

14 November 1996

Dear Everyone,

It is very early for sending a Christmas letter but next week I will be off and away to Zambia and Zimbabwe and won't be back till about the 17th of December---too late for a Christmas letter.

I can't access my last Christmas letter because I did something to my poor little laptop and it simply refused to do anything (I am still not sure what I did). I was unable to get anything to come up on the screen so I took it to 3 "experts" here in town (Durban) and---no luck. I wanted to Fed-Ex it to the States (it is still under warranty) but when I found out the charges--over R1000.00 to send it and another almost R1000.00 for insurance---one way, I decided that the only thing I could do was send it by air mail (that was only R315.00) but it could take several weeks (as things go) and then you are not sure if it will actually get there. Well, there are risks in life that you must take because, if you don't have the money, there is nothing else you can do. The alternative would have been to throw the thing away (I kept the hard disk here with me). But the point is that I, once again, have become "brain dead". I'm going to have to search around to find some contact addresses so that I can get this out to you-all.

But, let's start with the end of school---May '96. The sabbatical year was truly beautiful and enriching. We were all sad to part company from each other, but on the other hand, we had to get on with our lives and that kind of took over. I spent the summer helping out in Dearborn/Detroit as regards parish work plus a bit of family and friend visiting and tried to prepare some input on economic justice for our General Chapter in Quebec in late August. Just as I was preparing to leave for Quebec I discovered that I had a hernia. Ha! I don't have time to have a hernia. There are only three weeks to go before I leave and I have lots to do. So, I saw my doctor who lined me up with a "hernia expert" who did the job literally in a couple of hours. I walked into the hospital at 8:30 in the morning and walked out (not quite as quickly as I had walked in) at 2 in the afternoon with a patch on my lower tummy where he did the cutting and patching. 3 days later I was in the car and off to do some visiting and recuperating for a week on the way to the General Chapter in Quebec---about a 3000 mile journey (round trip). The marvels of modern medicine!

I had the pleasure of being a partial host to my Mariannahill confreres who had come from Africa and Europe--showing off my home town of Detroit and introducing them to some of the many beautiful people whom I have the pleasure of knowing and loving. I think that they enjoyed it. I also took them up to Quebec for the beginning of the meeting, via Niagara Falls and Toronto. A lovely time was had by all. I have so often been hosted by them in their countries that I was delighted to be able, for a change, to return the favor.

After my presentation at the G.C. I headed back for Detroit, did my final packing, and left to return to Africa on the 30th of August to Johannesburg via Amsterdam.

I arrived in Jo'Burg on Sept. 1st and stayed with some friends in Pretoria for the night (even for some days) and went to the Bishops' Conference offices of Justice and Peace (and several other offices) to be put back in the picture as to what was happening here in my absence. I also visited friends and offices in Jo'Burg, again, trying to get back into the picture. At the end of the week, a very dear friend gave up her Saturday and drove up from Durban with her daughter, fetched me, and took me back to Durban/Mariannahill the same day. I managed to hitch a lift with some of our sisters (CPS---you could say Mariannahill Sisters) back to Umtata the following Monday.

For two weeks I stayed at Bedford (one of my former parishes), helped out here and there, and tried to organize myself for the new job. Then, I set out for Durban and Mariannahill to see where a fitting place to set up shop might be. I also started getting quotations on cars (as I would need some sort of transport. I eliminated Mercedes and BMW's from the start. I also started scouting around for things needed, etc. Then I headed off for Pretoria where I saw Sean O'Leary who is the director of the Justice and Peace Desk of the Bishops' Conference. DI attended a National Workshop of the J&P and met delegates from all over South Africa so that I could hear what their priorities were and what their successes and failures were. Understanding the new constitution and what local government means are high on the agenda, as well as looking for the basic causes of the injustices we face. I then returned to Umtata where we rented a van from the Diocese for my temporary use (Up till then I had used the provincial's car---Fr. Robert who had been away at the General Chapter). The first two weeks of October were in and around Umtata, helping out at various missions while trying to organize for the move to "wherever." The third week was a retreat for the priests of the Umtata diocese. At the end of that week I attended another J&P workshop for the Diocese of Mariannahill (mostly Zulu---language.) There a presentation was made as

Red 7/4/97

villages what is happening and what is not happening.

