

# Letter Home

THE THOMAS AQUINAS COLLEGE PARENTS' ASSOCIATION

Winter 2025

## An Open Letter to My Parents

*"Like Our Heavenly Father, You Were There all the Time"*

By Pedro da Silva (NE'25)

*Meus Queridos Pai e Mãe,*

As I was preparing to write you this letter, I thought about the first time I hugged you in the airport, back home in Brazil, before coming to the U.S. and my freshman year at Thomas Aquinas College. I still remember how strong my emotions were that day, how happy I was to find some notes Mom put in my luggage along with letters and pictures from my friends. Every time I go to the airport for summer and Christmas breaks, my emotions are always the same.

The feeling of looking through the window of the airplane and seeing the coast of Santa Catarina, of counting the cities until we get to Nossa Senhora do Desterro, is always one of great joy and peace. Yet the adventures in the plane cannot compare at all to the adventures that my soul has undergone over these last four years.

Mãe, you know how much Plato's *Republic* changed me, because I called you to talk about the analogy of the cave and the vision of the sun. You saw how it fostered in me an incredible desire to share the education that I have received here. You know this curriculum well, because of the many hours we have spent over Sunday phone calls, talking about what I learned in class. I was always impressed by how well you followed the arguments in the first books of Aristotle's *Physics* and how you always raised the perfect objections to my points.

I also know how much you have suffered by not having me at home, especially for Sunday lunches with Grandpa and the family. I know that you wanted me to call more and to send you more pictures. But you endured all of that with great joy because you valued the good formation that I am receiving.

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Pedro da Silva (NE'25)

Pai, you have also seen me change. In some ways, I am becoming more and more like you. I have left my parents' home early, powered through some of the difficulties of life, made mistakes (many), and learned from them. Although you have never said much, you have always been there for me in case I fell, and it was the comforting feeling of your presence that allowed me to shoot so high toward my dreams. I know it was hard for you, too, to see me leaving and changing — even drastically at some points — and coming back home with a lot of strong opinions about virtue, justice, the common good, and God.

Like Our Heavenly Father, you were there all the time, allowing me, in my freedom, to pursue my happiness.

Both of you know very well how much Thomas Aquinas College has been life-changing and life-giving to me. But it would not have been possible without the immense effort that you two put into my formation. From my first steps, to my love for books — even now to my love for our country and the common good — everything I am came from you, in one way or another.

It is because of you that my dreams are higher than ever before. And now, as I prepare myself for a graduate school program in philosophy, as I start my life of service to my country and my God, going wherever He wants me to go, I am eternally grateful both to you and for you. Know that you will always be in my prayers.

*Com amor,*  
Pedro Kair Medeiros da Silva

# A Word from Our Shepherds ...

*Two Prelates Offer Encouragement & Gratitude to TAC Parents*

**O**n the eve of each of the College's 2024 Commencement ceremonies — set some 3,000 miles and one week apart — the invited speakers took an opportunity to commend the unsung heroes of Thomas Aquinas College: the mothers and fathers of its students.

In recent years, the College has hosted a dinner for the soon-to-be graduates and their families on the Friday night before graduation, the “Taco Dinner,” as it's known in California, and the “New England Seafood Dinner” in Massachusetts. Both events feature the next day's Commencement Speaker as the guest of honor, presenting him with small tokens of the College's gratitude and inviting him to offer a few words to the evening's guests. Although acting independently, the 2024 Speakers — both prelates of the Church and successors to the Apostles — used the occasion to express their encouragement and gratitude to TAC parents. Below are their remarks.

## Bishop Szkredka: “Your Children Are Ready”

by The Most Rev. Slawomir Szkredka  
Auxiliary Bishop of Los Angeles  
Santa Barbara Pastoral Region

Congratulations to you parents!

You must be very proud, and rightly so. Your children have received an excellent education. This school has taken care of their minds and also their souls.

This Christ-centered place has equipped them well to enter this world and to be the beacons of the Gospel and the values the Gospel proclaims.

It will be in the Eucharistic celebration tomorrow that we will ask the Holy Spirit to empower these young men and women as they go into the world, that they may fulfill what God has in store for them. For some of them, I know it's the priestly vocation, or the vocation to the religious life; for others, it's the vocation to marriage. So we will be praying for all of them as they go out of here, that they may find their path and, following our Blessed Mother, say “yes” to God.

