



Parents' Association Newsletter

THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE

Winter 2018

An Open Letter to My Parents “A Bigger Table”

By Thomas Cavanaugh ('18)

Dear Mom and Dad,

I still remember my first trip to Thomas Aquinas College. The summer sun formed pools of heat on Highway 150 as we curved our way between the browned foothills that the campus calls its neighbors. “Quintessential Southern California,” you remarked, Dad, looking up at the Topatopa Mountains, surely recalling fond memories from your own time at the College.

I was only eight years old then. Now, 13 years later, I reflect on the ways in which *my* time at Thomas Aquinas College has already shaped my life.

Within this community I've matured in my relationship with God, formed wonderful friendships, and appreciated that — somewhat paradoxically — my intellectual discoveries serve primarily to drive further curiosity. As I write on John Locke's labor theory of private property for my senior thesis, I realize the valuable resources with which my education has furnished me. In just over three years, I've refined my ability to approach an important question, and begin to answer it.

I owe my membership in this community to your generosity, Mom and Dad. Thank you for cultivating in me the ability to appreciate this magnificent place! It was you, as primary educators, who furnished me with the very curiosity that led me to attend Thomas Aquinas College. Indeed, sometimes I wonder how much the Discussion Method here differs from our memorable dinner conversations around the kitchen table, which I will cherish forever. (Bigger table?)

Mom, your wealth of knowledge of biology and love of all things scientific, fostered through your education and profession as a nurse, led you to raise a son who appreciates God's ordering of nature and the living world. Your contagious scientific curiosity frequently brought us to the California Academy of Sciences in Golden Gate Park. (Well, it brought you, and you brought me ... in a stroller!)

While reading Copernicus during Sophomore Year, I remembered your love of astronomy, which you passed along to me. Now we share an appreciation of the breathtaking night sky on campus. Your tradition of expressing gratitude for the day's blessings at grace before dinner continues to increase my recognition of God's presence in my life. Your unwavering support and sage advice always give me the perspective I need, without which I would not attend the college I love.

Dad, your example as a lover of wisdom both directed my intellectual formation and inspired me to attend your alma mater. I vividly remember sitting on the edge of my bed, hanging on your every word as you read from D'Aulaires' *Book of Greek Myths* before my bedtime. Shortly after, I remember your patience and gentleness in teaching me how to read on my own — proof that the true lover of wisdom delights in sharing it. I fondly remember my first official lesson in philosophy, at parent-career day, as you stood in front of my fourth-grade class and led a discussion on the philosophy of perfect circles.

You have prepared me for this place, which has, in turn, prepared me well for my next step — the University of Southern California Gould School of Law, where I have been admitted with a scholarship. Though I could never sufficiently express my gratitude to you, God willing, someday I will have the opportunity to return, through my own giving, what you continue to give me.

I pray that, through God's grace, someday you will see your own example, still active, in the raising of your grandchildren (TAC third generation?). As always, I look forward to our next Sunday night conference call.

Love,
Thomas



Keeping a Feel for the Pulse of the Campus

The College's New Resident Assistant: Jeannette Richard ('17)

How did you come to Thomas Aquinas College?

I am from San Jose, California, the third of seven children. My mom is a graduate of the College, as are all of my aunts, and my grandfather was on the first Board of Governors. So there was never a time in my life that I *didn't* know about this place. But when I was in high school, I really wanted to make the decision about where to go to college for myself, and not just come here because that's what so many others in my family had done. So, after much careful consideration, I chose TAC, and that choice led to the best four years of my life. Every year I was here, I liked it even more. I am so grateful to TAC, and I see my new role as Resident Assistant as a way to give back.

What made those four years so meaningful?

The ideas we study here are just amazing, and the way that we study them — through the Discussion Method — was a good way for me to learn. It was great to be part of a whole group of people who are all reading these texts together and trying to find the truth in them. And then the community here is just wonderful. I found that the more my friendships were based on the kinds of things we were studying in class, the better they became, which is why, I think, I made such good friends here.

What does the job of Resident Assistant entail?

The students all call me the “dorm mom,” which is a funny name, but there are so many small things I do to help them every day, kind of like a mother! I live in one of the women's residence halls, St. Monica's, and I just try to always be available for all the students, especially the girls, because the guys have the benefit of the priests' living in their dorms. So a big part of my role is to provide a female presence.

