

## FR. STEVE BAUMBUSCH ,PIME

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Dear Mom and Dad,

*I finally have a little time to sit down and write a real letter. I have a lot to tell you, since the past few weeks have been quite busy. In fact, I might separate this letter into three parts (the fiesta, scholar registration, and the elections), and send them as separate messages, just to give your eyes and mind a little break. We'll see how it goes as I move along.*

### THE PARISH FIESTA

*Our parish fiesta was held on May 7. The real feast day of San Isidro Labrador is May 15, but since this was so close to election day (the 14th), we thought it better to anticipate the fiesta. I always defer to our "mother parish", San Isidro Labrador in Tulunan, and they chose Sunday, May 6 for their fiesta. So we settled on Monday.*

*Of course, there was lots of preparation going on in the weeks before the fiesta. The two PIME seminarians here for their summer exposure experience are musicians and they did a great job helping me get the choir ready. I told you last year about the fundraising practice of the "Candidate Search". Different areas of the parish nominate candidates for Fiesta King and Queen, and then solicit donations in the name of their candidates. Those who collect the most are named the winners, with 1st, 2nd, 3rd, and 4th runners-up. This year, the solicitation went very well: more than twice as much as last year. After paying the expenses of the fiesta, we were able to put 25,000 pesos (about \$500) toward the new church construction. That is quite a lot for the poor people of Columbio to contribute.*

*The fiesta day itself began with a parade through the town, led by the statue of San Isidro. The different areas prepared floats for the King and Queen and runners-up, and Columbio High School provided the "drum and bugle corps" (actually drum and xylophone). The parade was supposed to start at 7:00, but (naturally!) it was closer to 8:00. I didn't go along, because I was waiting to greet the Bishop, who arrived around 8:30.*

*The Bishop was very impressed with the preparations; he especially liked the decorations in the church (done by my scholars and the parish team), which he saw as "simple but beautiful." As I mentioned above, the choir did an excellent job at the Mass. The seminarians and I had spent a lot of practices with them, learning new songs and working on "dynamics." Our choir had a tendency to sing every song exactly the same (usually loud!). So we tried to show them how to bring expression to the songs by varying volume, speed, etc. And it worked! One diocesan priest who was visiting couldn't believe that little Columbio could do such a thing. He said, "You could take that choir into any of the big cities and not be ashamed."*

*Confirmation also takes place on the fiesta day. Bishop Valles likes to separate the ceremonies, so after the Mass there was a short break, and then we returned to the church for the Sacrament of Confirmation. It was just as well, since there were about 100 to be confirmed; so this gave a chance for those not involved to leave, to be replaced by confirmands, sponsors and families.*

*Then we had lunch, followed by "parlor games" for the children (sack race, egg toss, etc.), again organized*

*and run by my scholars. At 2:00, there was an exhibition basketball game between the priests of the diocese and the men of MES (Marriage Enrichment Seminar, similar to our Marriage Encounter movement). Last year, there were many on the diocesan side, so I played with the MES. This year, only a few priests came, so I played on their side. In fact, we had just seven players, and get this: I was the tallest player on our team (thinnest too, for that matter). Put that together with the fact that the MES men brought along their teenage sons as substitutes, and you can imagine the result. But the final score was actually pretty close so, as I told our team, we lost with dignity! That's my once-a-year venture onto the basketball court, so now I can hang up my shoes until next fiesta.*

*At 4:00 (Filipino time; actually about 5:00) we had the coronation ceremony for the King and Queen. I've discovered that this is very ritualized event, following a set procedure: Entrance of the "Royal Guard" (High School ROTC students), entrance of the Royal Family, Invocation, National Anthem, different talks by invited dignitaries (Mayor, Barangay Captain, yours truly), "intermission numbers" (songs and dances prepared by different areas of the parish), giving of sashes, corsages, bouquets and trophies to all the runners-up, and finally the vesting and crowning of the king and queen. So, it takes quite a while. We finished at about 7:30, and some of the young people wanted to continue with a "disco". But after about half an hour everyone got tired out, and started to head for home. So, it was long but very beautiful day and a great fiesta!*

### THE SCHOLAR REGISTRATION

*Right after the fiesta, I began to work on getting the scholars registered for college. What an ordeal! Got some time? To give you a full picture, I have to go all the way back to March 30, the day of High School graduation in Columbio. There it was announced that although graduation had already taken place, reports would not be ready for distribution until April 6. I had planned to take five students for their entrance exam to the University of Southern Mindanao (USM) in Kidapawan on April 3. I knew that the report cards would be necessary for them at the time of registration, but figured that just to take the exam, they wouldn't need them. Wrong! So that was one wasted trip to Kidapawan. Of course, by the time the report cards were available, we were into Holy Week and right after Easter I had to go to Manila for a Regional Council meeting.*

