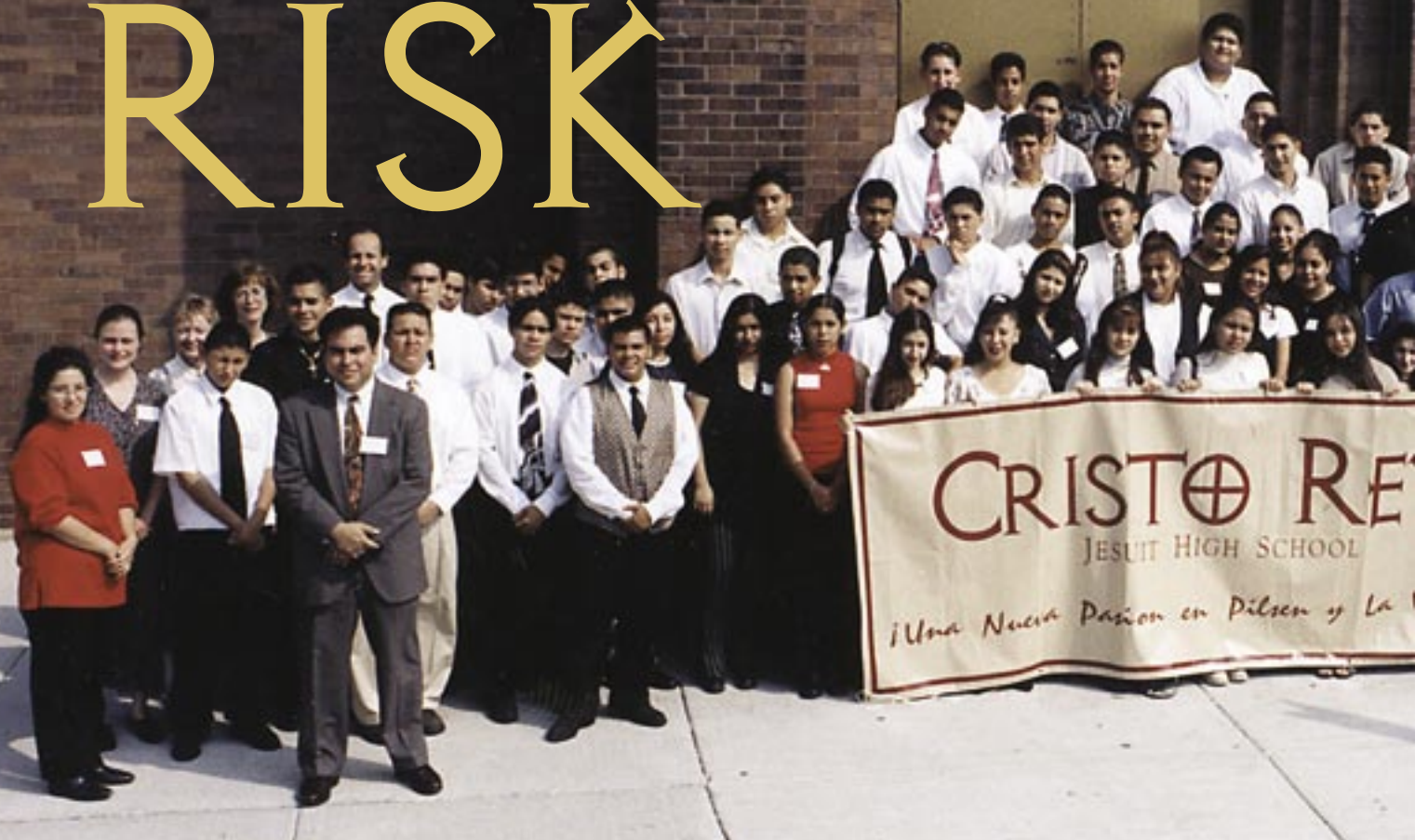


RISK



AND REWARD

CRISTO REY JESUIT
HIGH SCHOOL AND THE
CRISTO REY NETWORK

by George Kearney

When Cristo Rey Jesuit High School opened its doors eight years ago, hopes for the school were pinned to a funding model described alternately as bold, innovative, risky, and improbable.

