

SISTER PARISH

IGLESIAS HERMANAS

The voices that motivate us

For more than 30 years, Sister Parish has worked with a mission born out of love and solidarity, building bridges between communities in the Global South and the Global North, and this year we have continued that journey with renewed energy and purpose.

We had the opportunity to talk with members from the communities in the Global South about their experiences and reflections. One of them is **Concepción Mateo**, lovingly known as Conchita, a member of UPAVIM in Guatemala, with whom we recently had the pleasure of speaking. She shared with us:

"I have been part of Sister Parish since 1998, when I began participating alongside Ricardo (Dick Fenske) and Vicki Schmidt, Walter and Jackie Arreaza, as well as Miguel from LM2, Bernardo from Tierra Nueva 2, Pastor Diego from Ruth and Nohemi, and María Tomasa from Chontala. Now, I am serving on the Guatemalan advisory board.

What motivated me was the support from our partner parish, the feeling that we have value as people and that we could provide for our families. We have remained united in faith and solidarity...

The partnership has strengthened my faith through Bible reflections, community sharing, and the words of encouragement we always receive ...

Even though we are far apart, we communicate, and that fills me with gratitude toward God and our siblings in Christ. The delegations have also been a source of spiritual motivation.

Conchita is a true example of faith, hard work, and love. Her story inspires new generations to persevere and keep hope alive. Thanks to people like her, our organization grows stronger every day and renews its commitment to serve others.



There are also new voices within Sister Parish, people who have joined recently and, from the very first moment, have fallen in love with the Sister Parish community. Such is the case of **Bety Amaya**, from San José Potrerillos, El Salvador, who shared her experience with us:

[The delegation] was a wonderful experience. They had come to the community, but never to my home. I felt so happy that they were with us and saw how we live here. It was an unforgettable experience because we learned so much from them. They are such kind people, and they share all their experiences with [their church communities] after they return home.

The experience motivated me to keep going, to stay involved in the organization, and to be even more closely united. I've been involved in the community board and the women's association for a long time. I worked for 30 years serving the community. I thought I was going to retire, but there's still so much work to be done."



- Gathering in Chichicastenango during Downers Grove - UPAVIM delegation.
- María (Chichipate) and Allison (St Thomas) during the 2025 delegation.
- Emily (Decorah) with Nayely, Genaida and Mélida (Potrerillos).



- Mayeni and Francisca receive the delegation from Decorah in Potrerillos.
- Bety (Potrerillos) and Holly (Decorah).
- Don Manuel during a trip to the Lempa River.

The work never ends when love for others is the driving force. Solidarity continues to strengthen the collective efforts that unite us as brothers and sisters in Christ.

To close, our brother **Juan Tut Bac**, from Chichipate, Guatemala, shares a Bible verse to invite us to reflect on the heart of our Sister Parish relationships:

"The partnership calls us to be united, just as we are taught in Psalm 133:1: 'How good and pleasant it is when brothers and sisters live together in harmony!' This psalm highlights the beauty and value of unity among brothers and sisters."



Albertina (TN2), Nancy (SJA) and Eluvia (TN2) during the North to South delegation in 2024.

An opportunity can change lives



Nancy and other scholarship students from Guarjila engage in community service at Casa Museo, Father Jon Cortina's former house that now serves as a museum and community space.

Each Sister Parish relationship is different, which means the love and solidarity we share takes different forms. In many cases, our communities choose to work together on a community development project like scholarships. The eight current scholarship programs in Sister Parish communities support 130 students ranging from elementary school to university, depending on which level of education the community needs to access. Local volunteer committees are proud to support the youth in continuing their studies and building a better future for themselves, their families and their communities.

We share this letter from Nancy Amaya, a nursing student from Guarjila in El Salvador supported by a scholarship from Wallingford UMC (Seattle, WA). Her letter eloquently expresses the feelings of many scholarship students.

"It is a true honor and joy for me, Nancy Amaya, ...to express my sincere gratitude for the invaluable support I have received from your church throughout my university degree. Thanks to your generosity and commitment, I have been able to come ever closer to achieving my personal and professional dreams and goals.

...Much more than material aid; it's a show of solidarity that transcends borders, demonstrating that we are not alone on this journey. Thanks to you, I have not only been able to advance my career, but I am also inspired to give back, to be a source of support for those who may need it in the future, just as you have been for me.

From the bottom of my heart, I want to express my deepest gratitude, not only for the tangible support you've given me, but also for your commitment to the well-being and development of all people.

*With love and gratitude,
Nancy Marily Amaya Vásquez*

Guarjila, Chalatenango, El Salvador



A group of students from Guarjila and Louise from WUMC during the 2025 delegation.