*When I returned from Manila, I stopped in Kidapawan, where I got the message that the students were at USM that very day for their entrance exam (Fr. Eddie had brought them in the day before), so I went there to pick them up and take them back to Columbio. We were promised that the results of the exams would be posted in one week (now we're in the last week of April). I went back on May 4, and the results were not yet ready. May 7 was our fiesta, on the 8th I had a wedding and on the 9th there was a clergy meeting, so the next chance I had to go there was May 10. The results were there, as well as a sign saying that registration for first year students would take place from May 7-11! That notice had not been there the week before.*

*All of my students passed, but according to different "priorities". Only one was in the first priority, 3 in the 2nd, and 1 in the 3rd. Those in the 2nd priority can enter if there is room left after all the 1st priority students have registered, and so on for 3rd priority. I went to speak with the dean and told him that I had scholars wishing to enroll. "They are your scholars?" he asked. "You're going to pay for all of their tuition and fees?" When I said yes, he said, "In that case, we'll move them all to first priority; but only if you bring them back tomorrow for registration. After that, it will be considered late registration, and I can't guarantee a spot for them."*

*I rushed back to Columbio and gathered the students. I was able to find 4 out of the five: one was out of town with his family for a reunion. Early the next morning we returned to Kidapawan and that's when the real rigmarole began. The first step is to get a copy of the entrance exam results at the Guidance Office. That wasn't so bad, and the dean had even informed the people at Guidance of the special treatment for the Columbio group. I asked the Counselor there if I could register for the missing student (Melvin), but she said that would be impossible, because the next step was a personal interview. There was nothing to do but bring*

*Melvin back the next week, pay the fine for late registration and hope that a spot was still available for him.*

*So, on to the interview room. They had ONE person giving the interviews, each of which lasted about ten minutes. So, of course, if you were seventh in line, that's already a full hour of waiting. My students were about 12th in line. I left them there and went to the Bishop's House to pick up mail and make some phone calls. When I came back, they were still waiting for their interview. Finally one was called, and then the interviewer said, "Last one, then it's time for my lunch break." That last one was also one of my students. I went to the interviewer and said, "If you could just do two more, the group from Columbio will be finished." "Sorry Father," she said, "I have to take my lunch. I'm all alone here and I didn't even get a chance for merienda (snack) earlier."*

*By the way, I listened in on some of the interviews; even though they took ten minutes, the content could be condensed to: "Why did you choose our school?" and "Do you promise to obey all the rules?" I took the students to lunch and came back around 12:30. I told them to continue with the process while I went to get on the Internet. The next step after the interview was registration in ROTC, mandatory for all male students. When I came back at 2:00, the two students who had their interview in the morning were standing in line at the Registrar's Office. "Did you already finish at ROTC?" I asked. "No Father, we're waiting here to get a signature on this form." They had been standing there the whole time I was gone! "You don't get that signature here, you get it back at the interview room, and it takes about 5 minutes!" I told them gently (?).*

*Meanwhile, the other two had finished their interview, received the signature and completed ROTC registration. I dragged the two to the interview room, got the signature, and then took them to the ROTC building. Part of ROTC registration is getting a military-style haircut. "Why do they need a haircut today?" I asked. "They don't start classes for another month. By the time you see them again, their hair will have grown out." The answer: "Part of the requirements, Father." There were two barbers there. One went about his work quickly and efficiently. The other thought he was Vidal Sassoon. He was constantly stopping, checking, and trimming. For every three heads cut by the other, he did one.*

*When we finally finished at ROTC, we went back to the crowd at the Registrar's office. By the way, in the afternoon there were FIVE people doing the interviews, which means that all of those students who passed quickly through the interview phase were now ahead of mine, who wasted an hour and a half waiting in the wrong line. At the registrar's office, the students had to pick up a form on which they were to list all the individual courses they would be taking in the first semester. The form required that they write out the list four times. Three of my students received the form relatively quickly, but one was lost in the middle of the crowd (there was no line) in front of the registrar's window.*

*By the time I finally got him up to the window, the others were already working on their forms. I saw that one had completed his, and the others were copying what he had written. "That won't work," I told him. "You're majoring in Electronics, and they're taking Automotive." "It's OK, Father," he said, "everyone takes the same courses in the first semester." So, you might ask, why weren't the forms simply printed with the courses already listed, rather than having the students write out the list four times???*

