

Fr. Bob Thames' Newsletter
October 2022

Greetings to all of you there and OUR GOD BE WITH ALL OF YOU! This letter could be a little longer as so much has happened this month, much to tell. Hopefully not to get you tired reading. I am starting this letter so early, 27th of October, and who knows when I will finish.

First, on Oct. 14 we had a good rain, more than the one on September. Unfortunately, not much fell on our land in the mountains. Rain is forecast for this coming Monday. Hopefully, Our God hears our prayers and responds with a good downpour, not flooding, just a good downpour. (See how I want to pray to Our God), But we have some crops planted there and what we planted is growing. We urgently need sorghum maize that will be used for silage for our cows. This makes milk. But as I had written before in September, we are moving into irrigation. Our well in the river bottom is doing well and we have now three pumps to use to irrigate. The last one we bought is not doing so well. (Now a correction 1 day later—One of our workers remembered that new pumps with a gasoline motor needed a change of oil after a short trial use. After changing the oil in the motor, the pump is working excellently as advertised. Good to have folks who know more than me working for us here) For the price we expected more. We hope eventually to have some 7 to 8 hectares irrigated, some seventeen acres more or less, alternating with beans and sorghum to keep the land up to par, hopefully. The beans, a land enriching crop, will be used in our kitchen and for selling as the price is good and will help with our expenses. Interestingly enough the Indians all over the Americas (North and South) planted corn and beans together, knowing or not knowing. It kept their land producing. Read the book "Before 1492", extremely interesting, read from cover to cover by myself, Steve, and Amy, THANK YOU for the gift.

It was close to the beginning of the month when a man who is a specialist in Web pages (he designed our web page, maybe for free, not sure) wanted to come to spend two weeks of his yearly vacation with us. Interestingly enough he is Mormon, not too many in Bolivia. Highly educated (degrees from all over the place, in Bolivia and outside, including from the Catholic University of La Paz,) and rather rich with various companies in La Paz, he has been impressed with what we do here. He just wanted a change of pace for himself, I think, which he found so easily with us. He gave classes to our high school upper classes in Web Page work. He went around to all we do, taking pictures and whatever more. I am not sure what he did, but he did interview me at one time. I do not know if there will be any future contact, but he even attended one time or more our religious celebrations, sitting off to one side. He did not talk of his own religion. He spent more time talking with the psychologist who works with us, a specialist in motivation of teenagers.

The second week of October was the 18th anniversary of our high school, and did we ever celebrate. For me, the most important was our dance festival. It was at night which I would have changed. Most parents could not attend as most live outside Cabezas. Yet the stands were full all around. Each room (two rooms of each grade) presented a dance from the various cultures of Bolivia. I am sorry that Mexico has let go of so much of their cultures of dance. In Cd.Juarez where I spent 11 years is really

lacking in this. Happily, Bolivia is maintaining theirs, with video tapes in abundance and dance programs in the schools. The fact is that cultural dance, not couple dancing, brings out a consciousness of the people's beauty and self-value. We are even more in this area than other schools, having made the clothes of fourteen cultures for our kids and even at times rent them out to other schools. We are at present renewing all of these in our clothes shop. For me it is so important, having read a very long article back in 1966 or 7, written by a priest Doctor of Psychology who then taught in the Catholic University in Washington. He insisted that cultural ties to the past help maintain the solidity of the family and the overall stability of the nation (I remember so well). Our problem has been a nation formed from immigrants, constantly coming in, leaving behind their own culture to adapt to ours. But to which with so many different ones found here. I do not think the present instability in our society is because of this. What we find at present is a result of so many separated and unworkable families with little or no moral foundation that comes MOSTLY from stable and loving parents. This tends to generate a small percentage of an unstable population. But a small percentage in a population so large makes for a significant group in our society. Bolivia is right behind, becoming more and more materialistic, and with more broken families which is why I am so strong now here in working on family unity with moral stability, a commitment to spouses one to another, and then to their kids. Love takes time together, weaving their lives together to penetrate to the heart of the parents, and giving emotional security to their kids. The kids in my house precisely have lacked this, which is why most are here with me. And I was never prepared for such a task. It was just no one else would do it and I saw the great need; Our Lord so helps me. You all there pray for us here. That somehow God's Love so penetrates their hearts and make stable adults for their own future families.

