

## FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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*January 25, 2001*

*Dear Mom and Dad,*

*It's been quite some time since I've had a chance to get to the Internet. There's nothing ominous about that, and I can't even say that the reason is that I've been super busy since the new year started. It's just that I haven't had a reason to go to Kidapawan. Even though the road has been safe for quite a while, I try to avoid going in and out of Columbio unless it's necessary. This weekend, it will be necessary: it's the Super Bowl, don't ya know! So I thought I'd prepare a letter on disk to send out when I get to Kidapawan on Sunday.*

*I'm sure you've heard by now about the political happenings here. I was captivated by the impeachment trial, watching it on TV everyday. Up until the fateful decision on the "second envelope" (with evidence of President Erap's accumulation of ill-gotten gains), I was pretty impartial. I think I mentioned to you before that while I'm no fan of Erap, I wanted to see the constitutional process work its way out. But the vote of the 11 senators not to open that envelope, nor allow its contents to be entered as evidence convinced me that the whole thing was a sham. No matter what proof was brought forth; those 11 were going to vote to acquit. Their collusion in regard to the envelope was just a foreshadowing of the final verdict. But it backfired on them as the people took to the streets and one by one the cabinet members and finally the military withdrew their support from Erap. In fact, though, the envelope decision probably did the country a favor, by anticipating the final result by a couple of months. Because surely the same thing would have happened following a dubious acquittal.*

*So, we have a new president: Gloria Macapagal Arroyo (or GMA for short), the previous vice-president. Interesting how she took office. The impeachment trial was suspended, without a verdict. Virtually every official had with drawn support from Erap, so the Supreme Court met and simply declared the office of presidency vacant, setting the stage for the vice-president to take over. Not exactly what I would call a legal or constitutional process, but apparently effective none the less. The most important thing is that people remained peaceful. There were some pro-Erap rallies in addition to the big anti-Erap one, but no clashes between them. And Erap himself ended up leaving the presidential palace peacefully, even smiling and waving to the crowd.*

*Someone here was marveling that twice in his lifetime, People Power was able to bring about a peaceful change in government. (The first time, in 1986, was when Marcos was driven out). I agree that this is a great thing, and a real tribute to the Filipino people. It's just unfortunate that such a stand was NEEDED twice within the past fifteen years. It seems that the people here really know how to get rid of corrupt and unwanted presidents. Now if they can figure out how to keep that type from taking office in the first place...*

*There has already been criticism of some of GMA's appointments to cabinet positions, and speculation that the same kind of cronyism will surround her presidency. But for the most, part I think the attitude is hopeful, or at least people are willing to give her a chance. Particularly hopeful could be her stance in regard to the "Muslim issue", and the possibility that she will end Erap's call for all-out war in Mindanao and return to negotiations. Obviously, that would be a great blessing.*

*Speaking of peace, as I mentioned above, things have been calm here in Columbio. The holdups along the road, very prevalent before Christmas, have stopped completely, and I no longer have a police escort when*

*going in and out. Still, we try to be careful, and arrange to have at least two or three vehicles travelling together.*

*We're inching our way toward the start of construction on the new church. The plans have been reviewed and the final version should be ready soon. The extension of the concrete dryer/basketball court is completed...well, almost. I tell you, nothing comes easy. The last step is to move the basketball hoops into their new positions. I thought that this would be a pretty simple task. Some men volunteered to move them, and began to dig out the cement surrounding the poles, only to find out that when they were installed, they were built to last! There's a foundation to the poles of more than 1 meter, tied in with metal rods. The hollow poles themselves were then filled top to bottom with cement! So the whole thing is so heavy that it can't be moved safely by hand. Now we have to wait until the municipal payloader is available.*

*In addition, in order to reset the poles, we will of course need to mix new cement, and we are lacking gravel. This would not be a big problem, since gravel can be easily found around here, except that BOTH the municipal dump trucks are broken down, with no assurance for repairs any time soon. Anyway, once that step is complete, we plan to bring in filling material for the actual area of the church and get that land prepared for construction. Then we will assess the situation. If the rainy season is close to an end and there are no peace and order problems, we will proceed. If the rains continue and/or there is general tension and confusion, we will wait again.*

*The country has a new president, and so does the Columbio Parish. My Parish Council president has decided to run for municipal council. It's standard practice here that if one is a candidate, he or she resigns any position connected to the parish. Part of that might have something to do with conflict of interest, but primarily it's just the fact that one would be so busy in the campaign that there would be no time to devote to the parish activities. In fact, one of my parish team members is also thinking about running (don't know if she's made her final decision yet), so she too would resign. In both cases, of course, everything depends upon whether they win election. If so, their resignations would become permanent; if not, they would return to their parish positions. So our Parish Council Vice-President is now Acting President, at least up to the time of the voting in May.*

*You ain't gonna believe this one. Last weekend, our Regional Superior (Fr. Gianni Sandalo) came to Columbio, together with Vicar General Gianni Zanchi who is visiting from Rome. Fr. Sandalo brought with him from Zamboanga some Tagalog Bibles, which he was able to obtain and was donating, to the Columbio parish. He asked someone to place them in my office. I saw three boxes there, each with my name on it; two were the same shape and size, and one was quite different. I opened that one first. There were no Bibles inside. Instead, this was stuff that I had packed and shipped to the Philippines before I left the States in 1998! Inside were some books, old sermons, family pictures and assorted knickknacks. I've thought about some of these things at different times, and came to the conclusion that while I meant to pack and send them; I must not have done so.*

*I asked Fr. Sandalo about the box, and he said, "That's been in Zamboanga for a long time, ever since I moved there a year ago. In fact, I didn't tell my people to include it among the things to bring here, since I thought you had left those things at the house for safekeeping. They must have loaded it up on their own." So who knows...how it got to the Zamboanga house (I shipped all my things to Manila, and this box was not the original shipping box), and how long it has been there. When I go to Manila next week for the Regional Assembly I will check to see if anyone there has a clue as to what happened.*

*By the way, among the things in that box were the pictures we took at home in August of 1995, when everyone except Craig and family was there. I showed them to some of the students. Since it was August, Jim's tan was in full force, and the students said, "Father, your brother looks so much like you! But why is his skin like ours?" They also said, "You used to be fat, Father!" Brats. But they made up for it by saying, "You are have very beautiful parents."*

*I told you last time about Fr. Eddie Pedregosa, the diocesan priest who has been assigned as a resident here in Columbio, while he works in inter-religious dialogue as head of the Muslim Desk of the Diocese. Just recently I received a copy of the Bishop's official assignment letter. It continues to be good to have Eddie with me. He is a big help with pastoral work, and since he knows the area well (he grew up in Tulunan, not far away), he has a good feel for the people and situation. This arrangement should last until next November, when I will return from my 3-month vacation at home. That certainly will make things much easier for the time that I will be away; I had been wondering whom I would get to cover for me. Once I'm back, the plan is to have another PIME priest assigned here with me. Fr. Joseph Bui, a Vietnamese-American who was just ordained last year, should arrive here in the Philippines next month. He'll do his language studies, and some practice in another parish, then be ready to join me in November. I was Regional Superior in the States when he first entered PIME's formation, so we know one another pretty well.*

*Ok, I guess that's all for now. I mentioned above that I would be going to Manila for our annual Regional Assembly. I'll leave here on Feb. 5, return to Davao on the 18th, and will be back in Columbio on the 20th. I should have several opportunities to get to the internet while I am in Manila.*

Love,



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