I find that the girls want to come by and talk about *anything* — like, maybe they're having a hard time with their roommate, or they are stressed about their Senior Thesis, or they are homesick. Or sometimes they will come to me if they are worried about another student. I try to keep a feel for the pulse of the campus. When needed, I also take students to the emergency room. That happened on a recent Sunday, actually — we spent four and a half hours in the emergency room!

I also help the Assistant Dean, Dr. Decaen, with planning student events. We want our activities to support a campus culture that is wholesome, in keeping with Christian moral-

ity, and bolsters the intellectual and spiritual life of the College.

What is a typical day like for the Resident Assistant?

There is no such thing as a typical day! Some mornings I wake up with a big to-do list waiting for me — set up a date with a religious order that wants to host a vocations talk on campus, make signs for an event, pick out music to be played for a dance, or go into town and buy snacks for a dorm talk. Or, on other days, I may find myself tied up with meetings — meetings with the student prefects or activities directors, or the assistant dean, or the nurse. Often unexpected things will come up, such as when a student is having a rough time, and needs to talk for a while. It really varies.

I tend to spend time with the students mostly in the afternoons and evenings when they are out of class. That can be in informal conversations around the dorm, organized campus events, or something in between — like on a recent night, when a bunch of the

girls came to my apartment and we painted with watercolors. It was a fun thing to do and a good way for us to get to know each other.

I also try to provide fun study breaks. For example, on the Feast of the Holy Rosary, I put up a sign inviting anyone who wanted to come to a meeting where we read and discussed G.K. Chesterton's poem about the Battle of Lepanto. It was fun to do something a little different from what the students do in class, but which was also beautiful and worthy of contemplation.

Do you speak with students' parents often?

Not as much as I would like! I'll call if a student is sick, or if there is some need. But I encourage parents to call me (805-666-0819) whenever they have a question, or if I can help in any way. I usually answer my phone when it rings, and if I cannot I will get back to them as soon as possible.



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Love Amid the Flames

Parents Show Support for College and its Students During Thomas Fire

That the largest wildfire to strike California in recorded history bears the name “Thomas” is a testament to just how close its flames came to Thomas Aquinas College — and how remarkable it is that the College’s campus emerged from the blaze largely unscathed.

The fire began on the last Monday of the fall semester, December 4, just as students were leaving dinner in St. Joseph Commons and upper-classmen were preparing for the evening’s seminars. The initial outbreak occurred about a half-mile south of campus, around 6:28 p.m. Rather than waiting for an official evacuation order, College officials immediately began to remove students from campus to Sacred Heart Church in Ventura, where countless friends — including a good many parents of students past and present — offered them shelter within their homes.

Throughout the ensuing days, the College received heartening offers of help, prayers, and reports of good news by way of its Facebook and Twitter accounts. Below is just a sampling of the many gracious posts and tweets.



Tina Gomez

December 11, 2017



Even in the middle of this tragedy, God has shown me how good and merciful He is!

I have been hosting large groups of students all week because of the fires. (One night we had 14 refugees!) They have arrived scared, hungry, and worried about their fellow classmates. Some came with no personal belongings, not even shoes! But the inner spirit that they brought with them was one of gratitude and love. They consoled their distant family members over the phone, they were patient with my meager accommodations and accepted everything as if I were offering them the world. They consoled each other and praised God for their safety. They rejoiced when their school was saved. I heard no complaining, no vented frustrations, not even any mumblings of inconvenience as they slept three-to-a-bed and played games with my younger children. They offered to help with everything and were happy to pray the Rosary with us.

This happened consistently. We had one careful leave and another arrive ... all week! The story was the same. The last group left for LAX this morning. I don't remember everyone's names. I just wanted to tell you all that your children are amazing. They showed me what trust and faith look like in action. These godly young people showed me what "living your faith" means. They also exemplified what kind of students Thomas Aquinas College produces. I'm so happy that my family is a part of this community.

We are all so blessed.