Joy and hope in motion

In times of uncertainty, choosing joy and hope is a powerful act.

This is more than an invitation: it is a celebration. A celebration of love that crosses borders, of faith that becomes action, and of community that is built from spiritual diversity. Inspired by liberation theology, former Pope Francis' call for an outward-looking church, and the living witness of our Sister Parish communities, we have continued to create sacred spaces where different ways of loving God meet in unity.

To our friends and allies in the United States: thank you for believing in this mission. Your generosity not only supports the work of an organization — it also nourishes the soul of a movement rooted in justice, compassion, and human dignity.

Thank you for being part of this shared journey. Because here, hope knows no borders. Love speaks all languages. And community knows no limits.

With gratitude and solidarity,
the Sister Parish team

"During our trip to Guatemala, one moment really stuck with me, when we helped paint the coffee house for Marconi.

We didn't do a lot of painting, just a small section of the wall, but Marconi was so thankful...

I could see how much it meant to him— he smiled the entire time, and his eyes lit up every time he looked at what we had done.

It made me realize how something as simple as painting could be so meaningful and helpful to someone."

— Zonder,

Freyburg Academy delegate



Young people from Mojoca and Freyburg with a common language: Music!

A life experience

On September 15th, the community of San Antonio Los Ranchos in Chalatenango held its monthly Sister Parish call with the First Lutheran Church of Duluth, Minnesota. This time, the special guest was Kerri Sjoblom, who was part of the very first North-to-South delegation to Los Ranchos more than 25 years ago, when she was only 15 years old.



Margaret, Ruth, Kerri, and
Erica in front of the church in
Los Ranchos - February 2000.



Kerri - 2025

Her first visit to Los Ranchos in March 1998 impacted her significantly.

She recalled riding a horse on a dirt road to El Alto, learning to make pupusas, the meetings in Los Ranchos's church at the center of town, still damaged by the civil war, and the warm hospitality of many families.



Juan Carlos during a performance when he was 9 years old.

Throughout five delegations, Kerri experienced unforgettable moments: these included listening to the beautiful songs of the church choir, deep conversations and moments of joking and laughter with her host families, attending town dances, playing softball, swimming in the Sumpul River, learning about rural Salvadoran life, as well as visiting the national cathedral and the Central American University (La UCA) in San Salvador.

These experiences inspired her life's path and her commitment to human rights and social justice in Latin America and globally.

During the call, Juan Carlos Alvarenga, representing the community's scholarship group, also shared his story. Since childhood, he was involved in the local theater organization Tiempos Nuevos Teatro (TNT) and even traveled to Europe to perform. Among other things, he did aerial silk acrobatics, an art form he hopes to take up again as a way of expressing creativity and joy.

2025 Delegation Highlights



Holly and Don Beto meeting in Potrerillos.

The year 2025 was a time of renewal and reconnection for Sister Parish delegations. Despite ongoing travel challenges, four delegations from the North visited partner communities in El Salvador and Guatemala this year, strengthening their bonds of faith and friendship.

In El Salvador, Wallingford UMC (Seattle, WA) celebrated 25 years of partnership with Guarjila, while Decorah UCC and UMC (Decorah, IA) visited San José Potrerillos for the first time together with the two US churches, sharing cultural and family experiences.

In Guatemala, St. Thomas Lutheran Church (Bloomington, IN), reunited with Chichipate after eight years, and Fryeburg Academy from Maine had an immersion trip that inspired reflection on solidarity and gratitude. It was a year marked by faith, hope, and the power of community.

"I learned how people are affected by those in power and how joy and connection persist." - WUMC delegate



Bruce from WUMC & Armando from Guarjila.

"So many times in this trip I had to step back and put things into perspective. I learned that there are so many different ways to accompany others and sometimes that can be more difficult than trying just to "Fix" things. I am changed because the people I met touched my soul and I want to see them all succeed and be happy and fulfilled in life similar to what I want for my close family and friends."

