

## Port-au-Prince, December 15, 2007

Sunday, December 16, Fondwa, Haiti

I just arrived again in Fondwa, after spending Saturday and this morning in Port-au-Prince. I was picked up at the airport by Fr. Joseph's driver, Woody, who brought me to the large compound of the Spiritan brothers in Solino, one of the poor districts with a bad reputation. Fr. Patrick welcomed me and showed me to my room. Because the priests work with the people in the neighborhood they are left alone and were not getting bothered even during the past two years, which were very close to civil war. Now the situation has calmed and when I said that I wanted to walk through downtown Port-au-Prince I was driven to the cathedral by one of the priests. When he dropped me off he suggested that I take a taxi back to the compound before nightfall.

I did not feel threatened as the sole white guy walking around but when I met a "guide" who decided that I needed to hire him I took him up on his offer. We left Champ Mars, the main square, and walked a few hours together. Port-au-Prince is extremely distressing. I found that in most tropical cities the wealthy people head for the hills every evening, but here they seem to have abandoned downtown all together and don't come down at all anymore. Many businesses have simply closed their doors and the street vendors have taken over. Sanitation has collapsed, there is lots of trash and frequent whiffs of sewer smell. As the street vendors take up the sidewalks, one has to walk mostly on the street. That presents another challenge, as the cars, Tap Taps and trucks don't slow down just because there are pedestrians.

Upon my return to the Spiritan's compound, I met Efrain, a Cuban forestry specialist who is on loan by the Cuban government to help with the reforestation program in Fondwa. Efrain, Fr. Patrick and I sat and talked for a few hours while we almost finished a bottle of Havana Club rum I had bought in a super market. Then we decided to return downtown together and attend the free concert by Wyclef Jean and Acon on Champ Mars. It was a sea of people, but all peaceful and in a great mood. Several large screens had been set up in several locations around the square and we found one where we stayed and watched the concert. Fr. Patrick, who is Haitian, had to explain to several people who wondered about us, that we were not Minustah (United Nations forces in Haiti), but professors at a rural university and that we were staying in Solino. That changed the people's perception immediately. The presence of Minustah seems to be disliked by many. We left shortly before the concert ended and drove up the hill. Once we got back we climbed on the roof to watch the fire work, which we were told was to honor the dawning of Lavalas-day or the day of the followers of Aristide, the ousted leader of Haiti and of the Lavalas peasant organization.

Fondwa is a different world. The pace and the climate could not be more different. It is about 900 feet up in the mountains. While it was 90 degrees in Port-au-Prince, it's pleasant here in the daytime but the nights get downright cold. There is no readily available electricity and no running water.

I will teach tomorrow, Tuesday and Wednesday morning and fly back Wednesday late afternoon.