And I know their mothers, especially, that your hearts may be filled with trepidation, seeing how this world is getting more and more hostile to the Faith and the Church. But your children are ready, and I believe that. I encourage you, mothers, especially, just to entrust your children to our Blessed Mother. In this month of May, when we look at Mary, when we contemplate her love for us, we are encouraged to bring ourselves, our needs, our worries, our anxieties, and place them all in her heart. She will look after all of us, and she will look after your children especially.

So, thank you, again for inviting me here tonight. It's a great privilege for me, as a bishop, to see different dimensions of the Church, but especially to see this place, at this special moment, when, for the 50<sup>th</sup> time, young graduates are released into this world, proclaiming Christ and the beauty of the Gospel. I am so privileged to see that.

Please count on my prayers and my support. God bless!

**“I encourage you, mothers, especially, just to entrust your children to our Blessed Mother.”**



*The Most Rev. Slawomir Szkredka*





*Cardinal Burke with Cecilia (Johnson '92) and Joseph O'Brien at the graduation of their daughter Norah (NE'24)*

## Cardinal Burke: A Story of Providence

by His Eminence Raymond Leo Cardinal Burke  
Prefect Emeritus of the Apostolic Signatura

I want to express my heartfelt congratulations to the graduates of the New England campus for 2024. I was so happy to meet a number of you today and your parents. And I want to take this occasion, on which you have honored me, to say that, in honoring me, you are honoring the parents.

As a pastor of souls, my principal work has always been to serve families, and to serve parents in carrying out their call to procreate and educate children, who are the hope of the future. This, of course, is a participation in God's own work. Sometimes we speak about procreation, and we fail to mention that second word: It's always, in the Church's teaching, to procreate and educate. You good parents had at heart the desire to give your children the best classical education, and that is an education which begins and ends with God, Who is the source of all being, of all truth, beauty,

and goodness. His plan is written in nature and, above all, on the human heart.

You couldn't have chosen — and I say this without any exaggeration — you couldn't have chosen a better institution of Catholic higher education than Thomas Aquinas College.

I would just like to share a little story with you, and I won't carry on, about how I came to be involved with the College. It was through parents. I was a new bishop in the Diocese of La Crosse, Wisconsin, and there was a wonderful couple, Bernard — they called him Bernie — and Barbara

Johnson. Bernie is still living; Barbara was called home to Our Lord some years ago.

The Johnsons came to me, and they were very well formed in their Catholic faith, and they had a beautiful family, and their children were ready to go to college.

So, they asked me, "Can you recommend to us a good Catholic college?" And I began then — there already existed the Cardinal Newman Society — so I began to research it and look into it and, of course, very soon, at the top of the list was Thomas Aquinas College.

I soon got to know the College, and I was very privileged to know Founding President Dr. Ronald P. McArthur somewhat well, and to meet some of the other founders, too. We have Peter DeLuca here with us tonight — happy birthday! — and that was a great gift to me. I was invited to be the Commencement Speaker in California in May 2010, and that November I was created a cardinal.

So, it was in trying to serve parents that I discovered Thomas Aquinas College, and I have followed it very carefully ever since. After I was transferred to Rome, President Tom Dillon regularly came to Rome and would visit. The Lord called him home so suddenly in 2009, but he was a great man and, of course, he's had very good successors who have carried on this work.

Anyway, I thank you, parents, for having chosen this college for your young sons and daughters, and for your support of the College.

I am very pleased that I told you about Bernie and Barbara Johnson; well, one of the graduates this year is one of their grandchildren: Norah O'Brien. Her mother, Cecilia ('92), is a Johnson.

Well, thank you for your very gracious words. I am just so pleased to come to this new campus. To be here has been a great gift, and especially to be able to

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preside at the Commencement tomorrow. I thank God for that, and you can count on my continued support for Thomas Aquinas College, in union with all you good parents.

Thank you very much.



