

SISTER PARISH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM FINANCIAL SITUATION

Dear Scholarship Program Sponsors and All St. Tom's Parishioners,

It was certainly with joy that we heard Wendy Torres from El Salvador share her personal experience with St. Tom's Scholarship Program. This program allows the students of our Sister Parish, Maria Madre de los Pobres (Mary, Mother of the Poor), to attend high school and college. Without an education, these young men and women are destined for a life of abject poverty. The many parishioners who have visited our sister parish since 1988 have witnessed the dire living conditions of many of these students. An education provides their only chance to find a job that will lift not only themselves, but their entire family, out of poverty. Wendy is a fine example of this commitment to family.

A comprehensive application process is required for acceptance into the scholarship program. Acceptance, however, does not necessarily mean that they will be able to graduate. Many times, care for the family or other responsibilities take precedence, and students must drop out. More recently, gang violence has prohibited some students from travelling to the school or even to the parish. Theirs is truly a very difficult life.

As we begin a new year of sponsorship, we find that our current financial situation is extremely serious. The amount of money that we have requested our sponsors to donate (\$240 for a high school student and \$420 for a university student) has not increased in over 10 years, while the scholarship costs, per the chart below, have risen dramatically. As you can see, the annual scholarship for a high school student last year was \$461 and for a university student, \$1,013, substantially more than we have been requesting. We depended on our "Plan B" donations (donations to the program itself, not to a particular student) to make up the difference, but because of the rising costs, St. Tom's scholarships and donations no longer meet the needs.

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
HIGH SCHOOL	\$313	\$310	\$436	No report on hand	\$358	\$373	\$371	\$448	\$458	\$458	\$461	\$516
UNIVERSITY	\$430	\$435	\$507	No report on hand	No data	\$603	\$663	\$819	\$819	\$1,006	\$1,013	\$1,043

In retrospect, we should have been steadily increasing sponsorship levels to stay abreast of rising costs. We now face the challenge of finding various means to cover these costs. In light of the above, 2017 sponsorship levels will be \$516 for high school and \$1,043 for college, a substantial increase, as we are painfully aware. For those whose financial situations do not allow for such an increase, we ask that you consider donating \$300-400 (\$25-33 monthly) for a high school student, and \$500-700 (\$42-58 monthly) for a university student. As always, please know everything and anything you donate is greatly appreciated, especially by the students who benefit from your generosity.

Please consider joining the Scholarship Program—the ripple effects of your generosity will be more far-reaching than you know. There are scholarship brochures in the bulletin and narthex that give more details about the three different ways that you can participate: Plan A (becoming a sponsor for a particular student), Plan B (donating to the scholarship program itself), and Plan C (writing letters to students who might not receive one. No financial commitment is made).

Thank you for all you do improve the lives of the less fortunate in El Salvador, in our own country, and throughout the world.

Sister Parish Newsletter

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

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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.

REFLECTIONS FROM A FIRST TIME DELEGATE

by Patricia Macklin

My first trip to El Salvador was awful wonderful and I am grateful that I was able to be part of this delegation.

The reason I say awful wonderful is that my experiences there included both awful and wonderful moments. I base my opinion of awful wonderful based on El Salvador's heartbreaking history, some current realities that exist, my ten day stay in El Salvador, and the campus of Maria, Madre de los [Pobres](#).

The first-hand experience with poverty, unlike any I have known, and yet the generosity and helpfulness of the people, was both humbling and inspiring.

While riding through the streets of San Salvador by bus or van, one cannot help but notice the awful polluting exhaust from all of the vehicles. In contrast, the higher country of Chalatenango and the valley area of Alegria, and the city of Suchitoto, show the wonderful, breathtaking beauty of the land that is full of lush vegetation, volcanos spewing steam, crater lakes, and river valleys, all led me to think, "Surely, God is in this place!"

The wonderful Salvadoran people I met are welcoming and loving and generous and funny and grateful. The children, I have to say, "I am in love with them!" Their energy and glee and openness at the daycare and the Open Door School was contagious. Gloria Estela, our bus driver's five year old daughter, will remain forever in my heart and prayers.



