

## FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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Dear Mom and Dad,

*I know, I know... it's seems like ages since you've heard from me. I tried to send a quick message, just to check in, a couple of days ago when I stopped in Kidapawan on my way back from seeing Mark off in Davao, but the internet café was "offline" again. I'll make up for it by writing my usual novel-length letter, which I'm preparing on disk; I'll try to get back to Kidapawan next Monday to send it out.*

*All of the packages have arrived! I received one notice in the mail that a package was at the post office, and when I arrived, there were actually three. The second (or third?) Christmas box was there, containing briefs, peanuts, novels and candy; and the box of tupperware from you as well. There was also a package from Karen (Allen), containing a book. You mentioned before that Nancy was sending Tupperware from Germany. If so, that hasn't arrived yet. THANKS for all the goodies!*

*Mark's visit was absolutely great! I about fell over when he presented the check from the people of St. Andrew. I never expected anything like that! (And you did a good job of keeping the secret, too!) Just goes to show once again that people are really good, aren't they? This will give us a great start on the new church, which I'll tell you more about below. I had Mark take the check back with him, to deposit in my account in Detroit. I think it's best to keep it in dollars for now, since the value of the peso fluctuates quite a bit; plus it can even earn a little interest as we continue to finalize design plans, etc.*

*[Mark = Fr. Mark Hammond (Newark '73) is the Judicial Vicar of the Diocese of Columbus, and my best friend for many years. Coincidentally, his residence is St. Andrew parish, where I grew up and where my parents still live. He came for a two week visit in the middle of February, and before coming he announced to the people of St. Andrew about his trip and asked for their help in the construction of the new church here in Columbio. A second collection was taken up at all the Masses one weekend, and the response was fantastic (and very humbling, to me). Mark presented a VERY substantial check, and told me about the many people who expressed solidarity and unity with my mission, as well as many, many prayers. The school children got into the act too, with various fundraisers and special times set apart to pray for the people here. All I can say is: WOW!]*

*Mark arrived just after midnight on February 15, and of course we had to stay up and talk for a few hours after that (this, after his 13 hour flight from Detroit to Tokyo, and another 4 hours to Manila). He, of course, slept in the next day, while I got up at the usual time. So by the afternoon of the 16th, he was actually in pretty good shape, but I was wasted; so, we just sort of vegetated that day. On the 17th we went to Cebu for two days, just to relax and enjoy one another's company. Cebu is the large central island of the Philippines, and is noted for its resorts. I had never been there before. We had a nice hotel and a great time. Then it was on to Davao, and from there to Columbio.*

*I kick myself every time I think about my suggestion to Mark to plan a visit of two weeks, total. I was afraid that he would eventually get bored in Columbio, since I would be "on-duty" once we got back here. Nothing was further from the truth, and both of us were sorry that he didn't stay at least one week more. I put him to work right away, teaching the choir some new songs (in English, of course). I say "new" in regard to the people here. Most of the songs were actually ones that we had sung in the high school and college seminary*

*(and you know that means that they AIN'T new), including a couple from "Godspell". Mark really made an impact on the people here, especially among the youth of the choir. After practice, we would sit around and talk with them. Even though their English is quite limited (and of course, Mark knows no Tagalog), they managed to communicate very well. A couple of funny stories: The first day that Mark was here, we were talking to a bunch of students. One of them, noting Mark's fair skin, leaned over and whispered to me in Tagalog, "Father, doesn't he ever go out of the house?" I had to explain to him that it's wintertime now in the States and any summer tan that he might have had is long gone. Then at dinner one night, one of the students (Melanie) who lives at the convento, asked me: "Father, which one of you is mas guwapo (more handsome)?" This is not really an uncommon question when they are trying to make conversation. "I don't know," I said. "What do you think?" "Oh, pareho (equal), Father," she said diplomatically, and then added, "But you know, Father, he's mas puti (whiter) than you are." "Oh," I said, "and mas puti means mas guwapo, right?" She just kind of shrugged, but I know that that's true.*

