

"You give them something to eat" Jesus told the disciples in Luke 9:13.

Seems like years since we were stranded by siklon, Ike, in a Port a Prince hotel, sharing storm grief with friends on La Gonave by cell phone. Unable to stop the waves, wind and water that pounded the island for four weeks, I called Haiti-UMCOR, to whine. As a result of that call, tonight we are exhausted, blessed beyond belief, and nearly 5000 people in ten communities have food to eat and there is music in the darkness.

Believe me when I say, "nothing is easy in Haiti" and everything nearly impossible on La Gonave. It took from September 8th to October 25th to get "emergency food" to people in coastal communities on South La Gonave. Villages have no service or unreliable phone systems; no power to charge the phones they have; docks destroyed in the storms; are accessible only from water, or by burro; and, we had food enough for one third of the hungry people.

Four hurricanes battered the island for weeks, especially Hanna, who enjoyed blowing holes in bamboo or block huts and cisterns; rolling up tin roofs; drowning animals and gardens; bashing fish against the rocks; washing away docks; and, making bad roads impassable with tons of rock. No boats made it to mainland markets for 4 weeks and local markets had no food to sell if anyone had money to purchase. Local produce was flooded. 20,000 people were hungrier than normal.

The Missions Director for Haiti-UMCOR informed us, La Gonave had been included in an emergency food relief request, shortly after we arrived in Kansas in September. We did a few presentations and "radically generous" congregations began the "loaves and fishes" process. Quickly, we returned to Haiti with additional funds to prepare for distribution of food.

Critical situations on mainland Haiti and all over the world reduced the funds from UMCOR to \$3000.00 to include transportation. GBGM notified us our water proposal had been approved, with an additional \$4666.00 we could use for food if we wanted. We wanted. Haiti UMCOR agreed to include \$6000 from us in food purchase and we would pay transportation, storage and other expenses. "Because you are helping our people" was a common statement from boat and storage owners who reduced costs and added extras.

Last week, little boys and hulking men carried tons of food, and 18 helpers aided by community leaders worked in a large, hot warehouse, putting food into 15 lb shares including 2 gallons of rice, 1 gallon of beans and 1 pt of oil. Shares packaged totaled 840 to fill requests from 8 community leaders (to feed the VERY needy). Leaders agreed to add two small remote villages plus 15 additional shares to each of 10 communities for those who had been overlooked. I was no closer to understanding the parable of loaves and fishes as food seemed to multiply before my eyes.

I wish I could say all was smooth and uncomplicated as hundreds of burros and several boats arrived to deliver food. I will say, their attitude of gratitude made me cry; only one punch was thrown, not at or by me; greed was only an undercurrent; and "need" prevailed.

Jesus said, "You feed 'em" and you did.

Shirley and Joe, La Gonave, October 27, 2008.