Food for a Brighter Future

Providing meals for poor children

— Cabezas, Bolivia —

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty.”

John 6:35
Project Synopsis

Description
Help cover the cost of food for 448 poor students attending local schools and Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School run by Father Robert Thames. The school’s 50 staff members will also receive meals.

Purpose
Providing nutritious food to poor children will give them a better opportunity to learn — ultimately helping them escape poverty in their community.

Location
Cabezas, an impoverished town in rural Bolivia.

Cost
$14,520, or about $29 per person, helps provide meals for one year.

Highlights
- Bolivia is one of South America’s poorest and least developed countries. It is also burdened by civil unrest, poor infrastructure and widespread underemployment.
- Due to low national education standards, frequent teacher strikes and a general lack of funding for schools, Bolivia’s children are routinely under-educated.
- Father Robert Thames, an American priest, searches for the poorest children in his parishes and helps these young students attend local schools. The older students attend Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School, a middle and high school that also includes a vocation training program.
- Every day, Fr. Thames provides nutritious meals for all 448 students and about 50 staff members of Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School.
- The majority of the students don’t eat regularly at home and would be malnourished without these meals.
- Fr. Thames also houses about 30 orphaned or vulnerable children at a home next to the campus.
- Cross Catholic Outreach has committed to helping Fr. Thames cover the cost of food.

And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me.

Matthew 18:5
The Need

Life is incredibly difficult for the poor of Bolivia, one of South America’s most underdeveloped countries. For those living in isolated rural villages, survival is even harder. Electricity, running water and medical clinics have yet to reach many areas. Men and women struggle to find steady jobs. Their country’s poor economy and their inability to read and write create overwhelming roadblocks to success. Most work as subsistence farmers, barely able to feed their families.

Under these conditions, it’s no surprise malnutrition and disease run rampant. Many of Bolivia’s rural children survive on a meager diet of potatoes and rice. Few receive the vital childhood vaccinations needed to prevent sickness. Inadequate sanitation and shelter only worsens their health. For families without enough money for food, housing and clothing, education becomes a luxury none can afford. This perpetuates the community’s problems because children who don’t learn vital skills in school — reading, writing and arithmetic — have no hope of finding good jobs as adults. Few, therefore, have any hope of escape.

This seemed the likely fate of 8-year-old Francisco. While still a baby, his mother disappeared, leaving his father to care for him alone. Before long, Francisco’s father also abandoned him. Although his elderly grandfather took him in for awhile, the man eventually became too infirm to care for a growing child. Then, just as Francisco seemed destined to become another innocent victim of debilitating poverty — he was discovered by Father Robert Thames.
Ministry Description

Fr. Thames, a compassionate American priest serving in the town of Cabezas in Bolivia’s Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish, saw Francisco’s need and rescued him. He gave the broken boy a home, an education and hope for a better future — and he’s doing the same for hundreds of other poor children.

Fr. Thames believes educating children is the best way to combat poverty, so he searches out the parish’s neediest children and helps them attend school. Younger students receive scholarships to attend a quality school, and this help covers the cost of school fees, books, supplies and uniforms — items poor parents simply can’t afford.

Older students attend Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School, a middle and high school founded and run by Fr. Thames that also includes a vocation training program. When he first came to the parish, the priest discovered many schools only taught up to the sixth grade and most teachers had only a high school education. “We asked the people what was the greatest need they had. Almost unanimously they said they wanted a quality school for their kids,” Fr. Thames said.

Because some children live very far from Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School, Fr. Thames provides housing for those students during the week. He also established a special home next to the school’s campus for about 30 orphaned and vulnerable children that have no safe place to live. These children might have lost their parents or been abandoned (like Francisco). Some are victims of abuse; others come from families too poor to support them. Whatever the case, Fr. Thames provides a loving home, daily meals, quality education and spiritual counseling to help them recover.

In all, Fr. Thames supports a total of 448 students in their education and feeds everyone daily meals, including the Nuestra Señora del Carmen Parish School’s 50 staff members. Since most of these children don’t receive enough to eat at home, this food is often their only meal for the day. Fr. Thames makes sure it’s a nutritious one. “We bake our own whole wheat bread and use a lot of soybeans in our bread, soups and as hamburgers. We raise a lot of vegetables that supply our kitchens,” Fr. Thames said.

Cross Catholic Outreach has committed to supporting Fr. Thames’ feeding program to help combat malnutrition among these desperately poor students and give them the energy to focus on their studies. Only by taking advantage of their education can they hope to leave poverty behind. If they are too hungry to learn they’ll never succeed.
Help Now!

The children in Bolivia’s poor villages are hungry to learn — and hungry for a nutritious meal. They’ve gone too long without both! As Fr. Thames put it, the students he supports are “the poorest in the area.” If they are ever to leave poverty behind, they must finish their education.

Without support from compassionate Catholics like you, children who depend on Fr. Thames will return to a life of hunger and illiteracy. Please prayerfully consider joining Cross Catholic Outreach to provide food — and through food the opportunity for an improved education — to the poorest of the poor in Bolivia. Help Fr. Thames shine the light of Christ into their hearts. With your support, we can help create a brighter future!

Proceeds from this campaign will be used to cover any expenditures for this project incurred during the current calendar year. In the event that more funds are raised than needed to fully fund the project, the excess funds, if any, will be used to meet the most urgent needs of the ministry.