# Campus Life



All-College Seminar



Rosary Procession



Oktoberfest



Volleyball Playoffs



Feast of St. Thérèse



Sophomore Welcome Dance



Halloween Dance







Open-Mic Night



Women's Soccer Final



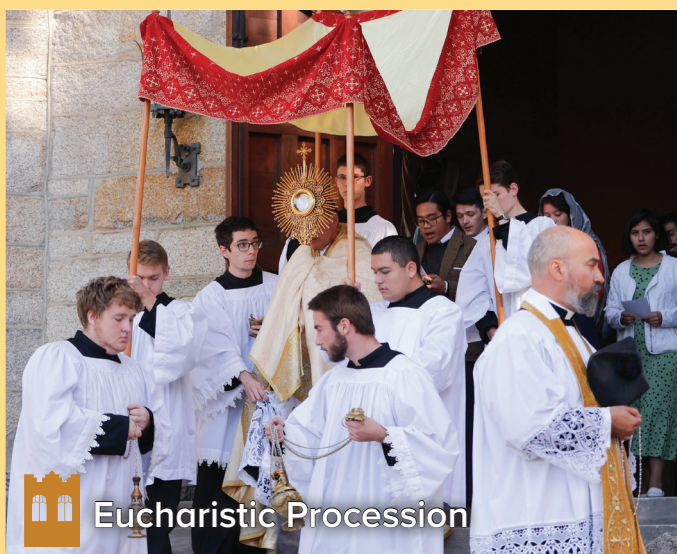
Schubertiade



New York Trip



King Lear



Eucharistic Procession



Scarves & Cider Party



# Back to Campus

## Generations Come Together at Alumni & Parent Days

Whether coming to visit their children or to catch up with old friends, hundreds of members of the Thomas Aquinas College family traveled to the New England campus on October 12 — and then, one week later, to California on October 19 — for fellowship, scholarship, and fun at the Alumni & Parent Days.

On both campuses, the day began with Mass in the Chapel and featured a faculty-led seminar for parents and their student children. Other highlights included an alumni v. students basketball game, All-College Dinners, and ice-cream socials for the children. “We really encouraged whole families to come this year, including grandparents,” said Georgiana Egan, special events manager on the New England campus. Added her

California counterpart, Irene Collins, “There were plenty of parents of current students there, but there were also parents of alumni, which was great! It was wonderful to welcome them back.”

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In New England, this year’s Alumni & Parent Day featured a new event: a “Sip & Paint,” at which guests tried their hand at some fine arts, painting with watercolors while enjoying wine and conversation. That evening, the Senior Class staged a benefit concert, filling Olivia Music Hall with beautiful, student-performed classical pieces, to support its farewell gift to the College.

Meanwhile, guests in California delighted in the resumption of a longstand-

ing tradition: the Cardboard Boat Race, returning after a few years’ drought-infllicted hiatus. The day culminated with a nighttime performance of *King Lear* in St. Cecilia Hall’s Fritz B. Burns Auditorium, starring alumnus tutor Dr. John Nieto (’89), who delivered a masterful depiction of the king’s descent into grief and madness.

President Paul J. O’Reilly was on hand on both coasts, presenting a “State of the College” talk and answering guests’ questions. Addressing TAC parents specifically, he recounted a visit from the foundation that would eventually donate the New England campus to the College. “What moved them to make their gift was the piety and goodness of our students,” he recalled. “They gave the campus to us, in large part, because of your sons and daughters and the example that they showed them.”





# Generational Wealth

*Class of 2028 Includes Children — and Grandchildren — of TAC Alumni*

After more than 50 years of pursuing its educational mission, Thomas Aquinas College has begun to show its age in the best way: welcoming third-generation students, with the grandchildren of its earliest alumni now reaching college age. This year, multiple freshmen are embarking on the same intellectual journey as their parents and grandparents before them.

“TAC has always been my one and only choice,” says Nicholas Zepeda (CA’28). “It has been a part of my life as long as I can remember.”

The eldest child of Wendy-Irene (Grimm ’99) and Nick (’90) Zepeda, as well as the grandson of Rose (Teichert) and Dan Grimm (both ’76), Nicholas grew up singing in the College’s choir. Though he always wanted to attend Thomas Aquinas College, his decision was cemented during the High School Summer Program, where he discovered his love for Euclidean geometry. “Euclid makes so much sense!” he exclaims. “I always hated geometry before, but now I love it.”

Nicholas isn’t the only Zepeda to follow the family legacy. His second cousin, David Zepeda (CA’28), is also a freshman this year. David’s grandparents, Anita (Grimm) and Andrew (both ’79) attended the College, as did his parents, Julie (Shields) and Dr. Joseph Zepeda (both ’04).

As a student at St. Augustine Academy in Ventura, California — a classical school founded and led by several TAC alumni — David made many friends who were also considering the College. “I visited the campus in January,” he says, “and ended up choosing it for the great financial aid, advanced course of studies, and, honestly, the number of friends I would be going with.”

Another third-generation student, Theresia Kuebler (CA’28), came to a similar conclusion at the family dinner table. The granddaughter of two mem-



*Third-generation TAC freshmen David Zepeda, Nicholas Zepeda, and Theresia Kuebler*

bers of the College’s first graduating class — Paula (Grimm) and Dr. Tom Kaiser (both ’75) — Theresia always enjoyed the Socratic-style philosophy discussions that her father, Dr. Jared Kuebler (’03), led at family dinners. Homeschooled by her mother, Maria (Kaiser ’03), she also attended monthly seminars at her homeschool co-op. “I realized how fun it is to talk about difficult but philosophically interesting questions,” Theresia now reflects.

