

# Educate the Children

Cabezas, Bolivia  
Vol. 05 Num. 3  
June, July and  
August 2010

A Mission Council program of the Diocese of Fort Worth

visit <http://www.fwdioc.org/ministries/missionoutreach/bolivia/Pages/edChild.aspx> for the latest news and pictures

## News from Father Thames and the Children from Bolivia



**Next ETC  
Committee  
Meeting**  
October 1st, 7pm  
@ St. Mikes

## Your Sponsorship

We are happy to announce that your continued sponsorship has helped change the life of many children in Bolivia. There are total of about 700 students at one or other level involved in the Educate the Children program.

## Bishop Vann Plans Visit

### Fr. Thames June letter

Father Robert Thames

### CABEZAS, BOLIVIA

**DEAR FRIENDS,** I hope this letter finds all of you well. Here is the June letter for this year.

I begin this letter with many things on my mind. But that which stands out most is the visit from the Diocese of Fort Worth of Bishop Kevin Vann, Fr. Jack McKone, pastor of Vernon parish, and Deacon Len Sanchez of the Diocesan Mission Council. This took place in the days of July 5 to 7th. Their presence here was in itself a big manifestation of the importance of our work here in the eyes of the Diocese, and its accomplishment was not of less importance either for what was clarified and what was set up for our part in the development of our diocesan mission outreach in each parish and diocese as a whole. I can only praise Our God for providing this opportunity for our growth. To tell all that was set up with us here needs another letter separate from the events I share in this monthly letter. This will be sent later. The only sad part of the visit was that it was so short, only 3 days, which was mostly spent in meeting and talking, after a walk-through of the school. But its impact will show itself in the months and years to come.

Going back to the start of June there was the Feast of Corpus Christi. As most are from Texas we know that this is not the city on the southern coast of the Gulf, but the annual Feast of the Eucharist, The Body of Christ, which weekly celebration is to be the high point of living our intimacy with Jesus Christ and its overflow into the universal fraternity of people. This presence of Jesus in

our midst is a Force towards that ideal, for we are far from this yet. Its celebration should be a strong reminder of where we ought to be, not where we are. We can never allow ourselves to be content, while knowing what we should be and knowing that we have this Power from Our God to be there, and we have not used to its full force this Power that is precisely Our God at our disposal for this end. It is another way of saying that we all should be saints in communion with Our God and with one another, and we have not lived up to this divine call that we receive in Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. How long yet? This question is just as much for me as all the rest of us? This Feast of Corpus Christi must make us hunger all the more for this end.

During this time of June our school had its winter vacation. If we were in the northern hemisphere it would be the Christmas vacation, which all of you there know serves as break from the routine of classes on all levels of study. Here it is called winter vacation. It serves also to have a break during the peak of our winter, and as no school here at any level has heating (nor cooling), it lets the kids be at home for some two weeks in the cold and not in school. The time of the vacation is flexible with the officials in charge of schools guessing as to when the coldest weather will fall. But inevitably as this year again the cold weather did not fall during the vacation but earlier. So the kids had a great time at home in the warm weather which on one or two days was great for swimming in the river

in Santa Cruz and other places. At least the kids are grateful.

The older kids of my house were taken for the 3rd year in a row to the mountains to the northwest of here to the homeplace of one of our most trusted workers. It is more rustic than our place, with cold streams coming down from the mountains (which cold in no way prohibits the kids from getting in, and coming back with colds and sore throats). Last year the worker's dad died while all were there, and this year was the one year anniversary. The custom is to have a mass or celebration on the day and to have a meal prepared by the family for all the people who come. The plan was to bring the kids back after two days, then the worker would go back to help in the family celebration. For some reason the plan was not carried out and the kids stayed on for the celebration helping in all the work of it, and finally came back two days later, after one week out. As there is no phone service there, it was our guessing as to what had happened, trusting in the best. But after all it was vacation! The kids lived in this time in the back of our big truck at night, and pure fun for them. Vacation seems to be doing something different as a break, no matter the hardship.

