

Cochabamba, December 2013

Dear Friends,

We have already started the season of Advent again, and so it is time for me to write to you.... It will be Christmas in a couple of weeks and then the New Year will be here. Time flies! The year 2013 will be forever in my memory as the year that my mother died; that's almost five months ago now, and I can only say that we have been able to say 'goodbye' to her in a very wonderful way. I was over in the Netherlands because of her sickness and her death and it gave me a chance to spend a lot of time with her.

After that of course, it was business as usual: back to work! What I would like to do in this letter is let you know once more what all the things are that I am involved in and which we are trying to do. I am still the director of two of the houses of our project, two houses for youngsters between the ages of 14 and 24 and all in all we have about 55 living with us there; that number is going to change a bit at the end of the year, because some people will go away and some new people will arrive; everyone who lives in those two houses is expected to study, to work and to save money. Only the youngest don't work, but for all the other ones that is obligatory. The idea is that at some point they will again leave those houses and start living independently; when that happens, depends a bit on their age and on how they are doing, whether they are ready for that.

Apart from those two houses I am also still officially the general director of our little school, but I don't do much work there; I have an office there (a little bit of a mess...) and I very often see people there who want to come and talk to me. But for the rest, I am just the contact person between the whole of the project and the school. In our school there are always around 250 children, but apart from that, we also try and help as many families as possible to send their children to school and we try to insist always that they should at least finish secondary school. After that, we try to give as many young people as possible a chance to do further studies; the number depends on how many scholarships we manage to get, on how much money is available; at the moment there are more than forty youngsters who are doing a higher (technical or university) study. Most of them I see once a week, even if only for a few moments.

There are also often families who come to see me who may be in need of help and we do what we can, at least, if we think that that is meaningful.

I also have a group of people who work on the streets and they run a night shelter for children/youngsters and they also work with them during the day; so, I also have to have contact with them frequently.

I have Eucharistic celebrations in quite a few different places (the parish, in a couple of our houses, in the women's prison, in a few convents, etc.), almost every day in some place. And yes, we have meetings as well.... They say sometimes that "if you really don't want to have any results, have meetings"; I think that that makes some sense in a way, but once in a while it is just necessary. It's not my favorite pastime...

So, all in all, plenty of work and my days are long, often from 4.30 a.m. until about 11.30 p.m., with a shorter or a longer siesta somewhere in the middle, at least, most of the time... You will understand that all this costs a lot of money, and that is why we keep on begging all the time, and the financial situation in the world does not help us a lot. But we can assure you that ALL the money that you send us really goes to the girls and boys, the kids and youngsters, the students and the families for whom it is meant. My own personal expenses are not paid from that money, and besides, they are not very high. We also always have medical expenses and in the two houses we have two cars and a motorbike, and they need petrol/gas and maintenance. This year one of our cars has cost us a lot of money in repairs, and those are expenses one does not really expect. But the bill has to be paid all the same! But once again, none of the money gets lost in the process, it all arrives where it is supposed to arrive. So we beg you to keep on helping us, because we can't do without you!!

It is not true either that we keep on spending money and that there are no results.

We always have results: e.g there are another eight youngsters who finish secondary school this year (the primary and secondary schools close in December for the summer holidays); we have Javier who already finished his studies as an engineer this year and he will probably also finish his masters this year, and he has already got a good job; Dayne has now finished all her studies to be a teacher and she is working; Rubén and Raúl have finished their studies as car mechanics this year; Mario will this month finish his studies to be a chef and Daniel as well; Hugo has in fact also finished his studies in accountancy and will only have to take one more exam somewhere in 2014; José Alberto did not know for many years what he wanted to do, but now he is studying to be a barber and I am sure that he will finish that course – I have never seen him so happy; Abel is also studying to be a cook and he makes delicious cakes and deserts which he has already started to sell; there are people who come off the streets and who come to live in one of our houses, and bit by bit they start living a regular life; we have contacts with many people on the streets and with many of them we have the hope that things can still turn out well; Igor is doing very well, both in his studies and in his work, after the kidney transplant which he had a year and a half ago; there is no end to the list of people who are doing well, and I could add many more; of course, there are also less positive stories, like the story of Jérico who is back on the

streets, again(!); he has never known his father and when Jérico was three years old, his mother went out to buy milk and she never came back... Jérico is eighteen now and something has to happen soon.

I am worried about Luis (10) who is often alone at home with his father and the father drinks all the time; there is no mother in the house, and when the father goes out to drink, Luis often goes with him.... I am also worried about Moisés (15) who is now living at home with his father and his brother; there is no mother there either; Moisés is very intelligent, but if we don't do something very soon, things will go wrong with Moisés and also with his brother. I know, I know: we cannot do everything, and I also get only 24 hours a day (there are no exceptions)... But we would like to do as much as possible, we would like to give as many young people as possible a chance for a better future.

That is only possible if you all keep on helping us, and there is no better time for that than Christmas time! I know that times are hard for many people, but I hope and pray that many of you will all the same say, "we can spare something for those kids and youngsters in Bolivia". Thank you very much for your generosity and for all that you are doing for us.

I wish all of you a very Blessed Christmas and a very Happy and healthy New Year!!

With kindest regards and all best wishes!!

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