

Sister Parish Newsletter

St. Thomas More Catholic Student Parish/María Madre de los Pobres

MISSION:

The Sister Parish Committee, led by the Holy Spirit, exists to facilitate the building of solidarity and the exchange of spiritual gifts and material resources between the people of St. Thomas More Catholic Student Parish and La Parróquia de María, Madre de Los Pobres in San Salvador.

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SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (AYUDA ESCOLAR) UPDATES

by Mary Frances Ross

Many of you know about the longstanding ministry St. Tom's has of providing Scholarships for students in our Sister Parish Mary Mother of the Poor. This ministry started around 1989 when our Sistering relationship first began. Currently we are providing partial scholarships for High School and College students to aid them in obtaining an education. High School is "technically" paid for by the government if you attend a public school, however many of our



students do not have ready access to a public high school and attend a local Catholic High School (which charges tuition) and if they do attend a public High School, they need to pay transportation (bus) costs, as well as supplies and additional expenses. This can be prohibitive for a family making WELL under the minimum necessary to exist. University students that are lucky enough to get into the National University do not pay tuition- but they must pay transportation, copy fees, internet access, books, labs, etc. If they go to a private university, their monthly tuition is between \$55 and over \$100/month in addition to transportation, copy fees, internet access, books, labs, etc. Those who attend the National University have classes during the day, so they are unable to work (at

least "normal" hours), whereas if they go to a private University, they often have classes on weekends and evenings to accommodate a work schedule.



Currently in the Ayuda Escolar program there is a different monetary amount for Scholarships to the National University and Private Universities- but either way, it is a help, but not a full scholarship, so either they or their families need to make up the difference.

In addition to their studies and work schedules (if they are lucky enough to get a job), the student must do 2 hours a week of "social hours" to give back to the Parish or their community. They also must keep up their

grades, not fail classes, and attend monthly formation classes. The program is run totally BY the students, the committee is chosen by their peers, and although they do have an administrative oversight, but they do the hard work. Some of our previous graduates continue to voluntarily help, also in administrative type roles.

During COVID all University classes have been online, and it is anticipated that this year the school year will also begin online. This has caused difficulties for many students as they do not have computers (they have been attending classes and doing homework assignments on their phones), or internet access. Many have had to use their phones to do all their work, and they buy minutes or data on an as needed basis, as they cannot afford a monthly plan. It

is AMAZING to me what they have had to overcome in order to keep up their studies- many of the faculty are not trained in online education and they have not had question/answer sessions for those who need help understanding material.

K-12 education went back in a hybrid format the last semester of last year and plans were to start the school year in person (or in a hybrid format) on January 31, 2022. They were hoping for most days to be in person.

I was blessed to visit our Sister Parish from January 12 - 28 and celebrate student graduations from 2020 and 2021 at the beach. The students had not gone anywhere or celebrated together in the past two years, so this was a treat for all of them. Due to illness/ familial illness or work, only 40 people were able to attend. We celebrated 9 High School and 6 University graduates from 2020 and 12 High School and 6 University graduates from 2021. They all received St. Tom's t-shirts and the cards that you all signed. In addition, University grads get certificates with official seals and signatures.



LETTER FROM A GRATEFUL MOTHER

First of all, I want to thank God and each one of you for the help you gave my daughters Xiomara Yamileth Cortez Bonilla and Meilyn Elizabeth Cortez Bonilla who graduated, the first with her degree in Nursing and the second with her degree in Psychology. Thanks to you they have come out ahead, and also to the Parish of Mary Mother of the Poor. I am a very grateful mom. For your great help, may God continue to bless each sponsor that with love give to all the young people of La Chacra.

Reina Bonilla

LETTER FROM A GRATEFUL IMPENDING GRADUATE

To the Parish of St. Thomas More

Through this letter, I would like to thank you for the support that you give to the young people of the Parish of Mary Mother of the Poor. I was a beneficiary of the Ayuda Escolar Program from 2012 until 2021 when I could finally finalize my studies with the help of God, you all, and my mother to reach my goal, and in 2022 I hope to attend my graduation and receive my degree, Licenciada in Psychology (in March).

I thank you infinitely for trusting in the youth of La Chacra. In these last years, it has been a little more difficult to get ahead, but I have no doubt that if you have the desire to get ahead, you can do it and do great things. I only ask God to keep you and give you many blessings in your homes and that everything you give is multiplied a million times. I know that also for you it hasn't been easy to be able to help all the students that you do, but with all of your help we are able to move forward.

I wish you much success in your lives and I say goodbye, sending you a big hug from a distance.

Blessings,

Meilyn Elizabeth Cortez Bonilla

(Meilyn was one of the two students chosen to visit us at St. Tom's in 2020- but they didn't get their visas, and then COVID hit)

COMMENTS FROM A LONG TIME STUDENT SPONSOR

Kathy and I have enjoyed supporting college students in the sister parish scholarship program for many years. It is particularly gratifying when we can sponsor a student throughout their whole college career. In the early years, we would send physical letters to our student that required translation and delivery to our student when a delegation from St. Tom's took a trip to El Salvador. But in recent years, we have been able to connect with our students via Facebook messenger and email. Our last two students have been Karina Elizabeth Larin Ramirez and Pablo Alejandro Flores Menendez. Pablo is still in the program and will be graduating soon. His area of study is industrial engineering, focusing on continuous improvement and logistics. He hopes to land a job with a company and help them with their logistical challenges. He also hopes to continue his education with a master's degree. It has been fun getting to know a little bit more about their studies and their dreams as we continue to support them. One common denominator with all of the students we have supported over the years is that they are extremely grateful for the support we give them....both individually and as a parish family. The support they receive from the St Tom's community is truly life changing for them....and for us.

We can't think of a way to help others where there is a bigger bang for the buck than the sister parish scholarship program. If you have never looked into this program, we highly recommend it. -- Lowell & Kathy Rinker

HANDMADE ALTAR CLOTH GIFTED TO ST. TOM'S FROM THE ROMERO DAY CENTER

The following is the note that was with the altar cloth

Brothers and Sisters of the Parish of St. Thomas More,



elderly. If they have sufficient funding they also provide help with medical expenses and medication for those who participate in the program and need it.

During COVID, it has been too dangerous for the elderly to gather- for the staff (2 people) or the participants, so they have still been making lunch and their snack, and they come to pick it up (or they deliver to those that are having a hard time getting out). St. Tom's Advent Project is one of the only supports they have to fund this project.



Xiomara, Reina and Meilyn

WE ARE EXCITED TO BEGIN PLANS TO SEND A DELEGATION TO EL SALVADOR

You are invited to join us for a visit to our Sister Parish November 11-19 (approximate dates).

INTERESTED IN SPONSORING A STUDENT?

Scholarship brochures are available in the narthex and on our website.

SISTER PARISH MINISTRY TEAM

Is looking for additional volunteers.

Call Michele at the parish office, 269-381-8917 x273 or email michele@sttomskazoo.org for more information about any of the above.

Thank you for your collaboration, may God multiply your provision. Words of St. Thomas More " Lord give me a good digestion, but give me something to digest".

The Romero Day Center is a program that provides Lunch, a hearty afternoon "snack", fellowship, exercise, and an opportunity to be useful to the elderly in the Mary Mother of the Poor area. They arrive around 12:30 and leave around 4:30-5pm. They have lunch, work on different projects (like the beautiful altar cloth), exercise, chat with each other and for "holidays" celebrate or take excursions. Monthly they try to give each senior some staples to help them through the month. Many of them do not have families that support them, and there are no governmental services for the