Tina Gomez
La Mirada, California
Mother of Moises ('19) and Hannah ('20)



Lisa VanDamme

@lisavandamme

Follow

We have my daughter, a TAC student, and two of her friends safe at our house in Orange County, and we are happy to take many more. TAC community please reach out if we can be of help. #ThomasFire @TACollege

8:37 AM - 3 Dec 2017 from Aliso Viejo, CA

1 Retweet 4 Likes



Lumsimms

@Lumsimms2PPC

Follow

My daughter attends @TACollege please pray for her and all the students, staff, and faculty. Pray also for all the buildings on campus.

8:48 PM - 4 Dec 2017

5 Retweets 25 Likes



Kari Beckman

December 11, 2017



Many people ask me how I can send my kids so far away for college, but TAC is special. Not only because of the amazing education and Catholic formation, but because of the love this community gives to one another, truly a Christ-centered community. In the early days of the Thomas Fire, my children were taken in and treated with love and kindness from several families! The Tittmanns, the Grimms, the Boles, and the Grumbines were all SO GENEROUS and did such a great job comforting them (and me too!). Thank you for opening your hearts and homes to my children!

Kari Beckman
Canton, Georgia
Mother of Joshua ('16) and Zachary ('19)



Laura Roland

@LauraRoland

Follow

Humbled by the prayers from family, friends, colleagues and complete strangers for my son and his @TACollege community. While I rejoice that he is well, I am heartbroken at the devastation their neighbors in Ojai and Santa Paula have endured. #thomasfire

11:37 PM - 3 Dec 2017

4 Likes



Campus Life

Students v. Tutors Trivial Pursuit



After the opening concert of this year's St. Vincent DePaul Lecture and Concert Series, students and tutors faced off for their annual game of Trivial Pursuit in the Dumb Ox Café. The tutors won handily. "It was rather sad," one student lamented. "We only got one slice!"

Fall Campout



Don Rags Blood Drive



At the midpoint of the fall semester, United Blood Service set up a makeshift clinic in St. Augustine Hall for the semiannual campus blood drive. Students made their way over to the building throughout the day, in between Don Rags sessions, to make their contributions.



Advent Dance

On Saturday, December 2, the students of Thomas Aquinas College transformed St. Joseph Commons into a formal ballroom for the Advent dance. Per custom, a large portion of the evening was dedicated to student-produced entertainment, with songs, skits, caroling, and a dramatic reading of "The Night Before Christmas" for children of faculty members.





A group of Thomas Aquinas College students explored the natural beauty surrounding campus in September with a backpacking trip to Topatopa Bluff (alt. 6,367 ft.). The College's head chaplain, Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., and Tutor Emeritus Dr. Carol Day led the effort, which included Mass at the peak.

Halloween Dance



The rafters of St. Joseph Commons were filled with (paper) bats on the night of October 28, creating a suitably spooky atmosphere for this fall's Halloween Dance, sponsored by the Sophomore Class. The evening included costumes, a student-produced film, feasting, and plenty of swing dancing.



Flash Mob 2017



Some 150 TAC students brought the joy of Advent to the marketplace on December 1, staging a choral "flash mob" at The Oaks shopping mall in Thousand Oaks. After furtively gathering around the central Christmas display, they simultaneously burst into song, much to the delight of the mall's surprised customers and employees.

“We try to take what we are learning in the classroom and apply it to our own lives. Obviously you can’t talk about Aristotle all the time, but I think it’s really important to make sure that what our students learn in class becomes very real, something that touches their lives every day outside of class, too.”

Do you have any advice for parents?

Make sure that you talk and listen to your children. When I was a student, I called my mom *often*, and it was so nice because I never felt that she was too busy to talk to me or listen to me. I just wanted to tell her about everything that was going on! I try to talk to students a lot in my new role as RA, but sometimes what students really need is to be able to talk to their own parents.

Whom do you consider to be a model for you in your work?

When I decided to take this job, one of the saints I found myself praying to a lot was St. Louise de Marillac. She’s my Confirmation patron and she founded the Daughters of Charity. She spent much of her life taking care of young girls and helping them, especially teenagers who came from poor families and who often lacked guidance. She would try to show them how to be Christian women and teach them the skills they would need to care for themselves and others. That is different, obviously, from my work here, but she is a model to me in her loving tenderness for the young women in her care.

