



Chicago Jesuit Academy

by George Kearney

FIRST NATIVITY SCHOOL IN CHICAGO OFFERS TUITION-FREE COLLEGE

Opens Its Doors

BEFORE ENTERING Chicago Jesuit Academy, Andrew Wright, a slightly built but bright-eyed, athletic, 10-year-old, pauses to inspect himself in the reflection of the clear glass doors. His crisp blue uniform shirt is tucked neatly into his pressed pants. His shoes are tied. He remembered to put on his belt. He takes a deep breath, reaches for the door, pulls



To mark the opening of Chicago Jesuit Academy, Provincial Edward W. Schmidt, SJ, and Most Reverend John R. Manz, Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago, joined CJA administrators, faculty and students. Shown here with many of the first nineteen fifth grade students of the CJA are Matthew Lynch, President of CJA; Catherine Cassidy, Director of Development for CJA; Bishop Manz; and Fr. Schmidt.

says being a gentleman isn't really on the minds of most of his friends from the neighborhood. But at his new school, "being a gentleman" is required.

It's a way of life.

Andrew doesn't hesitate when asked why it matters to be a gentleman. "It'll help my life be better," he explains. "When I grow up, my life will be easier. It'll help me get a job and probably a wife."

As far as jobs go, Andrew, who is a gifted athlete, says he wants to play basketball. But he also has a backup plan. If he doesn't make it to the NBA, he'll be a policeman or a banker, or maybe the mayor of Chicago. And he already knows what he'll do if he's elected mayor. "I'd give homeless people some money to help them get back on their feet. I'd put all the robbers in jail. I'd make the schools better by changing the buildings—things to make this place a better world."

In Hyde Park, some 53 blocks south of Andrew's new school, students at the University of Chicago are also returning to the classrooms. One of those students, a sophomore named Brandon Tillman, has a lot in common with Andrew. In fact, he was standing in Andrew's shoes just eight years ago.

Andrew Wright, a CJA student, is not only interested in the academics at CJA but is also eager to learn how to become a gentleman. The staff at CJA teach proper etiquette by example and refers to all their students by their title.



PREP MIDDLE SCHOOL EDUCATION

it open, and makes his way into school. For Andrew, September 6, 2005, marks more than just the first day of fifth grade. It's the first day of a new way of life. See, at Chicago Jesuit Academy (CJA), Andrew explains, there's a focus on "being a gentleman. That means helping other people, having respect for words, and wearing nice things." Andrew just moved from the South Side of Chicago to the West Side, where Chicago Jesuit Academy, the newest ministry of the Chicago Province Jesuits, is opening. Andrew



Fr. Edward Schmidt, SJ, talks with Jermell Green about a typical day at CJA.

Brandon attended St. Ignatius Loyola Academy (SILA), an academically rigorous, tuition-free, college preparatory middle school in Baltimore, MD. Before enrolling at University of Chicago, where he competes on the wrestling team, Brandon completed high school at the prestigious McDonogh School in Owings Mills, MD. Chicago Jesuit Academy will, like SILA, offer tuition-free education to middle school aged boys whose families are living at or below the poverty line. Both CJA and SILA are Nativity-model schools, and Brandon Tillman, who is thriving at the University of Chicago, is proof that the model is working. He is not the only one. Today there are hundreds of college students like him, all of whom once stood in Andrew's shoes as fifth or sixth graders preparing for the uncertainty of a new school and maybe a new way of life.

CJA's Roots

The Nativity model of middle school education—on which both CJA and SILA are based—grew out of a small school started by the Jesuits on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Since 1948, the Jesuits had been operating Nativity Mission Center, which, among other things, offered safe space for students from the neighborhood to come after school to study, play games and sports, or just hang out.

In 1971, the Jesuits expanded the after-school program into a year-round school to serve the neighborhood children, many of whom were immigrants or the children of immigrants. These were kids who struggled in their public schools while their parents struggled to pay the bills. Their futures, very often, were bleak. The new school was created for them, to prepare them to attend college preparatory high schools. To do that, the Jesuits at the Nativity Mission Center devised an academically rigorous program.

