

Greetings to all from Hilongos, Leyte, The Philippines.

10th July 2009

It has been seven and a half weeks now, since I returned to The Philippines from a holiday break in New Zealand. Time has flown and as usual, there never seems to be enough time each day to fit in the things one thinks ought to be done. Learning to pace oneself is a lesson that I always find difficult to achieve, but with the weather now being at its warmest here, it becomes essential. The last ten days I have found to have been as hot as anything I have known here, and the high humidity makes it all the more tiring. Shirts and T-shirts become saturated during the day, as Air Conditioning remains a pleasant day dream from the last time one flew on a plane. Nine hour long school days (from 7.15 am assembly until 5pm dismissal) compounds the problem of heat and tiredness for the staff and students. Everybody becomes exhausted. Some welcoming rainfall around evening time sometimes brings relief from the heat. The bells from the Parish Church thunder out across Hilongos each morning at 4.30 am, just to remind all that sleeping in is not allowed, and that slothfulness can only lead one down the path of perdition. Well, something like that anyway. However, the first term (sorry, semester) of school is only 21 weeks long, and then we can all have a one week holiday break.

Progress is occurring at Saint Teresa's School, with workers being busy each day trying to complete a new classroom, that had remained in a half finished state for the past two years. The school has finally been able to budget some money to complete the building, but it also needed the generous help (financially) of two schools, namely Shalom College, Bundaberg and St. Peter's College, Auckland. Grateful thanks to these two schools for helping us through. Thanks also to Year 8 at Kavanagh College in Dunedin for becoming Penpals with an equivalent class here at St. Teresa's. Our students here are beside themselves with excitement at being able to share letters and photos with an overseas school. Should any other school be interested in something similar with another class level, let me know. It is an excellent way of extending our students' ability with written English.

The Brothers' community here in Hilongos, is now sponsoring some 29 students to attend regular schooling. I am a little unsure as to what percentage of school aged students in Hilongos, actually are enrolled in school, but it is something like 70%, although that might be generous. Carl Sherrin has targeted some 29 students whom he thought that we could help, and has them now attending school regularly. They range in age from 10 years up to 18 years of age. Having said that, some of the teenagers amongst the group have only reached Grade 2 or 3 in Primary School. They have dropped out for all sorts of reasons, but mostly it has something to do with poverty. Hence Carl has arranged for them to be re-enrolled in various schools, both government and private, has organized for school fees to be paid, uniforms

bought, schools books purchased, etc. After six weeks of this new school year, the scheme appears to be working well.

Carl is now in Sydney enjoying a well earned rest for a few weeks, and we have welcomed Paul Coster and Denis Sullivan here to Hilongos. They will remain with us until the end of 2009. Their arrival has doubled the number of Europeans in Hilongos.

Last week provided its share of adventure for us. From 6am on the Monday morning until 6pm on the Wednesday, the whole town of Hilongos (55,000 people) were without water. Something broke down at the pumping station, and so no water flowed through the taps. No warning was given, so we had no water in reserve. All taps turned dry. Our filtered drinking water lasted for about 36 hours and was then exhausted. The filtering station refused to sell filtered water to the locals, but did make it available to us Europeans. We accepted the offer, trying not to reflect too much about double standards. Our school had no water in the taps nor in the toilets, but we continued school as usual !!! There are a few bore pumps around town, pumping artesian water, that people queued up for. Doctora Ely arranged for us to have a drum of bore water delivered. Not healthy to drink, but at least allowing us to wash, shower and shave. No laundry for three days, and I did clean my teeth with beer instead of water, but cannot recommend the practice. Finally the new piece of equipment arrived from Manila, was installed, and water once again flowed through the taps.

Last Saturday I was involved in my first road accident in The Philippines. I was a little late heading off for my Saturday review class at school, so I caught a motorcycle pedicab passing along outside our house. This is a motorcycle, which has a side car attached and so has the capacity to carry up to six passengers. There was only one other passenger, who happened to be one of our 2nd Year students, also heading to school. The driver, a young man of about 20 years of age, sped off, but failed to slow down sufficiently, when he came to the major intersection. There are no traffic lights, stop signs etc here in Hilongos, so road rules are mostly a matter of negotiation. Unfortunately, a jeepney was also speeding along through the intersection, at right angles to us. Neither had a chance to stop, so with a squeal of brakes we managed to hit the jeepney somewhere just behind its back tyre. Our pedicab decided to try and do a complete somersault, but only managed to end upside down in the middle of the intersection. The driver and the student were flung out, while I held on inside. Fortunately it was my adequate behind that cushioned the impact of my hitting the road, giving a lovely bruise, but not one that I can proudly show off. A cut knee and bruised thumb also resulted. Fortunately the driver and student were unharmed. Strangely enough, in the noise and confusion that followed, I managed to pay the driver a small tip for the unsolicited excitement.

Enough for the meantime.

Br. Frank Perkins 10th July 2009