*While we in the States like to darken our skin with the sun or even tanning booths, in the Philippines, where everyone is dark-skinned, the lighter the better. In the big cities they even have "whitening centers", and it's not for their teeth. They have different ideas about weight than we do too. We always want to take it off and become as thin as we can, but here it's considered attractive to be a little fat. It shows that you are well-nourished, even a little well-off financially. We think of the hourglass as the ideal figure for a woman; if Filipinos want to compliment a woman on her figure, they say she has a coca-cola body, resembling a coke bottle, and if it happens to be the "family size" as opposed to the twelve-ounce, that's OK too. On Sunday, of course, Mark accompanied me to the different barrios for Mass. We had a couple of rivers to cross, but there had been no heavy rain lately, so the water was not too deep. Still, the first time, Mark was a bit surprised that we just drive on through. In fact, knowing my history of river crossings, he had joked beforehand, "When we get to a river, just stop the car and I'll get out." But he hung in there, and after each successful crossing, he heard the chorus from my parish team members: "Trust the Vitara!"*

*And so, all too soon, it was time for Mark to leave. Some of the students came over on his last night and spent a couple of hours talking and laughing with him. We had told them that we were leaving for Davao around noon the next day, but we were ready to go at about 10:00, so we took off. Did I ever catch it from the students when I got back! They really wanted to see him off and had prepared a beautiful card and letter for him. I'll mail it to him.*

*Mark had told me that several people at St. Andrew wanted to know how they could continue to help the mission. The biggest on-going need that I see is the education of the young people. Many of them simply can't afford to go on to college, even to the public colleges which are pretty cheap, even by Filipino standards. Private colleges, which offer the better education, are usually out of the question. So, we talked about the possibility of finding sponsors for individual students.*

*I talked to the parish team, and discovered that the total cost at a decent college (tuition, board and lodging, fees, and a small allowance) would range between \$700 and \$1,000 per year. That's probably more than an individual or family would be able to commit to, but if several were willing to think about \$25 or \$30 a month, we could either offer partial scholarships, or pool the money into a fund for full scholarships. Mark said that he could think of a few people offhand that he's sure would help, so we want to start with a couple of scholarships even for the upcoming school year, which begins in June. Then we'll see how things progress for the future.*

*I said that I would tell you more about the church plans. We have the go-ahead from the board of the cooperative to transfer the bodega (storehouse) to another place, and they have already received a donation of land for this purpose. I mentioned to you before that it was unclear whether the cooperative will continue in business, but now they say that they are confident they can carry on. As I anticipated, however, they don't have the funds for demolition and reconstruction of the bodega. Pending the approval of our parish council, I have agreed to give them, from the budget of the new church, the amount necessary.*

*Actually, we settled on a figure, and if the cost is more than that, they will make up the difference. But I definitely want the parish council involved, since I still don't have a very firm grasp on the cost of things here.*

*The parish council president, with whom I've been working very closely on this project, has been out of town since I got back from Manila; I'm looking forward to his return so we can discuss the matter. Then we will have to get the "Design Committee" back together. With the extra space available due to the demolition of the bodega, we have a lot more options in terms of design. I mentioned to you that I would like to model the church after PIME's parish in Manila. Fr. Giuilo Mariani tried to gather some plans, sketches, etc. while I was in Manila for the Regional Assembly, but was unable to do so before I left. So, I am waiting for him to send them by mail.*

*I did get a TV and VCR for the rectory. I told you before that Fr. Gianni, our Regional Superior, had suggested that I take the "old" TV from the parish in Manila, since they had recently purchased a new one. However, they later discovered that the new TV was not multi-system in regard to videos, and would not show videos coming from Italy. After some discussion, Fr. Gianni told me to go ahead and buy a TV & VCR and the Region will cover the cost. God bless him!*

*While I was in Manila, I checked on the availability of the mini-satellite dish, which I was told would be ready for market by December of last year. Now they are saying October of this year. Don't hold your breath. I haven't yet installed a regular antenna, which will bring in just one channel, so for now we are using the TV for videos only. I've already seen a couple of the OSU games you sent me. (I'm starting with the wins, so it shouldn't take too long to get through them!)*