At the beginning of July our Archdiocese of Santa Cruz held its assembly of pastoral agents which is held every two years. The theme this year was the permanent mission of the Church in evangelizing our world. This theme is fruit of the Latin American Bishops Conference (CELAM) from the general council of all of Latin America held in 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil in which Pope Benedict XVI participated.

**LETTER, CONTINUES on the next page.**

## Interested in Sponsoring a Child?

Educate the Children needs your help!



You can help by sponsoring a child's education for \$25 a month or \$300 per year which will supply tuition, meals, lodging, supplies, teachers, and utilities.

For more information, please call

**(817) 560-2452**

<http://www.fwdioc.org>

## Volunteers Needed!

Volunteer your time with "Educate the Children". Give 10%, Give 100%

**GIVE 110%**



Are you unable to make the financial commitment to sponsor a child at this time but would like to help? Are you looking for another way to be involved? Educate the Children is coordinated completely by volunteers so 100% of all contributions go to Fr. Thames for his work in Our Lady of Carmen Parish. With over 400+ students in the program, there is a lot to be done. And many hands make less work for all.

For more information, please visit our website: <http://www.fwdioc.org>

## **BISHOP VANN PLANS VISIT - continued page 1**

The concern is to further the conversion of our people who are baptized catholic, but lack much in living it out. Latin America in actuality has the greatest number of baptized catholics in the world. What a difference it would make in our world if we as continent could give the testimony today as the early Church gave in its time. A New Pentecost! It is with this finality that a permanent mission of the Church was inaugurated. It is in my eyes an ideal that we lack much in realizing, but we must begin, we must continue. It is Jesus Christ whose commission we are trying to live.

As next week is the parish feast of Carmen, I won't have much time to write. The feast is not only for the small community of Cabezas, but of the many communities and families who have a image of the Virgin of Carmen and who want masses also in their communities to mark the feast. Too it is the municipal, civil government's feast as well, and the patron feast of the military of Bolivia. So a lot of folks will be involved. For the school it will be a night of folk-dancing presentations (this year we will not have the usual culture festival as it seems we have worn out this theme for a time and it needs a rest). This festive dancing will take place on the night of the 14th, then the vigil mass will be held on the night of the 15th with fire works and a candle procession with all students from our school and the public school involved around the plaza. Then on the 16th there will be the big mass in the morning, and the civil and military parades with again all students of Cabezas participating, and then talks of our local government officials afterwards in which I do not participate.

I would like to end this letter telling the story of the life of a lady parishioner who died in the month of May. For me she was somewhat symbolic of the at times rough faith that so many of people live out. Her name is Dina, and was owner of the land and house where our small kids dormitory is now housed. She was born in Cabezas in November of 1923 and lived most of her life here. Life was very different from today. Cabezas was an unknown and very insignificant community along the Rio Grande River that comes out of the mountains just to the southwest of here at Abapò. It was the seat of the parish as it was the oldest formed community, not the largest, and the parish priest lived here and rode horseback to other communities only on their parish feast once a year. The only contact with Santa Cruz was a dirt road that took a week or more with horse or ox cart in the dry season,