The model worked, and has since been replicated in 10 schools around the United States. Earlier this fall, high schools modeled after Cristo Rey opened in Cambridge (MA), Cleveland, Lawrence (MA), New York City, Tucson, and Waukegan (IL). They join existing schools in Austin, Denver, Portland (OR), and Los Angeles. A number of major cities, including Baltimore, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Memphis, Minneapolis, Omaha, and Washington, DC, are currently considering opening Cristo Rey model schools.

Cristo Rey's success has been chronicled in *America* magazine, *The Boston Globe*, *Business Week*, *Education*

Week, *The Austin American Statesman*, *The Chicago Sun-Times*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Post*, *The Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, *60 Minutes II*, and many many others.

The story of Cristo Rey's development is remarkable. Today eleven schools make up the Cristo Rey Network, a national movement that's garnered the support of the Cassin Educational Initiative Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Twelve years ago Cristo Rey was little more than an idea shared by a handful of ambitious Jesuits in the Chicago Province. Over the past eight years, *Partners* has regularly documented Cristo Rey's development. But now, as the Cristo Rey Network is hitting its stride, it seems appropriate to revisit the roots of Cristo Rey, to celebrate the courage and ingenuity of the Chicago Province, its Jesuits and lay partners, and a handful of brave Chicago corporate leaders.



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.



From 1993 to 1994, Jim Gartland, SJ, conducted the feasibility study that resulted in Cristo Rey. He often spoke with students in the neighborhood while studying the need for the school. Fr. Gartland began serving as president of Cristo Rey this fall.

“We’ll do it,” he said. “You don’t have to tell me anything else. I went to a Jesuit high school. I know who you guys are. I know what you do. We’ll do it.”

Luis Lewin, *Chicago Tribune*

Early Days

In 1991 Fr. Bradley M. Schaeffer, SJ, was appointed Provincial of the Chicago Province and very quickly approached Joseph Cardinal Bernardin about assuming control of an archdiocesan parish in Pilsen. “It was a no-brainer,” says Fr. Schaeffer, of the Jesuits’ decision to establish a presence in Pilsen. “There was a huge segment of the population in Chicago, and in the Church, that we weren’t serving through our traditional institutions.” There were innumerable reasons for the move into Pilsen, but the main one goes right to the core of the Jesuit mission. “The Province had recently withdrawn from Our Lady of the Gardens,” Fr. Schaeffer explains. “We didn’t know if our work at Holy Family was going to survive, but we had to continue to be with the poor in some way. We wanted to be with the poor. It’s the Gospel. It’s what our Congregations ask us to do. It’s who we are.”

The Province was given St. Procopius parish as a base in Pilsen. Fr. James W. Schulz, SJ, became pastor. A group of Jesuits moved into the neighborhood and began work on strengthening and revitalizing the parish’s elementary school. At the same time, ideas were being floated for a larger educational initiative in the neighborhood.

“The idea of a high school was always in the back of my mind,” Fr. Schaeffer says, “but that wasn’t enough. We all had grandiose ideas about what we could do, but we needed to make sure we were meeting needs. That was a big question. What is the greatest good for the greatest number?”

Fr. Schaeffer asked Fr. James G. Gartland, SJ, to come up with an answer by conducting a feasibility study. “They asked me to go out, meet people, study the situation in the neighborhood and figure out what more we could be doing, or should be doing, or shouldn’t be doing,” Fr. Gartland recalls. “A lot of it was just listening to people and trying to understand their needs.”

For a year Fr. Gartland visited parishes and schools, where he talked to students and parents. He walked the streets at night, talking to gang-members who’d dropped out of high school. He met with pastors and nuns serving in the neighborhood. He visited alternative educational initiatives run by Jesuits in Boston, Detroit, Los Angeles, and New York. He talked to community leaders and activists. He talked to Church leaders, politicians, and school



“The opening of these six Cristo Rey model schools in one year is astounding,” says Jim Stoeger, SJ, Chicago Province assistant for secondary education. “The Province is so happy to have John Foley joining the Cristo Rey Network because he can help others understand how to make these schools work.” Fr. Foley is pictured above in Cristo Rey’s newest classroom building.

officials in Chicago. He researched the social, economic, political, and educational realities of life in the neighborhood.

