



Upon This Rock

WITH ITS NEW BUILDING, CHRIST THE KING JESUIT COLLEGE PREPARATORY SCHOOL CONTINUES TO SERVE AS A FOUNDATION ON CHICAGO'S WEST SIDE.

by Jeremy Langford and Paul Kruse

On January 18, close to 1,000 students, faculty, staff, and supporters gathered for a Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Mass celebrating the opening of Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School's (CtK) new building. As presider, school president Fr. Christopher J. Devron, SJ, said, "A short 20 months ago, if you happened on the corner of Jackson Boulevard and Leamington Street, this very corner, you would have seen a broken down playground encircled and surrounded by overgrown weeds and a rusty chain link fence." Many of those present remembered those days all too well as Fr. Devron continued: "If it were dark, you might even have had to watch your back, in the way that backs need watching on abandoned street corners at night. Well, here we are a short 20 months later, and just look at what's happened. God had another plan!"

That plan, which began with the call of the community and led to a feasibility study in the spring of 2006, has culminated in the first Catholic school to be built on Chicago's West Side in 85 years. In the

Gospel of Matthew (16:18), Jesus names St. Peter his rock, upon which he will build his church. CtK has become a rock in the neighborhood of Austin, where so many vital structures have crumbled. Perched along the Eisenhower Expressway, Austin is a hot spot for drug trafficking, which drives the area's crime and gang violence. The neighborhood's predominantly African-American families make on average less than \$30,000 annually and the unemployment

rate is double the rest of the nation. Since the closing of Austin High School, there are only 7,500 seats at local high schools for the 14,000 high-school-aged youth in the area. Less than half of students finish high school, and of those, only 38 percent go on to two- and four-year colleges.

True to its Jesuit heritage, CtK addresses the need where it is greatest: in the classroom. CtK is part of a national urban network of 24 Cristo Rey model schools that are currently educating 5,892 students and have a 13-year track record of success (96 percent of graduates are accepted into a college or university). Following the Cristo Rey model's innovative work-study program, CtK students earn up to 75 percent of their tuition through jobs at Chicago-area companies such as hospitals, banks, and law firms.

CtK's new 100,000 square foot, \$28 million state-of-the-art facility stands as a beacon of hope for families and young people who want a safe, affordable, values-based, college prep education. The new building's unique open design, by award-winning architect John Ronan,

"The West Side community is so grateful because the building and the school mean so much for our kids. It's not every day that the government or anyone else invests in a project this size for them in this neighborhood. It is a project that reflects that there is a future for this community and for them. It's especially exciting for what it means on the corner where it stands. It brings hope to the whole West Side."

—La Shawn K. Ford, Illinois State Representative and Alumnus of Loyola University Chicago



On Martin Luther King, Jr. Day, Christ the King Jesuit College Preparatory School celebrated the opening of its new \$28 million facility in the West Chicago neighborhood of Austin. The school's president, Fr. Christopher J. Devron, SJ (center), presided over Mass and hosted a celebration that incorporated music, dance, and reflections. Those in attendance included Fr. Provincial Timothy Kesicki, SJ; Governor Pat Quinn; Senator Dick Durbin; State Representative La Shawn Ford; Bishops John Manz and Joseph Perry; and hundreds of family, friends, and Jesuits.

conveys the mission of serving students and the surrounding community. Following the example of its sister school Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood, CtK will work with local, community-based organizations that support programs for seniors, development of computer skills, the arts, and recreation.

When asked about the facility itself, Fr. Devron explains, "Architecture has the power to teach us about our God-given dignity—even to reflect God's glory. All too often, in urban and low-income neighborhoods, people are deprived from experiencing architectural beauty. We wanted to design a building to teach them that they matter."

Chairman of the Board Dr. Anthony Barbatto, retired chief executive officer of Loyola University Medical Center adds, "The efforts of people who have stepped out of these hard times to give and help has been amazing to watch. We believe these kids need the school now more than ever, and that is what this is all about." Building on benefactors' generosity, the school hopes to raise the remaining \$17 million for the building.

Christ the King welcomed 160 freshmen and sophomores back from winter break and into the new building after a year and a half at a temporary location in the former St. Martin de Porres School just north of the new location.

Soon after class resumed, the students of Christ the King gathered in the chapel for a morning prayer service in celebration and thanksgiving. Among the many beautiful features of the new building, the chapel stands out as a special place of holiness.

With three floor-to-ceiling glass walls and a skylight that rises the full height of the structure, it is a room of quiet and beauty. "I thought a lot about what I wanted to say to you," began Fr. Devron. "What I want to say is that, while we have this beautiful

new building and this beautiful new chapel with walls of glass surrounding us in light, remember the real light doesn't come from outside. You are the light. This chapel, this building is a candle holder, from which you shine out." ■

Rising Leaders Adopt-A-Student Program

Each student's family at CtK makes a financial commitment to pay a variable level of tuition, based on their personal circumstances and financial situation. During the start-up years of the school with fewer students in attendance, these tuition payments only cover about 60% of the cost of education. In light of this fundraising for scholarships is particularly critical in these early years. The Rising Leaders Adopt-A-Student Program bridges the tuition gap. Each CtK student needs between \$3,000 and \$5,000 annually to cover their tuition. If you are interested in learning more, please contact Tim Freeman at tffreeman@jesuits-chgdet.org or (800) 922-5327.



Christ the King freshman Jonathan shows off one of his school's new state-of-the-art science classrooms.



Christ the King relies on the support of the community. Sophomore Kendra, who served as a praise dancer during the celebration, shared the day's festivities with her parents.