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August, 1999

Dear Mom and Dad

Nothing much new is going on here. I think I told you about the retreat already. The retreat director was really good. He's written several books, especially focusing on "the Kingdom of God" and "Discipleship". I give a Bible Study here once a month, and as it happens, the themes I'm covering are (are you ready?) the Kingdom of God and Discipleship. Needless to say, I got some good material from the retreat. The only problem was the constant rain, and surprisingly, some pretty cold nights. I even had to use a blanket...that's a first for me in the Philippines! The flooding that you might have heard about was far away from where we were. Back here in Columbio, I've been working on homilies and the Bible Study, as well as doing some yard work, especially in the area in front of the church. There are a lot of trees and bushes on either side of a gravel path leading to the church. The grass is kind of sparse, but grows quickly and wildly. In general, it looked kind of messy. So I've been trimming trees and bushes, cutting the grass and pulling weeds. Up until recently, cutting the grass meant hacking at it with a machete. While I was in Davao, I bought a push lawnmower (the kind without a motor), but so far it hasn't worked out too well. For ordinary grass, it's not too bad, but if the blades (of grass) are just a little bit thicker, it's practically useless. I had the blades (of the mower) sharpened, and discovered that some bearings were missing. I bought the mower already assembled so I don't know if they were never there, or if they somehow fell out in use. They say I can find bearings in Kidapawan, so I will check it out sometime next week. Then, hopefully the mower will prove to be a good investment.

Eventually, I think we will have to build a new church here in Columbio. The existing church is pretty old, and was built like a mission chapel (which is what it was at the time): pretty small, bare concrete walls and floor, a metal roof which is rusting out. Now that more people have settled here and it's a real town, something bigger and better-looking is needed. I'm going to take my time on it though. The initiative should come from the people. If we do build a new church, I'd like to keep the existing building standing, and try to develop it into a youth center.

I've also been working on a songbook in Tagalog. I like to sing, but since I don't have the words in front of me, I can't really learn the songs. So I asked the parish team to give me the words to the most popular songs for the Mass, and I'm typing them into the computer. If it turns out well, I might print many copies, so that the people will all have something to follow too (now they sing along as they are able). Eventually, I will do the same with songs in Cebuano, Ilongo and Ilocano.

That's about it for now. I'll write again soon. In the meantime, know that I'm thinking about you and miss you a lot!

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