Looking back, I didn’t know I was going to have this job when I chose her as my Confirmation patron. So I think that was really providential.

Do you have any special plans in terms of activities for this year?

In November we put together an all-girls campout with Dr. Carol Day, who recently retired from the College’s teaching faculty. We hiked the Matilija Canyon trail, then cooked hot dogs, roasted marshmallows, and delighted in conversation during a night in the wilderness. The next morning the College’s head chaplain, Rev. Paul Raftery, O.P., came out and offered Mass for us, after which we had a pancake break-



Jeannette, left, leads a women’s campout in November.



Resident Assistant Jeannette Richard (’17) and head women’s prefect Marie-Barbara O’Brien (’18) present the gifts of bread and wine to the Most Rev. Paul S. Coakley, S.T.L., D.D., Archbishop of Oklahoma City, at the Mass of the Holy Spirit that opened the 2017-18 academic year.

fast before hiking up the Cozy Dell trail. It was such a good time for bonding and deepening friendships.

I try to hold informal gatherings in my apartment for the girls, where we can read short texts together, do some watercolor painting, listen to a good talk or piece of music, or just share some food together — anything to foster good conversations, because that’s one of the most important parts of the community life here. We try to take what we are learning in the classroom and apply it to our own lives. Obviously you can’t talk about Aristotle all the time, but I think it’s really important to make sure that what our students learn in class becomes very real, something that touches their lives every day outside of class, too.

Then there are outside speakers. The Activities Directors and I are planning to continue the Dorm Talk Series that the last resident assistant, Sarah Dufresne (’14), started, in which women from the broader College community come to campus and share their wisdom with the girls. We also get a number of visiting religious orders. The Little Sisters of the Poor gave a talk in November, which was neat because we got to meet some of their members and learn about their work of caring for the elderly and the dying. That was very beautiful to hear about.

A Manhattan ‘Friend-Raiser’

Parents Pip and Tom Donahoe Help Organize Event with Fr. Rutler

As the CIO and executive director of New York’s Wethersfield Institute, Thomas C. Donahoe is accustomed to planning events in the storied rectory of St. Michael’s Church in



Manhattan. “I can practically do it with my eyes closed,” he jokes, noting that St. Michael’s pastor, Rev. George Rutler, has long played the role of gracious and generous host for these events. So when Mr. Donahoe, father of Theresa (’20), learned that Thomas Aquinas College President Michael F. McLean was going to be in New York City last fall, he kindly offered to arrange a reception on the College’s behalf.

At Mr. Donahoe’s request, Fr. Rutler — a longtime friend of the College — once again played host in his rectory’s salon parlor at the November 13 soirée. He played the piano and greeted friends of Thomas Aquinas College, old and new, who came to hear Dr. McLean speak about the College’s unique program of Catholic liberal education and its ongoing efforts to establish a branch campus in New England.

“The idea was to have a reception that was more of a friend-raiser than a fundraiser,” says Mr. Donahoe. “It was essentially an opportunity for Dr. McLean to talk about the mission of Thomas Aquinas College and the hoped-for expansion to the New England property, as well as to build up our network of friends in New York City and along the East Coast.”

Among those in attendance was Robert Bagdazian, coordinator of the Parents’ Association and father of Daniel (’13), Gabriel (’14), and Samuel (’20). “Tom and his wife, Pip (Puccetti ’78), appreciate that, for the College to expand east, it must make additional connections in the region, and they are deeply committed to helping us forge those relationships,” says Mr. Bagdazian. “It is always heartening to see parents who, recognizing the role of the College in their children’s lives, do whatever they can to aid in its mission.”

The College is grateful to Fr. Rutler for his hospitality, as well as to the Donahoes for their assistance. “We were glad we could help,” says Mr. Donahoe. “It was an opportunity to showcase Thomas Aquinas College, which offers a special type of education, an enabling education, an education for life. We were only too happy to lend the resources that we have at hand.”

Of Cardboard Yachts and Charity ...

College Hosts Second Annual Alumni & Parent Day

Alumni, parents of current students, and their families from throughout Southern California converged on campus October 7 for the second annual Alumni and Parent Day. “For nearly 30 years, it was simply an alumni event, but last year we expanded the day to include parents,” says Robert Bagdazian, Parents’ Association coordinator. “The combined event was such a success that we decided to make it our new, annual tradition.”

