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N. Cotabato, PHILIPPINES

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Dear Mom and Dad,

I'll be heading into Kidapawan tomorrow because the Diocese is holding a two day Youth Jubilee/Vocation Jamboree, so I thought I would write and try to get this out via e-mail. As usual, if the internet is not cooperating, I will send it out via snail mail.

About 100 teenagers from my parish will be attending the event. Unfortunately it begins on Sunday morning, and of course I have Masses on Sunday. But I will go there after my last Mass and stay through Monday afternoon, when I'll need to come back to Columbio for the 4:30pm Mass.

When I was in Davao a couple of weeks ago, I bought a Mita copier. It's a small model (desktop), but can handle letter size or legal size paper, does enlarging and reducing, can make up to 99 copies at a time, etc. I told you before that I was trying to prepare a songbook. Well, it's ready to go, and we are already making copies. I plan on preparing 200 songbooks of 40 pages each (i.e. 20 pages, both sides), with the Mass in Tagalog and English and songs in Tagalog, English, Cebuano and Ilonggo. We're covering the pages in plastic so that they will last. We were able to find plastic bags, similar to Baggies, but a bit thicker and stiffer, that will work perfectly.

Of course they are not the exact size we need so we have to trim them: 4,000 of them! That's really the most time-consuming part of the project, other than the actual typing of the contents, which I did gradually over the past several weeks. For the covers, I bought thick files, which we cut to size. Then we'll add those plastic sliders along the side and staple everything together. All told, including paper, copying costs, plastic, covers, sliders, etc. the cost per book will be less than \$1.00. (Of course that doesn't include the cost of the copier itself, but we will have many uses for that.)

A while back I received a donation of \$300 from one of our benefactors in Detroit, and I wrote to them right away, telling them that I would use the donation for the songbooks. So, as it turns out, everything is covered. As I mentioned above, the copier will prove to be very useful here, since it is the first one in Columbio. Up to now, the people had to travel to Kidapawan if they needed copies. Now, as it becomes more and more known that there is one at the parish, they are coming here. We are charging a nominal fee, so who knows...within a few years, the copier might pay for itself, besides the use we make of it for parish projects.

The only problem so far as been the daily "brownouts" that we have been experiencing. We would call them "blackouts" in the States, since it is a complete loss of electricity. All during the month of October, you could almost set your watch by the time the electricity has gone out and come back: around 9:00am until 4:00pm. Then just for good measure, sometimes it would go out again in the evening and stay out until the next afternoon (candle time!).

I think they must be installing new lines in the area, extending electricity to some of the barrios which do not yet have it. That's good, of course, in the long run, but it sure can be frustrating when you're trying to get something done. And of course there's not much use in a copy machine if there's no electricity to run it. I did buy an Automatic Voltage Regulator for the copier to protect against any surges, of which there are many, even without the brownouts. Hopefully the current will become more consistent once they finish whatever

work they are doing.

I had an interesting experience recently. You can file this one under "Mis(sionary)-adventures in Housekeeping." Before I came here to Columbio, I bought a bed pillow to bring along, because I knew that here there were only small throw cushions. As you know, it's usually pretty hot here, and I sweat a lot in my sleep, so after a time the pillow started to smell a little gamey. So I washed it (by hand) and left it out in the sun for several days to dry. Then I tried to think of way to prevent the same problem from happening again. "I know," I said, "I'll wrap the pillow in plastic before putting the pillow case on. That way the sweat won't soak through to the pillow itself." And I did a great job: got a big piece of plastic, wrapped it around the pillow, and sealed it up tight with duct tape. Sound like a good idea? Wrong! The problem was, the polyester fill of the pillow had not dried completely. So with the moisture inside, and no air getting through because of the plastic, the next time I looked at the pillow it was covered with mildew! I took a scrub brush to it but the stains wouldn't come out. So I cut the end of the cover, removed the innards and soaked the cover in detergent.

That worked, but the problem was still there: how to keep the outside of the pillow clean without soaking the filling. Finally I bought a zipper, which the parish secretary will sew onto the pillow. And this time, I am making real sure that the filling is completely dry before using it again. So, from now on, I will be able to unzip the cover and wash it when needed. In the meantime, for the past two weeks, I've just been using one of those small throw pillows that I mentioned.

Last Sunday we had a "General Assembly" of the leaders of the various "zones" of the poblacion of Columbio. Let me explain what all that means before I tell you more about the meeting. The parish is made up of GKK's, which are the initials for the Cebuano words meaning Basic Ecclesial Communities. The idea is a small group of people who gather together to pray, reflect, etc. (that's the condensed version; there's actually a lot more to it than that). Each of the barrios that I go out to would be a GKK and within the town (or poblacion) of Columbio, there are 4 "zones", each of which is a GKK. Once a month, we have a "Center Meeting" with representatives from all the GKK's (16 in all), but this Assembly was for the leaders of the zones within Columbio itself. Clear?

Anyway, among other things, we discussed the idea of a new church building, and the leaders agreed that one is needed. They started to come up with ideas for fundraising, and we established a "Planning Committee" to decide upon the location, size, design, etc., and try to arrive at a general estimate of the cost. The first meeting of the Planning Committee will be on October 28. It is composed of myself, the Parish Council President, and a representative from each of the zones.

I think I mentioned to you before that I have already done some measurement in one location and some preliminary drawings for a design. But as I told the people, that's just one idea: it's not going to be my church, it will be theirs, so they need to be involved from the start. As for fundraising, I'm pretty certain that the people would not be able to raise the full amount needed, but I told them that there are funding agencies, both in the U.S. and in Europe, for projects like this, and that I would look into how to apply to them.

I've already taken pictures of the existing church to include with the application, in order to demonstrate the need for a new building. Still, I think it's important that the people contribute as much as they can, so that they really do have a feeling of ownership. One thing they have already indicated is the plan to provide most of the labor on a volunteer basis. That should cut down the costs considerably, since we would only have to hire a foreman-type person to oversee things, and maybe a couple other professional laborers.

So, things are really at the preliminary stage right now. Once we've settled on a design and get an estimate, I will be able to apply for funding, since these agencies require a lot of detail in the application. Certainly, we would not be able to begin construction until well into next year. Well, I've been rambling on for quite a bit here, so I think I'll end this now. After tomorrow, I don't think I will be going back to Kidapawan until the

second week of November, when there will be a Clergy Meeting. So, I do hope that I can get this out by e-mail, so you won't have to wait too long to hear from me. At any rate, know that I'm thinking of you, and miss you lots. Love,



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