On June 22, 1994, he submitted the fruit of his labors, a report titled “Ministers of the Word Sent to New Frontiers?” to the Province. In it he pointed out that the number of Latino students enrolled in the Chicago Public Schools had increased by 111% between 1970 and 1992. The 1990 census revealed that 126,000 people lived in Pilsen-Little Village. 109,000 were Latino. 40% of the area’s Latino population was under the age of 18. The two schools in the area, Benito Juarez High School and Faragut Career Academy had dropout rates of 55% and 73% respectively. Average income in the neighborhood barely surpassed \$20,000 a year

At the end of the report Fr. Gartland concluded there was a compelling need for a new educational initiative in Pilsen-Little Village, but pointed out repeatedly that funding such a center would be a significant challenge. Little did he or anyone in the Province know that this challenge would give birth to an idea capable of reviving Catholic high school education in urban America.



Students at St. Martin de Porres High School in Cleveland, OH, get to work during the first week of classes. St. Martin de Porres is one of the six new Cristo Rey model high schools to open this fall.

The Idea: A School that Works

Fr. Schaeffer asked Fr. Theodore G. Munz, SJ, a Jesuit priest with a Masters in divinity as well as a Masters in business administration, to determine what type of educational center the Province should open. “I remember thinking we can do almost anything, and in a community that has huge needs it will be valuable,” Fr. Munz says. “But what is that we really know how to do? The answer is high schools.” In January 1995, Fr. Munz presented his vision for an educational center in Pilsen. It was called the Pilsen Project, and included the elementary school at St. Procopius, a proposed educational program for parents, and a new high school.

At that time, Catholic high schools weren’t opening; they were closing. It had been 30 years since a new high school had opened in the archdiocese of Chicago. Fr. Schaeffer and his consultants approved the proposal.

Fr. Munz then turned his attention to funding the new high school. There were many ideas and examples to consider, like a tuition-free model—the result of a large gift in 1914 and steadily growing endowment—at Regis High School in New York.

Unfortunately, the Regis model wouldn’t work in Pilsen. There weren’t enough Jesuits available in the Province to staff an entire school for the many years required to build an endowment. Nor could the high school be tuition-driven; the Province hoped to open it precisely for students whose families wouldn’t be

able to afford a college preparatory education.

So how would it be funded?

Fr. Munz invited Fr. John Costello, SJ, provincial assistant for development, and Mr. Richard “Rick” Murray, a Chicago-based real estate attorney and education reformer, to brainstorm about different possibilities for funding. At a long lunch in January 1995, they discussed endowments, sponsorship models, and volunteer labor. Nothing was resolved.

When they gathered again two weeks later, Rick had an idea. What if the students worked to pay for their own education? College kids did it in work-study programs. Could kids in Pilsen pay for their own education by working in businesses?

On the face of it, the idea seemed laughable. Why would a business hire a 14-year-old high school freshman? And how in the world would you ever balance working with the rigors of a college-prep education? But Frs. Munz and Costello didn’t laugh. In fact, they nodded their heads. It could work. It had potential. They agreed to further explore the idea. In numerous lengthy conversations, Fr. Munz and Rick refined their ideas for the project. A group of students would share an entry-level clerical job at a corporation, a bank, a law firm, an architectural firm, and the firm would pay the school for their services. The money generated would pay for the costs of the students’ tuition. Rick began the painstaking work of refining the idea, investigating the legal and tax ramifications of such a program.

In early January, 1995, Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, became part of the team. Fr. Schaeffer had asked him to return from Peru, where he’d served in high school education for 34 years, to work on the project. He also served as a co-principal at St. Procopius. Throughout 1995, the circle of folks working on the project expanded further when Dave McNulty, a Chicago banker who’d been a Jesuit for four years after graduating from Loyola Academy, came on board. The Province also hired Sumner Rahr, a fundraising consultant. Fr. Tom Widner, SJ, the Chicago Province director of communications, Tim Freeman, the Province’s development director, and Tadas Kulbis, a Chicago Province development officer for special projects, also lent their expertise to the project.