*By the time everyone had his form ready, it was 4:45; registration closed for the day at 4:30. The registrar was kind enough to wait until she received the forms, but of course this was not the last step; it simply ensured that when we came back, we would not be charged for late registration. Since the following Monday was Election Day, we were told to return on Tuesday. We were also told that they must bring with them two 1x1 photos for the school ID. Over the weekend, I had a bright idea to save some time. With my digital camera I took face shots of the students, then cropped, resized and printed them. I experimented with different kinds of paper, and finally found one that would accept the ink well and still provide some sturdiness. They looked great, not exactly like a studio job, but pretty darn close.*

*So on Tuesday, we all went back to Kidapawan, Melvin with us this time. Things were moving along pretty*

*smoothly at first. Even though Melvin had to start from the beginning, there was not a long line at the interview, so he got through that phase in about an hour and half. Meanwhile for the others, the process consisted of taking their forms to the bookkeeper for tallying of tuition and fees, paying at the cashier, returning to the bookkeeper for posting, and then finally presenting everything to the registrar. The only hitch was that they would not accept the ID photos I had made. I went to ask why and was told that it was because they were not on photographic paper. "But once they are inside the lamination, what difference does it make?" I asked. "It has to be the prescribed ID photo," she said. I told her that I didn't have time to take them back into town (USM is several kilometers from the town center), sit them in front of a photographer and wait at least an hour for a "rush" ID. At that point, she had a little mercy on me and said that they could take care of the ID on the first day of school, when a photographer would be on campus. (As it turned out, the photographer showed up that same day, and we got the photos taken care of.)*

*So at 10:30, I was feeling pretty good. The four students were enrolled, and Melvin was just finishing his interview. As I came out of the registrar's office, he was coming toward me, and I told him that he had to go to ROTC. "I just went there," he said. "There's no one there." We went back to the Registrar's office and informed them of the situation, and they said they would try to find someone. About 10 minutes later, we were told that the person needed was not around; MAYBE he would be in at about 1:00 PM. After some discussion I got the registrar to let Melvin move on to the next step immediately (filling out the forms with the course lists). According to "procedure" that's supposed to take place after ROTC, but I think the look on my face convinced her that I was in no mood to waste any more time. When we came back from lunch at 1:00, the personnel were there at ROTC and luckily the barber was the fast one. Since Melvin already had his class list forms filled out, the rest of the process didn't take too long. We just shuttled back and forth between the bookkeeper and the cashier, and finally back to the registrar. The final step was to fill out individual cards for each class to be taken: so that makes FIVE times the students had to write out the same information.*

*In the end, they all got enrolled. I had to pay a small fine for Melvin's late registration, and he had to switch to Mechanical Technology since all the spots were taken in the Automotive major. All the others got the majors they wanted. Of course, this is only one group of my 27 scholars. For those going to Notre Dame the process is much easier, and I don't have to accompany them, since we have a "guardian" (an adult supervisor, from Arakan Valley, the other PIME parish that sends scholars to Kidapawan) at the boarding house that helps them through it.*

*Davao is another story. I have three scholars who want to major in Marine Transportation at Holy Cross College, and one who wants to enroll in the Ford Academy of Fine Arts. I called a friend of mine at Maryknoll (Br. Jude) and asked him to inquire at Holy Cross about scheduling for the entrance exam. He went there and found out that you have to apply for the entrance exam, and then the school informs you of the date. That's a new one: at all the other schools, you just show up within a set time period and take the exam. As it happened, Bishop Valles was in Davao on the day Br. Jude got the info, so he was able to bring the application forms back to Kidapawan and give them to me when I stopped in the Bishop's House during the USM registration. I brought them back to Columbio and had the kids fill them out, then sent them via a next-day courier to Br. Jude. He will take them to the school and let me know the date of the entrance exam by calling Fr. Peter, who will in turn radio to me.*

*In the meantime I called the Ford Academy and found out that they give the entrance exam only on Mondays and Fridays, so I called Br. Jude again and asked him to BEG them at Holy Cross to schedule the exam on one of those days, so I don't have to make several trips to Davao. I know that I will have to make at least two trips anyway, since it will be impossible at either school to take the exam and register on the same day. I hope that registration can take place just before school starts, so I can get the students settled in their boarding house and leave them there. Otherwise it will be three trips: one for the exam, one for registration, and one for the start of the year. Br. Jude has some leads on boarding houses, so I hope that finding one will not be too much hassle.*

