

I couldn't help but appreciate many of the stories of the students. Many have come from very difficult family situation (death of a parent, abandonment by a family member for example). For several, their parish is one of their main support systems.



On Saturday I took one of the smaller city buses with Fr. Luis to attend a Mass at the Cathedral. This Mass was celebrated by the Archbishop. This was for the infirmed and their caregivers. It was well attended. The Sacrament of the anointing of the sick was also administered. In the afternoon, I accompanied Fr. Luis to one of the three churches in the parish for the evening Mass. It is really a small chapel in one of the sectors of the parish bounds. It is a brisk walk from this chapel to the main church grounds where visitors typically stay.

Sunday morning started off celebrating Mass in the other chapel in the next sector of the parish bounds. It is also a brisk walk in the opposite direction from the chapel on Saturday evening. Keeping up with Fr. Luiz for these walks is a challenging task! He also seems to know everyone in the parish bounds. At least, they are aware of him! After the Mass, we quickly walked back to the main parish grounds for the last morning Mass.

Sunday afternoon I had the opportunity with several of the college students to visit El Boqueron. It is a park located in the crater of the San Salvador Volcano! The view of the city and the crater is incredibly spectacular! We spent a few hours there and then had a graduation ceremony for the recent college graduates! It was an honor to distribute certificates from St. Thomas More honoring their graduation accomplishment!

Monday, my last full day at the sister parish, I had the opportunity to visit the medical clinic on the main parish grounds! The medical clinic is opened Monday through Saturday for a half a day. There are always people lined up by 6:30 am. Many come for various needs. Some are there for wound care. The medical staff report that they appreciate the support of our church, especially with the special wound care bandages. We are able to purchase these items in the United States easier and cheaper than in El Salvador. We typically send them with a visiting delegation or students who visit from El Salvador. I sometimes will bring them when I visit. These wound care bandages have made a big difference in the life of some of their patients. They have reported a complete closure of some open wounds. If these bandages weren't available, the only alternative could have been an amputation. Last year, our parish donated a microscope for their laboratory. They use the microscope for basic examinations (blood, urine, etc.). The medical technologist stated she was just so grateful for this addition. It has helped her treat the patients more efficiently.



I was also able to visit the little school on the main church grounds. This school starts with children as early as one and a half years old up to the sixth grade! I had the opportunity to visit every classroom and give a blessing to the students, their families and teachers!

One afternoon, I was escorted to downtown San Salvador by two of the college students, Valeria and Diego! It was wonderful to visit the local markets and visit the Cathedral, the church of the Holy Rosary, the Church of the Seplechor. We also had the opportunity to visit the new National Library! It's open 24 hours! Always time to check out a book!

My last event was wonderful and sad. The evening was a farewell party also put on by the college students at the main parish! I always appreciate the music, food, and time that the students were so generous to offer. I appreciate their stories. We ended the celebration with a blessing for their families and studies. Many had to go home early because.....hey, they had classes the next day!

Tuesday morning was an early car ride to the airport. After a quick jaunt through their customs, I was back on the plane heading home! I appreciate always the time to visit this wonderful country. I am grateful that our parish has been able to assist the people in so many ways, especially with the impact on education for so many young people. These graduates stay in their country and help build up their community, their families and themselves. What a wonderful way to assist someone not only in their education but their faith journey as well!



Newsletter

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

APRIL 2026

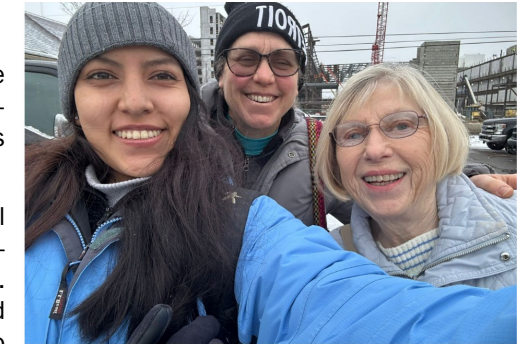
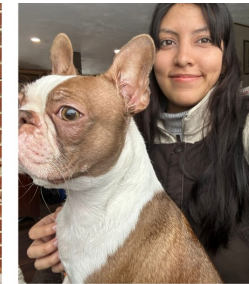
MISSION

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.

