

Hidden Issues? In the gospel text from Matthew today Jesus was asked questions about taxes. A favorite preaching sight pointed out the insight Jesus had concerning questions being asked of him then asked, *"so what kinds of questions are you receiving these days, and how do you respond?"*

Since the storms; since schools opened with limited enrollment; since we are planning UMCOR food distribution to many non-church members in communities other than Sousafilip; since water projects include some non Methodist communities; since we distributed school supplies not only to the Methodist schools; since we participate with a variety of resources, even Catholic; we have been asked many questions. I wish I were as resourceful and insightful as Jesus.

At town meeting last week when asked what we were going to do provide lights for Sousafilip, "I wish I had said", we would match whatever they intended to do. Today, I was asked if we would fire our "water guy" who is letting his children attend Pastor Abner's new school. Later, we received a written question wanting to know what we would do if the Methodist Church makes us leave.

Jesus understood that questions he was being asked were related more to hidden issues. Often the questions were bait or traps intended to provoke answers outside "the law." In reality, the questions really cloaked criticism and frequently were statements, with a question mark at the end.

Several decades ago, the island was divided between two church groups for development and management of communities and programs. The north half has greater population with more industry and activity from NGO's and a variety of church denominations. .

South La Gonave was to be developed by the Haitian Methodist church. For a few years an active micro-finance program provided industry for the south but eventually groups were left to direct themselves. The Methodist compound at Sousafilip was used for annual church meetings and an occasional VIM team. Other NGO's say they are discouraged from providing programs for South La Gonave as it "belongs to the Methodists." No meals are fed in schools although funds are provided by UMCOR for food, and teachers are unpaid for long periods by signed contract.

Barriers and challenges come from the church we came to help. Church resources are available for high fees. Thousands are hungry, the church clinic has no resources or salaried staff, safe water is not addressed, and storm damaged schools and churches receive no attention. There are no programs to help the poor develop and manage their lives, farms, families and communities. Most walk miles for water, live in small huts with tin roofs, have only one set of clothing and eat perhaps 3 meals a week. Agriculture and industrial loans and financial programs are discouraged.

The meaning behind the questions seems fairly obvious. Our activities are not what "the church" expected. We live in Sousafilip but assist people in other communities and use resources outside the church which has none. We insist on written plans, receipts and accountability and we try hard to be truthful and tactful. It isn't the questions that concern me, it's the answers that seem crucial.

Shirley, La Gonave, October 19, 2008. Late and thinking of a large Starbucks latte.