A part of this anniversary week was a meeting of many important folks in education and giving out recognition certificates to so many teachers and other folks who have made our school here a model for others. It is we in our school who have started high school adult education and five different technical courses with that are open to everyone of any age, the special education program for handicapped, and the only technical institute in the whole area outside the big city of Santa Cruz. I suspect that behind this program was the ex-district superintendent who now lives and is a school principal in the city of Camiri (provincial capital for us) to the southwest of here. She worked with us to do so much and was trying at the same time to generate our example to other high schools. She came back and was the announcer and mover of the day of rewards program.

(Now Friday, 28 Oct.). Another great event of this month happened on October 21, a Friday. When we first started our school here in 2004 the first principal was the lady who was the principal in our grade school in the city (Corpus Christi parish). She did all the necessary paperwork to get us recognized officially as told above. She is now the principal of Corpus Christi High School in the city whose land was in the process of being secured when I left the city. She yet senses a strong bond with us here and arranged a trip of her graduating class to visit out here, bringing all kinds of food and clothing that the kids in the various classes have gathered up (food means 100 pd. Sacks of flour, sugar, cooking oil, I mean lots of things.) The senior kids and a good number of adults came in 3 buses, one of whose owners was a young man who was a kid who had a strong memory of me while there in the city. He talked a lot with me of

his memories while visiting. In all they stayed some 3 to 4 hours, playing soccer with our boys, eating lunch with us before departing around 2pm.

But there is more to this story. Among the seniors from the city who came to visit were twin girls whose history began out here in our parish in the country. It must have been either 2003 or 4, around June or so, that a woman without a husband gave birth to a set of twins. She already had eight kids, and the struggle to maintain all of these was really hard. Worse yet she did not have enough breast milk for the twins and within a month or less they ended up in the hospital with severe malnutrition. The grandmother insisted on keeping the twins, but necessity made the mother decide to put them up for adoption, leaving this process of adoption in our hands. We decided to obligate any adoption to include both girls together. Quite a few couples wanted one, but not two. Finally, a young woman who had come out with us from the city decided to adopt them both, although she was single at the time. She was a recent university graduate in Sociology and would go on study in the teachers' training school (5 yrs.). She is the one who also with us established the adult high school and the first technical courses, then the technical institute. (Some of you may know her, Angela Hernandez, a real angel for our work out here). She later married and has a smaller girl, now living in the city, teaching night school. Now at last, the twin girls came out as part of the graduating class, being even more tied to me as I am their godparent of Baptism. Many photos were taken as you might imagine. The proposal is that our senior classes establish a tradition of visiting each other, so we have to figure and plan a visit them before our school ends in November.

When we started out here, I walked around a lot and knew all our property and how it was developing for our work. But as the parish took more and more of my time and interest, I didn't notice so much as in the beginning. The land next to the high school property started to develop two large gullies, not sure when this started. But now both are working themselves close to our fence. These are some fourteen meters deep and eight meters or more wide. I should have been more alert to this. We are in consultation with specialists in the municipal government and are going on to the departmental (state) level looking for guidance. The owner never told us of this and surely knew of it. It must have been washing the gullies when it was raining more some 10 years or so ago. Now it is up to us to keep it from reaching into our school property. The land on top (like topsoil) is only two feet or so deep, then all the rest is sand, easily washed away, like riverbed that it might have been at one time back in history. Reminds me of the land of my family where I was born near Alvord. The U. S. Gov. bought much of the land and began restoration projects and eventually would rent the pasture out to cattle growers. We have some advantages as we have professors who know a lot too on this and have students who need practice time (70% of their class time). So, the technical institute and our high school agriculture and veterinary classes all will participate in the work of saving restoration. May God bless us in this. We will accept only the restoration near our land so as to protect ourselves. The owner next to us seems to be irresponsible for his part, sad to say, but it is too large an area for our responsibility as the gullies both end up in the river bottom and include some forty acres. We will do the first steps now as our school is ending, will continue some in our summer, then do more next year.