much longer and sometimes impossible in the rainy time. But the faith was an integral part of living, making possible life in very difficult circumstances. One of her oldest memories was a war of Bolivia with Paraguay in which many local boys and men died. One old man to whom I take communion now tells me that more soldiers died from thirst and hunger than from actual battles. This took place in the early 1930's. Quite a few battles were near here and the church recently transferred in the late 1920's to its present location served as a hospital for the wounded. Bones of severed limbs are still found just behind the present church building. Back to Dina she was marked by the hardness of life and was not above harshness herself. I noticed that her kids never came to see her, so I thought she probably had none. The people told me that she had several, all whom were run off by her when they reached 13 to 14 years old (boys and girls) so she would not have to be responsible for them. Yet she was a very honest person in her faith and was very conscious of the last years of life as punishment and purification for her sinfulness when very few people would visit her, even her kids. One Sunday when I was in the city recovering from open heart surgery the lay person in charge was carrying out the Sunday celebration. As it was necessary to have quite a few hosts consecrated for when I would be absent and as it was yet in the rainy season and lots of humidity, several hosts had stuck together. It fell to Dina to receive two hosts that could not be separated. Dina took it, but stopped just a couple of yards away from the communion post, waited until all had received, and said in a voice for all to hear, that she as great a sinner as she was should never have been given two hosts, she just was not worthy. And how could it be that she was given two hosts stuck together. When I was told this it spoke to me about the woman who saw God so personal and present in her life. She had no difficulty in publicly admitting her sinfulness, something which is sadly missing in our world today. It is only public scandals that cannot be denied that we admit to, our pride being such a barrier to humility. St. John's first letter (1 John 1,5-10) is a testimony as how we ought to live. Dina was for me an example of that, how necessary in our time. Thank you for all you do for us here.

Your brother in Jesus Christ, Fr. Bob Thames

## **COLD WEATHER IN JULY - July LETTER**

**DEAR FAMILY** and Friends, Greetings!

**I HOPE** and pray that all goes well with all of you. As you can see, here is the July letter, hopefully in good time. My hands, especially the fingers are cold and are a little stiff. So if there are some mistakes, you will know why. your brother in Jesus Christ, Bob Thames

The month of July began with the visit of Bishop Vann with Fr. Jack McKone, and Deacon Len Sanchez from the Fort Worth Diocese. I covered this in the June letter. But so many things have occurred and are on tap that this letter will be full without repeating any of their visit. I would like however speak of one important part of the talks we had, that is the formation of parish mission councils that would work all year round to make mission conscience more present in each parish. Here in Latin America we are in a campaign of permanent mission, that is making all Catholics aware of the need to be mission believers. This love that God has poured into our hearts by The Holy Spirit (Romans 5,5) just can't be kept inside. It must be shared with all. This seems to be the concern of Bishop Vann in the Fort Worth Diocese too, that this Loving Presence of Our God in Jesus Christ Visible in His Body has to show itself in the daily lives of our people, and make a more human world (Pope John Paul II). It is the job of the Diocesan Mission Council and it needs help from each parish, ALL YEAR ROUND. Our particular mission in Bolivia would benefit of course, but so would our people in the Diocese. Doing more of what we were baptized to do, we share in the mission of Jesus Christ, loving our world into redemption.

The cold weather seems to be in second place of the events of note this month of July. Normally here our cold months are from the middle of May through June, but cold very moderated when compared with the Fort Worth area. This year it changed. The evening after our visitors left in the morning a cold spell slipped in slowly and stayed for some 10 days or more, dropping temperatures to the lowest since I have arrived here in Cabezas. Previously we have had on more than one occasion temperatures into the middle forties, but only for some few hours until the sun warmed us up each morning. This time the thermometer registered about 40 degrees Fahrenheit (4 degrees Celsius), but it stayed for the ten days, fluctuating between 40 to 50 degrees, day and night. It is not only that we are just not used to it in our bodies, our clothes and houses are not made for this kind of cold, and it was a wet cold with rain that fell in the form of mist and sprinkles for some 4 days, giving us good needed moisture as we shook with cold. But cattle died, many, many fish died in the rivers, fruit trees and some vegetables withered, all kinds of damage. School was closed for one week all over the country except for us here who only took two days off. The miracle for us was that not one young person (nor we older folks either) got sick, with no heat in our buildings nor houses. This has to say something for the heartiness of our kids and the food that they are served, weak in taste at times, but nutritious at least.

