

Always Alternatives: Since January 2010, our transition from living on South La Gonave to being an intermittent presence has changed our mission focus. Volunteer missions on the "island in the bay" has paralleled the pattern of changing world missions. The transition has been confusing and frustrating for our associates here and on the island. Seeking "alternatives" seemed logical but as with any transition, required readjusting priorities.

As GBGM Volunteers living in Soursafilip, we were dependent on the financial support of individuals, congregations and various UM Conferences UMW and UMC groups and agencies. Amazing generosity provided us opportunity to address issues of poverty, health, education, need for water and food and to support community church projects in a timely manner. We soon realized we were duplicating some projects and often "reinventing" established programs.

Early in 2007, GBGM provided funds to revive the water project begun in the late 1900's. Late in 2008, following four hurricanes, again GBGM offered to supplement a small UMCOR Emergency Food Grant to feed the most vulnerable on South La Gonave.

Eventually, we asked that donations to our personal Advance Special be "designated" for specific projects. At that time we began to work with other agencies to provide teacher education and intense industrial training for trusted community leaders.

Our relationship with the Haitian Methodist Church was never properly developed due to frequent changes in EMH leadership and oversights in the appointment process. Local church and community relationships flourished with outreach to women and young adults seeking education.

Following the earthquake in 2010, we committed to a continued relationship with the island as our Kansas East Conference committed to a covenant agreement with the EMH. With the changing structures of missions in the world and Haiti, the new relationships have been hard to define.

Internationally, the way of being in mission has changed. GBGM / UMCOR is leading in developing partnerships with specialized Christian ecumenical organizations and para-church agencies. UMCOR/GBGM leadership was meeting with such a group at the time of the earthquake.

Partnerships and companion relationships have become effective in international missions. Coalitions and loose associations with other Christian organizations and specialized NGO's increase effectiveness to meet special needs. These relationships are critical to our La Gonave mission.

Partnering with AAPLAG, a long standing micro finance / industrial training organization that is Christian based and associated with Church World Service expanded the potential for increased industry and group activity. Haiti Outreach, Concern WW and World Vision have been good partners to address water and housing issues, and association with the island political platform, PLATIG is a way to share and participate in activities that cannot stand alone with volunteers.

I look forward to teaching at this years session of School of Christian Missions with focus on Haiti. The changing structure of international missions will be addressed for participants and allow for greater understanding of alternative ways to address the issues of poverty in our world.

Pastor Shirley Edgerton, GBGM Long Term Volunteer: Focused on La Gonave, Haiti. May 13, 2011