They extended the school day and the school year. They made a summer camp—which was held in the Adirondack Mountains—part of the curriculum. Each day when the bell signaled the end of afternoon classes, Nativity students were hours away from going home. They still had nearly three hours at the school, hours that included after-school study and reading, competitive sports, and an evening snack. The Jesuits kept class sizes extremely small and focused their energies on providing personal care and attention for each and every one of Nativity's students. Academically, the Nativity school focused on math and language skills, and set aside time every single day for each student to simply read.

And, almost miraculously, they did all this without charging tuition. Teachers showed up at the school and volunteered to work for free. There were also many Jesuits on the staff. And generous donors and benefactors made up the difference.

In a few years, it was clear the model was working. Nativity's early graduates were accepted into some of the best high schools in the city, schools like Regis and Xavier. And when they got there, they thrived. After finishing high school, many were accepted into some of the top colleges and universities in the country. (One of the Nativity Mission School's alums, Dionis J. Rodriguez, now a second-year student at Harvard Business School, discusses his experience at Nativity Mission School in Q&A on pg. 18.)

For nearly two decades the original Nativity School continued to provide wonderful opportunities to young men in New York. And then, seeing that it was working and believing they could raise the necessary funds, others started to replicate the school. The first replication was in Boston in 1990. In 1993, schools opened in Milwaukee, Baltimore, and Boston, and a parish school in Philadelphia converted to the model. In a few short years, the original Nativity school had become an educational movement.

Chicago Jesuit Academy, when it opened its doors this September, became the forty-fourth Nativity school in the United States. The existing Nativity schools currently serve over 2,000 students each year. More than 29 religious congregations have joined the Jesuits in sponsoring, and are now running or helping to run Nativity schools. Graduates of Nativity Schools have gone on to top high schools, colleges and universities like Amherst, Boston College, Boston University, Brown, College of the Holy Cross, Cornell, Emory, Fairfield, Fordham, Georgetown, Harvard, Howard, Johns Hopkins, LeMoyne, Manhattan College, Middlebury, Northeastern, Syracuse, University of Maryland, University

of Pennsylvania, and Villanova.

In 1993, just as the Nativity movement was gaining momentum, Jesuits in the Maryland Province opened SILA, which also played a prominent role in the development of Chicago Jesuit Academy. It was at SILA that Chicago Jesuit Academy's president was first exposed to the power of the Nativity model.

Laying the Foundation

Matthew G. Lynch grew up in Elmhurst, IL, and attended St. Ignatius College Prep. He then enrolled at Georgetown University. In 1998, after graduating from Georgetown, Matthew began a two-year volunteer program at SILA. "During my years as a student at St. Ignatius, I became aware of just how blessed I'd been and how many opportunities I'd been given," Matthew says, in explaining his desire to volunteer after college. "Through my Jesuit education and my parents' selfless example throughout my life, I learned I had a responsibility to share the gifts and opportunities I'd been given with others." At SILA he taught religion and mathematics and coached soccer and basketball. He spent his summers at camp with SILA's students. And in those two years, he became a firm believer in the Nativity model.

"It worked," Matthew says. "It was just so clear that it worked. Before even taking into consideration the success that graduates of Nativity schools were having in college prep high schools and in colleges, it was clear to me that the model worked. Each year, I saw tremendous changes in our students. They were improving academically, and sometimes making dramatic improvements.

Success Rate for Jesuit Nativity-Model Schools		
Daily attendance rate	Percentage of Jesuit Nativity graduates who graduate from high school or earn a GED	Percentage of those who graduate from high school who enroll in two- or four-year universities and colleges
97%	94%	89%

Matthew left Baltimore after two years and returned to Chicago to serve as a teacher and administrator at his alma mater, St. Ignatius College Prep, where he was also asked to direct Jesuit Alumni Volunteers-Chicago, a volunteer teacher training program that serves St. Ignatius and St. Procopius. As soon as he was back in the Midwest, Matthew started to wonder why Chicago didn't have a Nativity-model school.



Sports are vital to Nativity-model schools and are part of the core curriculum at CJA, which caters to mind, body and spirit. With the extended school day (7:00 A.M. to 6:00 P.M.), sports not only help keep the students physically healthy but also teaches them sportsmanship and teamwork.

Jerrod Castleberry lines up in the hallway for his next class. CJA has its own small wing at the Marillac Social Center with three classrooms and space for the faculty and staff.



