

Saturday, October 29, 2005

Its another 6:30 a.m. day for me. I find I am well past the worst of my cold. I sound bad with insistent cough, and nose blowing, but thankfully feel about 90% of full strength. My goal is to get caught up on my travel logs, and to begin taking my long hand versions and typing them into my laptop. Along the way the housekeeper offers me some tea, which I of course gratefully accept. One thing I have found is that I again have a fellow traveler who is a tea enthusiast. In 2002 it was June Hoffman, and this time it is my roommate, young Aaron. Whenever tea is offered, which is early and often in Eastern Cape South Africa, we do not hesitate saying yes please!

Today we have a very full day planned. We make a quick stop at the main station of the Erskine Congregation, right in the middle of the commercial district of Mthatha. I believe it is called the Ncambedle Congregation. This is the congregation that will now host the Computer Project, but it will not be at this very busy and insecure site. The church is building a new building that will host the Computer Project. Tandy says he will take us there on our way to our final destination, another Out Station of the Erskine Congregation named Corana.

The old location, in the middle of the commercial district will be developed by the church commercially and hopefully offer the church income for many years to come.. As we drive in both Victor (on the way there) and Tandy (on the way out) lament a property, that they both say they will never step foot in, that they say the St. Andrew Congregation sold rather than develop. By doing so they gave up the chance to develop it and bring year after year of income. The Erskine Congregation will not make the same mistake.



But this is all for down the road. We stop at the present location of the of the Ncambedle Congregation in downtown Mthatha to visit an interdenominational group that is very much like the Mason's back home. The group is called: Independent Order of True Tempers (IOTT). Their focus is drug abuse. They include Presbyterians, Methodists, Anglicans, Zionists and I'm sure more denominations. They work together in the effort against drug abuse. They all wear sashes of either blue or red. We have a chance to great each other briefly before we must depart.

On our way to our next destination, the regularly scheduled youth gathering at the Corana Congregation. As promised Victor and Tandy, our drivers, take us by the site of the new Ncambedle Congregation Church, which will also be the site of the Computer Project. It is even better than I envisioned. It is a very lovely neighborhood with a large plot of land and a wonderful distant view of downtown Mthatha. I put my camera's landscape mode to work. I can imagine the blue line drawing Victor showed us some days back standing here in about a year. It will be perfect and much more secure than in downtown Mthatha





Around noon we reach the Youth Gathering, only one hour behind our schedule not bad. This area, Tandy informs me is considered semi urban. It is beautiful, with a newly constructed church building, partially financed by the Meegs Bank where Victor used to work and his wife still does. Tandy says it can hold up to 1,000 people, which upon entering I see he probably is right. I note on the dedication plaque that our friend Graham Duncan dedicated the new building a few years back.

The meeting is already in progress and they are well along in the agenda. It turns out to be a long and wonderful day that I could write pages on. But, it's late at night as I write this and we have another early morning tomorrow, our last full day in Mthatha. So, I will try to summarize briefly.

The day includes listening to a great group of young people, who despite challenges our young people back home would never imagine, are able to rise above. As in 2002 I look around at the many faces and see a bunch of eager, well educated, and talented young faces and yet I imagine many of them cannot find employment. They work on many projects to help their churches and community in a myriad of ways, providing communion elements to one of their Presbytery's Congregations, and working with the community on HIV / Aids to name just two that are talked about today.



After the formal agenda, the meeting turns to formal introductions and greetings. Aaron and Sarah speak to the youth, and Denise gives a wondering, inspiring greeting / challenge filled with words of wisdom on HIV / Aids and other topics.





Somewhere along the way we you guessed it..... eat a banquet of food. Then we return to the pews for entertainment by the young boys and girls of the church. They are incredible, especially the girls. I get a lot of good footage on the camcorder. Somewhere in there is an exchange of gifts and near the finale we share a great period of fellowship including cake and other sweets. No one wants to leave, but alas we must.

By the time we leave it is half past 5 p.m. We stop on our way home to see Victor's two young sons. Victor is an incredible guy, leader of his congregation's youth, the Presbytery's youth and the UPCSA denomination's youth (includes Zambia and Zimbabwe. He is also the real force behind the computer literacy project. Anyway, it is great to see his home and two boys. He recently gave up his job at the Meegs Bank in East London for less appealing job with the government in Mthatha just so he could be closer to his family. He tells me he is the only member of seven in his family who has a college education and a good job. He is responsible for taking care of several of them. We enjoy a few moments and Barb has small gifts for the boys, but all too soon it is time to move on.



Our last stop of the day is to meet with Executive Committee of the Presbytery's Youth Group for dinner. Being that it was just at 3 p.m. when we ate a huge meal, having another one planned at 5:00 p.m. at the Savoy Hotel seems like overkill. We all thankfully decide this would not be wise, and to save money, agree to meet at the Wimpy Hamburger Joint by the university at 7 p.m.

The gathering at Wimpy's is the icing on the cake. Aaron, Sarah, and Denise sit at the table with Victor and the other youth group officers, while Barb, Larry and I join the older crowd of Percy and Tandy and his wife Winnie. Here we get to order what we want! Most order dessert. I order a waffle and syrup plus a hot mocha drink.

It is definitely the capper to a wonderful day, which ends at about 9:30 p.m. and finds me alone writing these words in my travel logs at about 11 p.m. Tomorrow is a very early day as we first will attend church with the St. Andrews Congregation in Mthatha (the only former UPCSA or "white" church in the Presbytery) and then will attend church with the T. P. Finca Memorial Congregation in Tsolo where Percy is the pastor. I must rest to be ready for our grand finale day in Mthatha.