2016 St. Tom's delegation Patricia Macklin, Elsie Romano, Mary Frances Ross and Judy Bohl pictured with Morales family.

It was a pleasure to meet the wonderful students that St. Tom's parishioners sponsor. We did hear some awful stories from them about their difficulties coping with neighborhood gang pressure and threats and not feeling safe on their way to and from school or university.

After meeting the students, I am so glad we offer support for their continued education. I met Yansy, a university student, who I will now be sponsoring! The students are appreciative and so grateful for the support. They are also so happy to be with us and you cannot believe how much it means to them to receive letters from their sponsor.

While there, I remembered that it is in giving that we receive. I received much more than I gave on this trip! I am happy to share my pictures with you, of all I have received in El Salvador. I also made an El Salvadoran collage on my kitchen bulletin board that I could show [you](#)!

There is so much more awful wonderful and I guess the same can be said about many places. However, we have a bond with Maria, Madre de los Pobres. A relationship. I remember Fr. Ben once saying that God is all about relationship. The relationships formed between St. Tom's and Maria, Madre moves us closer to God. I felt it.

So, there you have it. Just a little bit of my awful wonderful visit to El Salvador! Let me know if you want to see pictures and perhaps talk about it.



In peace, and with love and prayers for you and for our world,
Patricia

WHAT DOES EDUCATION MEAN?

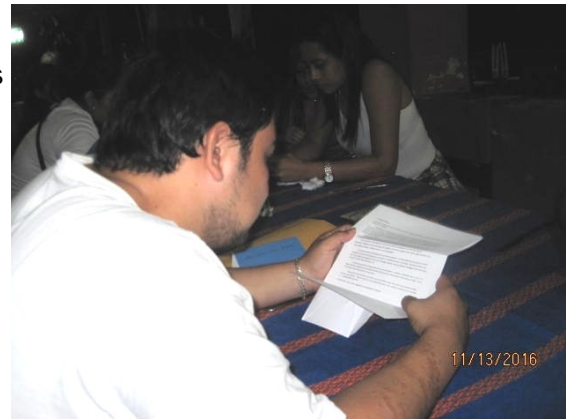
by Mary Frances Ross

What does education mean to a community?

When members of a community are educated it brings up the standard of living; people can get jobs in the public sector; it increases the affluence of the area; it increases community organization and the ability to get things done. When kids are in school, they are busy, they have activities to go to, they stay off the streets - and they are less likely to be involved in or become engaged in gang activities. **Education is a key to peace...**

What does education mean to a family? Education is one of the social determinants of health. It is clear that when members of a family become educated, the level of their health improves. They eat better, get more nutrients, tend to exercise more, and are less likely to smoke. As family members become educated, they get better jobs and contribute more to the family's welfare, bringing up the standard of living of the whole family. **Education is a key to health...**

What does education mean to a young person? As we celebrated the graduations of the High School students from the scholarship program they all thanked us and they all had plans and hopes for their futures. All of them wanted to continue their studies. As we met the kids that were still in school, they all had hopes and dreams for what they wanted to do after they graduated from High School. These are kids that live in social and familial conditions that most of us couldn't even fathom. The barriers and obstacles they have to overcome just to study are immense, and yet the looks on their faces and in their eyes as they described their plans for their futures were filled with hope and desire. **Education is a key to HOPE.**



THE "GIFT" OF DELEGATION/PRESENCE

by Mary Frances Ross

Whenever I tell people that I am going to El Salvador, the questions that inevitably come are: "What do you do while you are there? Are you building something? What do you bring? It has taken me many years to come up with an answer, but I think I am getting closer.