He and St. Ignatius' president, Fr. Brian Paulson, SJ, often discussed the many ways a Nativity school would benefit the city. While at Ignatius, Matthew helped launch the St. Ignatius Higher Achievement Program (SIHAP), a middle-school enrichment program for students from underserved backgrounds. SIHAP was modeled in part after the summer enrichment program Matthew had seen used at the Nativity school in Baltimore.

In 2002, Matthew enrolled in the MBA program at Washington University in St. Louis. On the surface, the decision to go to business school didn't seem to fit with Matthew's career. In reality, it fit perfectly. He planned to use the skills acquired in his MBA studies to open a Nativity school.

In fall 2003, at the beginning of his second year of studies, Matthew approached the Chicago Province and asked them to consider sponsoring a new Jesuit Nativity-model school in Chicago. "It was very exciting," says Provincial Edward W. Schmidt, SJ. "Much is made of the fact that our numbers are dwindling. So it's wonderful for us as Jesuits to see a layperson who's a graduate of our high schools and universities step forward to found and lead a new ministry.

"For the Province, Matthew's proposal came in at the ideal time. For many years, Jesuits from our Province had been engaged in ministries with the African-American community in Chicago at Our Lady of the Gardens and Holy Family, but when Matthew came to us, we were no longer working in those parishes.

We'd just begun a ministry with the African-American community in Cincinnati, but in Chicago we didn't have anything, and there was a desire to put ourselves at the service of that community. Matthew's proposal gave us a great opportunity to do just that."

But it wasn't quite that easy. Fr. Schmidt and Fr. James A. Stoeger, SJ, the Provincial assistant for secondary education, loved the idea of the school. But they knew that paying for it would not be easy.

The Benefactor Factor

In late August 2004, after completing his MBA studies, Matthew partnered with Stacey Clements—the Academy's first development director—to submit to the Province a detailed feasibility study for the Academy. After reviewing the findings (see below), Fr. Schmidt approved the school on the condition that Matthew and Stacey could raise enough money to fund the first year of the school's operation by spring 2005.

Matthew and Stacey weren't starting from scratch. The Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation, created by Silicon Valley venture capitalist B.J. Cassin to replicate Cristo Rey, Nativity, and San Miguel Schools, made a large initial gift to fund the feasibility study and once the school was approved made another very generous gift to help fund the school's start-up.

But there was a need for much more. Chicago Jesuit Academy would, like its Nativity-model counterparts around the country, function as a tuition-free school. Efforts are made to keep costs down. The school will not, for example, hire janitors to clean the classrooms on a daily basis; students will instead be asked to clean up after themselves and "do chores" to keep the classrooms and hallways clean. Yet with students and families making sacrifices for the school, the small class sizes, the extended school day, and the extended school year would be expensive.

The projected cost per student at CJA is just over \$12,000 per year, comparable to what many wealthy suburban school districts spend per student. But here the sum also includes school days that are three to four hours longer than a traditional school day and nearly two months of additional summer school. To open the school with 24 students would therefore

Chicago's West Side						
Median household income	Percentage of households run by single women	Percentage of households at or below poverty line	Unemployment rate	High school graduation rate	Percentage of high school graduates who enroll in college	Percentage of fifth grade students who met state reading or mathematics standards
\$19,000	60%	44%	20%	54%	33%	30%

require raising \$12,000 per student. Not only that, Matthew and Stacey had decided with the Jesuits that it would be best to raise four-year scholarships for each student instead of one-year scholarships. That way, funding would be in place for all of a student's education as soon as he set foot in the building. That meant funding 24, four-year \$48,000 scholarships. The total cost would be \$1,152,000.

It was an intimidating figure.

But Matthew and Stacey found that benefactors were really excited about the project. "We didn't really know what to expect. We'd been given a deadline for securing funding and at first we thought it might come right down to the wire," Matthew says. "But it didn't. We found that people really wanted to partner with us and make this school a reality. Not only were benefactors providing scholarships for our students, they were also sharing our story with their friends. For example, two of our earliest benefactors, Jim and Cate Denny, chose to host a dinner party at their home last December so we could tell some of their close friends about the school. Their support and the support we have received from each of our other benefactors have been truly remarkable."

Cate says she and her husband Jim both feel the school "is a great cause." They've long been supporters of the Jesuits. Jim attended Georgetown University Law School and their sons attended Loyola Academy.