*Different people in town have videotapes, which my live-in students have borrowed, but I've tried to slow this down. In the beginning, when everything was brand new, I could understand the excitement. But I told them that we need some moderation now...maybe once a week.*

*Speaking of the live-in students, I have some changes in mind. As a matter of general principle, I don't think it's a good idea to have teenage boys and girls living together here, even if the girls' room is downstairs and the boys' is upstairs. Plus, even though they present no problem for me, I think I'd like to experiment with having the rectory to myself. So, after the school year ends (at the end of March), I will ask them to go to their homes for the two-month vacation.*

*I understand that in the past, they took turns going home at vacation time, so that a couple were always here. Instead, I think they should all spend the whole vacation time with their families. I'll have to see what to do about meals, since they are the ones doing the cooking, but that shouldn't be a big problem. Then when the new school year begins in June, I'll have to decide what to do. Maybe they'll come back to the rectory, maybe they'll stay at a boarding house in town (as many students do), or maybe they'll live at home and commute to school from their barrios (as other students also do). In any case, I told them that it is important for them to continue going to school, and I will continue to support them in that, no matter where they live. I talked to some other priests who are supporting high school students, and they told me that the students do not live in the rectory. Rather, they come on weekends to the rectory, to do some work around the parish grounds and so that the priest can check on their progress. There's also time for prayer and discussion as a group, since the idea of sponsoring them is not only in regard to their schooling, but also to ensure a total human and Christian education. That might be the best way to go.*

*There's just one other complication to all of this. With the "communitarian" aspect of their culture, Filipinos cannot fathom someone being alone even for a short time, much less living alone in a house. If I mention that I'm going to Kidapawan, the first question is: "Who is accompanying you, Father?" One time it happened that all my students were away overnight. I can't tell you how many people asked me, "Who was with you in the rectory last night, Father? You weren't alone, were you?" To this you can add the superstitious belief that*

*if one has a nightmare and no one else is in the house (in the same room would be better), that person will die. So, even if I am without live-in students, I'm sure that I will have plenty of volunteers, and least to spend the night in the rectory so that I will not be alone. I'll have to come up with a tactful way to turn down their offers.*

*On March 1, I began the Remedial English class. I limited it to 3rd and 4th year high school students, because I figured a large number would make the classes less effective. As it is, almost 70 kids showed up! That makes the class a little unwieldy, but I'll just have to get my creative juices flowing to make sure the messages gets across to everyone. I plan to teach on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Fridays, from 7:30-8:30pm.*

*I was really ticked off when I was coming home from Davao. Every once in a while the LTO (Land Transportation Office) sets up checkpoints along the road, and stops vehicles at random to inspect their registration. In fact, some of the roadblocks have the misspelling "LTO CHOKEPOINT", and that is probably a more accurate description of the activity.*

*I was stopped and produced the registration for the Vitara. When I had the new engine put in, I had to re-register the vehicle and was given a temporary registration while waiting for the permanent one in the mail. Of course it has not yet arrived. The official said that my registration was lacking a certain number, and I told him that surely the permanent one, which I'm still waiting for the LTO to send, will have it. He said, "OK, once you have that number, you can claim your driver's license at the LTO office." "Wait a minute," I said. "You can't keep my license. I'm a priest and I have to drive to get to my people. I need my license now." "Oh," he said, "in that case, you just have to pay the fine...600 pesos." "Why should I pay a fine? It's not my problem; it's the LTO's problem. They're the ones who haven't sent the registration yet." "Yes sir, that's the problem. That's why you have to pay the fine. Then I'll give you your driver's license back."*

*After going back and forth on this dead-end exchange several times, I asked, "What about the next time I'm stopped, if the registration still hasn't arrived?" "Oh, no problem, sir. You only have to pay the fine once." "I was told there would be no problem with the temporary registration too," I said. "I want an official receipt from the LTO." "Oh, yes sir." So I paid the 600 pesos, and went away fuming. It's not that much money (about 15 dollars), but I just hate to be scammed. Ok, I think I've given you enough to read for awhile. As I said, I will try to send this out next Monday. Love you and miss you! Love,*



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