- St Thomas Delegate

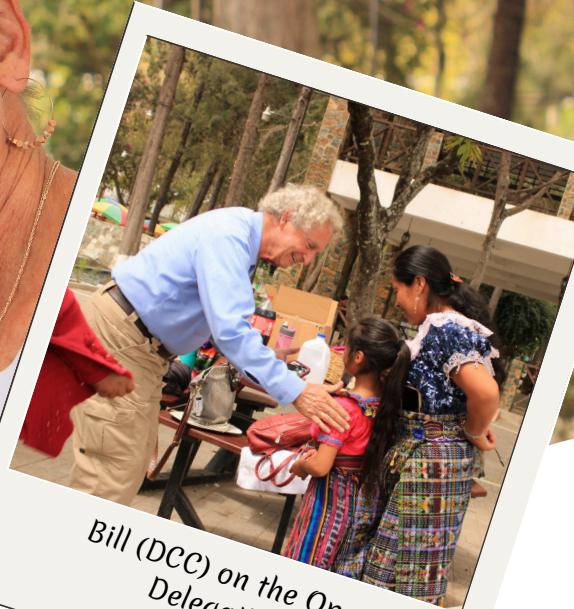
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Pancha (San Antonio) and Linda (DCC) visit the San Juan River.



San Antonio prepares for a delegation visit.



Bill (DCC) on the Open Delegation.

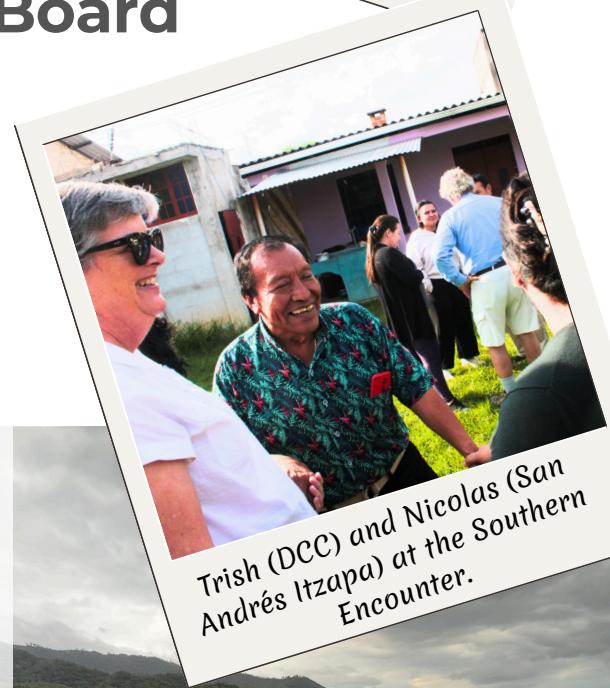
Join us on the Sister Parish Board

The Sister Parish Board of Directors is seeking new members to join our leadership team! According to our bylaws, the board consists of 6-10 directors serving staggered three-year terms. Beginning in January, we will have 3-4 open positions to join our 6 continuing members.

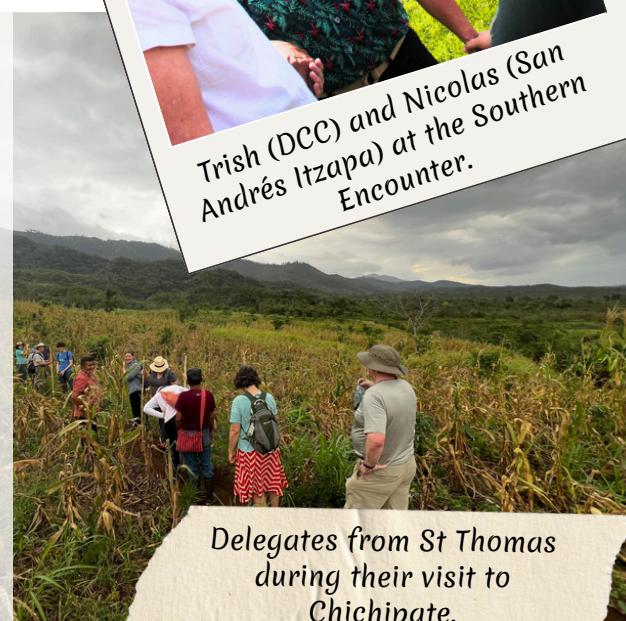
What to Expect:

- The board meets four times per year: two in-person weekend meetings and two virtual sessions (3-4 hours each).
- Between meetings, members may engage in committee work, depending on organizational needs and personal interests.
- Serving on the board is a meaningful way to deepen your connection with Sister Parish and contribute at a broader level.

If you are interested, please contact David Scott, Chair of the Governance Committee at board@sisterparish.org.



Trish (DCC) and Nicolas (San Andrés Itzapa) at the Southern Encounter.



Delegates from St Thomas during their visit to Chichipate.

Stay connected with Sister Parish

Stay connected with Sister Parish, as we plan delegations and virtual events for this coming year. Contact us to start planning your next in-person delegation, U.S. tour stop, or Zoom call with community leaders in Guatemala and El Salvador.

We hope to hear from you soon about how we can work together to build faith, justice and community across borders!



Delegates from St Thomas in Chichipate's new church.