

# 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, ELENA FLORES

### *Finding Joy in El Salvador*

During my first visit to El Salvador this past November, I encountered love, joy, hardship, trauma and laughter. Mostly laughter. Salvadorans laugh a lot!

#### **Joy and Generosity**

The people we met in El Salvador were kind and generous despite of their poverty. I would even argue that they were more generous because of their poverty. They know what it is like to go without and so they are often giving to others so that they can prevent poverty in someone else's life. Everyone we met graciously welcomed us into their homes and generously fed us whatever they could. The staff members at parish

of Maria Madre de los Pobres were also amazingly welcoming and loving. On our last day, many of the parishioners we met even gave us parting gifts. The Salvadorian way is to give gifts at every opportunity!

During our time there, I noticed that most of the community members were SO joyful, even in the most treacherous of moments. Many of the people we met understood the effects of the trauma they had experienced in their lives. They openly told us about the hardships they had been facing. But they didn't let that stop them from feeling joyous! They knew the healing power of laughter and used that power as often as they could!

#### **Scholarship Students**

During our visit, we stopped by a few of the student's houses. We met with their families and were able to learn about their lives. Their houses were small and often jam packed with all their belongings. When we asked about what the student's daily lives looked like, they told us about their extracurricular activities, many of them required by our scholarship program. The students volunteer multiple hours a week, are involved in sports, take classes, study, have part time jobs, and many of them also take care of their families at night. The neighborhoods they live in are overcrowded and impoverished. Some of the neighborhoods were built on the side of railroad tracks due to the internal migration that took place during the civil war almost 30 years ago. This internal migration caused many families to move to San Salvador and squat where they could. Eventually their squatter homes turned into permanent residences. It is for this reason that the neighborhoods are often overcrowded.



Despite all these responsibilities and stressors, the students were so determined to complete their studies and to better their country. They often expressed humble gratitude for all the support that the parishioners at St. Toms are able to give them. On behalf of our students, thank you to everyone who is able and willing to support the scholarship program! You are greatly appreciated.

The Salvadoran parishioners were also immensely grateful to have us visit them and to be able to communicate with their sister parish. I felt just as grateful to have visited because the trip has opened my eyes. My worldview has been broadened. I have seen what our brothers and sisters in El Salvador struggle with and what they have achieved. I have also made friendships that have stayed with me. As a member of the St. Toms community, you are invited to join a delegation and travel to El Salvador. Please, pray about this opportunity and reach out to any member of the sister parish committee with your questions or concerns.

## THE GOOD NEWS FROM EL SALVADOR – Steep decline in murder rate

Truncated Blog post taken from “El Salvador Perspectives” posted March 13, 2020

While the international press often still describes El Salvador as one of the deadliest places in the world with one of the highest homicide rates, that has not been the case for several months. Since the middle of last year, coinciding with the start of the Bukele presidency, the homicide rate has dropped dramatically in El Salvador.

Roberto Valencia, a journalist who investigates crime and gangs in El Salvador tracks homicide statistics in El Salvador using official data from government sources. His daily tweet shows the steady declines in daily average homicides to this point in 2020 when the rate is between 3 and 4 per day. Compare that to 2015, the bloodiest year since 2000, when the daily average homicide rate was 18. So the homicide rate has declined by as much as 80% from those heights.

With this improvement, San Salvador no longer ranks as the most dangerous capital city in the Americas, instead it ranks sixth behind Caracas, San Juan, Panama City, Tegucigalpa and Guatemala City. Forty-five of El Salvador's 262 municipalities have reported zero homicides in the past 13 months. In another important data point, the number of Salvadorans reporting that they or someone in their family has been a crime victim in the previous three months is steadily trending downward.

Carlos Martinez, who investigates gangs and crime for El Faro wrote recently in El Pais:

El Salvador is a safer country since President Nayib Bukele came to power in June 2019. It is a fact. It is incontestable. And we must also say that it is not a little safer, but much more, much more than this journalist came to imagine possible. In fact, it must be said that things improved almost immediately, in a sustained way and with increasing depth...El Salvador is, today, a country where its inhabitants are killed less. There are even days, ever more frequently, where we don't kill ourselves.

To read the entire post or for more than 2800 previous articles on all things El Salvador related, visit <http://www.elsalvadorperspectives.com>. El Salvador Perspectives is the product of Tim Muth. Tim is a US trained lawyer who splits his time between El Salvador and Milwaukee, Wisconsin in the US. When he is not researching and writing articles for this site, Tim works on matters involving civil liberties and human rights.

We continue to pray for peace in El Salvador and the safety of our Sister Parish family at Maria Madre de los Pobres.

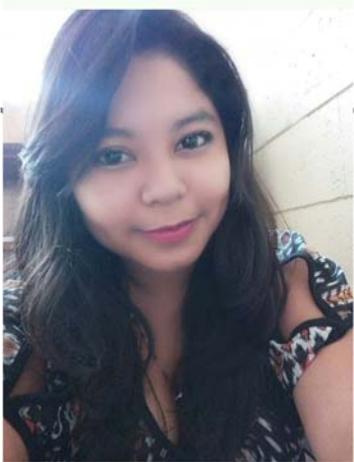
# Meet

Meilyn Elizabeth Cortez Bonilla and Maylin Yanira Navas Oliva, the scholarship students that were chosen to visit St. Tom's ... but sadly were unable to get their visas.