But something about the idea of a new school on the West Side touched their hearts. Jim and Cate saw an opportunity to partner with hard-working parents and deserving young men in a neighborhood where fewer than 54 percent of young people graduate from high school. "This school seems like it might give its students a chance to better themselves and that's something we thought we could help with. It's also very exciting because there's the opportunity or the hope that the graduates will then reach out to their own community. There's the potential for this one school to affect the lives of the students, and their families and the entire community," Cate says.

Matthew doesn't mince words when describing the contributions of CJA's benefactors. "This school would not be possible without the support we've received. Without our benefactors, we wouldn't be opening our doors. I've been awed by people's generosity. We have received \$20 gifts from college students who are Jesuit alums and \$100,000 gifts from the leaders of major corporations. Together, these gifts allow us to give a four-year scholarship to each student in our inaugural fifth grade class."

Years down the road, the young school may be able to build an endowment. Until then, it will have to rely on the generosity of benefactors like the Dennys or Maralyn and Mike Reilly, who were the first benefactors to sponsor a scholarship and have also shared the

CJA Founding Donors of Full Scholarships

These generous **friends** and **benefactors** provided leadership and scholarship support. Their important partnership with Chicago Jesuit Academy helps provide Jesuit education aimed to break the cycle of poverty.

Robert and Sheila Berner
Matthew and Christine Botica & Family
Kevin and Mary Grace Burke
Richard and Maryjeanne Burke
Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation
Chicago Province of the Society of Jesus
Jim & Cate Denny Foundation
Theodore Eckert Foundation
First Bank of Oak Park
Paul Gearen
Jesuit Community at Xavier University
Michael and Lindy Keiser
William McIntosh Foundation
Robert Parkinson
Sheila and John Pigott
Maralyn and Michael Reilly
Katheryn Stamm
Mark T. Stamm



CJA co-founders Stacey Clements and Matthew Lynch are pictured here with generous benefactors Maralyn and Mike Reilly. The Reillys have encouraged others to support CJA, hosting a dinner to share news about the school and its important mission.

Chicago Jesuit Academy is the forty-fourth Nativity school in the United States and the seventeenth Jesuit Nativity school. The other 16 U.S. Jesuit Nativity schools and their founding dates are as follows:

- Nativity Mission Center**, New York, New York (1971)
- Nativity Preparatory** (Boston), Jamaica Plain, Massachusetts (1990)
- St. Aloysius School:** Gonzaga Program and Thea Bowman Program, New York, New York (1991)
- The Gesu School**, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (1993)
- Nativity Jesuit Middle School**, Milwaukee, Wisconsin (1993)
- St. Ignatius Loyola Academy**, Baltimore, Maryland (1993)
- St. Ignatius School**, Bronx, New York (1995)
- Jesuit Middle School of Omaha**, Omaha, Nebraska (1996)
- Loyola Academy of St. Louis**, St. Louis, Missouri (1999)
- The Good Shepherd School**, New Orleans, Louisiana (2001)
- Sacred Heart Nativity School**, San Jose, California (2001)
- St. Andrew Nativity School**, Portland, Oregon (2001)
- Washington Jesuit Academy**, Washington, DC (2002)
- Brooklyn Jesuit Prep**, Brooklyn, New York (2003)
- Nativity School of Worcester**, Worcester, Massachusetts (2003)
- Catholic Central Augustine Scholars & Monica Scholars**, Buffalo, New York (2004)

school with many of their family and friends. With so many wonderful donors already in the fold (see sidebar of CJA's founding scholarship donors), things are looking promising but, Cate Denny says, "It won't be easy. Every year they'll have to raise money for tuition. That's a big job. But I know Jim and I are in for the long haul."

Fr. Schmidt says he's elated that so many folks in and around Chicago have chosen to support the new school. "Our Province has long relied on the generosity of benefactors. They help provide formation for our young Jesuits, they help us care for aged Jesuits, and they have helped us, both with Cristo Rey and with this project, launch new ministries. We thought donors would want to get involved but we've been truly amazed at the outpouring of support. Obviously, though, as the enrollment grows, we will need to share this idea with more and more people."

Nativity in Chicago

In the midst of the struggles, there is hope. There is Andrew's desire to make the world a better place. And there's the hope on the face of Andrew's mother, Necolia Griffith. She hopes that this new school will help her son. "I have a great feeling about this place," she says. "I think it will be a great place for my son. I think the long days and small classes are things that are going to help him."

