

*Florida Bahamas Synod  
Journey to Jamaica Report*

At the 3<sup>rd</sup> Caribbean Consultation, Rev. Dr. Oral Thomas, Acting President of the United Theological College of the West Indies (UTCWI) issued an invitation to the FB Synod to do an “immersion” journey to Jamaica. Plans immediately began to develop for a group to travel to Jamaica in January 2019, stay at the seminary, and be “immersed” in the culture. Morning lectures and presentations by seminary and neighboring University of the West Indies professors on church history, the history of Jamaica and the culture of resistance, Rastafari, and the impact of Jamaican music and dance helped the group to understand and appreciate how and why the Jamaican people have developed the religions practiced there today. We also heard from Rev. Dr. Eliseo Perez-Alvarez, ELCA missionary to the seminary, about his work; as well as from Rev. Jaime Dubon, ELCA Global Mission Area Program Director for Latin-America and the Caribbean, who shared important information about how the ELCA is active around the world, and especially as it relates to our Companion Synod-church program.

We attended worship at Providence Methodist church and afterwards were hosted by church members in their homes for fellowship and sharing stories. Visits to the National Art Gallery of Jamaica, Devon House, Bob Marley museum, Marcus Garvey museum, National Heroes Park, and the University of the West Indies Centre for Reparation Studies museum added to the experience and reinforced new learnings. The trip was capped by an enjoyable day at Dunn’s River Falls Park soaking in the beautiful Caribbean sun and ocean – and getting soaked while we hiked up the falls!

Group members committed to forming a new Jamaica sub-committee, part of the FB Synod Global Mission Committee, to continue learning and deepening our companion relationship with the seminary. Several hope to return again to the seminary in the future as they develop projects and decide how to best utilize and share resources to further the mission of the seminary.



Chapel at the United Theological College of the West Indies. Founded in 1966, the college serves 6 denominations throughout the Caribbean, including Lutheran, in preparing students for ministry. They also offer advanced degrees in philosophy and religion.

There are currently about 140 students enrolled in various degree programs.

**Being “immersed” meant staying in student housing, and eating in the student canteen. Some of us stayed in married student housing – with bathrooms and small kitchenettes. Others stayed in “cottages” – with 4 bedrooms and one shared bath. All of us had to get used to cold showers – when we had water!**

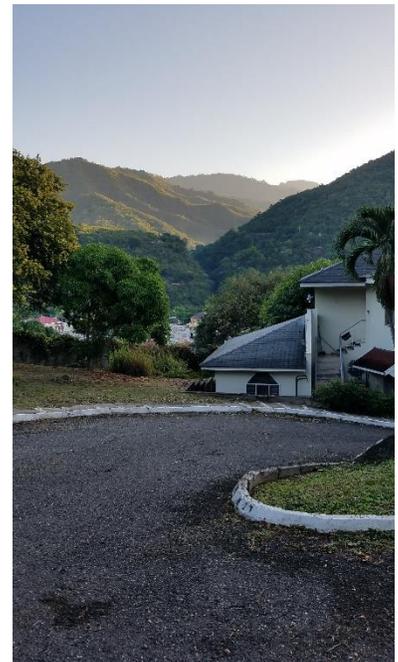
**Our meals featured fresh vegetables and fruit – especially papaya, Jamaican apples, bananas and plantains. We also ate goat (some of us for the first time!), cow’s feet and leg, beef liver, chicken and snapper. A special treat was the national dish of Jamaica – Ackee and saltfish (pictured below).**



**Ackee is a fruit, that when prepared looks (and kind of tastes) like scrambled eggs. It is served with greens, onions, tomatoes and salted codfish mixed in. Jamaicans import the salted codfish from Canada – which imports Jamaican Rum in return!**

**Another treat we all enjoyed was Jamaican Christmas Cake.**

**From L to R – morning view of student cottages, open air gathering spot, view of mountains behind married student housing.**



To better help us understand the history of religion and the Jamaican culture, we heard from several UTCWI professors, as well as Dr. Sonjah Niaah of the University of the West Indies. Their presentations were enlightening and informative.