## THE MUNICIPALITY ELECTIONS

*A little background on election procedures. The government body in charge is called the Commission on Elections or COMELEC. This commission is supposed to ensure that all election laws are followed by candidates and others during the campaign period: everything from monitoring the placement of campaign posters to setting up checkpoints to search for illegal weapons, etc. On Election Day, COMELEC watches the polls to ensure against any kind of fraud, vote buying, intimidation, etc. If I understand it correctly, each party has COMELEC-approved poll watchers. However, since COMELEC itself is not trusted completely, there is another organization called the National Movement for Free Election (NAMFREL) whose purpose is more or less to watch the watchers: NAMFREL volunteers are at the polls to guard against fraud, and they make a "quick count" in each area to verify the results.*

*NAMFREL is non-governmental and very much backed by the Church. The volunteers are recruited and trained out of the parishes. The parish solicits funds to provide for their transportation and food. All of this, of course, is very new to me. I told the parish team that not only do we not have such parish involvement in the States, it would be impossible to do so, because of strict separation of Church and State. Constitutionally, there is separation of Church and State here in the Philippines too, but apparently it does not apply here, and the church/parishes are the most trusted to act with fairness and integrity. Lucky for me, Fr. Eddie is quite experienced in these matters, and he really took over all the NAMFREL preparations and activity.*

*Election Day was May 14. The day itself passed uneventfully. After the polls closed at 4:00 PM, the counting began, with COMELEC and NAMFREL representatives. The place of counting was the Elementary School, not far from the convento. At about 9:00, some of us were watching a video (there were lots of people around the convento, mostly teenagers) while members of the parish team, Fr. Eddie and other NAMFREL volunteers from the parish were at the school. We heard an explosion, followed by automatic weapon fire. Some kids were outside the convento and I went out to tell them to come inside. In the distance I could see people running toward the convento, carrying someone. I thought it was a shooting victim, but as it turned out, it was a teenage girl who was frightened and had passed out. We got everyone inside, revived the girl and waited for more news. Not long after, we got a call on the radio telling us that the explosion was quite a bit further away from the area than we had thought. The shooting was the response of the military to the explosion (some kind of mortar shell); they simply shot into the air to chase off anyone who might be around. So it was not an actual battle, and there was no damage or wounded.*

*I told you before that there was one Christian candidate (Bermudez) and two Muslim Candidates for mayor. The speculation is that the shell was launched to stop the counting, because at that point Bermudez was pulling ahead. We were worried about Fr. Ed and the others at the counting, and so were relieved to learn that the action was further away. Plus, the military began to patrol the town, "clearing" the streets, as they call it here; that is, sending home anyone who was outside.*

*Counting continued into the next day and night. This was the day that I went back to Kidapawan with the students to complete the enrollment at USM. I got back around 4:00 and was told that it was pretty clear that Bermudez would be the winner. In fact, later that evening, Fr. Eddie and the parish secretary went to the Municipal Hall where the COMELEC officials were to publicly proclaim the winners in the election. Again around 9:00 PM, there was an explosion followed by gunfire. A shell had been launched toward the municipal hall. Again, the gunfire was the response of the military, shooting in the air. Inside the hall, everyone dived for cover and the brother of the Vice-Mayor-elect, a Muslim, covered Bermudez with his own body. No damage or injured. Here at the convento, we gathered in the sala and closed the shutters. But there was no more action. I was concerned about Fr. Ed and the secretary, but others told me that they would probably spend the night there at the municipal hall rather than coming home in the dark. I found out the next day that they did come home at about 11:00.*

*Now, it seems as if things will be calm. The Muslim candidates have said that they accept the outcome and*

*will not permit their supporters to cause trouble. Still, being mayor in Columbio is a dangerous business. The father of Bermudez was mayor and was killed while in office, as was the husband of our current mayor (and brother of one of Muslim candidates). Makes you wonder why anybody would want the job.*

*The only other thing to tell you about is the new church, and there's not much to say on that front. I was determined to get started right after the fiesta, and in fact we did have about 8 loads of filling material delivered on May 8. Then nothing. Of course there are all kinds of reasons: a broken fan belt, the upcoming elections, etc. I just hope that it is not a repeat of the experience when we were preparing for the extension of the dryer/basketball court: one day of work, three weeks waiting, one day of work, two weeks waiting, etc. We need a total of 30 loads of filling material, so if they would just keep at it, it could be finished in 3 or 4 days. So, we'll keep trying.*

*Ok, I'll close for now, and I'll send both the messages out the next time I get a chance, probably next week sometime.*

*Love and miss you both!*

*Love,*



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