It was during this cold spell that our parish feast of Our Lady of Carmen fell, the 16th of July. The outdoor culture festival had already been changed previously, and we stayed with only the dance festival on two nights. This was good, but with school out most of the previous week for the cold, the quality lacked in some of the younger kids' presentations. I yet enjoyed it, I guess knowing the kids and the circumstances, dancing on cold cement in bare feet as most of our dances are performed. The actual feast of the vigil was colder yet, and rain off and on all the time. On the 16th we had the procession only around the plaza and my hat got completely wet in the less than 15 minutes it took to go around. The usual political talks that follow were all canceled, sort of odd, that left only the religious part of the celebration intact. I would like to comment that as always the church itself is adorned, sometimes too much. This time it was simple and very good taste that put emphasis on God to a greater degree. I liked it. This adornment will now stay for about 3 months. The only mishap was some candles caught some of the adornment on fire and we had a pause in the vigil Mass while that was extinguished.

The week after the parish feast was supposed to have an activity called the "Olympics". This is almost all sporting events that include chess, which events we have had in the past within our school district or municipal government area. This year it was to be 8 municipal areas together for the first time, all gathered in Cabezas. Our school was to house two hundred kids from outside in these events, meaning that all school is canceled. The cold affected it and the "Olympics" were postponed until the second week of August, starting on the 9th. We will see what happens. Our new mayor or municipal head fought to have this first one of 8 districts together here because he hoped the President would attend, or some other important person

## ***COLD WEATHER IN JULY - July LETTER - continued page 2***

at least. It will really surprise me if that happens. This important person has supposed to present itself on other occasions, and it has always failed to happen. Cabezas is just not big enough to draw that much attention. Again we will see.

We continue with the eyes being checked, and each week I have carried 2 to 4 persons to the city for a checkup with the eye doctor and glasses ordered. This is not just with the young folks, as we have older people in IRFA (a program of primary education for adults up to the 8th grade). It is possible that some of these would never have seen the need for glasses if it were not for the study. And we have given out about 10 to 12 pairs of reading glasses to older folks besides. We are grateful to Rosalie Kuhanek of Olney, TX and Mike Wuller of Fort Worth who have been able to get these, I believe, through the Lions Club.

A new program for handicap young people has opened in the city of Santa Cruz and the head visited our area doing a census of those in need. We have sent out first two, one young girl of 16 who was born with only one ear, and another who suffered severe psychological damage as a infant which has prevented her from holding in her memory things she learns (this latter one lives in our house as part of our family and has not attended school). The center is supported by money from Holland, I believe, for a NGO here. There are over 510 registered handicap folks in only our municipal area. And how many more outside of this area, but near. This center only helps people up to 25 yrs. old, but so much good can come from it. Next year our own trained teachers in special education will dive in to help.

We are working on a family bible study that hopefully will be part of the permanent mission of our diocese. The family is so key to any societal renewal, and I am hoping this will have a success. It is not possible to do harm, but our families are so in need, even the good families with fewer problems. Our world is so distorted with a materialistic bent, and our poor who do not have, do have the desire to have that lessens their concern for spiritual values and customs necessary for happy family life.

We are ending the second semester (of three semesters that form the school year here in Bolivia), sign that our school year is more than half over. Our third and final series of school retreats for all our high schools will begin at the end of the month of August, with only the senior retreats to finalize our religious program for the year. This is of course, apart from the first communion classes and confirmation groups. Taking our cue from the Council of Latin American Bishops in Aparecida, Brazil in 2007, we have concentrated all year on the person of Jesus Christ in His concrete life-style as applied to our young folks today in our area.

(It is now August 6. This morning at 6 AM my thermometer registered 1 degree Celsius, or 34 degrees Fahrenheit, a record for us. By 8:30 AM it has risen to 50 degrees in the sun)

I end this letter with much gratitude to all of you who have made and continue to make all our work possible. You are prayed for each day. May Our God continue to bless you with much love.

Fr. Bob Thames

## ***US VOLUNTEERS VISIT; FEAST DAY CELEBRATIONS MAKE FOR BUSY SCHEDULE***

### ***August LETTER***

Dear Family and Friends, Greetings! I hope and pray that all goes well there with all of you. Here is the August letter which I trust finds all of you in good spirits and growing inside.

