

Cristo Rey Network Update

The opening of Verbum Dei was celebrated from Chicago to Los Angeles. In attendance were back row: John P. Foley, SJ, president of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Jeff Thielman, executive director of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation (CEIF), Bishop Edward Clark, John Welington, SJ, president of Verbum Dei, Tom Smolich, SJ, provincial of the California Province, and BJ Cassin, founder of CEIF, front row, Verbum Dei students Francisco Tafoya, Marquis Modkins, Darren Acker, and Jose Palacios.



CRISTO REY ON THE MOVE

NEW SCHOOLS OPEN IN AUSTIN AND LOS ANGELES

Three years ago Cardinal Roger Mahony, the archbishop of Los Angeles, invited the California Province of the Society of Jesus to assume control of Verbum Dei High School. According to Jeff Thielman, director of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation which helps found and support new Cristo Rey model schools, Cardinal Mahony hoped that the Jesuits might be able to replicate Cristo Rey Chicago in Los Angeles.

by George Kearney

This fall his hopes were realized when Verbum Dei reopened as a Cristo Rey model school. The school, which had struggled in the past to make ends meet, managed to stay open until last year, when California provincial Fr. Tom Smolich, SJ, and then president of Verbum Dei, Fr. Bill Wood, SJ, decided to make the switch to the Cristo Rey model. Reorganizing Verbum Dei as a Cristo Rey model school has “breathed new life into this place,” says Jeff Bonino-Britsch, vice president for

the corporate internship program. “Our sister school closed its doors last year. That could’ve easily been us, were it not for the work study program.” The Cristo Rey model will make private, high quality, secondary education accessible and affordable to Verbum Dei’s students on a long term basis.

Bishop Gregory Aymond of the diocese of Austin, TX, called the Cassin Foundation two years ago and said he too was interested in starting a Cristo Rey model school. Bishop Aymond visited Chicago to see the original Cristo Rey, started by Jesuits in the Chicago Province, and fell in love with it. He rode buses with the students, toured the facilities, and studied the innovative Corporate Internship Program. In the end he decided that Austin, the largest city in the United States without a Catholic school within its city limits, could benefit greatly from a Cristo Rey model school.



One day after the opening of Verbum Dei in Los Angeles, Juan Diego Catholic High School opened in Austin, TX. On hand to celebrate were Jeff Thielman, Todd Austin, president of Juan Diego, the Most Reverend Bishop Gregory Aymond, John P. Foley, SJ, B.J. Cassin, and Gustavo Rodriguez, a 1998 graduate of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago.



This academic year, four students from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School are working in the Chicago Province Development Office as part of Cristo Rey's Corporate Internship Program. They answer phones and assist with many tasks in and around the office.

The four students are Eduardo Rodriguez, Carmen Rangel, Lizzette Contreras, and Vanessa Urbina. They're pictured at a recent luncheon at the Province Office with Rick McGurn, SJ (middle), and Richard Baumann, SJ.

This fall, Juan Diego Catholic High School opened in Austin. Forty-three freshmen make up the school's first crop of students. "It feels great to be off the ground," says Todd Austin, president of the new school. He adds that the new students "have already bought into the program. They're beginning to feel a sense of ownership in being the founding student body."

In an interesting coincidence, Gustavo Rodriguez, one of Cristo Rey Chicago's first graduates, is also one of Juan Diego's first employees. Rodriguez, who graduated from Xavier University last spring, spent the summer working as an intern recruiting students for Juan Diego. "Gus has been fantastic," says

Austin, who invited him to stay on as a computer applications teacher and director of the media lab. "He's a great asset," Austin adds. "He's brought some of the Cristo Rey energy and charisma down here."

In addition to these two new schools, the Cristo Rey Network of Schools also announced that two new Cristo Rey model schools will open in fall, 2003: Arrupe Jesuit High School in Denver, CO, and Cristo Rey in New York City.

Todd Austin says Juan Diego hopes to eventually support 400 students, "there's a lot of work ahead, but it's exciting." His words could be the motto from the Cristo Rey Network. There is a lot of work. And it is exciting. ■