THOUGHTS FROM A STUDENT

submitted by Valeria Flores

Hi! My name is Valeria Flores, and I am a third-year Food Engineering student at the UCA in El Salvador, Central America. I am part of the scholarship program "Ayuda Escolar" at María Madre de los Pobres Parish.



I thank my parish in El Salvador, which coordinates the program with St. Thomas More Parish, and the people in Kalamazoo for the support you give to this program. Your support allows students like me to continue studying and preparing for a better future.



Being part of the scholarship program has been very meaningful in my life. Education is very important to me because it gives people opportunities to grow, improve their communities, and create a better future for themselves and their families. Thanks to this support, young people like me who are part of the program are able to focus on our studies and work toward our goals of becoming professionals who can contribute positively to society.

In January 2026, I had the opportunity to visit St. Thomas More Parish, and it was a wonderful experience. I really enjoyed traveling to your country, meeting members of the parish, and having conversations with many kind people. It was very special for me to see the community that supports this program and to personally thank the people who make this opportunity possible.

This experience encouraged and inspired me even more to continue studying and working hard to achieve my goals. I feel very grateful for the generosity, kindness, and support that you share with students like me.

Thank you for being part of my educational journey and for making a difference in the lives of many students in El Salvador. We are all deeply thankful for your support. For many students in the program, this opportunity means the chance to pursue a better future, something that not everyone in our country has access to.



St. Tom's Sister Parish Ministry Team will be **SELLING Daisy Dollar Gift Cards** to Schuring's Greenhouse **AFTER ALL MASSES April 11th and 12th**

Gift cards can be purchased with cash or check in \$10, \$20, or \$50 amounts

25% of the total gift card amount purchased will go directly to fund student scholarships!

Purchased Gift Cards will be distributed after all masses on April 25th & 26th.

Schuring's Greenhouse is located at 610 Schuring Rd location in Portage open Monday-Saturday until June 13, 2026.

PAST HISTORY AND CURRENT STATUS OF THE ST. TOM'S/ MADRE SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Our Sister Parish relationship began in 1989, in the final years of the decade long civil war in El Salvador (which was largely funded by the USA). The area that the parish encompasses includes a train track and one of the most polluted rivers in Central America. Part of the area at one time was a dump. Refugees came pouring into the Capital from the war-torn countryside and settled in the area as squatters along the tracks and along the river. Young people had hopes and dreams and because they were in the Capital, they had nearby universities- so they told the parish priest that they wanted to get an education. Fr. Daniel looked for ways to fund scholarships to enable these youth to go to universities and study. It started with a few people from his former parish in Madrid, Spain who were musicians, actors, and artists who put on a spectacular every year to raise funds for the scholarships. When St. Tom's began our sister relationship with Madre, we looked for a way to help, and since St. Tom's has always existed with a mission to serve the university students, it was natural for us to join in to support the scholarship program. While there have been other projects and programs along the way that we have peripherally supported, the scholarship program has always been our main focus for the past 36 years. St. Athanasius from Spain maintained a smaller number of students they sponsored, which over the years has gone down, and over several years we have had to cover financially as their parish moved, people aged out and they couldn't continue the artistic production. Also, during COVID, nothing artistic could happen. The number of students and support from St. Athanasius has been phasing out and as of last year, they had only three students left in the university program.

submitted by Mary Frances Ross



The people of St. Tom's have been very faithful and generous in funding the scholarship program. So much so that we received several very large donations and the monies built up to an extent that for about three years we didn't ask for sponsorship. Last year (2025) we began again to solicit funds for the scholarship program. We had enough left to cover their budget for 2025, but not for 2026. Over the past five years, the budget for the scholarship program has run about \$70,000 for both High School and University. That covers in most years roughly 10-20 High School students and 40-55 University students. (numbers have fluctuated a bit as different education funding laws changed, with COVID and students' interest in studying). In 2025, there were a total of 44 students encompassing both HS and University. While the numbers of students have fluctuated, the costs have continued to rise. The program is named Ayuda Ecolar, or student help. It does not provide full funding for the students' education; it is a help. For high school students, for the most part if they attend a nearby school, it will pay for most of their costs, however that is not the case for the university students. If the students attend the National University, their tuition is paid for, but they have expenses getting to and from, books, internet, materials, etc. The classes at the National University are only during the day, therefore most of our students have chosen to study at private universities where they can attend at night and on weekends, as they have to work to pay for the rest of their expenses. There are also differences in programs of study and quality of education.