In this month of August there was a very welcomed, doctor-type, visit from the Diocese of Fort Worth. Sara Martinez of St. Bart's parish and Ricardo Martinez (no relation) from St. Michael's arrived somewhat delayed to take fotos and pick up letters from the students to help us with the scholarships of the Educate The Children program of the Mission Council of the diocese. Really it was a work session from the time they arrived until they left. A lot was done in this short time, time to see very little of our reality, taste a little of Bolivian hospitality, Cabezas style. We are grateful to them and to the ETC program for sending them, but with a plea that next time the visit might be a little longer, with some relaxation possible and greater display of our beautiful folklore in dancing and singing.

Our parish feast is Our Lady of Carmel whose day is 16 July. It is also a feast of all the country, which affects a lot of people. But our parish feast pales besides the most popular Marian feast of the whole country, which is the Feast of the Assumption on August 15. The feast is called The Virgin of Urkupiña, a Quechua (ancient Inca people) word, from a village near the center of the country just outside Cochabamba. A large portion of our people in the parish have a particular devotion to the Virgin of Urkupiña, so when this feast rolls around, there is a great movement, people flocking to the church with this name which is located in the small town of Zanja Honda in the northern part of the parish. From 1000 to 1500 folks pour in from all sides, and many families want to baptize on that feast as it is good omen. This year there were 48 baptisms, better than 31 of last year (cheaper by the dozen?). I was glad that Fr. Vincent did the work there as it is within his part of the parish. 48 baptisms at one time can really tire a person, then give a Mass with a large number of communions. I'm just too old to do that kind of standing on my feet. The Mass and baptisms are all held outside the church as there can only squeeze in about 120 standing. The normal mass has an attendance of about 90. About 400 or so attend outside. The rest of the folks are wandering around outside the grounds of the church in the various stands of food and other things that people bring to sell or show at the feast.

But I was not idle. Actually I gave 10 celebrations in 48 hours (two days) in 10 different villages, as so many have statues or fotos of the Virgin, and want a blessing and community meal on or around that time. This I like it very much, not for me so much as they always include meat in the meal. But the family or families responsible for the celebration invite the whole community to eat and hear very loud music that helps deafen those of weak ears like myself. But the community spirit is great and makes up for the negatives. I usually cannot stay very long in any place, as the next community is waiting. I do this with adrenalin, or I would fall on my face. I only notice how tired I am after it is all over. On the long hauls I now have a driver helping me, which makes a lot of difference. I was never aware how much driving on rough roads can take the energy out of a person. It helps a lot to have someone help drive.

Another thing that I do in July and August when there are so many community feasts is give talks on the family. Most of these folks in the celebrations are present at Mass only on the feasts. So I take advantage to talk on The God of Life Who wants the Fullness of Life for us whose Trinitarian Life is reflected in the Love of husband and wife with their kids. Like many parts of the world today we have a high proportion of dis-integrated or separated families (about 40%). In church documents the word Communion stands out when talking of the Holy Trinity, and the same word is used about the family. The family ideally should be then a visible reflection in our world of God's Life in Heaven. The harmony in full participation, the fidelity and permanence until death, the respect and tenderness of God, should be seen in our homes. How much our world today needs examples of this God-Life made visible in the midst of us. Reading the international news each day of another bomb of hate that destroyed so many lives and communities, or other acts of violence that divides with fire whether emotional or physical, it is all the more urgent to have some counter-balances of good. This is not a new idea. St. Ciprian of Carthage (now Tunisia, North Africa) who was martyred in 256 AD spoke of the task of the Church to make visible in our world the invisible love of God. Life is sacred because it is a participation in the very Life of God, Who is the Source of all Life. May Our God deepen in all of us this respect for Life that all of us share in communion.

