

**Father Bob Thames**  
**November 2023 Letter**  
**Cabezas, Bolivia**

**Father Bob Thames' end of November 2023 letter from Cabezas, Bolivia, follows below. Use the [link at the end](#) of the letter for easiest access to the on-line donation page.**

Here it is now December 2, Saturday, and I am just now beginning this letter. Actually, I have had a list of topics for more than a week, just lazy getting started. I have been running around quite a bit, some of which I will share in the letter. To begin this letter, I will tell that we will finish our school year a week later this year, Dec. 8, to compensate for some of the time lost to forest fires that caused severe danger with the air we breathe. This was in a greater part of the whole country of Bolivia, including Cabezas. Actually, we had no big fires near here, but high winds brought the smoke from the north and east. Most of our fires were caused by people burning forest to make fields for planting. The government has promised that they will prosecute those who have done so, but very probable they won't. It seems to most of us that they favor more agricultural planting at the cost of clean and cooler air. This is more political in nature as those who burn are of the government party. I will tell more of the end of school in the next letter.

I don't know if I told this in the last letter, but even if so, I want to tell it again for it is such good news. At the end of each school year there are scholastic or academic competition in various subjects that let the best scholars show off a little. This year at least it was done on a provincial level, some 5 or more school districts together, including two larger towns where we think as having perhaps better scholars with larger school populations. But our small high school this year had 70 kids place in the top categories of the competition. (top categories meaning being 1<sup>st</sup> place down to 4<sup>th</sup> place). This means that almost one fourth of our kids in the whole school were up high in the level of academic achievement in competition within our 5 or 6 districts. If you think I am proud, you are right. It was beyond my wildest dreams. What it tells me is that our kids from

poor families that are students here, can really put out academically if they push themselves to do so. And our professors are just more willing to give extra time to those students, more so than in the public schools around us. I couldn't do much for our professors, but did give them a very large and beautifully decorated cake for one of their breaks in classes about two weeks ago. I really am proud of our students who are so wonderfully supported by our professors. (our gastronomy professor is one of them and is really great doing these things (beautiful cakes.)

We continue in our drought conditions, just very light rain about two weeks ago, not enough to wet down the fields to have enough moisture to plow and get ready for planting. May Our Lord hear our prayers! We really need moisture. Worse, we have high, dry, and hot winds so much of the time which makes it worse. These winds are from the east, from Brazil, across eastern Bolivia to here, where so much forest has been cut, land dried out. This once was all humid forest, even with lots of swamps that made for a lot of rain. No more. We are suffering from our own doing unfortunately, like our world over. It seems too little, too late, the conference in Qatar that is going on now. Of course, I grew up plowing, working fields out east of Decatur. These were just open plains, no forest to cut or burn, but maybe we just did not notice what was happening some 70 or 80 years ago. Now again too little, too late.

Another event in our school that is always at the end of the school year. This is an exposition of activities from our physical education classes. I don't know if I have ever told this before, but this year was the best yet that I can remember. Our young professor really put time and effort, and, evidently he showed his talent to work with the kids. They did rhythmic dances (here part of the physical education program to develop body movement and mental concentration, I was told), plus pyramids with the girls 3 girls high, and the boys 4 boys high, so stable and solid with kids 3 and 4 up on others. But the last event was a special group of boys who did tumbling and turning somersaults which at the last was jumping through a circle of wire covered with fire materials that were burning and doing somersaults out on to cushions on the other side. This professor seemed to me to have an extra talent that our

previous professors did not have. Hopefully, he will stay another year, but I don't know. He is from a larger town near the border with Argentina, and usually the teachers keep asking to settle closer to their home town where their original families live. We pray he returns next year.

Another event for us was the selling of a huge amount of plastic bottles (mostly bottles of 2 to 3 liters of soda). We have a rather large truck that can hold up to 7 tons of material. We filled the truck, stacked high, with the plastic bottles compressed into huge blocks (the local government has lent us a compressor to form the blocks). This was the work of lots of time for the kids, each one responsible for a certain number of bottles all year (not sure how many), and the result was this. Along with this we plant a good number of trees each year as part of ecological consciousness. I don't know if these activities will penetrate enough in order to stay a lifetime with our kids, but we try.

