

Father Bob Thames' end of June 2024 letter from Cabezas, Bolivia, follows below. Please use the [link at the end of the letter](#) for easiest access to the on-line donation page.

Greetings to all of you there! Here, Saturday, June 29, it is cold for us at 16 degrees Celsius (about 62 degrees for you all, I think). This year we are having a colder winter than any other since I came in December 2002, but better than last year which was the hottest that we have had. I prefer the cooler one this year because in the hottest there is a limit to the clothes one can take off. There are a few offices with air conditioners for cooler room, but to my knowledge there are no homes nor offices with heating. Different from all of you there.

Yesterday our school had a feria or a type of trades day, just a little warmer than today, but few people came. This is the last one we will have in the school proper. From now on there will be these days of putting our products out in the public square of the Old Town Cabezas with the folks there participating too. But these days will be every two months, hoping to have a lot more people to be present. We want the competition so that the kids can see how the real world operates. This is a major reason for our ferias, that our kids know how to work in the real world. But with fewer folks coming from outside, one thing we did was really successful. Our hog sale was very successful. The two men who work there killed 5 hogs of some 50 kilos (110 lbs ea.), cooked them in an open pit with firewood in front of our small kids home one block off the main highway up above the Old Town. This was done on purpose so folks there would see what we were doing. It was very successful even at an elevated price. We sold everything and people kept coming for more. I don't know why, but young hog meat here really sells, especially when cooked in an open pit, with just some yucca and boiled corn. So, we will continue to do this every Friday if we can find enough hogs of this age and weight. We don't have enough ourselves to keep doing this each week.

Another thing that struck me yesterday again after the feria in May was the presentation of the technical courses of our adult education program. I am from the farm but there is so much more now in farming than when I was young some 70 to 80 yrs. back. And more yet the advanced computer course and the physical therapy course also continue to amaze me. Just things that I had never seen before, never knew about before. Of course, I am old and don't get around so much to see all that's going on these days. I am very glad that our adult courses are here in Cabezas so that our country folks can keep up with what the rest of our world is knowing and using. A young girl (woman now) that came to me when she was 13 or 14, now a high school graduate and in the accounting course, was there in her wheel chair (she has only one leg, the other one cut off just below the knee, with her prothesis, or false leg, just

doesn't work well), now married in the Church – a rarity in Bolivia, with one child. She will be able to finish the course in accounting and do the work in an office someday. May Our Lord so bless her and her family! Her husband works with us too (an orphan, raised by us also) and has had a course in electricity, maintaining all our electrical apparatus and other maintenance work.

Yesterday, Friday, June 28, was the last day before our winter two-week vacation (like your Christmas vacation). Most all the kids went home yesterday afternoon, except those in my house and our small kids' dorms whose kids are ours. This is their only home for some 15 to 18 or so. But they will not just be sitting around. Our corn crop just combined (harvested) by a big combine left a lot of corn on the ground as well as high winds that we have had. Already we have picked up some two hundred 100 lbs. sacks or more (several truck loads) and have a lot more to pick up yet. So, the kids who stay in our house on vacation will be able to work a little and be paid for this, if they would want to. No one has to, but most, both boys and girls, want to do some activity and earn a little money also. We had planted some 84 acres of corn, with just under half yet to be picked up by hand. A high wind blew some down, the combine left some more if the stalk was bent over somewhat. I want our kids to have some experience in working too, at least the ones who are 12 yrs. old and older. Most are boys, but several girls want to go too. This is normal in our farm area, as I have talked with some fathers and mothers who have done this in their youth and now their kids are into this also on their own land. Actually, we have done some of this every year with our own workers, but this year more corn was left on the ground, so a lot more work to pick up. Just a note to say also that we had already filled our two biggest silos with what the combine harvested (maybe I had already told this in the May letter).

I think I mentioned some time back that we have a new music professor, really talented for playing some 8 or more instruments. Unfortunately, he was in an accident in a vehicle recently and now is recovering with a crutch, but still working. He seems to like his accordion most so uses it when we sing the national hymn (this one sung in the Guarani Indian language as we are in their basic area of living) and the Santa Cruz regional hymn. These hymns are sung on Monday to start every week and also when there is some special occasion or program.

Something that is also part of the school year is classes (I don't know how many) in moral living. This was included more in the past when the country was mostly Catholic. Now not only are there other Christian churches, but also some other groups including Muslims. So, the school year includes classes on moral, which includes making posters that are hung in various places and a special day when each grade must present some kind of dance or skit that presents some of their learning, which includes correct treating of women as

equal, honesty, and service to the community amid other themes. This was presented this past week (on Tuesday, June 26, I think if I remember correctly).

(Sunday June 30) Also this last week, on Tuesday also, we were presented with a new computer because we grew and planted 1000 new trees. Also our technical institute also was given a new computer for the same work. I had talked with some at the beginning of the school year (February) thinking to plant some 5000 new trees on our land, planting some each month, not knowing of the computer offer. It was our school principal who told me later of the offer by a group of 3 organizations to donate a new computer for each 1000 trees planted. This fit well with our plan. But we have some 4000 or more trees to go. Actually, we already had some 7000 seeds bought, so just a case of getting them planted as seedlings, then setting them out all over our land area, which is quite large. Last year the students planted trees beside the street in our community. Unfortunately, every single one was taken by neighbors evidently to put on their own land, so this year only within our area.

