



## Faces of the Maria Madre Godparent Program: John and Kathy Opitz

My husband John and I became sponsors of our god-daughter Natalia in 2008 when she was just 4 years old. She is now a 17 year old senior and will be graduating from high school this year.

I am fortunate to have been involved with the godparent program from the very beginning. In July 2008, three parishioners, Jean Johnson, Deb Kalcevic, and I, went to Maria Madre de los Pobres as delegates from Holy Trinity. My purpose was to record a photo journal of our sister parish relationship for Holy Trinity parishioners. The staff at Maria Madre were so welcoming and accommodating! They arranged for me to accompany one of the local working mothers, Cristina, to her daily job of selling baked goods on the streets of San Salvador. The parish provided a college student to interpret for me as we walked through the city streets.

Cristina's job was to collect baked goods from a neighborhood bakery, wrap and place them in a large basket and then walk to businesses and residences in the neighborhood while balancing the basket on her head. She was not allowed to return until she sold everything. The temperature most days was in the mid 90s with high humidity. It was hot!

At Maria Madre we were introduced to Zoila, one of the women who founded the parish after the Salvadoran Civil War of the 1980's. Zoila's son was brutally tortured and murdered, his body left on her doorstep. His twin sister was spared. His crime? Teaching catechism and organizing the refugees coming from the mountains. Zoila, who started the Apadrinamiento (Godparent or Sponsorship) Program, became the parish's surrogate mother. She asked us if Holy Trinity would be interested in starting a sponsorship program at Holy Trinity. We said YES!

With the help of Jean Johnson, Gerry Sequeira, and many other volunteers, we brought the program to Holy Trinity in the fall of 2008. The three-year-old sister of my god-daughter Natalia was our poster child for the program. Twenty families began to sponsor students that year. Since then, the program has expanded to over 40 students from elementary school through high school with a few college students. We have been fortunate to be able to recruit many dedicated Holy Trinity parishioners to be godparents. Many sponsors, such as John and I, have been blessed to watch their godchild, grow from a pre-schooler to a beautiful young woman who will graduate from high school this year. We hope she will decide to continue her education either through a skills training program or perhaps even college one day.

I cannot begin to describe the difference sponsorship makes in a child's life. Every year we receive a handmade Christmas card with Natalia's picture, and a letter or two from Natalia, her mother, and sometimes her twin sisters. We also receive updates twice a year in the form of report cards and notes so we can see our god-daughter's progress in school. Since I don't speak Spanish, Mauricio Rodriguez, other parishioners, neighbors and friends have been very supportive and helped me communicate with



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Natalia. I have recently used Google Translate and other computer translation programs to help me communicate with my god-daughter. Although it is not perfect, she understands what I am trying to say and vice-versa.

Recently, Natalia was one of two students who was fortunate enough to receive a laptop computer through the Apadrinamiento Program. A Holy Trinity parishioner generously provided the funds so participating high school students with a strong desire to learn could further their education. The Apadrinamiento Program supervises students' use of these computers and the students must keep up their grades, and demonstrate maturity and responsibility in their use of this computer and the internet or it will be given to another worthy student. She told me the computer has helped a lot with homework for herself and her sisters. And

being able to communicate by email has helped me feel closer to her than I ever have. We no longer have the long waits between letters and the worry of whether she actually received what I have sent. She tells me about what she has been reading and about her school work. I hope to continue with this form of communication to encourage her to do well in school and to look to her future education.



The sponsorship program has been so rewarding to my husband and I! I know our goddaughter Natalia has benefitted immensely from this comprehensive program as have almost 300 other children in the Maria Madre de los Pobres community. And many more children could benefit from your assistance. Why don't you join us!

To learn more about the Godparent program and to apply to be a sponsor, visit [our website](#) or email Mauricio Rodriguez [debandmo@verizon.net](mailto:debandmo@verizon.net) or Margie Legowski [margielegowski@gmail.com](mailto:margielegowski@gmail.com). It could change a life.

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