

Education in the Parish of Nuestra Senora del Carmen Cabezas, Feb 2019

First we can ask, “**Why** have we decided on the service of **education**?” It is an effective way to help poor people. First, education enables people to stand on their own two feet in the future. They know how to earn their own way in our sophisticated world. They do not need ongoing support while contributing to improve lives of others in their surrounding society. Secondly people can decide for themselves what is best for their family and country, harder to be manipulated by unscrupulous demagogues or leaders. More than that it is a tradition of the Catholic Church to be in education as a way to help people, at least from year 265 AD (confer, St. Athanasius Life of St Anthony of the Desert).

We believe **from our faith in Jesus Christ that every person is a gift from God for the good of the entire community** (1 Corinthians 12:7). Each person is a unique richness offered by God for the good of their brothers and sisters. **For the progress of a people it is necessary that ALL people be developed to contribute to the common good.** Each person, uneducated or who lacks a complete education, cannot give their bit for the good of all. We must find ways for all area youth and adults to have the opportunity to study. In our municipal area or county there are more than sixty communities. Most communities do not have courses through 8th grade, much less to a high school diploma. At the same time there are many families in which there are not enough resources for books, school supplies, and money needed to buy clothes for school. There are many communities in other municipalities with the same circumstances (single mothers, children of separated parents abandoned in the hands of poor grandparents, families made poor by sickness, etc.). About 60% up to 70% of our regular high school students are from broken families. We look for the most remote and poorest young people to offer our services. There are many adults who did not have the opportunity to study as children who need ways to complete their development. Being followers of Jesus Christ we have to look for those who most need our help. **The Child Defense Office (Welfare Dept.) has given us some 24 young folks to raise. Eleven now are adults and 15 more currently live with us in 2019.**

Overall, **we are the largest boarding school in the area**, receiving students from six municipalities covering an area some **four times the size of Tarrant County, TX**. We have the only Special Education program with specialized teachers in the whole department (i.e. state-wide in U.S. terms). Special Education has just not arrived in Eastern Bolivia and **two of the four teachers are graduates of our high school, including the principal**. Some **60% of our high school graduates go on to higher learning**. As a comparison, **the Bolivian public school average is 5%** per a 2013 study done by state university, Cordillera Province. We have four dormitories, two for regular high school students in Cabezas for some **400 students** who attend our high school, then a dormitory for grade school students in Cabezas for some **30 students** who attend the public school. We have a dormitory in Mora, a small town to the northeast of Cabezas with meals. All who live there, both grade school high school students, attend the public school. There are **62 students** there in 2019. We offer free lodging in two houses in cities where there is a branch of the state university. These house up to **75 students**.

Our regular high school is a humanistic and technical school, meaning all students must take at least one technical subject at least 3 years and have a general idea of various other technical courses during their time with us. All programs, except the grade school and the special education programs, include mandatory computer laboratory in each year of study. Failing a technical course is also failing the year. We give all the necessary elements for study, food and lodging, text books and reference books and medical attention, including surgery if necessary. We provide school supplies and uniforms for those who need them. We have found that buying books is an impossible cost for most of our students' families, taking a half of a month's salary for each child in school. We ask parents to help as they can, without pressure on anyone. We have found that the poorest families are too timid to ask for help and, if pushed to help, they withdraw their kids without saying anything. There are **410 students (U.S. 6th-12th grades) in 2019** and we expect a few **more in 2019**. Our school year begins the first Monday of February and terminates the end of November.

Our technical institute now offers these courses of study as of 2019: a Technical Superior Degree (similar to an Associate's Degree in Texas) in agriculture including veterinary science, honey bee production, and business administration for rural businesses which includes accounting. All these take 3 years of study. Then we offer Technical Medium Degrees for agriculture, honey bee production, business administration for rural business, carpentry for wood, metal, and fabricated lumber, plus clothes making (sewing). These take two years of study. We are finishing a new building with 8 classrooms with a science laboratory, plus a kitchen for processing food that we produce to put food on the open market. These classes are held on Thursday afternoon, Friday, and Saturday allowing students to work at least part time. There are **over 50 students in 2019**.

