

Fr. Bob Thames Newsletter June Newsletter

Dear Family all of you, I hope this letter finds all of you well and growing. Here is the June letter in good time. Pray for us here!

I understand that at some of you are going through some heat wave there, although I don't know if it is directly affecting the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Hopefully not. Here as I begin this letter we have had two weeks of cold (for us anyway, in the upper 40's and lower 50's), but now this seems to be warming up. This is always interesting for us because the two week winter vacation that we began yesterday (Friday 29 of June) is supposed to be given when the weather forecast proclaims the coldest weather of the our winter. Without fail these last 5 or more years we have our coldest weather beforehand, then on the winter vacation it warms up without fail. The students are really glad for that which makes their time off more enjoyable. Another element that makes the students' time off more enjoyable is the international tournament of soccer (El Mundial in Spanish) which is culminating in Russia at present. Although just about all of the kids in my house will be working, many others will be glued to their televisions (or someone else's) to see at least the games that include someone from Latin America. I must admit that the enthusiasm passes over to me at times watching on very few occasions. I believe that Colombia is yet in the running or maybe Mexico, I am not sure, for the top spots.

Most kids from my house have gone home, except those whose house is here. I am trying to put all of them here in some work, because it is part of my job to get them accustomed to work, learn some skills too, that will benefit them later on as adults. Because I take in some kids with bad emotional baggage it is all the more urgent to have them working some, getting rid of some of their bad moments. Being busy helps in this. Three of the recent arrivals with more serious problems I sent to their family homes (if there is one) for the vacation to maintain contact with their adult family members. It seems to me too soon to start them working. Family contacts, even with more distant relatives, if there are some, help in this. But as they are longer with me and accept me as in charge of their lives, I start with the work ethic.

Winter vacation also signals the end of the second semester of our school year, although in our high school no report cards were given out yet. That will be when all return after July 16. Some of the public school grades were given report cards, although not all. Some in my house received them. I am hoping for the best as we have had some very low grades with some of the kids, which makes me a little afraid to see their grades when the report cards do come out.

The big news perhaps this month is the finishing of the new buildings for the adult high school and the technical institute. Why may you ask is that so, when this is not about them, but about the regular high school students? I will explain in more detail than before. Our new district superintendent is pushing hard in all our school district (our municipal government area like a big county in the U. S.) to get technical courses made available to all the regular high school students. Our adult high school (with 7 technical courses offered) and technical institute (with 6 technical courses offered) have the capacity of giving technical courses all over the district. Our regular high school yet has the advantage because we have work in practice (70% of the technical courses are practice) with our cows, pigs, goats, fields, farm equipment, our gastronomy kitchen and all its equipment of ovens, blenders, old car motors for mechanics, computers for secretarial and accounting courses, and our physical therapy center, plus other things. The district superintendent would like all the students of the district to have access to our places. Imagine some 30 kids trying to learn how to take care of our pigs, another numerous group trying to milk our 17 cows, or 40 kids trying to mix some batter for cake? I will see what comes of her push with us. As I have said in an earlier letter she put her own daughter in our school (9th grade) precisely because of our technical courses (at least I think so). Her daughter is taking classical music with keyboard (we also offer classical guitar).

But now she is talking about another aspect that should be more far-reaching. She is proposing, and I heartily agree, to have a district-wide exposition of all people (adults as well as young folks) with some skills to be able to present their product or skill. In this exposition there would be judges from the ministry of education who would qualify the products, then giving certification to the persons whose product shows high quality. Both the national government as well as the state government has some type of qualification process that recognizes work done. I am thinking that this will be a big push to get kids more interested in getting into

some profession in high school. A high qualification can mean someone can start making and selling a product with state approval.

