

FR Thames August 2017 Letter

Family all of you, Greetings! I hope and pray that all goes well with all of you there. The letter covers two pages, but I hope to include this afternoon several photos of persons mentioned in the letter, that Keith could send out with the e-mails. I am not sure of the regular postal mailings which could increase the cost with an extra sheet. You all can decide that there.

It is a hot sun that is shining this AM, Tuesday, August 29, and later there will be a hot, dry wind blowing. This is the zenith of our dry season. Later in September the air will become more humid before the rains start, making the hot temperature even more irritating. I am saying all of this to preface the buying of a new water tank for the school, some 10,000 liters or about 2700 gallons. Our old tank, with 5000 liters, now 12 years old, was leaking rather badly, and we really can't afford to lose water in these days. With the heat the girls especially bathe more often, and wash more clothes as they change more often. But the boys are not far behind. A cold shower (all we have) is a real life-saver in the heat. Our two water pumps for the two wells on the school property are also 12 years old and last year during the hot, dry season both had problems, leaving us with 3 days with very little water. We had to bring water in buckets and jugs from the other property nearby where there is another functioning well for cooking and washing dishes. The kids went all over the place with buckets looking for water for bathing, even into the night. I just don't want to see this situation again. My hope is ultimately to build another water tower near the 3rd well that will allow the water from there to flow, first to the special education/physical therapy/mechanic places, and then have a connection with the school property, that will allow us to have interconnections with all places. This will be some 350 meters of line. I will ask each class room of students to help dig the trench for the pipe to be laid out, each class digging so many meters of line. Then if one well, or even two fail as last year, we yet have backups all connected to run water from one side to the other. There is yet another well, further into the second property (where the cows are), never connected with electricity. Maybe it is caved in by now without use, but we can ultimately see how to get electricity there so as to use it as well, connecting all together. We can easily live without electricity as some of our villages are yet without this advantage, especially to the north where our agricultural property is located. 4 villages there are without it. But water is another element---just can't live without it.

As I am saying all of this about lack of water I see on the internet news with much sadness the severe floods in south and southeast Texas, even into central Texas where too much water is destroying lives and all the things that make life possible, housing, schools, etc. I pray for all of them, seeing with gladness so much concern in the whole nation and help coming in from many places to assist. But some things can't be replaced so easily, and lives re-built so easily. It is our Faith that must show itself now, expressed in charity. Here with all our weaknesses in the Catholic Church we do excel above just about all other churches in helping when there is a need as we see now.

Something that did not get into the July letter was the arrival of two more kids into my house the first week of July, Mateo at 8 yrs. old in the 3rd grade and his younger sister, Adriana, at 5 in kindergarten, now replacing Mayerlin as the youngest. I would like to include their photos in this letter if possible. Adriana at 5 is yet larger than Mayerlin, taller and heavier. And about two weeks ago, the first part of August, a young, 14 yr. old boy, came to live with us, Francisco by

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name. I have known him for many years as he was growing up in the small town of Florida. His earliest years were violent. Fr. Wily Flores, a priest who was with me for several years and was recalled by his own bishop to the extreme west of Bolivia over a year ago. Fr. Wily had taken in Francisco (Wily is also of the Prado association as I am) to raise him, but recently Francisco was becoming violent in the urban setting where he was. Fr. Wily asked me to take him in again. So far Francisco is doing fine in my house.

And speaking of charity, a girl, Judith, in the graduating class this year, although only 16 yrs. old, had an attack of appendicitis the day I left the hospital in Santa Cruz. She was operated on that same afternoon in a small catholic hospital, with complications of growth on one of her ovaries (also fixed with the operation). Her family is very poor and we were able to take care of it all. (Altogether just under \$1200) She also was put into the physical therapy center to recover for one week so as not to let her get into too much activity too soon in the dorm where she lives. In the physical therapy building we have indoor bathrooms that make life easier for folks who have trouble walking. Medical help is a service we offer that most if not all other school scholarship programs do not offer. We try to cover all the needs of the kids for their education. We have this help THANKS TO ALL OF YOU WHO MAKE IT POSSIBLE.

