

Herry

Christmas

1984 up-date

2 Bd. Abbane Ramdane
ORAN, ALGERIA
October 22, 1984

Dear Friends,

Another year has gone by and we most humbly apologize for not writing sooner. We count on your understanding and forgiveness and we also promise to write sooner next time.

Our last letter told about "A Day in the Life of the Butlers." Well, the overall pattern hasn't changed much. Shortly after writing that letter, Carol had a very interesting day. She had no classes that day but spent the morning conferring and coordinating with her British colleague from the English department. David left for Algiers at 1 p.m. From then till 7:30, as she was TRYING to get some more university work done, she had 13 interruptions. Three times it was the phone, but 10 times she had to go downstairs to the street to answer the door. Most of the people involved were church contacts but also included university colleagues, personal friends and neighbors. Many stayed for some time, often overlapping in their visits. These people represented 6 nationalities, 4 continents and 3 religious traditions (Protestant, Catholic and Muslim). We haven't bothered to keep detailed notes on other, similar days!

Our church situation hasn't changed radically either. On 2 occasions when we made a detailed check on our little French-language congregation in Oran (once with 22 adults and once with 29 adults), we found we represented 12 different countries (not all the same ones each time) and 4 continents. We almost always have a few Catholic friends worshipping with us and otherwise represent a wide range of Protestant traditions.

As for our Brazilian Pentecostal connection, there are only 2 or 3 Pentecostals at that dam construction campsite now (nearly a 2-hour drive from here), but there are always a number of Catholic friends (plus another Protestant right now) to fill up the living room in our house meeting. We still use a Catholic student from Sao Tome to translate from French to Portuguese. We have them do their own singing, praying and Bible reading in Portuguese, of course. Twice these services have been recorded on cassettes to be sent back to Pentecostal families in Brazil. The first time the priest came by during a house meeting, the Catholics there looked like kids caught with their hands in the cookie jar! They were greatly relieved when they saw that he and David were good friends and that he was glad to stay for the rest of the service and pronounce the benediction. After one service, as we were eating supper with the host family, we were called from the table to the front door to shake hands with a man we'd never seen before. After he'd gone, the host explained that the fellow had heard there was a Protestant pastor here who preached the gospel of Christ instead of ranting against the Catholics and wanted to greet both the pastor and his wife.

In the fall of 1983 we also began regular services in English in the camps for foreigners near the petro-chemical complex some 25 miles east of Oran. For several years there was a fairly large English-speaking community there. The Catholics had up to 200 and more at weekly mass, while an English Baptist minister counted nearly 100 at weekly services. When the latter left, around Christmas of 1982, he had contact with only 2 Protestant couples plus 2 or 3 other couples who were leaving at that time. One of the remaining couples had begun attending mass regularly, and David was already preaching occasionally at that mass at the invitation of the rather elderly and ailing priest. By October of 1983, David was preaching at the mass once a month and had also found

a small group of Protestants desiring separate services twice a month. We find about 12-18 in attendance while the Catholics are down to about 40-50, roughly half of whom are skilled laborers from the Philippines.

David's other main project last year ('83-'84)^{was} participating in the diocese wide Catholic study organized by their bishop and a sociologist who made several trips here from France. The goal was to have a better understanding of who really composed the international Catholic community here and how they see their church as an institution, what they expect from it and how they understand their own role in it, as well as how they feel they are fitting into their Muslim surroundings here, almost always on a fairly short-term basis. A dozen categories and sub-categories were set up for investigation, one of which was the priests. For that group they felt it would be better to have an interviewer who was not one of the "tribe" and yet not too far removed. David was the perfect compromise--neither priest nor layman! He was also put in charge of the group of lay people here on a long-term basis. In addition to doing most of the interviewing himself, he found the analyzing of the interviews and the writing up of the contrasting reports a very time-consuming task. We felt the time was well-spent, however. It was all most interesting, enriching and relevant to our own situation as a Protestant community.

Carol's last year at the university was one of the most exhausting and frustrating (only '77-'78 was worse). While many among both students and fellow teachers lamented the fact that she and another American were being forced to leave because they were foreigners without a Ph.D degree (realizing that their native speaker status, lengthy experience and conscientious devotion to the task of developing and coordinating the first-year program in basic language skills was worth far more than such a degree), Carol herself was delighted to be able to withdraw with a clear conscience. For several years she had been asking for more Algerian colleagues to work along with the native speakers in that first-year program in view of the day when they would have to take it over on their own--all to little or no avail. She figured the time had come for their traumatic change-over--and it has indeed proved very traumatic in the English department this fall.

Now Carol is happily teaching English in small groups at the U.S. consulate in Oran, helping adult professional people (and a few university students!) improve their English. She is also doing some tutoring. This is teaching with a human face instead of teaching impersonally to a sea of faces to which some of the names don't even get firmly attached till the end of the semester. So she continues to rejoice in the Algerianization of the staff at the university.

The highlight of 1984 was Jim's 3-month vacation with us and our trip with him through Europe, racing as far as southern Norway and back. Along the way we visited 22 families (in rare cases individuals), mostly former colleagues or parishioners and most of whom we hadn't seen in a long time--up to 23 years! We reveled in the beauty of God's creation and were mightily blessed in a pilgrimage of friendship where the human dimension of love flowed in full force as another crucial element in God's world, rooted in His own nature.

By the time this reaches you, a "Merry Christmas and Happy New Year" wish will be in order. May the "Love" that "came down at Christmas" be yours then and always.

Fraternally yours,

David & Carol BUTLER