This week should see a meeting on this with the district superintendent, me, and others, to start to plan this. My hope is to have the exposition on the Cabezas anniversary day at the end of November. It would give time to publicize and prepare for such an event. We will see. It does make me a little proud because our school has a big advantage over others with our hands-on workshops and animals. But if this idea catches on, it will promote much activity from others to push for these courses in the 7 other high schools in our district, which is what the district superintendent wants. Again all students as well as adults can take our technical courses, and if there are enough students in distant towns, teachers from our adult high school and technical institute can be sent to those places rather than have the students come here. We at present have 1493 students adding up all involved in our educational offers. This would push us way over that as all the administration grades would be given as part of our programs even though the grades would appear on their own school's report cards.

I have written before of a room in my house for pregnant students or young girls with babies that are able to continue their studies. Just recently the child defense office asked me if there would be room for other girls, one 15 and another 14, both pregnant, who maybe could come at the end of the winter vacation. Both have been made fun of in their own schools, so dropped out. I have no idea how many kids there are in our district with this situation, but at least we can help a little. Our desire has been to reach out to those most in need and least able to handle a situation for themselves. Young girls from poor families who need help in this certainly qualify for what we try to offer. May Our Lord continue to bless us with enough resources to do good for those who most need it! This is helped by our having two university nurses here to care for the young mothers-to-be and their new-born babies in their special needs.

We had our monthly retreat in June again, even though it was on June 29th, the day school ended for the winter vacation at noon that day. We expected fewer kids, but 60 or so from our high school showed up with about 20 from the town where the retreat center is located, some 80 or so in all. It turned out really well, concentrating on the family who lives in Faith. One of our small communities that have a good number of students in our high school recently had their town religious feast. Their patron saint is St. John the Baptist and this is always a big

event with folks coming from all around to participate, even from the city. Free food, music and at times dancing, helps bring folks in.

This year it happened on a Sunday, June 24, (a weekend so more freedom to come), even though we always celebrate the night before, so Saturday night (we say here on the vigil of the feast). But what prevailed on me in reflecting on what to say is the God-passionate life of St. John. We know of him in the gospels and a little in Josephus, a Jewish historian of the first century, so a contemporary of St. John and Jesus (and maybe even Philo of Alexandria, I just can't remember if Philo mentions his movement or not, but I think he does. I know for sure the Christians are written about by him and by others, including Tacitus, a Roman historian). Wow, how could we use some passionate Christians today in our world! Folks willing to proclaim the truth of what is right and just, not to condemn, but calling people to see the evils of our society and make changes in their own lives. The big difference with St. John is that he lived differently from the beginning, so that he showed the way before he talked (as did Jesus). This for me is what I am talking about. We have so many who talk but live like all the rest, some even making lots of money from their message. We need radical witnesses who live and love first, then call others to follow as St. John did. Even clergy, and religious, and a whole lot of lay folks!

Looking back over the past 15 years of our time in Cabezas with the schools and other things that we have been involved in, it is easy and necessary to see that all has been God-given. Certainly Our God has used our humanity and that of so many others, but all of this has originated in the Grace and Spirit of Jesus Christ. It could never have been done otherwise. I rejoice in this Divine reality, but it also hurts a little (at times a lot) to think this might end with my life, as I approach my 80th birthday. Actually I have only been a conduit for help from the generous and Faith-guided folks of the Diocese of Fort Worth and this does not have to depend on me. Another person or persons could do the same, without doubt, even better than me. I have said and believe that I am not the best person to do what I do here; just that no one else has showed us to take my place or to do it before me. So I keep on, trusting in Our Lord. I know very well that I am not a St. John Bosco whose charisma attracted droves in to help and the works he made spread far and wide in the whole world in very little time. Certainly ours has not done this. I know too that God has many ways to help and mine is only one way, and I have been allowed to do things never dreamed about with my limited ability. What the

future holds remains to be seen, and I and others continue to trust, pray, work together to do what we can to help so many in need.

I stand or sit speechless so many times before Our God in the Eucharist, just knowing that God has done so much for so many, never thinking ahead of time that all of this could have happened with so little from me. I ask for your continued prayer and sacrifice that Our Lord may be praised in the lives of so many who have benefited from this endeavor in the surroundings of Cabezas!

Your brother in Jesus Christ,

Fr. Bob Thames