As of 2019 **we have granted high school diplomas to over 1,000 students** in our regular high school and our adult high school since we started in 2004. **Our total student body**, adding up all programs, is just **over 1,100 students at the beginning of 2019**.

Our **Special Education** program will expand **to some 67 students in 2019** with programs carried out in four locations. Physical therapy is a part of our program in Special Education and we have successfully helped one little girl who was born paralyzed to be able now to walk independently. We are now working with several others with various difficulties to better their possibilities of movement. We teach those who are able to learn how to make simple, money-earning tasks that can help support their own lives, and live as able citizens in their communities.

We have a psychologist to work with struggling students and collaborate in cases of abuse of children and women, and provide emergency housing as needed. We offer vocation guidance and collaborate in courses on value reflection for all students. This year, 2019, we will offer motivation and life planning workshops for students in the regular high school and workshops for teachers to better their teaching methods.

In 2018 we built a type of **retreat center** nearby that can accommodate over 130 youth (can actually seat over 300) for moral formation. We incorporate games and songs that form community, teach our faith in Jesus Christ, question self-centered worldly values, and inculcate Christian ways of thinking and acting. Our emphasis is on living the Gospel first and foremost in peaceful fraternity and service to others. We already have planned one retreat each month, but will have more specific topics such as marriage and family for the graduation class, and motivation and life-planning goals for high school students, amid other themes.

We also have a **high school for adults called CEITHA** (a GED type school on weekends) for those folks, 18 or older, single or married, who work now and did not have a chance to study when they were teenagers. Two years of regular school are included in each year of study. **Our regular high school students are obligated to take their technical courses in this adult program or the technical institute.** We offer auto mechanics, physical therapy, natural medicine and first aid, secretarial science, gastronomy. All courses are accredited by the Ministry of Education for students in our regular high school who choose one of these courses and for adult students who are pursuing a high school diploma. This meets the government requirement that all high school students graduate with a vocation. **There are some 500 students** in this program in **2019**. This program has a new building this year with three classrooms and an auditorium that can be divided to make two classrooms.

One must notice that in our schools one can see three basic pillars of education:

1. There is elemental humanistic formation using the normal humanistic courses common to all schools in Bolivia, this to form the mind and prepare the student to discover talents, establish life's goals, and desires to develop further for service in our world.
2. Basic technical courses are offered that are necessary to maintain a human community. This gives also a possible work source for the student when finishing high school, while at the same time giving a source of part-time work so that the student can continue further education.
3. In our world of today there is moral education so necessary to bring harmony in families and in communities, to develop honesty and responsibility, all based on the life of Jesus Christ whose example and spirit make for a better family, community and world order.

We are a **Mission Project** of the **Mission Council of the Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, TX USA**. All funds go through the Diocese as tax-exempt charitable donations with 100% coming to us, as all administrative costs are borne by the Diocese. **To help us**, donations may be:

Mailed to:

ETC Bolivia Fund, The Catholic Center, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76106

Checks should be made out to ETC Bolivia.

Made online:

ETC Bolivia school/student scholarship or one-time donations:

<https://fwdioc.thankyou4caring.org/campaign-pages/etc-bolivia-sponsorship>

Please note there is a separate account for **Father Bob's Wishlist** items or **other donations**. These are not scholarships but special items or projects that add to the school's capabilities. These items can be found online at: <https://fwdioc.org/fr-thames-wish-list-2019.pdf>

Mailed contributions should be made out to **Thames Mission Bolivia**.

Online donations for this Wishlist or other donations can be made at the following link:

<https://fwdioc.thankyou4caring.org/campaign-pages/thames-mission>

Point of contact for all of these funds is Cecille Britton, Gift Processing, 817-945-9461.

Any questions regarding other financial considerations or arrangements should be directed to Christina Ybarra, Assistant Director for Fiscal Management, at the Catholic Center. The Catholic Center phone number is 817-560-3300.

See us on FACEBOOK, **Ñombori Opaetepegua Cabezas**, our name in the Guarani Indian language meaning "All Working Together for All".