I will tell more of this in the next letter, but we are working now to open a meat market that will be with our bread sales room. We hope that the animals that we raise (cows for milking and for meat, chickens and ducks, and hogs) can help us earn money to support our school. Of course, all that we do also is for teaching students how to live, earning money to support a family. How to sell is a part again of that. At our suggestion, the municipal government has begun a type of Trades Day as in Bowie, Tx. (I have talked of this before.) At present it is every two weeks on a Saturday, beginning a week ago (25 Nov.). This one was a real success. Many people came to buy, some to sell, but all the space was filled. This will give our kids a chance to practice. But also it will bring people from a wide area here to see our work and its products, including our meat. My hope that this next year we will have several types of Trades Days on our own school, this to publicize our school. We did this several years back and they did well. We will try again.

The last activity that I want to share is a visit to a hog farm that puts ours to shame. And I understand that this visit was to a smaller of those hog farms that are really serious. This one had only about 230 sows producing, while another really large one to the

north of Santa Cruz has 1200 sows producing. We now have 37 sows, with hopes of going up to 65 or 70. We have corrals for this many. A young man who graduated from our technical institute worked for some 5 years for the large one north of Santa Cruz, now coming back to his home town in order to have time to finish a university degree in agriculture on weekends. His former work did not allow time for this. This is a part of our plan to become more self-supporting in the future. By the way this owner is a part of the large Mennonite Community that is just east of us. I went with the young man who now works with us, veteran of the large hog farm, but also went with the state veterinarian who helps control disease in all agricultural animals in our municipal area. He knew the owner, who was absent that day, but two of his workers showed us around. I remember the one hog we raised at home in Decatur for eating at Christmas each year. These were midgets along side those we saw. Ours we have now are large, but these were larger yet, all hybrids as ours. My hope is to buy this week a 5 to 6 month old boar (male hog) which price we can afford, that will grow to breed with our sows later. Then my hope further is to buy some sows also at 5 to 6 months old that will serve to produce for us in the future replacing the smaller ones we have now.

(Now Sunday Dec. 3) My thoughts have been really concentrating these last two weeks on the Gospels of these last two Sundays. A week ago, the Feast of Christ the King and today, the first Sunday of Advent, have left me thinking a lot. Jesus, the owner of the house (our earth) we live in, will want a report on what we have done with what Our Lord had given us for living. The Climate Conference has put some realness in this process of reporting. Not one of us will be able to remain silent, for all of us, little or big, have a part in living here. What has struck me more is that in our catechisms for First Communion and Confirmations yet today we are concentrating on the Old Testament Ten Commandments, whose teacher is Moises. The laws for obeying are so basic in living, but those of us who strive to follow Jesus Christ (New Testament) must go far beyond these, certainly obeying all of the commandments, but with these all fulfilled, we also take the Gospel of Christ the King as our principal model of living, that is, "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, etc." (Mathew 25, 31-46)

Jesus is our Model of loving that urges us to give all our lives to others, beginning with our own families. We can't just not lie, not steal, we must give ourselves in loving that builds up with the Grace of our Baptism, our Communion, our Confirmation. Let us go beyond the Old Testament negatives, live today as Jesus Christ in a world so given over to materialism and egotistical pursuits. We must be shining lights in this world of darkness so we can show Jesus at our judgement time that the 5 talents He gave each one of us has made 5 talents more. We did not bury our love in the dirt.

To end this letter I must give you all a great THANK YOU for the help given us in the month of October. You are all prayed for each day here in Cabezas. It was great and I only knew of this here in November. This makes it for sure that we will continue our school another year. I just hope and pray that this could be some path that will be followed that will help us become more and more self-sustained. As I mentioned above about the hogs we will have to invest more that will help us produce more, even in our drought. We already have much, but we will need more to make us self-sustained, including our cows and other areas of production. I must take part of the blame for not doing more in years past that were leading up to the present need. I try to get around this by saying that I was never a good business person, always a dreamer, as those who know me can testify. With some humility I must ask you to continue your financial support, as before, saying that if 300 to 400 persons and/or families could help us with \$25, \$35, or more monthly/annually (about 1000 families receive this letter), we can continue our path to be self-supporting.

May Our Lord so bless all of you there, please grow in the Spirit of Jesus Christ. Our world so needs you all in this.

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](mailto: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>***

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