On the aspect of the school, as was mentioned a little in the last letter, there was the Olympics of sorts. This was a competition of the best teams within the 8 municipal areas nearest us who earlier had a competition to determine their best teams. Our mayor put in a struggle to have the first 8 area wide competition here in Cabezas. Sadly he managed it (maybe no one else wanted it), which meant all the schools in our town, the public and ours, had all classes canceled for a week, so we could house all the various students in all the areas of competition (about 1600 students) in the

## AUGUST LETTER - continued page 3

classrooms, and in our case, in our dorms, which received 200 students. Our kids went home except for the ones in the competition for the week, just before the second semester exams (we have 3 semesters in a school year). But that is life here.

Again about the schools, we have begun the 3rd round of religious retreats for the students of all the high schools of the municipal district. In our own school we include the 6th to 8th grade also so our retreat center is getting its use. It is a lot of work, but hopefully will bear its fruit in the years to come, in the lives of those affected by the things said and done now. Our faith is always sowed in hope, as all ultimately depends on Grace and a person's response to that Grace which is a participation in God's Life of loving others. As anyone who has worked with teenagers (here in Bolivia we use the word adolescents) knows the persons are searching and only later will make decisions that they come to through the process they are in at present.

Maybe it would be good to give an overview of what we do in education in the parish. I put so much emphasis on education because it will make the people later to stand on their own two feet. They will have the elements necessary to make decisions for themselves, and not have to accept everything that those on top will tell them. The uneducated are manipulated in all societies because their lack of education makes them vulnerable to ideas that they do not understand. With education, and now with internet so readily available, not only can they understand their own society, they can know what is happening in other parts of the world and know the consequences of decisions of others, helping them to choose correctly and avoid the mistakes that others have made. Then you understand that education for me is a part of loving this people.

- 1) IRFA: education of primary grades for adults or older kids, done at home with recordings and workbooks
- 2) Two small kids dorms, go to public school, we give food and lodging during the week.
- 3) Our junior and senior high school for kids far from schools with courses they need, or too poor to have the text books, supplies, and clothes they need. School is humanistic/technical.
- 4) The only psychologists, sociologists, and religious in the whole area that work with families and kids in abuse cases and broken families, pregnant girls, etc in all the area. Also give career testing for all seniors of the area
- 5) Sponsor the computer introduction workshop in 4 locations for kids and adults paid for by a company in Geneva, Switzerland
- 6) Give religious retreats for all high schools (4 public and ours), marriage preparation for seniors
- 7) CEITHA: high school (GED type) classes at night and on weekends in 4 locations for adults
- 8) We founded and still subsidize the university level technical school, now public, will be independent later.
- 9) university housing and some food for university students in two cities with branches of state university

There are total of about 700 students at one or other level involved in the programs, with students from 6 different municipal areas. But we influence a much larger population of close to 40,000, to 50,000 or more. Apart from this we work the pastoral in 35 communities/villages, for the most part twice a month if not weekly. Only a team can do this, people dedicated for the good of the people. God has blessed us with these dedicated folks who make all this possible, and they continue to grow in Spirit.

Once again all this is made possible by all of you. Your brother in Jesus Christ, Fr. Bob Thames

## Facts on Bolivia...

<b>Area:</b>	424,164 Square Miles
<b>Population:</b>	8.8 Million
<b>People:</b>	Quechua Indian - 30%, Mestizo - 25%, Aymara Indian 30%, European 15%
<b>Religion:</b>	Roman Catholic 95%
<b>Infant Mortality:</b>	56/1000
<b>Language:</b>	Spanish, Ayamara and Quechua
<b>Education:</b>	Despite a notable increase in enrollment, only 7% of children in rural areas complete primary school within the standard eight years with girls being affected the most. Over half of rural primary schools offer only three of eight grades.
<b>Birth Rate:</b>	Bolivia has the highest birth rate but also the highest death rate. About half the population live in rural communities, days away from medical help.
<b>Land:</b>	Bolivia is about twice the size of Texas. Only about 3% is arable and over 50% is forested.

