

DREAMS BECOME REALITY

Christ the King Jesuit



Sonji Cooks, director of admissions, and Brendan Conroy, principal, have been very successful in recruiting students to attend CTK. According to Rob Birdsell, president of the Cristo Rey Network, "The 120 students of Christ the King's inaugural class represent one of the top recruiting efforts for a new Cristo Rey School in the nation."

Until its new and permanent building is completed at 5088 W. Jackson for the 2009–2010 school year, Christ the King is located nearby at the former St. Martin de Porres School (116 N. LeClaire Street). Christ the King banners signify for all to see that the much-anticipated school is open. What began more than two years ago as a call from the West Side community for a Cristo Rey model school led to the school's creation under the Chicago Province Jesuits and with the help of many benefactors and supporters.

College Preparatory School Opens

By Jeremy Langford

“Christ the King is an example of Catholic education’s commitment to serving wherever the need is greatest.”

—Francis Cardinal George, Archbishop of Chicago

On August 25, 2008, Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School (CTK) became the first Catholic high school to open on Chicago’s West Side in 85 years. As the 120 members of the inaugural class of 2012 made their way to the school’s temporary location at the former St. Martin de Porres Grade School, their smiles told a profound story of faith and hope, of dreams becoming reality.

The students, many of them accompanied by family and friends, were greeted on the school’s front steps by CTK faculty and staff, as well as local media. “I think Christ the King is about to make history,” one student told a reporter. “And I’m going to be part of it.”

That history began 460 years ago in Messina, Italy, when the Jesuits opened their first school and began providing high-quality Catholic education that helps students grow in their faith, intellectual competence, and commitment to justice.

It took on a new chapter 12 years ago, when the Chicago Province opened Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood and launched an innovative, nationally replicated work-study model that allows students who otherwise couldn’t afford a college-prep education to earn 75 percent of their tuition while gaining life-changing experience in the

workplace. With a total enrollment of 3,000 students nationwide and a 98 percent success rate at sending graduates on to college, Cristo Rey schools are transforming education in this country and making dreams come true.

Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School is the 22nd Cristo Rey model school in the United States and the first to serve African-Americans on Chicago’s West Side, where there are more than 14,000 high school-age students but only 7,000 seats at nearby schools.

On a sunny, late-August morning, the dreams of St. Ignatius, of countless Jesuits, educators, benefactors, parents, and

students through the ages joined those of everyone affiliated with Christ the King. To kick off the new school year at the new high school, students gathered for the opening day assembly to hear words of inspiration from Christopher Gardner, author of bestselling autobiography *Pursuit of Happyness* and later a producer of the hit movie of the same name starring Will Smith. “If you’ve got a dream,” he said, “go get it!”

And that’s exactly what the 120 members of Christ the King’s class of 2012 are doing.

The photo story that follows captures the excitement and promise of Christ the King’s opening day.



In the days before CTK’s opening, boxes of desks and chairs filled the entranceway and required many hours of labor to be assembled. Faculty, staff and volunteers worked tirelessly to prepare the temporary school building for the 120 incoming freshman. Parents of Christ the King students and parents of St. Ignatius College Prep students volunteered and worked together to repair and clean the classrooms and halls for the first day of school.

“I commend the West Side community leaders and educators in the area who have supported Christ the King from the beginning. I also commend the Jesuits for responding to the concerns of parents and community residents who will be served by this school.”

—Mayor Richard M. Daley

Throughout the West Side neighborhoods, students like Brandon could be seen walking to Christ the King dressed in the business attire that is characteristic of Cristo Rey–model schools.



Members of the class of 2012 were eager to begin their first day of school at CTK. “We set a goal of 120 students in the freshman class, knowing that it would be a challenge recruiting families for a school they could not yet see. By making the commitment to attend CTK, our students and their families have proven that they are motivated and hungry for quality education, and that they are open to growth. The students are so proud to be a part of the founding class and to set the bar for future CTK students,” said Sonjii Cooks, director of admissions for CTK.



Since the Jesuits of the Chicago Province first announced in September 2007 that they were opening Christ the King, the school has received significant media attention. Reporter Frank Mathie of the local ABC affiliate was on hand to cover CTK's opening day and spoke with incoming freshman Eric about his hopes and dreams for the future.

To view ABC's coverage, please visit <http://abclocal.go.com/wls/media?id=6350524>



“We greet students as they enter the building by shaking their hands, looking them in the eye, and asking how they are doing or encouraging them to have a great day,” explains Principal Conroy. “You won’t see metal detectors out front; our gatekeepers are the faculty and staff who promote safety in a manner that is in tune with who we are as a Catholic Jesuit high school.”

—Brendan Conroy, principal of CTK

“When the Chicago Province started Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in 1996, our hopes were to provide a college prep Jesuit education for students whose families could not afford one. The innovative corporate internship program, faculty, staff, parents, volunteers, and benefactors have given Cristo Rey students an opportunity for a better life, and the students have succeeded beyond our expectations. Today, the Chicago Province proudly sponsors Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School. I welcome parents, faculty, staff, and benefactors to offer Christ the King students the same opportunity to work and dream to succeed for the Greater Glory of God.”

—Edward W. Schmidt, SJ, Provincial

CTK’s president, Fr. Christopher Devron, SJ, was delighted to welcome the school’s first class of 120 students. CTK will add a new class each year and will enroll 600 students at full capacity.



Fr. Brian Paulson, SJ, president, and Dr. Catherine Karl, principal, of St. Ignatius College Prep presented CTK with a special plaque welcoming the newest Jesuit high school in Chicago.

At the opening day assembly, CTK students enjoyed some moments together.



During CTK's opening assembly, students performed in the choir and gave presentations for their classmates, families, and community members in attendance.



For more information on CTK, please visit the Province website: www.jesuits-chi.org



"It's an honor to know that the core of Christ the King Jesuit College Prep is based upon Jesus, the word of God. It's an awesome thing for me because the teachers reiterate what I'm already teaching my children."

—Shawntel Mables, parent

“The internship program depends on the relationships between business leaders and young people who need exposure to living role models of leadership. Much more than a way to finance education for low-income families, it provides a path for students to become the dream they desire by seeing that dream realized in the lives of others who have made the most of the opportunities afforded by quality education.”

—Fr. Christopher Devron, SJ,
President of CTK

In his address on CTK’s historic first day of school, Christopher Gardner, author of the bestselling autobiography *Pursuit of Happyness*, delivered two key messages to the students: first, “Set your sights on five colleges” and second, “Don’t ever let somebody tell you what you can’t do.” Having risen from hardship to great heights as the owner and CEO of Christopher Gardner International Holdings, Chris made a profound impact on students, who were captivated by his personal story and wisdom.



CTK students have a wide variety of jobs as part of the work-study program. This group shares a full-time job at Loyola University Medical Center.



Behind Fr. Chris Devron, SJ, are blueprints for CTK’s new home. Fr. Devron explains, “We are constructing not just a building, but with God’s grace, a beacon of light and hope—a place where our young people will become tomorrow’s leaders; leaders who not only better themselves, but commit to serve and lift up their community.”