My name is Maylin Yanira Navas Oliva; I am 22 years old and studying for a doctorate in medicine. I have 2 younger brothers, one of them is already in high school and the youngest is in fifth grade. My mother is a single mother. She got her degree in Accounting (with help from St. Tom's Scholarship Program) but because the country has a very low rate of jobs, she still cannot get one. So currently the only possibility for work is through "free sales" (informal sector selling in the streets or in an outdoor market). She is the head of the family, so my brothers and I only have her since my father passed away. For me to be able to study and carry out my career I have help from the "Parish of María Madre de los Pobres" thanks to the scholarship program.

Thanks to the people from the aid programs that exist in the parish we have been able to get ahead, me in my career and also in my brothers studies because the Godparenting program helps us with them. In the parish I am coordinator of youth ministry, trying to giving hope, formation and bring the message of the life of Jesus to the youth of our community so that they have a much broader vision of the future and give them support for their future plans. Thanks to the Scholarship program I have been able to continue in my medical studies which usually uses many financial resources. Young women from the community like me, sometimes do not have the necessary resources to study what they want, but thanks to God and the program I have been able to continue in my career. I am in my fifth year of medicine (5<sup>th</sup> year of college studying medicine). I really like to know how the body works, its biochemistry and physiology. I find the great machine that is our body exceptional, to maintain each function acting normally and balanced knowing that each system is in charge of a specific thing and knowing that even so, everything is still connected. I really love my career; Thanks to the people who have helped us and I hope will always continue to participate in the program. For me this is not over yet! Medicine is the longest program but it is the most beautiful career I could find and although it is a little difficult and sometimes I get very stressed, in the end the reward is much more heartwarming. Thank you very much to all those people who know that many young people from El Salvador and from our community Mary Mother of the Poor have hopes and dreams that we can realize because of the Scholarship program and that thanks to them we can move forward- without them we cannot. I hope that God will always bless each one of you and for your enormous heart we are eternally grateful.



My name is Meilyn Elizabeth Cortez Bonilla I am 24 years old, I was born in San Salvador, and I am studying for a degree in psychology at the Technological University of El Salvador. I am starting the 5 year of my degree path. Supporting me financially for the expenses of my studies is my mom, my sister and the St. Tom's Scholarship program.

I currently live with my mother and my sister. My family is made up of four members, we are a happy family, we like to spend time together and we are believers in God. Since I was little, they taught me love for God. When I was 7 years old my father died in 2002, since then my mother has taken care of the family, and fought to provide us with an education.

Since 2002 I have participated in the Mary Mother of the Poor Parish, I started participating in biblical groups when I made my First Communion. My mother has been the one who guided us to participate in the church. In 2009 I began to participate in the youth ministry group of sector two (the area in which she lives), and in 2012 I was appointed as their group coordinator. Currently I am part of the group that coordinates youth ministry.

I am helping in the Godparenting program by doing formation for a group of children and adolescents on different education topics.

Since 2012 I have been a beneficiary of the Scholarship program which is what helps me to finish my studies. I am very grateful to the program, since it has helped me to become a professional and also provide my services to the community.

**COVID19 IN EL SALVADOR AND AT MARIA MADRE DE LOS POBRES** (data as of 4/14/20) - submitted by Mary Frances Ross  
Covid19 has effected every country and El Salvador is no different. Their healthcare system is not developed enough to care for a rush of very sick Covid19 patients, they have very few ventilators and ICU beds-especially for those lacking insurance (the vast majority of the country). Their president wisely put strict measures into place very early to try to prevent transmission and spread. On March 11 he stopped all in person schools, prohibited the entry of foreigners (who were not Salvadoran), etc. From there the restrictions quickly escalated to any entry into the country have a mandatory 30 day quarantine and stopping of all commercial flights in and out (although the US continues to deport people there from ICE detention centers). Everyone is mandated to stay home unless you are essential personnel or have permission to be shopping/buying medicine, etc. (must have a permission slip and only one member of a family). The difference between here and there is that they are not allowed outside to even take a walk- if caught they get thrown into a containment center for 30 days. Currently they have 149 cases confirmed (117 from travel/32 local) and 72 more suspected. There have been 6 deaths. There are confirmed cases in 4 of the 14 "states" in the country. Every case is being put in confinement for 30 days as well as all of their traced contacts (similar to what was done in Singapore). There are 88 containment centers with 4287 people currently being contained (for travel, being out without reason, etc), three quarters of them are men. Info available at: <https://covid19.gob.sv/>  
In our Sister Parish things continue on, the staff is going in M/W/Sat because the clinic has to stay open as well as the church office. The doctor is only doing consults on Sat, but the pharmacy is open three days. All the other projects have stopped, except the Scholarship program as many of the college students had already started. They hadn't finished accepting new students, but the old students that are continuing, mostly those attending private universities, started at the end of January and are getting their monthly checks. It is unclear to me if the National University and the Jesuit University ever started as they start late Feb/March. All college students are doing online classes, as the Universities are here.