The group began to feel they had a pretty good idea, but knew the project’s success depended entirely on businesses in Chicago. If businesses wouldn’t hire students from the school, then the plan would fall flat on its face and they’d have to go back to the drawing board for a way to pay for the school. So they all opened their rolodexes and called friends in the business world. They mentioned the idea at cocktail parties, meetings, and lunches. They went to pitch the idea to local businesses.

Dave McNulty remembers the first such visit he and Fr. Foley made. “We were going to see Luis Lewin, the director of human resources for the Tribune Company. In the elevator on the way up to see him we were rehearsing,

‘You say this, and you say this, and we’ve got to make sure we tell him this.’ We had no idea what to expect. So we sat down across from him and started telling him all about the idea. After a minute or two he put his hands up and waved. We stopped talking, not sure what to expect. ‘We’ll do it,’ he said. ‘You don’t have to tell me anything else. I went to a Jesuit high school. I know who you guys are. I know what you do. We’ll do it.’” Other responses were equally enthusiastic.

While the team went door to door and friend to friend promoting the proposed program, Rick Murray worked tirelessly on developing it into a workable model that would effectively balance the academic demands of a college-prep school with the innovative funding model. In late summer, 1995, the team’s plan, drafted almost entirely by Rick, for the school and its “work for tuition” program was presented to Fr. Schaeffer. The plan explained how the “work for tuition program” would be organized and reiterated the need for a Catholic high school in Pilsen.

Fr. Schaeffer loved it. He doesn’t deny that it was risky. “No one knew what would happen. It had never been done before, but I had complete trust in Fr. Munz. He’s meticulous. He’d assembled a great team. He’d done all the homework and he said it could work.” He officially approved the project late in the fall of 1995. The school would open a year later.



Mr. J. Michael Heaton, a Loyola Academy graduate, and his law firm, O’Keefe, Lyons and Hynes, have been corporate sponsors since 1996, the year Cristo Rey opened. Mr. Heaton is shown here with Melissa Rodriguez, a Cristo Rey senior who began her second year at the firm this fall.

The School: It Works!

Winter of 1995–1996 was a whirlwind of activity for the team. Despite the fact they all had other jobs or responsibilities, they were putting many hours in every week as they planned a PR campaign to announce the school, strategized about raising funds to cover start-up costs, initiated a search for a suitable site, conducted a search for the school’s first administrators, and continued to grapple with the myriad practical considerations such as a unique project demanded.

Sr. Judith Murphy, OSB, a bilingual educator who’d served previously as president and principal of St. Scholastica High School, was tapped to be the school’s first principal. Fr. Foley was appointed the first president. In November, 1995, G. Preston Kendall, a 1980 Loyola Academy graduate who had volunteered in Peru with Fr. Foley, heard about the school and wrote saying he wanted a career change. Preston, who held an MBA from Northwestern University’s Kellogg School of Management and extensive experience in the business world, was hired to direct the school’s internship program.

His first day of work was January 16, 1996, the day of the press conference formally announcing the school’s opening. At the press conference, Fr. Schaeffer introduced Fr. Foley, Sr. Judy, and Preston, the team that would run the school. A reporter asked Fr. Schaeffer where the school would be located. He responded that it was designed to be a neighborhood school and would be located in Pilsen. “But where in Pilsen?” the reporter asked. “What’s the address?”

“We don’t know that yet,” Fr. Schaeffer said defiantly, “but this school is going to open.” He was right—but the next nine months weren’t easy, especially with respect to securing jobs. Preston found that, when it came time

to talk turkey, some of the corporations who’d promised jobs to the school had suddenly gotten cold feet. Many of the jobs promised in handshake agreements were not materializing.

Lewis Lewin and The Chicago Tribune, however, honored their promise and signed on to sponsor a job in the human resources department. Lewis’s decision, according to Preston, was representative of almost all of the first-year sponsors. “I don’t think we’ll ever realize just how important the reputation of the Society of Jesus was as we opened this school. It was directly responsible for so many of these jobs.”