It was last November that a young man who works with us, and myself went to see a man who has a water well digging equipment to ask about digging another well on our land. He promised maybe in January. But he never came. We went again and he promised maybe by March. Again, a no-show. But about 10 days ago he called us to say he was close by and we would be next if we still wanted the new well. We surely do. I think it was 2011 when our two water wells on the school property had problems and for 3 days there was no water. Kids were running around until 12 at night trying to get water just drink or bathe. I don't want this to happen again.

A water witcher (my Dad was one who never failed to find water) came to check our land and he found a lot of water just close by where I wanted to put a well. So, we had hoped to dig there. Now it looks like we will be able to do it. Of course, the equipment is not here yet. He promised to be here last Friday (June 28) but hasn't called us yet. His equipment is nearby and one of our tractors will go over to bring the equipment. My desire then is to connect all the wells together with pipes that allow us to bring all the water when we want it to school when it is necessary. That is our priority. Meanwhile we will use the water for irrigation, some for silage production (excellent cattle feed for milk cows), but more for our vegetable production.

Maybe some of you have read of some bad news in Bolivia of this last week (so much happened last week) of a possible government takeover. Unfortunately, my time in Bolivia has seen now 3 such occasions. I first came to Bolivia on October 10, 1979. On November 1 of that year there was a military takeover that lasted two weeks. Then on July 16, 1980, another one, very violent with some 3000 deaths, that lasted just over two years. We thought that Bolivia was now leaving that history of takeovers behind. But now another one. It didn't go well, lasted a couple of hours, no deaths. The leader of the takeover was the

national head of the military. He claims that the president (his personal friend) asked him to do this!! to help the president gain in popularity. No one knows the truth. But either way Bolivia will be a rather shaky investment place for outside money. And as the economy of the country is already going down, this won't help the poor folks at the bottom. Of course, our schools here are precisely for those who need help to educate their kids and adults also, it is just that we didn't need to have another downer to destroy more financial situations of already poor families. May Our Lord grant us more strength to continue to help against greater adversity!

Back in late September of 1961 I and a friend were traveling on motorcycles through France, coming north from Lyon after seeing Mont Blanc. Just a little north was the parish of Ars, France. There worked for many years Saint John Maria Vianney, the patron saint of Diocesan priests. He had always interested me, the little that I had known about him. I had read some of his life, especially his total and long devotion (hours) in front of the Eucharist. Also, in his later years he was found to have a rare gift to help people in Confession. He could discern things in those who came to him and as the word got around, thousands began to come from all over France, so much so that a special train service was established from Lyon to Ars just to carry people to and from this service. He evidently never tired from the long hours. I went to his house, which is yet preserved (He died in 1859), the door to which was so low I could not enter it except on hands and knees (he was very short also, I must say). He cooked his own food, mostly just potatoes 3 times a day when he ate. This visit along with several other experiences has been influenced by priesthood (along with the pastoral service of Fr. James Tucek, maybe I have mentioned several times before who visited families, ate with them, was a part of their lives). This was the same practice of Saint John Vianney, home visiting, being a part of each family. This brought Faith in Our God to the family, so much do we need this today. I am sorry that I can do very little of this today, not being able to drive any more. But I have tried to live HIS humbleness of living, as patterned after Jesus Christ Who lived among the people, using examples of their lives to teach them, but so much more from His example of Total Giving, never tiring, never too busy with worldly affairs to give time to those in need of Love and spiritual support. This in part is why my home today is filled with abandoned, abused, orphan kids. I can't go out, but they can come to stay with me. May Our Lord so bless all of you in your families. That is where Jesus first established His Presence among us humans, in Bethlehem and then after some immigration to Egypt, in the lowly community of Nazareth, as archeologists have discovered to have had some 150 to 175 inhabitants at most when the Holy Family lived there. This Family is the beginning of our Faith and its model for all our world, Mary being with the apostle John with Jesus on the Cross! (John 19, 25-27) in HIS TOTAL SELF-GIVING.

A little long letter this time, but to say that I need your help to continue our school for the poor. As I have said several times before, if each family, or at

least 700 to 800, who receives this letter could send \$25, \$35, \$50, or more each month to help us it would make all our work here possible. I can't tire from asking as so much depends on all of you there for the good that we do here for so many. I fear that the number will increase in our school as our economic situation continues to go down. May Our Lord so bless all of you for your love of the kids here.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,
Fr. Bob Thames

We are volunteers supporting ETC Bolivia. The current contact information at the Diocese of Fort Worth to continue to financially support the children is: Dianna Rhoads (817) 533-3174 or via e-mail at: DRhoads@adv-fdn.org

The following link takes you directly to the Diocese ETC-B web page for easiest access to donate on-line: <https://fwdioc.org/educate-the-children-bolivia>

To donate by paper check, make it payable to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth. On the memo line, please write, "For ETC-Bolivia, Fr. Thames Mission". Mail it to: Catholic Diocese of Fort Worth, 800 West Loop 820 South, Fort Worth, TX 76108-2919. Please reply to this e-mail if we may answer any questions.