When I speak of poverty as it exists here, I am basically talking of subsistence living, hand to mouth, or from day to day as we say in English. Especially many of our Guarani villages are of this type of existence where small plots of land are allocated to each family and they are to farm that to make their living. Judith's family is of that type. Actually with the coming of much oil and gas exploration and production many of the younger folks are working in that which is making changes in their lifestyles. Their income is larger and more stable. The situation of many families are made worse by family separations, men who leave a woman with kids, joins with another woman to have more kids, without taking responsibility for the first ones. The law obligates them to be responsible, but the area is large and very little control in many cases. As you might imagine it is for these families that our schools exist. As I have said before some 60% to 70% percent of our kids are from separated families, the poorest of our area, along with kids abandoned into the homes of elderly grandparents, then orphans several of whom live in my house. One of the things that I notice that is happening in our school is the mixture of campesino (Quechua Indian or old Inca) and Guarani Indian that marry after graduation from our school. This will have its effect ultimately on the lifestyles of our people as a whole. The Quechua or campesinos are more energetic, more ready to move to new locations if better opportunities exist there. And of course moving to the city is one of the moves that most make, where job opportunities exist as well as vices to be picked up.

Now for something a little more joyous, On Tuesday August 22, we had our annual dance festival. I must say it was better than last year with more time to prepare. Normally our dance festival coincides with the visit of folks from the U. S. around our Independence Day, August 6. That leaves us only about 8 to 10 days of preparation after our winter break the first two weeks of July. With more time to prepare the quality for me was noticeably better. The older kids do well with little preparation as it is now in their blood, but the younger ones with more time did very well too. Of course I am partial to them anyway. But I see the beauty of a people

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in the traditional clothing and movement in the dances, the smiles of joy of the older kids, all are great for me. The smaller kids are yet more serious trying to remember what to do next.

Knowing that this letter goes to mostly to those who give our scholarships and this help does not go to the technical institute nor to the adult high school program I yet want to include some news of these two programs. The money given after a talk whether in the second collection or just given after the Mass in a parish does help at times in these. Actually all the programs of education that we have were started and are maintained at least partially by us. In all our programs the government here pays most all the salaries of the teachers. Where food is necessary as well as housing there we put in what is required. Hopefully with money recently given as a donation to me we will begin a new technical institute building, simple, but more beneficial to the students. With their own facility the government has promised to give us more areas of study. This should be ready by next February when the next semester will start. We hope also to begin to build some two or three classrooms for the adult high school program. As you probably have known we use the same classrooms seven days a week for all the programs that causes conflict at times when a professor leaves some material there which might be missing when the same class begins the next week. And with hope we will eventually have a small auditorium that will serve several purposes, for expositions of class work, for the parents' meeting every month or 6 weeks of our high school, a place for our weekly religious celebration, as an extra classroom, or for whatever is needed. Now we use the big basketball court which is hard to maintain attention of the people, being outside in the wind and the movement of folks. Why mention these programs for older students? One reason that many of our high school students, mostly boys, leave our school to work, before finishing, and end up graduating from our adult high school. Secondly our institute has many of our graduates continuing here in the institute, and many more will enter when there are more career choices.

Again I am thinking of us humans created in the image and likeness of God, not a physical likeness to be sure, nor our mind, many times not so sharp, but our spirit, that which affects much of our personality. That is the part of us that can be molded by God's Grace, Jesus' own Spirit, the Holy Spirit, into the image and likeness. It entails our way of "seeing" the world, hopefully more and more through God's eyes, and responding with the Spirit of Jesus Christ to love, heal, to soothe, pick up, forgive those around us, who so desperately need this Loving Touch of Our God, made present visibly, touchable, by us, His Body. May Our God bless all of you with my gratefulness?

Your brother in Jesus Christ, Fr. Bob Thames