

St. Emmanuel Parish—Landsend

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Dear Everyone,

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Time is flying and here it is almost Christmas again. As usual, I would like to share with you some of the highlights of the year that has just gone by.

January: I usually dead since most things have closed down and don't really get started till school starts again in mid January.

February: I had the pleasure of a visit of a dear friend and classmate who is now the Bishop of Evansville, IN. I took off some time to fetch him from the plane in Joburg and we visited several bishops and even the Cardinal so that he could get a sense of what are the challenges facing the church here in South Africa. St. Mary's Hospital and the monastery were some of the Mariannahill stops we made. We also took time to visit friends from all sections of society to, black, white, Indian, so-called Colored—poor, well-to-do, in between. When we finally arrived back at Landsend, it was welcome home—no electricity and no water. Ha! Welcome home. He had a chance to taste a home-cooked traditional meal in our village and to meet lots of people here locally as well as visiting the outstations. It gave him an idea of the life of people and the life of a pastor in this rural setting. It was also a chance to reminisce and to recall that we are a few of the privileged who are still alive today from all of our classmates. It was refreshing and invigorating.

March: Well, it had to be Holy Week and Easter because of the juggling act between two parishes, Thursday here, Friday there, Saturday here, Sunday try to be in both places. Not satisfactory for me or them but, we are so short of priests that we have to do double duty. We keep telling Rome that they have to look in other directions for priest material but they aren't listening. Many people just leave and go to another Christian community where they feel better taken care of and looked after.

April: I made a trip to Mariannahill to have my teeth checked, to get an international drivers' license as my US license expired when I wasn't able to renew it because it didn't have a photo. Shades of 9/11. I could be impersonating myself.

May: The highlight was the consecration of our new bishop, Sithembele Sipuka, a local Xhosa, 47 yrs. old, who, finally, took the place of the retiring bishop, Oswald Hirmer, who was 78 yrs. old and very tired and soooooo happy to be relieved of this responsibility which weighed heavily on him. He is also not physically well which was a real burden for him. It seem cruel to keep a man in the harness when his energy is gone and he just has to force himself each day.

June, July, August: Of course, this was, by far, the highlight of the year, my Home Leave. I was longing for this and when it finally happened, it was pure delight. Most of June and July I spent in the States visiting family (natural and Mariannahill and CPS—Precious Blood Sisters) and friends and just letting my spirit soak up the loves and friendships that have kept me going over the past 42 yrs. I can't go into details here but I will say that there were two things that made a dent in my mind and heart. 1) How blessed I am to have the family, friends, confreres etc. that I have. The older I get the more I appreciate them. 2) Everyone has a story. There is not one family that I shared with that did not have at least one burden that weighed heavily on their hearts, and some of them really heavy. Not a lot of moaning and groaning but quietly carrying the cross that had been put on their shoulders—dealing with ageing parents, cancer, children with severe diseases, money problems, health problems, misunderstandings, etc. etc. etc. It emphasizes how important it is to remember that we are all connected together and we support one another, especially, at this distance, in prayer. The link is always there. I always make a stop at St. Meinrad (A Benedictine Monastery and seminary in Indiana), my spiritual womb, where I visit the graveyard and recall that it is their fault that I got into so much trouble, e.g. we already started being acquainted with the Social Teaching of the Church in our Junior year of High School. I think that I have been in trouble ever since.

The last just over a month was in Europe with friends and confreres (fellow Mariannahillers) with whom I have worked or got to know through other connections. London, Rome, Switzerland, Germany, and Holland. In the States I was running like a crazy man but managed to slow down a bit but travelled mainly by train throughout Europe. I ended my stay in Europe in Amsterdam and flew from there to Kenya for a quick stop to see how our fledgling community is doing there.

September: Got back to South Africa on Sept. 1st in time for a 100 yr. celebration of one of the first Mariannahill foundations called Koeqana, a real celebration, the first for the new bishop and the last for the old, retiring bishop and his farewell.