Rev. Dr. Oral Thomas speaking on "Resistance Hermeneutics".



Rev. Dr. Stephen Jennings - "Rastafari as Counter Biblical Engagement"



Dr. Sonjah Niaah sharing her book [DanceHall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto](#)



Our mornings began with devotions led by different members of the group. In the evening we made time for "debriefing" the day's events and speakers.

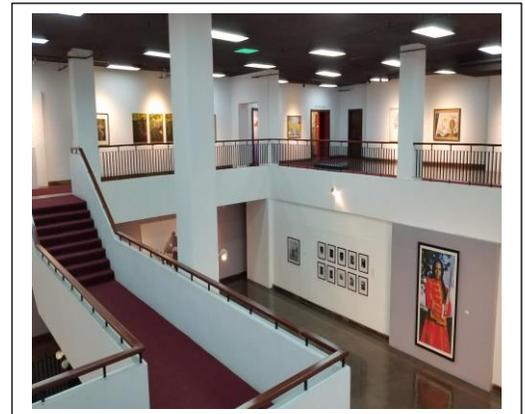
**Some of our cultural immersion events and venues:**

**National Art Gallery of Jamaica**

**Shopping at craft market and walking along the Kingston Harbor**

**Worship at Providence Methodist Church - with dinner and fellowship afterwards with church members in their homes**

**Tour of the University of the West Indies campus and visit to Centre for Reparation Research and museum**

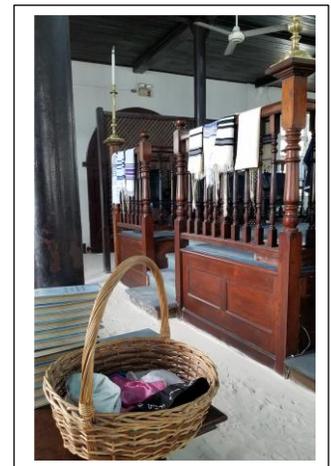
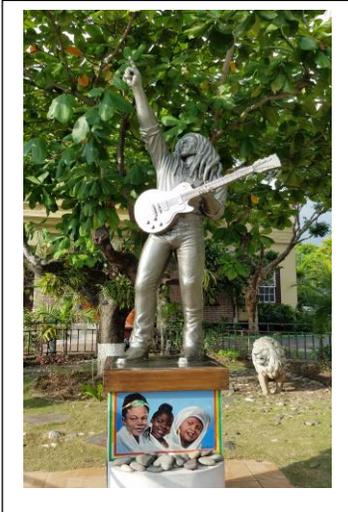


**Tour of Devon House and eating ice cream!**

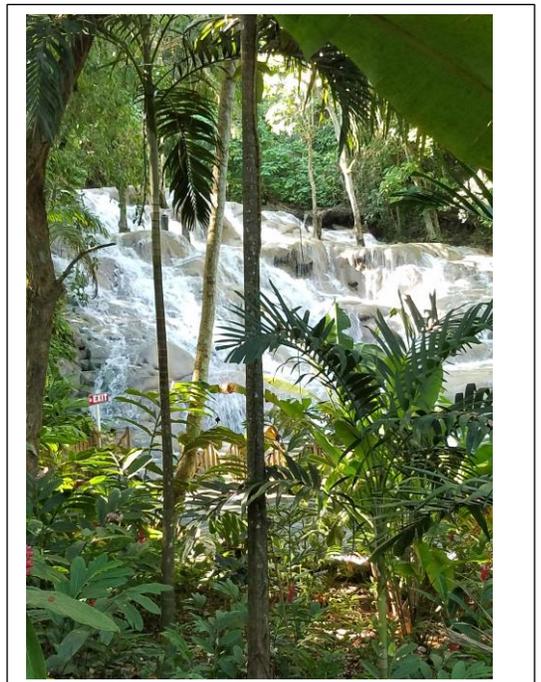
**Tour of Bob Marley Museum**

**Tour of Shaare Shalom Synagogue with their sand covered floor**

**Visit to Marcus Garvey Museum and National Heroes Park**



Those who opted to stay an extra day enjoyed one of Jamaica's natural treasures – Dunn's River Falls.



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