with the help of Mrs. Mariollène Dorvil, are teaching new mothers about proper breast feeding technique.**



Photo © Keith Mumma



Photo © Keith Mumma

## In the Midwife's Capable Hands: **Traditional Birth Attendants**

Traditional Birth Attendants, or midwives, are the principal sources of care for pregnant women in Haiti. International Child Care trains Traditional Birth Attendants in the techniques of delivery, importance of hygiene during pregnancy and delivery, signs of complications, and the dangers of certain traditional practices. Once formally trained, a Traditional Birth Attendant receives a certificate and delivery kit and is required to attend refresher courses every six months. Since the inception of International Child Care's Traditional Birth Attendant program in 1998, over 400 Traditional Birth Attendants have been trained and equipped.

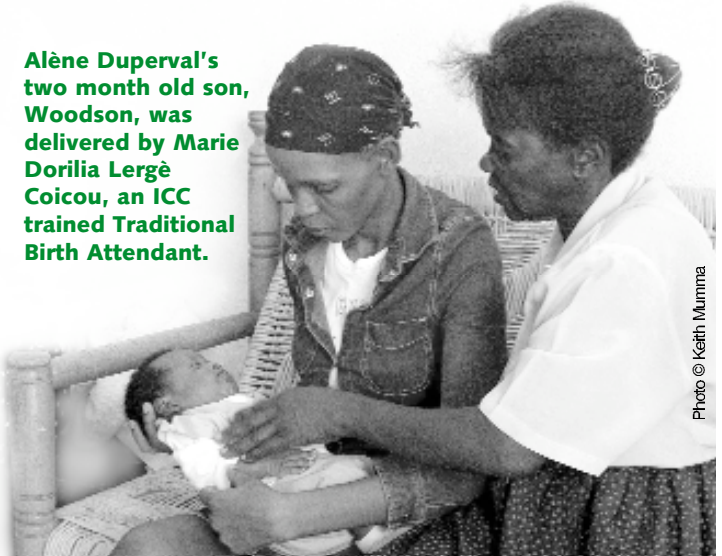
**Small Price for a New Life**  
Traditional Birth Attendants charge 250 gourdes (\$6.00 USD) to assist with a delivery, but if a family can't pay they will offer their services free of charge. Even then, a family often gives gifts of food or other items in gratitude to the Traditional Birth Attendant.

Recruitment for new Traditional Birth Attendants begins two months prior to the next scheduled class. Trained ICC Traditional Birth Attendants are sent out into their own communities to identify practicing midwives. These women and men, many who have years of hands-on experience, are then recruited for official training with International Child Care.

ICC encourages expecting mothers to deliver at a hospital, especially if it is their first pregnancy, to avoid any possible complications. If the mother refuses to go to

a hospital to deliver, or cannot afford institutional medical care, then an ICC Traditional Birth Attendant will assist with the delivery, reducing the risk of unnecessary pregnancy-related suffering and death. After delivery by a Traditional Birth Attendant, a doctor from Grace Children's Hospital examines every infant within 24 hours of birth. ICC Traditional Birth Attendants also provide in-home follow-up visits to mother and child. During these visits the Traditional Birth Attendants educate the new moms on topics such as nutrition, hygiene and the benefits of breast feeding. ●

**Alène Duperval's two month old son, Woodson, was delivered by Marie Dorilia Lergè Coicou, an ICC trained Traditional Birth Attendant.**



## **Birth-related Disabilities in the Dominican Republic**

When Anna Cristina Almonte-Sosa was pregnant with her first child, she was expecting to deliver her baby at the local hospital in Santiago, Dominican Republic. What she did not expect was that little Maria Cristina would come more than two months early. Although she was able to deliver at the hospital, the doctors used forceps to aid with the difficult birth rather than performing a caesarian section. Because of this, Maria Cristina has cerebral palsy, a term used to describe a group of chronic conditions affecting body movement and muscle coordination. Cerebral palsy can be caused by damage to the brain during a premature or difficult birth, like Maria Cristina's, but in other cases, the cause of the condition is a brain injury that happens before or shortly after birth. The chief effect of cerebral palsy is an inability to fully control motor function, particularly muscle control and coordination. Fortunately for Maria Cristina, her mother Anna heard about ICC's Community Based

Rehabilitation program from a friend and began learning exercises she and Maria Cristina's father, Carlo, can do to help her control her movements and gain more skills. Now five years old, Maria Cristina is learning to sit up and can use her feet to bring things close to her so she can grasp them with her hands. She has even figured out how to change the channel on the TV with her toes! Maria Cristina will continue to face challenges, but with the help of the Community Based Rehabilitation program and her loving parents, she will be able to develop her skills to her highest potential. ●



**ICC Rehabilitation Promoter Barbara Taveras shows Anna Cristina Almonte-Sosa some rehabilitation exercises to do with her 5-year-old daughter, Maria Cristina, who has cerebral palsy.**

Facts about cerebral palsy courtesy of [www.ucp.org](http://www.ucp.org)

## Newslines –

### Haitians Elect New President, Parliament

February 7th was a landmark day in Haiti as a multitude of people turned out to vote in presidential and parliamentary elections. Some citizens walked for hours to reach their polling station and then waited all day for their turn to vote. It was more than a week before all the votes could be counted and the results finalized because of questions about the legitimacy of some ballots and how blank ballots would be counted. During that time, supporters of the frontrunner, Rene Preval, took to the streets in protest, lashing out against what they saw as fraud in the electoral process. Demonstrators were even more incensed when what appeared to be charred ballots, most marked for Preval, were discovered in a dump outside Port-au-Prince. But in the end, their protests turned to celebrations as Preval, who was president of Haiti from 1996-2000 and who was a protégé of the controversial Jean-Bertrand Aristide, was confirmed as the victor with 51% of the vote. A second round of parliamentary elections is scheduled for April, which will delay the inauguration of President Preval, but when the new government is in place, the international community is hopeful that Haiti will be able to move toward political and economic stability.

Even before his inauguration, Preval made his first state visit to the neighboring Dominican Republic, where preparations are well underway for congressional and local elections on May 16. His friendly welcome by Dominican President Leonel Fernandez is a positive step toward improving the troubled relationship between the two countries. ●



### How Has Haiti or the DR Changed Your Life?

We want to hear about your experiences traveling to the Dominican Republic and Haiti. ICC is collecting personal stories, journal entries, poetry, artwork, photography—anything that represents how encountering the wonderful people on the island of Hispaniola has had an impact on your life. We hope that by including your reflections in ICC publications and educational materials, we will better be able to tell the story of ICC's mission and ministry in Haiti and the DR.

If you have memories you would like to share with us (or questions about this project), please email or mail them to your ICC national office:

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Thank you for taking the time to share the experiences in the DR and Haiti that made a difference in your life. Watch for these stories to appear in this space as well as in other ICC publications.

Electronic submissions are preferred. By sending us your stories, photos, and artwork, you are giving us permission to edit them if necessary and use them in future organizational publications. Please make a note if you prefer we do not credit you by name; otherwise, photos and stories will be attributed to the person who submits them.



*Grace!* is published quarterly for friends of International Child Care. ICC is a Christian health agency working in Haiti and the Dominican Republic to change conditions which make people sick, hungry, unemployed and afraid.

ICC depends on individuals, churches, and donor agencies for the financial means to serve. A response card and envelope are enclosed for your contributions. Your gift will be received for income tax purposes.

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