

Mutual Mission to Jamaica

I hope to share my experience in Jamaica with everyone in person sometime soon, but until then I will write about it here in the Belltower. In God's service, Bette Nagele

Day One: A Wild Ride

When I completed an application for volunteering on a presbytery committee I had no idea how soon I would be asked to serve, nor in what capacity. Richard Kirk from First Presbyterian Church in Ocala called one day in October to ask me to join the St. Augustine Mutual Mission committee (SAMM) in January 2014 and I accepted. Imagine my surprise when only about a week later he called back to ask if I would like to join an adult exchange group planning a visit to Jamaica in November. After only a very few seconds of contemplation I said yes.

VERY early on Thursday morning, November 14, I found myself on a plane headed for Kingston, Jamaica knowing only that I would serve in whatever capacity I was asked. We were greeted at the airport by Shirvette Smith, Director of our partner in mission the Jamaican Ecumenical Mutual Mission (JEMM). My first car ride through the streets of Kingston made me think of the reality show, *Amazing Race*, where contestants race along the streets of world cities like a roller coaster ride. We zigged and zagged, making quick stops and starts to avoid the other frenzied drivers. As our driver tried unsuccessfully to avoid the many potholes in the streets I thought of my preconception of Jamaican life as slow and laidback. I thought, where are those people?

We arrived at our base of operations, the Shirley House Retreat, a beautiful bed and breakfast, met with our hosts from JEMM and ate the first of many fabulous meals. Later, we attended a lecture by the Minister of Education, Ronald Thwaite, on the future of education in Jamaica. The title of the lecture was "Balm in Gilead: The Church's Role in the Future of Jamaican Education." My thoughts on the lecture will have to wait until we have much more space or time.

Finally, fourteen hours after leaving Gainesville, we were sent to our host families. I was warmly welcomed by Glen and Eulette Bailey, who gave me their own bedroom (the only one with a/c). After a nice cup of tea and some delicious pumpkin pudding, I crashed on the bed and fell quickly to sleep.

Next time... Day Two: Mel Nathan Preparatory School (Painting Day)

Matthew 25:40a *'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers and sisters you did it to me.'*