(Now Saturday, Oct. 29) Last March we here began with our classes of The Sacrament of Confirmation. Calling the Bishop in May we arrange a date of Oct. 23, a Sunday,

this year for the Sacrament. We announced in August also for those adults who had not been Confirmed and wanted the Sacrament. I set up a program based on reading the Gospel of St. Luke at least three times and studying the Person of Jesus Christ. More and more adults have come forward. So, with the kids and adults in Abapó, then the kids from our high school and the adults around here, those who work with us and others from Cabezas it has added up. The number now is around 120 to 125. Poor Bishop! But I had told him before that it would be around 90 to 100. Here Confession is a rare event in the lives of many, so we urge and at times push not only the godparents, but also the parents of the kids, if possible, to make a Confession so the kids know that this is part of the Christian life, not just a once-in-a-lifetime experience for kids. So, a lot of Confessions! I had pretty well done all we could do, the day before our Confirmations (Oct. 22) Political chaos erupted all over the country. The major excuse was from a date for the next census that will distribute the tax money for the next 10 years, similar to some problems in the U. S. But then any group, local or national, with some gripe or other, decided to block roads, block streets in cities and in the country. Fights are part of this, work stops, food at times does not get to where it is needed, fuel is limited and at times none in some places (even in Cabezas). And it continues today, Saturday Oct. 29. The bishop last week told us that we will have Confirmation when all the turmoil is settled. With road blocks many parents cannot come as well as godparents if they live in the city, or a good distance from Abapó. All taxi service is very limited and expensive. We just have to live with our conditions. We will see when all settles down, so we wait!

It is not only in Bolivia that there is chaos, and worse yet, violence of war, mass kidnapping for ransom, (Mali, Nigeria), all sorts of crime and internal national violence, hunger, some to starvation, diseases in masses. I can only go back to the ONE AND ONLY SOLUTION, JESUS CHRIST, I repeat it so often, hopefully not boring you all, but JESUS IS THE WAY, THE TRUTH, AND THE LIFE (John 14,6). The world is not ours, but God-Created and maintained. And as we search further into our universe, we find only a universe that is larger and larger, more magnificent than we could ever have imagined, created, and maintained by Our God. I know that Jesus does not find solutions to our problems, but Jesus teaches us by His Example to love, giving meaning to our lives to find solutions that demand sacrifice that produces solutions, one way or another. In Jesus there will be solutions: peace in war, vaccines for diseases, political chaos into family-community-national harmony. We find solutions to our problems without violence because respect and fraternal love control our evil urges, whether between nations or in families. Leaving Jesus out of our lives lets our evil inclinations to go further and further, even to nuclear total destruction. This will take a mass conversion, seeing the other alternative as world destruction, but Jesus waits for our turning to Him. I do not think this will come from the upper, civil level (few if any government folks), but turning our lives to live more like Jesus, a Mass Prayer campaign also, maybe Pope Francis-led, with other religions joining in. God is in control, even though Our God leaves so much in our hands. The way Jesus lived and continues to live through us today must find solutions that beget new life, even here on our planet. Let God be out in front! As you see, I believe in MIRACLES as I have seen so many.

I continue to ask for your help, some increase in donations for two months or so, one way or another, asking friends who are concerned about helping the poorest get an education, larger foundations who might be interested in all we do here. (Let me know

and we can send information on all we do to those interested). I have been informed that some have already given some extra and I am extremely grateful. May Our Lord so Bless you all! We need your help now so that we can be sure to finish the next school year. At present we cannot finish the next school year. Any money can be sent directly through the Diocese of Fort Worth but be sure to direct all to "ETC Bolivia." Otherwise, it could go to other places. Or it could be sent more directly to us here in Bolivia. My niece, Carol Allen, a CPA in downtown Fort Worth at 817-632-2500 can tell you how. I appreciate all your help for so many years, and hopefully some day we may be more self-supporting. But the poverty around us will make it harder than in other places. Still, we are trying. Thank you for all you have done for us over the years.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames

P.S. In last month's letter, I forgot to add special education, a program we began in our place in 2011. It has grown to six centers in the municipality with about 110 to 115 students. Here there is no graduation, the students of all ages are there. There is now one exception, a young 17-year-old girl who is deaf except with a hearing aide in her right ear. She hears just behind the ear with the aide. She is a beautiful girl and rather bright, and the director (young woman) wants her to study a little more here, then go to the teacher training school to be a teacher in special education. Actually, we are reaching only a small portion of the handicap folks, actually some 500 in all the municipality.

We are volunteers supporting ETC Bolivia. The current contact information at the Diocese of Fort Worth to continue to support the children is: Kim Stutzman at (817) 803-5146 or via e-mail at kstutzman@adv-fdn.org. The following shortcut link takes you directly to the ETCB donation web page: <http://bit.ly/ETCBolivia>. Please reply to this e-mail if we may answer any questions.