As soon as she heard about the school, she

Bishop John R. Manz, Provincial Edward Schmidt and Mr. Steve Fatum look on as Ms. D'Alessandro teaches a science class. The Archdiocese of Chicago and Bishop Manz have been important supporters of CJA from the beginning. Maria and Steve Fatum are generous donors and promoters of CJA.



enrolled Andrew in the summer program. And he was there August 29 for the start of a five-day orientation to the Nativity way of life and to the idea of becoming a gentleman for others, someone Andrew says who, in addition to using “respectful words,” will never hesitate to “help ladies and other people.” During that time, Andrew and his classmates earned the blue shirts emblazoned with the Chicago Jesuit Academy logo they wear today on the first day of school.

There is hope on the faces of the students. In their nervous eyes. It’s there, too, on the faces of CJA’s first four teachers—Liane D’Alessandro, David Diehl, Maria Eidietis, and Lauren Hogel—young educators who are committed to inner-city Catholic education. Quincy Jones and Jacqueline Hurley—members of Inner City Teaching Corps—and Ryan Shirilla, a JVC Magis volunteer, also share in this excitement as CJA teachers.

But when Andrew gets upstairs for the first day of class, there’s no talk of hope or dreams for the neighborhood. And there’s definitely not any talk about obstacles or difficulties. There isn’t time. They’ve got to read. After morning assembly each day each of CJA’s students will spend 45 minutes with his nose in a book. It’s the first step in a long day—they’ll be at school until 6:00 P.M.—and the first step in an even longer journey.

That’s what Chicago Jesuit hopes to be, a stepping stone for young men, and an incubator of hope. For



Charles Jones and Jaquan Grier help each other during class. CJA’s academic program is very rigorous, and the students are encouraged to challenge themselves in and out of the classroom.



Mr. Quincy Jones is pictured here with his class of students. The small class size at CJA allows teachers to spend quality one-on-one time with each student.

the first year, while CJA seeks a permanent site, all this good work will take place in three classrooms on the second floor of Marillac House a Daughters of Charity ministry that's been serving the West Side of Chicago since 1947 thanks to the generosity of Sr. Catherine Mary Norris, DC, the center's CEO.

By next year, the size of the school will double. At the beginning of the 2008-2009 academic year, the school will reach its full enrollment of 96. And in 2009, CJA's first graduates will begin high school. Some of them, hopefully, will become students at Loyola Academy and St. Ignatius College Prep. Fr. Ted Munz, SJ, Loyola's president has said that any CJA graduate accepted to Loyola will receive a full scholarship. Fr. Brian Paulson, SJ, president of St. Ignatius has also said that substantial financial aid will be made available to any CJA graduates accepted to St. Ignatius.

"We like that part of the story," Matthew says. "Through our Jesuit partnerships, our benefactors are able to provide our students with more than just four years of great college-prep middle school education. Their gifts actually open the door to eight years of Jesuit college-prep education. Our students know

that we expect them to be ready to take on Loyola or Ignatius when they leave us. And once they do, we know they'll be ready for college. We're very clear about that from day one. The baseline expectation for every student is a college degree."

"It's a good opportunity," Andrew Wright's mother Necolia says. "I just have a really good feeling about this. It's a really great opportunity."

Chicago Jesuit Academy has adopted for its students a saying employed by the founders of the first Nativity School in New York. "An opportunity is the Academy's gift to you. What you do with that opportunity is your gift to the Academy."

The Jesuits hope that Chicago Jesuit Academy will be an opportunity not just for its first 20 students, but also for the West Side of the Chicago. Both Matthew and the Jesuits in the Province look forward to seeing what CJA's first students will do with their opportunity.

But for now it's time to focus on school. The reading period is over. Andrew and his classmates slide bookmarks into their paperbacks, return them to the shelves, and head to their desks.

First period is about to begin. ■

On behalf of the Chicago Province Jesuits, Fr. Michael Class, SJ—along with CJA's Matthew Lynch and Catherine Cassidy—shares his gratitude with the Dennys. "Cate and Jim Denny and their fellow contributors have made CJA a reality through their generosity. They have given these children a gift that will last throughout their lives, the gift of learning. Without their generous support CJA would never have opened its doors, and we rely upon their continued support as CJA adds a new fifth grade class each of these next three years."