October: We Mariannahill priests and brothers made our annual retreat at a place called Emaus, where our first leader, Abbot Francis Pfanner, was forced to do penance at because he broke the rules and send monks out to be missionaries instead of insisting on them being contemplatives. What I learned there is that you must do what you have to do and be willing to take the consequences as long as you know that it is the right thing to do. You do have criteria outside of yourself but sometimes we let ourselves be intimidated by rules and regulations and customs and whatever that need revising.

The death of my ex-wife (I called her that as we worked together at the retreat house when I was there) came as no surprise and she had insisted, before I left for my home leave, that I must take her funeral. She had cancer and had refused chemo, choosing to have a better quality of life until her time would finally run out. I told her that she would have to wait till I got back from my home leave. She did. I talked to her the day before the day before her death. She was as ready as anyone could be. Being a staunch Scotswoman, she asked for bagpipes at her funeral. We were happy to oblige.

November: The death of Fezeka Mpahlwa, our AIDS outreach person for the diocese, was a blow from which we are still recovering. She was the female saviour to many struggling with AIDS, especially those child-headed households, as she was their lifeline. She got sick early on Saturday morning and by noon was dead. She was only around 50 yrs. old. There is still weeping for her loss.

I also went for my yearly checkup for the prostate and was given a clean bill of health and told that my kidneys were in perfect shape. I didn't have to pay a fortune to find that out—I can hardly pass a tree. I also made an appointment with the dentist to replace a lost filling—I am sure that if God had just thought this through a bit, s/he could have done a better job with teeth. I asked another doctor to check out why my right foot seems to be fatter than the left, only to discover that I have what is called osteoarthritis. The cartilage between some of the bones of the toe next to the big toe is gone and that's why I was kind of hobbling around. He says if it gets a bit painful from time to time take a panado. Thank you. I also found out at home from my brother's chiropractor that I have a curved back. Ha! The old man is falling apart but is still comparatively healthy and hasn't had to stop any kind of physical activities as yet (grass cutting-ugh! Climbing on roofs, painting, digging in the garden, etc. I have been richly blessed here too.

December: Here at our mission, I get the impression that people put Jesus on a shelf in the closet at this time as they have many preparations to make for the circumcision ceremonies that are going to take place during these holidays. I had 4 cancellations this week, as people said not to come to the small Christian communities as they were all busy with something or other. We will see who will be here at Christmas besides Sister (the other 2 sisters are on home leave) and myself. Midnight Mass is far too dangerous so it may be just the 2 of us.

Otherwise, you can imagine that one of my highs for the year is that Irishman O'Bama. I was thrilled to death and really look forward to a Bush free world. Don't ever tell me about the "experts" when it comes to finance and banking. The Free Market System—man if this is the best we have to offer I don't want to imagine what the worst might look like. My own home town of Detroit is really badly off. Two standards, one for banks and high finance and another for the struggling Auto Industry.(Never mind the average bod in the street.) Big payouts and golden handshakes to the ones who caused a whole world to be going down the toilet. I am also ashamed of South African and African leaders in general for not getting rid of Mugabe. I can't imagine a worse disaster, and he has the nerve to say there is no Cholera crisis. Holy Moses.

Hey, have a very blessed Christmas giving you the oomph and staying power to meet the challenges of the coming year, and they are many. I love you all to bits. Love and Peace, Fr. Cas.

PS. I can't begin to name all the names and I am truly sorry that I wasn't able to see all of you. The States and Europe are just a bit too big for a 2 month and 1 month visit, especially with the new and growing family members. Next year Mariannahill celebrates 100 yrs. since the death of our "founder". I already have the OK of our bishop to be present at the celebration in Dearborn Hts. In October next year. It will be a short but sweet pop in visit, about a week and then back to work here.

PPS. Perhaps the one thing that bothers me the most is the paranoia about funerals. We spend so much time being respectful to the dead that we cancel all other things to keep the living alive. We are dying as a community because of our obsession with funerals, even on Sundays now.