

## Press Release

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### **Success of Innovative Urban Catholic School Movement Sparks Major Investment**

#### ***Los Angeles' Verbum Dei High School as first school to convert to Corporate Work Study model will receive part of \$18.9 million nationwide grant***

**LOS ANGELES** – The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation announced today in Chicago plans to grant \$18.9 million to create 12 new small college preparatory high schools across the country, modeled after the highly successful Cristo Rey Jesuit High School of Chicago. The combined investment will strengthen and expand the existing network of Cristo Rey-model schools, which target low-income and minority youth using a proven formula of rigorous coursework, an innovative work-study program, high expectations for all students and a personalized learning environment. Los Angeles' own Verbum Dei High School, a member of this network, will receive a portion of this generous gift.

Expansion of the network will enable high quality Catholic education to remain a viable option to young people living in some of America's poorest communities. "Cristo Rey Jesuit High School has given birth to an entire network of new and emerging schools that focus on meeting the needs of underserved communities," commented John P. Foley, S.J., President of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago. "The magnitude of the investment in the network is gratifying to all of us here in Chicago as more and more young people will reap the benefits of this tremendous educational model."

Verbum Dei High School, which enjoys a 40 year history in the Watts area of Los Angeles, was on the verge of closing three years ago. In 2000, at the behest of Cardinal Mahony, the Society of Jesus (Jesuits) took charge of the school. To help them combat financial pressures as well and to provide greater career opportunities for students, the Jesuits employed this new model of education whereby students earn their tuition and in the process gain valuable job skills. Verbum Dei is the only pre-existing school in the country which has attempted to convert to this model, but others are soon to follow as they witness the great success Verbum Dei is enjoying.

"Our admissions have increased incredibly as a result," says John Weling, S.J., President of Verbum Dei. "We have over 170 applicants for 100 new freshman spots. We are thrilled." As a member school of this energetic new Cristo Rey network, Verbum Dei will receive funding in the amount of \$160,000 each year over the next three years to help the school reach its target enrollment of 400 students. "It's great to be a part of this winning team and to receive resources—both financial and other—we need to help us with the vitally important mission of educating the deserving young men of South Los Angeles," Weling adds.

Since its establishment in 2000, the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation has helped launch four new Cristo Rey model schools and has financed several feasibility studies for future schools. "We are excited to partner with the Gates Foundation in this work," said B.J. Cassin, chairman and president of the Cassin Educational Initiative. "The Cristo Rey model is an amazingly effective way to make high quality, education available to economically-disadvantaged young people."

In a 2002 study, the Manhattan Institute found that just 55 percent of all African-American and Hispanic students graduate from high school. In today's demanding economy, dropping out of high school often leads to a life of struggle and poverty. The U.S. Census Bureau has found that students who drop out of high school are often unable to support themselves and are three times more likely than graduates to cycle in and out of poverty. In the area Verbum Dei serves the statistics can be even more dismal. There the graduation rate from local high school is only 38%.

"We have a responsibility to provide high-quality educational options for all our youth," said Tom Vander Ark, director of education for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. "All students should be able to choose from an array of small, focused high schools designed to give them a solid, personalized education and the promise of a bright future. Successful models like Cristo Rey Jesuit High School should be a part of the national discussion and local solution."

Parochial schools have long played a critical role in creating high-quality educational options for inner-city youth, offering all of their students a narrow rigorous curriculum that prepares them for college. For example, in contrast to the Manhattan Institute findings, over the last five years, Cristo Rey has achieved graduation rates of more than 85 percent. In 2002, 100 percent of its graduating class was accepted into college. Verbum Dei has enjoyed similar success. This year Verbum Dei seniors have been accepted into 6 University of California campuses, and 10 other four-year colleges as well.

Despite their long and successful track record, many Catholic schools have suffered due to financial pressures. According to the National Catholic Educational Association, more than 500 Catholic high schools have closed over the last decade, many in America's poorest communities. This trend has contributed to the reduction in viable educational options for disadvantaged students and the elimination of low-cost faith-based options. Verbum Dei was soon to face this fate as well

until the new administrative team looked for and found a solution in this Corporate Work Study Program.

To ensure that Verbum Dei is both affordable and financially viable, the school, like all schools in the network, offers a unique work-study program in which students finance most of their education by sharing entry-level clerical jobs at local businesses. The proceeds subsidize three-quarters of the cost, making the school an affordable option for most families. Verbum Dei's program places students in some of the top law and business offices in downtown Los Angeles.

Cristo Rey's success has attracted the attention of educators and the business community. Two other cities have opened schools modeled after Cristo Rey Jesuit High School:; Austin, TX; and Portland, OR. But Verbum Dei is the only existing school to convert to this new model—a feat many say is much more challenging than starting from scratch. Seven other cities are in the planning stages to open schools in 2003 or 2004: Denver, CO.; New York, NY; Cambridge and Lawrence, MA.; Cleveland, OH; Tucson, AZ.; and Waukegan, IL.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is focused on improving the nation's low high school graduation rates. To date, the foundation has committed more than \$450 million in grants to expand educational options for high school students by creating new small schools and transforming existing large high schools into smaller learning communities. The effort is complemented by a rigorous evaluation process designed to gauge the effectiveness of the grantmaking and adapt to the changing education landscape.

**The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation** is building upon the unprecedented opportunities of the 21st century to improve equity in global health and learning. Led by Bill Gates' father, William H. Gates Sr., and Patty Stonesifer, the Seattle-based foundation has an endowment of approximately \$24 billion.