I stayed for a few days at the monastery, taking some classes with the novices and then on Wednesday I presented my budget and plan for work to the provincials who accepted and approved everything. That meant that I could get started with setting up a place here at Mariannhill (is it more central and the communication is better. Umtata is a bit out of the way and the communication is poor.) But first, I attended another J&P workshop in Port Elizabeth where there were five dioceses represented, again, hearing the reports of initiatives they took, the problems they faced, successes and failures. I am learning. That workshop took place on the last weekend of October. I immediately went back to Umtata, loaded up my gear and dumped it at my new home here at Mariannhill. I was given a room at the so-called "Mission Centre", which is a kind of hostel for visitors to the area (the ocean, Durban, etc.) where people can have a simple place to sleep, toilet and shower facilities, and an equipped kitchen to cook in. R20 a night (about \$4.25). I am supposed to be the official welcomer and to keep an eye on the place, etc. I enjoy it but my work will take me away often so we will have to find someone to work with.

I am leaving tomorrow (Nov. 21st) for Umtata for some prior commitments and then a workshop for young religious on Justice and Peace, Development, and the Integrity of Creation. It ends on the 1st of Dec. And on the 2nd I leave for Zambia and Zimbabwe to try to do some planning for next year. In the meantime, I phoned the Bishops' Conference and they will be sending the contract which includes terms like: a) for one year, renewable b) 20 hrs. A week (part time) c) R1000 a month plus another R1500 a month for travel and office expenses. (R1000 is roughly \$215 a month.)

Not much, huh! But then, job satisfaction more than compensates. The car that we finally settled on is a Golf, 1600cc (my brother's van was 3800cc). But the frosting on the cake is that I managed to get a car that matched the color of my socks!!! It's hilarious. There's no way I can hide!

In the meantime, my little laptop collapsed and after being examined by three doctors here, the verdict was that it must be sent to the specialist in the States, where it is now. It would have cost about a third the cost of the computer to send it by FedEx so I just sent it by ordinary air mail and that was expensive enough. A friend on the West Coast has been checking on it and it seems that it will live to see more days (miraculous recovery). I will be back here by the 17th or 18th of December. Where I will spend Christmas I don't know yet. I feel very loyal to Umtata and our community there.

I haven't talked much about the situation here, but, all in all, it is hopeful. The crime, although bad, has been decreasing, but there is still too much killing and violence going on. The economy continues to struggle and the Rand keeps losing value, but, again, there is hope. The unemployment is the real killer. If you feel the "downsizing" in the States, you can imagine what it is like here when, among the Africans, almost one out of three is unemployed (if not more!) But, we

are getting there. A very contentious abortion bill was approved and passed but I am still of the opinion that the majority of our people were not in favor of it. It seems that it was more or less rammed through and the MP's were forced to vote for their party rather than by their conscience.

There was another difficult bill regarding education that makes it difficult for Catholic schools to keep their ethos, which is the main reason why they are so popular. (Many of the MP's send their children to Catholic schools simply because of the quality of education and the moral underpinning that is found there. Canada had a similar experience some years back. What is happening in other parts of our lovely continent is very distressing, but the revelations of who are selling the arms, and how the money has been procured to buy the arms is more than angering. It is outrageous!! It seems that most of our governments (many of the individuals in them) have no moral fibre at all, with the result that the whole world continues to suffer and, even worse, injustice grows (child exploitation, economic exploitation, etc.)

Christmas brings with it, this year, as always, the challenge to be life-bringers, and hope-bringers to a world that has become cynical and doubtful if there is any truth or justice left in it.

Without truth and justice, and those who are willing to stand for them, there is no possibility of peace, either in the world or in our hearts. So, this Christmas, my prayer for you (for us) is the courage, love, and deep faith not to be taken in by the prophets of doom, but to be signs of hope by our determination to make our little part of the world (wherever that may be---even your own house and family) a place where truth and justice, love and peace, can put down their roots and grow.

Love and Peace to all of you always,

Fr. Cas.

Fr. Cas.