

*More on our ecumenical ministry
Family
New Car project*

2 Bd. Abbane Ramdane
Oran, Algeria
February 9, 1985

Dear Friends,

We are keeping our promise and writing again before a whole year has run around. Many thanks to a great many of you for cards, greetings and letters—some received after a two or three-year silence. We hope to see some of you while on furlough this summer.

Several people complained that our last letter did not bring them up to date on the boys, so here goes. Actually there are no great changes since all are continuing studies in their respective scientific fields. Paul is in his third year toward a doctorate in chemistry at the University of Tennessee (Knoxville), where he has teaching and research assistantships. John is the one who did pass through a significant rite of passage, having graduated from Baker University in Kansas last May with the same double major Paul got there—physics and chemistry. John is now in the first year of a doctoral program in physics at Arizona State (Tempe, just outside Phoenix). His teaching assistantship covers his minimal needs as a thrifty bachelor. Mark is in the third year of pre-vet studies plus a good dose of physics and math because he likes that area of study. That also keeps open the option of eventual work in bio-physics. He and Jim are still at Baker, where Jim is in his second year of a double major in physics (especially electronics) and computer science.

Here we have just finished an extended "Week of Prayer for Unity," beginning early and ending late. David preached at one English language mass, 2 French language masses and one multilingual mass. The last was most interesting. We went to a small city in the midst of an agricultural region where a good number of Hungarian agricultural specialists have been brought in. The congregation, squeezed into what had once been a large living room, consisted of nearly 25 Hungarians (counting six children), three or four French people, two workers from India (for a railroad construction project), one person each from Belgium, Spain, and Italy. We were the only two Americans. Fortunately, no more Italians had come from the nearby camp built for them as they construct a factory to produce detergents. To avoid the problem of overcrowding and to minimize a bit the linguistic problem, the priest goes to the Italian camp for a mass in Italian every other Friday (weekends here being Thursday afternoon and Friday). We were at the weekly Sunday evening mass held after work hours and to which some of the Hungarians had come from distances of 30-40 miles. The Protestants, besides us, were one Hungarian family, one Hungarian wife, one Frenchman and one Indian.

From typed stencils, the priest had made up quadrilingual booklets containing all the essential readings of the mass. On any given two-page spread, one has the same readings in French, Hungarian, Italian and English. The Scripture lessons for the day were read aloud in Hungarian and French. The few who could understand neither language read in their own Bibles. David preached in French, giving just one sentence at a time. Each sentence was then translated aloud by one of the Hungarians while David translated himself into English in a very low voice for the two Indians sitting immediately to his right.

During this same "extended" week David was invited to give his annual lecture at the Catholic diocesan center. In previous years he has lectured on Luther, Calvin, John and Charles Wesley etc. This year he was specifically encouraged

to deal

to deal with those things in the Catholic tradition that grate on our Protestant sensitivity as we remain a tiny minority of Protestants in close relationship with a vastly larger Catholic community (also a very small minority in this Muslim country). He was able to talk very freely and openly in a very relaxed and fraternal atmosphere because that is the kind of fellowship we have been privileged to know here and for which both we and our Catholic friends are very grateful.

Carol continues to delight in her new situation in which her teaching has a much more human side rather than reducing her to an over-worked cog in a bureaucratic machine. We have both enjoyed her greater freedom, which has permitted us to accept more invitations and invite more people here. The second semester, however, she will teach four evenings a week instead of two at the consulate. Fortunately, her tutoring hours will be unchanged. Both of us had extra work around the Christmas-New Year's season (when we least needed it!) as we filled in for the consulate teacher, who took a three-week vacation to visit family in the States. David found it an interesting experience even though the timing was poor.

On a number of occasions we have received letters from both individual friends and congregations asking what they could do to help us in our ministry. We generally answer that we ask for your prayers and that any financial contributions should go to one of the approved Advance projects in the Advance Special catalog put out by the General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church. Now we have a very special project to call to your attention. It is project #009218-0 A-S and bears the title of "A Car For Pastoral Service and Outreach, Algeria."

When we arrived in 1975, we came with our own small Renault station wagon in Carol's name. Since she had always had an official job with a government agency (the university), she had never had to pay any customs on the car (about 100%). After losing the job, however, she was forced to sell the car to someone else having the right to keep the car duty free. The car was too old to be imported by paying customs on it now, so the only alternative was to export the car at more expense than it was worth. So it has been sold. Since Carol's present work requires no car, we don't need a second one. However, what we have left is the old church car, a mini Renault four dating from 1968. As our only car, it is not nearly reliable enough and must be replaced with a new one. We shall have to limp along with it, though, until the money is received for the project. Hence we urgently appeal to all who can help, asking you to send your contributions to the Advance project number given above.

In our unusual situation we have very few occasions to perform the official pastoral functions of baptizing, confirming, marrying and burying. However, we recently had the privilege of conducting a religious wedding ceremony for a young couple from Madagascar already legally married by their ambassador in Algiers. Our small chapel was filled as it never has been except when the Catholics come for the week of prayer for Unity. While the ceremony was simple as befitted our simple chapel setting, it was centered on the essentials. At the end, just after the exchange of vows and rings, the couple turned and sang a soft, sweet, melodious hymn in their own tongue. Many of us could not understand the words but nevertheless found that their singing communicated to us a real harmony of life based on the love God has given them to share. It was a beautiful ending for the service, and we'll let that note also serve as the end of our letter.

Yours for human harmony in the love of
God,

David & Carol BUTLER