

Transforming Lives

CRISTO REY JESUIT HIGH SCHOOL
CELEBRATES ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY

by G. R. Kearney and Jeremy Langford

On January 18, 1996, the Chicago Province Jesuits held a press conference to announce the opening of the first Catholic high school in the Archdiocese of Chicago in more than thirty years. The school, to be named Cristo Rey, would provide high quality college preparation to the children of the primarily immigrant working poor population in Chicago's Pilsen & Little Village neighborhoods. During the press conference, Fr. Brad Schaeffer, SJ, then provincial of the Chicago Province, said, "We hope and we believe that this will be a national model for urban Jesuit education."

It was, in many ways, an audacious statement. The work-study model the Jesuits planned to use to fund the school was totally untested. That did not, however, stop them from trying. Ten years later, the school has become a model for urban education in the United States. Eleven schools modeled after Cristo Rey have opened in greater Boston, Cleveland, Denver, Kansas City, Los Angeles, New York, Portland, OR, Sacramento, Tucson, and Waukegan, IL. This fall, seven additional Cristo Rey-model schools will open in Baltimore, Birmingham, Indianapolis, Minneapolis, Newark, Omaha, and Washington, D.C. What follows is a celebration in photos and words of the original Cristo Rey that got it all started.

"Cristo Rey generated an amazing network of support unrealized by any school upon its opening," says Fr. Provincial Edward Schmidt, SJ. "From the start, business executives and staff—many of them Jesuit educated—have worked with students in the intern program to help them see the benefits of college education and dream of bright futures. Jesuits, faculty and staff, alumni from Jesuit schools, leaders like Rosemary Croghan, and many others formed a powerful partnership with Cristo Rey to ensure that students who might otherwise not have had the opportunity could earn a Jesuit college prep education. We Jesuits are forever grateful to all whose prayerful support and generosity have made, and continue to make, Cristo Rey possible."

—Fr. Provincial Edward Schmidt, SJ



Rosemary Croghan, Cristo Rey's founding chairperson, and her husband John have been generous supporters of Cristo Rey even prior to its opening in 1996. In gratitude for her tireless efforts to found and build the school, Rosemary has been named Fundadora (Foundress) of Cristo Rey.



The risks the Chicago Province took to open Cristo Rey began paying off when the school opened its doors to 97 sophomores and juniors in fall 1996. Ten years later, students have reason to smile as they celebrate the school's success and prepare for their own bright futures.

"Cristo Rey definitely helped me," says Leo Maldonado, who was a sophomore when the school opened its doors and today is an assistant lending manager at TCF Bank. "For me, it wasn't so much the learning. It was the motivation, the teachers saying, 'you can do it.' The teachers were constantly telling us 'you can do this.'"

"As the President of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, I am fortunate. I love my work. I am surrounded by great people. Our families and students, faculty and staff, corporate sponsors, our Board of Directors, benefactors, alums, are on fire with this mission of providing the best Jesuit Catholic college preparatory education to our center city youth. This passion breathes hope and gives new life. It's hard not to be excited about what happens daily here at Cristo Rey Jesuit High School. I thank God daily for the opportunity to serve the mission of this school."

—Fr. Jim Gartland, SJ, president of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School



Fr. Jim Gartland, who as president of Cristo Rey leads a team of Jesuits and lay faculty and staff devoted to making the school a national leader in education, enjoys a conversation with students.



Nereida Jaime and Karina Ramirez graduated from Cristo Rey in 2006 and just completed their first year at Georgetown University in Washington, DC.

“Cristo Rey is in every sense the best thing that ever happened to me,” says Karina Ramirez. “It helped me grow so much. I left with a sturdy foundation that will allow me to be not only successful, but a person of value as well, wherever I go.” Nereida Jaime, who led retreats at Cristo Rey in addition to competing on the volleyball and softball teams, is also planning to major in nursing. Cristo Rey’s Corporate Internship Program, she says, helped chart her course at Georgetown: “I wasn’t sure if I wanted to become a doctor or a nurse until I worked at Loyola University Medical Center through the Corporate Internship Program. There, I realized nurses interacted much more with patients. So far, I love my major.”



Gustavo Rodriguez (far right) was the first student to register for Cristo Rey when it opened in 1996. He is pictured here with Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, then-president of Cristo Rey now serving as president of the Cristo Rey Network, and B. J. Cassin, the chairman and president of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation and Chairman of the Board of both the Cristo Rey Network and the NativityMiguel Network. After graduating in 1998, Gustavo enrolled at Xavier University in Cincinnati, OH, where he was the recipient of a presidential scholarship. Today Gustavo is an administrator at San Juan Diego Catholic School in Austin, TX. He’s also made numerous visits to speak to groups considering opening Cristo Rey–model schools in cities around the United States.



A 2002 graduate of Cristo Rey, Maritza Santibáñez-Luna celebrates with a friend during graduation weekend at Brown University in 2006. A native of Mexico, Maritza studied English and Spanish, edited the school’s literary magazine, and played volleyball at Cristo Rey. She went on to major in Hispanic studies and Portuguese and Brazilian studies at Brown and is currently working as a national sales assistant at Univision/Telefutura, a Spanish language television network.

I remember well more than 10 years ago all the hurdles that had to be jumped in order for the “dream” of Cristo Rey High School to be realized. I give all the credit in the world to Fr. Brad Schaeffer, SJ, Fr. John Foley, SJ, and others whose determination got them over these hurdles. Cristo Rey has accomplished even more than the great expectations many had at that time. It is a pearl in the life of this Archdiocese. Congrats to all associated with Cristo Rey on their 10th Anniversary.

—Most Rev. John R. Manz, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, Vicariate III

Tony McGuire, founder of McGuire Engineers, attended Regis High School, a tuition-free Jesuit school in New York City. He has been inducted into the Chicago Entrepreneurship Hall of Fame and readily attributes much of his success to the education he received from the Jesuits. It’s not surprising, then, that he jumped at the chance to help the Chicago Province Jesuits in their efforts to open Cristo Rey. “I remember thinking, ‘I know these kids. I went to high school with these kids,’” McGuire says. “From the moment I first heard about Cristo Rey, it seemed to me exactly the type of work the Jesuits should be doing.” Late in 1995, McGuire agreed to become one of the school’s first corporate sponsors. Ten years later, his firm is still sponsoring students.



Tony McGuire (far right) and his wife Lynn enjoy a moment with Fr. General Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ, and Fr. Brad Schaeffer, SJ, during a province event.

G. R. Kearney is the author of the forthcoming book New School: How Cristo Rey Jesuit High School Changed the Face(s) of Education in Urban America, which will be published by Loyola Press in spring 2008.