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In 2025 when we started soliciting funds again, we were only able to raise about half of the students' usual budget for this academic year. Providentially, we had received a very generous special donation from a family to fund education for young women. For many reasons, the project proposals for the use of those funds fell through and this year we are using it (with the permission of the donor) to fund the rest of the 2026 budget shortfall. We had to tell the scholarship program that we are only able to provide them with \$60,000 for this year's budget and are waiting to hear what decisions they have made for changes in the program.



That brings us to the present time. We once again are asking for sponsorship for the Ayuda Escolar scholarship program. This year we do not have any fallback to fund a shortfall for 2027. Our goal is to at least fund \$60,000 so they can allow the current students to finish their studies. Our committee has shifted gears and are trying to come up with alternative ways to raise money in addition to donations. You may have noticed more fundraising activities- we had two tables at the November Art Fair, there is an upcoming Daisy Dollars fundraiser where you can buy gift cards to Schuring's Greenhouse where you can buy all of your flowers for the upcoming spring planting, as well as two concerts- see the ads in this newsletter.

It has always been our belief that the only way out of poverty is an education, and that with an education, you do not just bring one person out of poverty but their entire family. That has been proven time and time again over the years and there are so many stories of the lives that have been changed.

The Scholarship students themselves have created a video for you to watch- please use this QR code to hear their message.

Scholarship brochures are available in the narthex or at www.sttomskazoo.org

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SISTER PARISH VISIT 2026

submitted by Fr. Paul Redmond

This February I had the wonderful opportunity to visit our Sister parish. I do try to make visiting the Sister parish a priority. I believe that it's important to keep up the connections with the pastor, the administration and the people of Maria, Madre de los Pobres. The connections are good to have through zoom meetings, emails and regular mail. There is no substitute for on-sight visits. I'm afraid of losing the human connection if consistent, in person visits are not present. It is in these real life connections that one's sense become more heightened (the sights, the sounds, the smells, the touch). In person visits help strengthen the existing personal bonding. This has been the third year in a row that I've had the opportunity to visit.

This year I was able to spend five days at the sister parish. I drove from Guatemala to San Salvador. One of our parishioners, Mr. Manuel Brenes is from the next door country of Guatemala. He and his family were kind enough to drive me to the sister parish. The distance from his home to the sister parish is approximately 120 miles. It took about four hours to complete. The main highway system is relatively good. When one drives into a city the size of San Salvador, the traffic slows one down! It probably also didn't help the traffic that pop singer Shakira was performing 5 shows during at the time of my visit!

We arrived Friday afternoon. After having a nice lunch with the staff and Mr. Brenes at the church, we said goodbye to Manuel and his family. The evening was spent with a welcome reception prepared by the college students in the scholarship program. It's always wonderful to meet the new students in the program and reconnect with the more seasoned students. They all wanted to thank everyone at St. Tom's for their support to their education. Many stated it would not be possible to complete their education without this assistance.



Continued on back page ►

Enjoy two nights of musical entertainment

TO HELP SUPPORT THE SISTER PARISH SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Presented by: Arts in Action

¡SALUD!

a night of Latin American music

Help support students in El Salvador attain secondary and college education

421 Monroe St Kalamazoo, MI

APRIL 16 AT 7PM

St Thomas More Catholic Student Parish

Donate Here:



Live In Concert Jean Marie & The Lads

Friday April 17, 2026
7:00 - 9:00 PM

St. Thomas More Catholic Student Parish
421 Monroe Street ~ Kalamazoo, MI 49006

Suggested donation \$15 per person.
A portion given to the St. Tom's Salvadoran Scholarship Program, which supports students at their Sister Parish, Maria Madre de Los Pobres in El Salvador.



Bandmates

Jean Marie Learman – vocals, flute, whistles, concertina, guitar
Frank Gibes – vocals, rhythm guitar, lead guitar (current St. Tom's parishioner)
Aaron Gibes – vocals, bass guitar (former St. Tom's parishioner)
Steve Nyquist – vocals, percussion
Dennis Lowe – bagpipes

To preview our "Celtic Folk / Medieval Rock" sound, give a listen to our new CD "Lads in the Lane" on Spotify, iTunes, Amazon Music, and YouTube. CDs will be available for purchase at the concert.