**“It’s amazing to think that my grandparents were in TAC’s first graduating class.”**

So, she attended the Summer Program, where she finally got to engage in the College’s Discussion Method firsthand. “It was nice to be able to experience the classes myself,” Theresia says, “rather than just listen in or hear about them from someone else.”

As freshmen, these third-generation students are grateful to be continuing their families’ legacies at Thomas Aquinas College and excited for the next four years. “I second-guessed myself at first,

since I wasn’t sure if I was making an unbiased decision,” says David. “But I can already tell it was the right decision. I feel at home here, not just because of the proximity of friends and family, but simply because TAC is a tightly knit community, sharing the same ideals on a small and beautiful campus.”

Nicholas loves that he gets to continue the study of Euclid he began at his Summer Program, as well as the other Great Books in the College’s curriculum. “I was surprised by how much reading there is, even though my mother warned me in advance,” he laughs. “I’m looking forward to growing in my ability to think about important topics, becoming a wiser person, and making lots of good friends.”

Says Theresia, “It’s amazing to think that my grandparents were in TAC’s first graduating class. They still remember all the classes they took as freshmen, so it’s really fun to talk to them about the same things they started studying all those years ago. I’m really excited about bonding with the other people in my class and growing in knowledge and love of God.”



## Parent's Corner

By Tom Brittain ('96)

In the winter of 1994, I was a junior at Thomas Aquinas College, and Melissa and I had just had our fifth child. During the Christmas party that year, I cornered Bill Grimm, the father of 17 whose children and grandchildren have been a fixture of the College since its very beginning. I asked him for paternal advice: What can I do to help my children keep the Faith?

Mr. Grimm was a humble man and seemed perplexed by my question. But he finally shared two insights that have stuck with me fiercely over the years. He said Our Lord had been very good to him. And he said he thanked God every day for Thomas Aquinas College.

And so, while striving to trust in the goodness of God, it has also remained our fondest hope that, one day, our children would be blessed to attend my beloved alma mater.

Our eldest child began her TAC education in 2008, and our youngest is now a freshman. Between those two beginnings, 9 of our 11 children have graduated from the College. And if Gianna, a senior, and Madeleine, the freshman, can make it through, then it can be said that the Brittain family made Mr. Grimm's insight their own.

So now, 30 years later, if some earnest, wide-eyed young man asks me how he can keep his kids Catholic, I will echo the words of Bill Grimm: Trust in Our Lord's goodness, and, if possible, send your children to Thomas Aquinas College.

My children have embarked on diverse professional paths since their own graduations. They have pursued careers in education, pro-life advocacy, and family counseling. There is an electrician, some in real estate, and one in corporate management. Although they share a common education, they have proved more than capable of successfully blazing their own trails.

My wife and I never worried whether a Bachelor of Arts in

the Liberal Arts would prepare them to make a living. We were certain, from our own experience and the experiences of our friends, that the breadth, rigor, and timelessness of a TAC education would serve them well.

We are grateful to TAC for the unparalleled education it provides, but even more that it has helped our children keep the Faith. Instead of the intellectual arrogance that breeds skepticism, reading the Great Books carefully fosters a humility and confidence that enable one to uphold and defend the Faith. It is an education in which one's faith will grow.

But nothing is more evangelical than an authentic Catholic community, where the families are open to life, where faith and reason work in harmony, where the rich tradition that is our heritage is cherished and embraced. It is the people of the College who constitute the best bulwark against the madness of our age. It is because of their witness that I returned to the Church while a TAC student, and it is their witness which has undoubtedly helped preserve the faith of my own children as well.

Finally, the College remains a place where one can truly discern one's vocation. Eight of my children have discerned that they were called to the married life. And while the eldest married her high school sweetheart, the other seven fell in love with devout Catholic classmates whom they were blessed to meet while students. The best marriages are true friendships, and the friendships born during the years at the College are ideally suited to last a lifetime.

Life is full of disappointments. But for my family, watching our children leave home for college has not been one of them. Melissa and I will be forever grateful for our children's education; for the community they, for a little while, made their own; and for the witness to the Faith that continues to shape their souls. It is safe to say that, just like Mr. Grimm, we thank God every day for Thomas Aquinas College.

**“Trust in Our Lord's goodness, and, if possible, send your children to Thomas Aquinas College.”**