What do we do? We go to visit and live with our brothers and sisters at our sister parish. For 8-10 days, we live like they live (although we live at the parish house and have our own driver). We live in their community, go to mass at their church, we visit all of their projects, their homes, and the tomb of their beloved saint. What are we building? We build solidarity across borders and across cultures. What do we bring? Besides supplies for various projects and water filters/replacement parts, we also bring warmth, compassion, friendship, hugs, an ear for listening and a space for joy and celebration. We bring encouragement and support for the students in the scholarship program; we celebrate their successes and we listen to their problems and their challenges. We open our hearts and we learn about their realities, their struggles and their difficulties; and we accompany them as we walk through areas they could not walk through on their own. It means so much to them to



know that we haven't forgotten about them, that we took time out from work, family, and our crazy lives to spend some time with them- for the people of Madre de los Pobres, that is priceless.

No one ever asks me though- what do you get back? For it is in giving that you receive- and as many times as I have visited the dear people of El Salvador, no matter what I gave, I got so much more in return! What is priceless to me is the number of hugs, the warmth, the love, the outpouring of friendship, love, caring and the clear ability for me to see the living gospel.

My future goal is to establish a nursery school to help many children.



THE POWER OF RELATIONSHIPS

by Elsie Romano

It's hard to believe that I went to our sister parish for the first time over 22 years ago! At that time I was a new parishioner at St. Tom's and I felt a strong "nudge" when I read about a delegation going to El Salvador to visit a sister parish there. To say that going there was not part of my normal life experience would be a huge understatement! But I am very grateful that I listened to that call. It has made a profound impact on my life in many ways. I met people who gave thanks just because we were taking time out of our busy lives to meet them and learn about their reality. I met people who gave us food and drinks when they couldn't always eat or drink themselves. I met people who told us stories of their lives during the civil war that could only be described as desperate, but they continued to have hope. I met people whose faith has had a great impact on my own faith and how I live my life. When I returned from that trip I decided to support one young person's education in high school. I was given Roxana Juarez Cruz as my student. We started a correspondence that lasted all through her high school and university years and continues to this day. Two years after my first trip, I went on a second delegation trip with my daughter Sondra, who was 16 and a junior in high school. She was the same



age as Roxana, and they became friends. Sondra returned by herself that summer and stayed with Roxana's family. At that time Roxana's mother was pregnant and said she would name her child after Sondra if she had a girl. She did! Sandra Leiva is now a recent high school graduate and is starting her university studies this year! I will sponsor her as she prepares to get her university degree in international studies! When I travelled on this past November's delegation trip to our sister parish, I had the privilege of staying with Roxana's family for an entire evening and next morning! There are two more daughters who have gone through our scholarship program. Margarita is completing her university studies in agro-economics. Her dream is to teach organic farming practices in water and in moss and to teach ways to enrich the soil with composting. Rosa Vianney is completing her master's degree in political science while she works in a government position. Roxana now owns her own tourism business and is studying English to become more proficient at giving tours to English-speaking clients. Their mother and I spoke about our lives, our journeys, our children. I asked her what her secret is for raising such a wonderful family, and she said her parents taught her that family comes first. She gave thanks for all the help her children have received through the scholarship program at St. Tom's. She also said that she has a strong faith community that prays for each other's needs every day. We shared our need for prayers for each other. She asked me to pray for her country, for the people who are afraid of what lies ahead for them because of our possible new immigration policies, for the end of violence in their country, and for hope for their young people. We will pray in solidarity for each other. This family is my family in our sister parish. They have



taught me much about love, hope, prayer. I love them very much. I pray for their safety and their future. I know they pray for mine. When you get to know someone, you want the best for them. We want the best for each other. I was able to provide help with education, but what I received in return was a gift of friendship and faith. People ask what they can talk about in their letters? Everything that you would talk about with your friends. They ask how they can correspond when they don't speak each other's language. I don't speak Spanish. We correspond through translators. It happens if you want it to happen. If you have been given even a small nudge to help with the sister parish scholarship program, please listen. It's worth every bit of time and/or money you can offer!

Wendy Torres, a visitor from our Sister Parish, presenting Fr. Dan a gift to St. Tom's from the people of María Madre de los Pobres. The framed photo is displayed in the Chapel of Mary Mother of the Poor.