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Dear Mom and Dad,

Greetings! I'll be going to Davao tomorrow, so I thought I would write a quick update.

First, about the "peace and order" situation. Things have calmed down here in Columbio, at least on the surface. I told you before about the reaction of some Catholics to the task force report in regard to the shooting of the Council member and the aftermath: some people felt that it was biased toward the Muslim side. We've had several opportunities to explain the situation and I think that people are beginning to understand. As I suspected, those making the criticism had not even seen the report; they were reacting to rumors of what it contained. At one gathering, I told the people that the task force was set up by the municipal government and was acting in its name, not that of the church. Nevertheless, it's good and appropriate that the church be involved, since the task of any follower of Jesus is to speak the truth and seek ways of peace. At any rate, the tension has eased in general, and I don't perceive any lingering hard feelings.

Pastorally, we're in the Lenten season, of course. The daily Mass I started during my first year kind of died out during the time that I was out of the parish last year. I revived it for a while, and then when I went on vacation, there was another hiatus. Never one to give up, I figured Lent would be a good time to give it another try. The attendance has been OK, 30-40 people each day. On Wednesdays we also pray a novena to Our Lady of Perpetual Help (a very popular devotion here) and on Fridays after the Mass, we pray the Stations of the Cross. There is a nation-wide Lenten activity called *Alay Kapwa*, which means something like, "Helping Others".

It includes a grass-roots collection of funds, even among the poor, to benefit those who are even poorer. But more important than the collection is a program of catechesis about what it means to be church, especially in the Filipino context. The Bishops' Conference put out a guide, in English, to the catechesis program. I thought this would be a good activity for our different barrio chapel communities, so I translated the guide into Tagalog, and gave it to the parish team, who prepared a three-hour seminar. So, throughout the season of Lent, the parish team will present the seminar in the morning to each community.

I go to each place in the early afternoon and provide the opportunity for confessions, followed by Mass. Then I have to hurry back to the Poblacion for the daily Mass here at 4:30. You know that with Fr. Eddie there are two priests here, but he has been very busy with his job of Inter-religious dialogue, so I've been saying both the Masses each day.

Last Sunday we had the installation of new "Kaabags". You might remember that these are the Lay Ministers who lead the community in the Sunday Liturgy in the absence of a priest. I think I might have mentioned before that a kaabag could be a man or woman, but in practice only men take on the position. In fact, since women are the most active in attending church and participating in the life of the community, this is one way to assure that at least some men are involved. We had a series of training sessions for the Kaabag over the past several months, then the Bishop came for the installation (as well as renewal of the existing ones). It had been a goal of mine that each of the barrio chapels would have at least one kaabag, and we're almost there: all but two barrios. Since there are several kaabag in the poblacion, they will take turns

covering those two communities until we can recruit and train kaabags from there.

The work on the church continues, although I was getting pretty antsy (not to mention ticked off) until the beginning of this past week. For two weeks, no workers showed up. And of course, this is not like the States where you can just call up the contractor to find out what's going on. The aunt of the contractor is from the parish, so after the first week of no work, I asked her to try to contact her nephew and tell him that I wanted to see him. She was able to do so, but of course the day he came, I was not at the convento. So another week went by before he came again. The problem, of course, was cash. He had overextended himself on various projects, and now could not get more credit for supplies, salaries, etc. I had already paid up to the work accomplished, and he asked for an advance in order to keep going. I gave some more, and received his solemn promise that work will now continue until completion. Now we'll see if he is a man of honor or not. In fact, this past Monday the crew showed up and has been working steadily.

I'm trying something different with a picture, inserting it right into the letter. We'll see if it works. It is a picture of the church interior. It's still not easy to get much of a perspective, but at least you can see the basic layout.

Ok, I said this would be a quick update, so I'll close for now. I don't know for sure when I will get back to the internet, so just in case it is some time from now, let me say: HAPPY BIRTHDAY, MOM! Wish I could be there to celebrate with you, but you know that I'm with you in spirit, prayers and all the best wishes. Love and miss you both!

Love,



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