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Hi everyone,

I'm back in Kidapawan because our Bishop, Romulo Valles, is celebrating the 25th anniversary of his priesthood ordination. There is a special Mass and dinner tonight, so I have the chance to send this out. It's been a few weeks since my last real letter.

Once again, there is no big news or stories to tell; and once again, I guess that's good because it means that nothing dramatic or dangerous is going on. As you know, I got the freezer! Still no generator in place, but I'm taking the chance we will not lose electricity for any lengthy period of time. In fact, the day after I started using the freezer, we had a brownout, and I was ready to beat my head against the wall (as I told you before, we had gone months without a brownout). But it only lasted a couple of hours, so no damage done; the next day there was one of similar length. The freezer is plugged into an automatic voltage regulator, so if there are fluctuations in power (which happens all the time, even without brownouts), there's no danger of surges. I am definitely enjoying the opportunity to have different kinds of food on hand, to provide a variety from rice and fish. I even found frozen hash browns in Davao, so you know I'm a happy boy!

We've started the vegetable garden too. We built a large box out of wood to use for "starters", and just yesterday transplanted a lot of tomato plants. The lettuce and green peppers still need a few more days before transplanting. I also have seeds for onions and carrots, and they will be the next to be planted. Of course, I know absolutely nothing about gardening. In fact, for the starter box I followed the principle that "if one is good, ten must be better!", and so I kind of overdid it with the seeds. The result was many seedlings coming up very close to one another. But we are able to separate them before transplanting, so I guess it will turn out ok.

Guess what? We have a parish dog now! A few weeks ago, I noticed a puppy out back and I asked where it came. Melanie, one of the students who lives in the rectory compound, told me that she had brought it from her village, Lasak. In fact, the family that was massacred there had owned it. This might be a little irreverent toward the victims, but since the dog had no name, I suggested that we call him "Massie" and the name has stuck. He's a cute little guy, but if the size of his paws is any indication, I think he will grow into a good-sized dog. He was pretty wary of me the first couple of days, but has warmed up well, and loves to play. Hope Goldie won't be jealous!

We're still on hold in regard to the church, and at this point, I've pretty much resigned myself to the fact that nothing will be done until after the parish fiesta on May 7. It makes sense not to have a lot of confusion around the parish grounds at that time. But I'm determined to get started immediately after that. I've written a letter to the mayor, requesting use of the municipal equipment starting on May 8, and will follow it up with a personal visit later this month.

I have, however, been able to get a new garage put up (well, it's almost finished). Since Fr. Eddie is now living here, there are two vehicles to house. I've been keeping the Vitara in a small shed, which we often have to use to store materials (cement, etc.). So, actually both vehicles were often left outside. I hired a carpenter and helper to build a garage big enough for both. Rather than buying lumber, we cut down a few trees on the parish property (ones that had to be removed anyway because they were posing a danger to nearby

structures). With a chainsaw, the carpenter expertly fashioned all the lumber we need. Actually, when I say "garage", don't imagine anything fancy. It's really just a larger shed. But at least the vehicles will be out of the sun and rain, and we will be able to lock them up at night.

I mentioned to you last time about getting things ready for the new school year. Last week was the high school graduation. Dante, one of my students here at the rectory, is in the graduating class, but his parents were not able to attend, since their village is far away. So, I was acting parent for him, accompanying him in the procession and bestowing his medal as one of the "athletes of the year." I'm sure it wasn't the same as having his folks there, but I'm glad he at least had someone to share the day with.

The housing situation for the new college scholars in Kidapawan has been taken care of. We found a small house close to the one we are currently renting near the campus of Notre Dame College. So the girls (13 of them) will stay in the current house, and the boys (just 4) will move across the street. They'll eat their meals together at girls' house. It will be a little more crowded for the girls than I would be comfortable with, but they seem to have no problem. There are four double-sized bunk beds, which could sleep four persons each, so 13 of them can fit ok. For those who will attend the University of Southern Mindanao, we've reserved space in another boarding house close to that school. I still have to arrange things for those who will study in Davao, but the entrance exam for them will not be until early May, so I will see about things at that time.

Oh, here's some happy news. Last letter I told you that I was dreading going to the LTO to renew the registration on the Vitara. Much to my surprise and delight, the whole process took less than 45 minutes! Last year, I was there for almost four hours. In fact, this time while I was there I realized that my operator's license was overdue for renewal and I got that taken care of too, all within the same 45 minutes. I left there with a big smile on my face, thanking God for small favors.

Naturally, we're busy now preparing for Holy Week. Two of my scholars attend the Notre Dame Center for Catechesis in Cotabato City and they are now home for their summer vacation. But it's not really vacation for them, since part of their program is to work in the parish at this time. So, they are a big help in the preparations. On Palm Sunday, we'll gather near the municipal hall and bless the palms, then process to the Church. I won't go into all the plans for the other days of Holy Week, because I'll tell you about the celebrations after the fact, in my next letter. One thing we have been able to do this year, since there are two priests, is have all the liturgies in two places: the poblacion and one of the larger villages. The people really appreciate that, since it is not always easy for them to come to the poblacion, especially for services in the evening.

Right after my last Mass on Palm Sunday, I will go to Davao to pick up two PIME seminarians who will stay with me for two months exposure experience. They are students at PIME's Theologate in Tagaytay (near Manila); one (Andrea) is Italian and one (David) is Burmese. Actually David is not a PIME seminarian, but we host him and some other Burmese students at our theologate as they study for their own diocese. I know Andrea pretty well because I was still in Detroit when he went there a few years ago to study English. He's an excellent musician and I'm looking forward to his help with the choir, especially in preparation for the parish fiesta. I'll take the two of them to Kidapawan for the Chrism Mass on Wednesday and we'll be back in Columbio on the morning of Holy Thursday.

I had one more experience of "possession" a couple of weeks ago; or at least, that's what everyone thought at first. On a Friday evening, the students from the Tribal Training Center next door had asked if they could come to the rectory to watch a movie on the VCR. Several of them arrived, and as we were just beginning the film, another ran in and said that there was a problem with Donna, also from the Training Center. She was acting delirious; showing unusual strength, and claiming that she saw "spirits" whom were after her. She had already been taken to the small medical clinic and by the time I arrived there, she was fast asleep.

Then, before I could say or do anything, a group of the tribal students arrived in a jeep they had borrowed,

hurried into the clinic and carried her out to the jeep, saying that they were taking her to a faith healer. I asked to see the doctor to find out what she thought and what she had done. She told me that it might be malaria, but she wasn't sure, and that she had given Donna a shot. "What kind of shot, antibiotics?" I asked. "Anti-spasmodic, Father," she replied. That's all she said, but later I heard her speaking to her assistant and thought I heard the word "valium." That would explain why Donna was out like a light. The Doctor said just to keep an eye on her, and probably by the next day she would be fine.

In the meantime, I was wondering about the faith healer, because I had heard the students say they were taking Donna to see "Salinas". That's the last name of one our youth leaders, so I asked my secretary if the faith healer was related to Florante. "Related?" she replied. "It's his father!" "The faith healer is Valeriano Salinas?" I asked. "Of course, Father." Valeriano Salinas is one of my "kaabags": Catechist and Lay Minister of the Eucharist! A couple days later, I mentioned this to Fr. Peter, and he didn't really see anything unusual about it. He said that Valeriano is quite well known as a practitioner of herbal medicine and prayer in cases like this. At any rate, whether it was his doing or the shot of Valium, the next morning Donna was completely normal, acting as if nothing had happened at all.

OK, I guess that's about all for now. Let's keep on praying for one another. Take care,



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