

Clergy Report for 2008: A little more than a year ago I "came out" of retirement and became a Long Term Volunteer to the island of La Gonave, Haiti. Thanks to Kansas East Conference my license as a Local Pastor was reinstated, or whatever, since it was assumed I would be performing some clergy functions in Haiti.

Structure of the E'glise Methodiste D'Haiti and the United Methodist Church appeared very similar and President Raphael, who heads the Haitian Methodist Church said they have few local pastors. The only seminary is in Jamaica so few can afford to attend. There are not many ordained pastors in Haiti and local churches are served by lay speakers who receive no salary and are not allowed to serve sacraments of communion or baptisms. Marriages can only be performed by persons who go to the palace and receive government approval.

I preached a number of times after we arrived and sermons were grandly received with many amen's and alleluias! Of course I was never sure if the translator was preaching or me! We generally combined the guest speaker appearance with a mobile clinic so services packed the house.

The evangelist who "runs" pastors on the island wanted me to preach as guest speaker every Sunday somewhere and I had to decline. Some pastors walk many miles to preach at 7:30 or 8 am and our pickup doesn't like going where there are no roads. I have yet to master the art of burro riding.

I was considering serving communion about the time Pastor Ralph visited Sousafilip and he did just that. The process was very foreign..duh..as only a few "qualified" and were served and he made a special dispensation for Joe and me. The table is open to only members in good standing and that has many limitations. I did serve communion one Sunday when we had a visiting team and help from the lay leader of the church. The congregation was shocked at the intinction method used with the team and the translator who joined us was teary eyed.

I find very little time to study or pray but there is intimacy in sharing life in a different culture. I must actually LIVE the justice, ethic, and compassion I have always preached. This is not a gentle or compassionate place and the ethic, even in the church, is "I get mine first" and "if you don't catch me in a lie its ok."

Frequently, youth and community leaders comment about our faithfulness and honesty in dealing with community, and about our patience in treating the ill or very poor. Faith sharing is a major part of hosting teams. Often members are seeking spiritual experience or searching for answers they could not find at home. God seems always at work transforming a life, either of a team member, local people, or us.

As we returned with a team to Port a Prince, Wednesday, in a large, handmade sailing vessel, we watched the moon set and the sun rise. I could only think of Jesus and the disciples on the sea. I felt the Holy Spirit "hovering" as the dolphins escorted us to a safe port in a far away land.

Pastor Shirley Edgerton, La Gonave, Haiti, November 15, 2008. Report for Lawrence Central UMC