The morning began with Mass in Our Lady of the Most Holy Trinity Chapel, followed by brunch in St. Joseph Commons. In the afternoon, the College hosted three separate seminars, led by members of the teaching faculty, about St. Thomas Aquinas’ writing on charity from the *Summa Theologiae*. Meanwhile, children had fun at a student-organized Junior Olympics, which — thanks to the past year’s rains — once again included the much-beloved Cardboard Yacht Race. Afterward the recreation continued with basketball and volleyball on the campus courts.

In the evening, President Michael F. McLean welcomed



parents and alumni at a reception in the Burns Plaza behind St. Gladys Hall, followed by a barbeque dinner with students in the campus picnic area and an ice-cream social in St. Joseph Commons. “It was a great time, bringing together so many parts of the College community,” says Mr. Bagdazian. “We can’t wait to do it again next year!”

Parents' Corner

Living the Good Life

By **Brigitte (Curphey '92) Youngblood**

As an alumna of Thomas Aquinas College, my desire to become a TAC parent is now realized, just as I had hoped when I first became a mother some 22 years ago. Much to my delight, our eldest two children — Margaret and Andrew, a senior and a freshman, respectively — are students at the College today.

Not long after my graduation in 1992, I met my future husband, who was able to go through the Catholic conversion process thanks to the kind guidance of some TAC chaplains and the support of my large network of TAC friends. So, even though he did not attend the College, he experienced the care and culture of the extended Thomas Aquinas College community. He soon found himself in love with the College and her fruits, and thus likewise became eager to support the school and encourage our children to attend.

Because I had married an “oil man,” early on we found ourselves moved to Alaska, where we were blessed to befriend many fellow TAC alumni as well as their friends in the greater Catholic community. With the benefits of good food and ample space, we found it easy to enjoy the company of the ever-expanding community to which we had grown accustomed. Little did I know that this experience would one day help to bring at least some of our children to my alma mater.

While we regarded our social life as an attempt to be with friends and live out our glory days in the context of a growing family, the children — who were throwing themselves full-heartedly into loosely supervised playtime — were somewhat aware of the happy solidarity that the grown-ups shared. To this day they have a memory of our like-mindedness with our friends, without compromising our individuality.

What's more, in seeing us with our TAC friends, they noticed our comfort with the vulnerability of being persuaded, and our confidence with presenting arguments to persuade others. They witnessed our genuine love and joy when we discover the truth and more about each other. They could see that our commonalities do not detract from our engagement in the

larger community; we relish the opportunity to make new acquaintances, to meet them where they are, and to make them comfortable while incorporating them into our particular brand of rhetorical grappling.

My husband and I had no notion of the potentially formative effects that living the good life could offer our children. Only recently have I become aware of some of the moments of conversion, sometimes incremental and other times dramatic, that moved our two older children to set their hearts on TAC.



The Youngblood family

“Attracted by the good, which is everywhere, our children yearn for the wholeness that only a Catholic education can truly provide. The solidarity that Andrew and Margaret witnessed among our TAC friends is so attractive that the source of this unity — the Church and a school that supports intellectual wholeness — has become a personal need for them.”

As our children enter a society filled with skepticism, one that panders to lesser and sometimes illusory goods, they experience the divisive and factious nature of a broken world. Attracted by the good, which is everywhere, they yearn for the wholeness that only a Catholic education can truly provide. The solidarity that Margaret and Andrew witnessed as children is so attractive that the source of this unity — the Church and a school that supports intel-

lectual wholeness — has become a personal need for them.

As our children make the steps to decide their future, they do so in their own way, each struggling with his or her own, unique set of parameters. Life is messy and sometimes it even brings them to a place where they find themselves, like the Prodigal Son, feeding swine in a foreign land. But the hope is always that the good, true, and beautiful that was lived vigorously in joy will be the reminder of the “Father’s House.”

With hindsight I see that many of my best efforts to persuade my children of the virtues of going to TAC take a backseat to the joys they experienced through the many gifts that the College has given to me, and by extension, to them.