**The Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation** is committed to helping religious congregations, dioceses and other groups begin Nativity/San Miguel and Cristo Rey schools in communities challenged by low educational attainment and limited academic options. The foundation intends that its grantees contribute to a community by bringing Catholic or other faith-sponsored education to young people who otherwise cannot afford it, reducing the local dropout rate, and increasing the number of students prepared for post-secondary studies.

#### **On the Internet:**

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/education/default.htm>

<http://www.cassinfoundation.org>

<http://www.cristoreynetwork.org>

#### **Current Cristo Rey Schools**

##### **Cristo Rey Jesuit High School - Chicago**

The Chicago Province of Jesuits opened the school in 1996 to serve young people in Pilsen/Little Village, a Latino community on Chicago's southwest side.

Contact: Joshua Hale, 773.890.6818

Web site: [www.cristorey.net](http://www.cristorey.net)

##### **De La Salle North Catholic High School – Portland, Ore.**

The San Francisco District of De La Salle Christian Brothers opened the school in 2001 in North Portland, a community that is approximately 50 percent African-American. The school has two classes (freshman and sophomore) with a total population of 144 and plans to grow to 300 students.

Contact: Matt Powell, 503-285-9385

Web site: [www.delasallenorth.org](http://www.delasallenorth.org)

##### **Juan Diego Catholic High School – Austin, Texas**

The Catholic Diocese of Austin, Texas opened the school in the fall of 2002 to serve low-income students in Austin, one of the country's fastest growing cities. The school has 37 students and plans to grow to 400 students within the next five years.

Contact: Todd Austin, 512-804-1935

Web site: [www.juandiegoprep.org](http://www.juandiegoprep.org)

##### **Verbum Dei High School – Los Angeles**

The California Province of Jesuits took over management of Verbum Dei in 2000. The school was about to close, prompting the Archdiocese to ask the Jesuits for assistance. The school opened as a Cristo Rey model in the fall of 2002 and is serving 142 students with plans to grow to 400 students in the next three years.

Contact: Rev. Scott Santarosa, S.J. 323-564-6651

Web site: [www.verbumdei.us](http://www.verbumdei.us)

#### **Planned Cristo Rey Schools (Opening Fall 2003/2004)**

### **Arrupe Jesuit High School – Denver, Colo.**

The Missouri Province of Jesuits is opening this school in Denver, Colo. in the fall of 2003. The school is recruiting students now and will have a freshman class of 100 students next fall. The school will be serving a city with a 36 percent public high school graduation rate among Hispanics and a 55 percent African-American graduation rate.

Contact: Fr. Steve Planning, 303-902-5077  
Web site: [www.arrupejesuit.com](http://www.arrupejesuit.com)

### **Cristo Rey New York High School – Harlem, New York**

A coalition of laypeople, Jesuits, Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus and the De La Salle Christian Brothers will open the school in the fall of 2004 in East Harlem. The school will use the dual language program that is in place at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School of Chicago.

Contact: Bill Ford, 718.585.3338

### **North Cambridge Catholic High School – Cambridge, Mass.**

An Archdiocesan central high school, North Cambridge Catholic, which serves 240 low-income students in greater Boston, will open as a Cristo Rey model school in the fall of 2004. The school will serve 400 students. Contact: Sister Ellen Powers, CSJ, 617.876.6068

### **Lawrence, Mass.**

The Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur are planning to open a Cristo-Rey school in 2004 to serve what is currently the poorest city in New England. The sisters have worked in the community for 150 years and operated a school in Lawrence that closed in 1996. Contact: Sister Mary Murphy, SND, 978.682.6441

### **Cleveland, Ohio**

Two religious congregations (the Detroit Province of Jesuits and the Sisters of the Humility of Mary) together with a group of laypeople plan to open this school in the fall of 2004. Only 28 percent of Cleveland public high school students graduate from high school. Contact: Rich Clark, 216.281.4381

### **San Miguel Catholic High School – Tucson, Ariz.**

The San Francisco District of De La Salle Christian Brothers is opening this school in 2004 to serve the southern part of the city of Tucson, reaching an Hispanic community along with the Tohono O'odham and Pascua Yanqui Indian Reservations. Median family income is between \$10,000 and \$20,000. Contact: Henry Rillos, 520.792.3410 or 520.982.5167

### **St. Martin de Porres High School – Waukegan, Illinois**

Four religious congregations and a coalition of laypeople intend to open the school in the fall of 2004 to serve young people from Waukegan and North Chicago. These communities have seen a 57.9 percent increase in the Hispanic population since 1990. The high school drop out rate is approximately 50 percent. Contact: Rev. George Rassis, 847.234.0205

### **Feasibility Studies Currently Underway**

#### **New Bern, N.C.**

The Diocese of Raleigh, North Carolina began a feasibility study in October 2002 that will conclude in 2003 to determine if a Cristo Rey model school is viable in the New Bern area, a community two hours south of Raleigh.

#### **New Brunswick, N.J.**

The Diocese of Metuchen, NJ began a feasibility study in October of 2002 that will conclude in the spring of 2003 to determine whether a Cristo Rey model school can succeed in the greater New Brunswick community.

#### **Wilmington, Del.**

The Ministry of Caring, an organization run by the Capuchin priests that serves low-income people in Wilmington, began a study in 2003.