Mr. Michael Heaton, a partner at what is now O’Keefe, Lyons, and Haynes, was another of the first to sign on. The moment he heard about the project, he pledged his support. He is a graduate of Loyola Academy. Mr. Anthony McGuire, founder of McGuire Engineers, was another early job sponsor. He’s a graduate of New York’s Regis High School, a school he says, that radically altered the course of his life. “That first year,” Preston recalls, “we had people signing up because they’d gone to Jesuit schools and they believed in the Jesuits, or because someone was twisting their arm to do it.” Dave McNulty twisted arms in the banking industry and produced jobs. Jesuits twisted the arms of family members. Preston twisted the arm of his sister, Paula Kendall, director of human resources at what is now Katten, Muchin, Zavis & Roseman. The law firm is still a sponsor today. So are Mike Heaton’s firm, McGuire Engineers, and the Tribune Company.

While Preston was chasing jobs, Sr. Judy was busy hiring a dynamic faculty that included Mike Heidkamp, who’d taught at Loyola Academy, and Jim Wall, who’d taught at St. Ignatius College Prep. With the faculty in place, Sr. Judy set about developing a student-centered dual-language curriculum designed to engage the students, to help them take ownership of what they were learning, and,

Cristo Rey Network Schools

The Cristo Rey Network, a national association of schools modeled after Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, was formed in 2001. Today the Network includes 11 schools in 9 major metropolitan areas. Feasibility studies for new schools are also underway in Baltimore, Indianapolis, Kansas City, Memphis, Minneapolis, Omaha, and Washington DC. The 11 Cristo Rey schools are listed with the year they were founded.

Cristo Rey Jesuit High School, Chicago, 1996
De La Salle North Catholic, Portland, OR, 2001
Juan Diego Catholic High School, Austin, 2002
Verbum Dei High School, Los Angeles, 2002
Arrupe Jesuit High School, Denver, 2003
Cristo Rey New York High School, New York, 2004
North Cambridge Catholic High School, Cambridge, MA, 2004
Notre Dame High School, Lawrence, MA, 2004
San Miguel High School, Tucson, 2004
St. Martin de Porres High School, Cleveland, 2004
St. Martin de Porres High School, Waukegan, IL, 2004

For information about the Cristo Rey Network, visit www.cristoreynetwork.org.

“Maybe you could do something to help us help the people who are interested in replicating schools like these.”

Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, Cristo Rey Network

ultimately, to keep them from dropping out.

At the same time, Fr. Foley and Fr. Brian G. Paulson, SJ, were assembling a board of directors and raising money for the school. Fr. Foley eventually asked Mrs. Rosemary Croghan to chair the board, which she did until 2003 when Paul Purcell took over. Rosemary and her husband John are part of a group of incredibly generous benefactors who continue to support Cristo Rey today. “It’s impossible to talk about the success of Cristo Rey or the Cristo Rey Network without talking about those who have so generously supported the mission of the school,” says Fr. John P. Foley, SJ, who stepped down as president of Cristo Rey earlier this year to direct the Cristo Rey Network. “Their contributions made the school a reality. And that’s the case at every one of these schools.”

In the months leading up to the school’s opening, the pace was frenetic. There was more work than time. At one point Sr. Judy and Preston went to Fr. Foley and told him they needed another year to open the school. He went to Fr. Schaeffer, but Fr. Schaeffer told them they could do it.

And he was right. The school opened its doors to 97 sophomores and juniors in September, 1996, just a few weeks after the target date. Gustavo Rodriguez was at school that first day. In fact, he was the first student to sign up for the school, and once he signed up, he began visiting parishes and recruiting other students. “I remem-

ber going into the gymnasium on the first day with a bunch of new students, sophomores and juniors. We had no clue what the heck was going to happen. We didn’t even have a building.” The grammar school building Cristo Rey would eventually occupy was nowhere near ready. On the first day, classes were held in separate corners of the gymnasium and cafeteria (which doubled as a roller rink). But the lack of facilities didn’t deter Gustavo or his classmates. “We knew it was totally new,” he recalls. “Fr. Foley always said we were the pioneers; the first class, the first ones doing this in the country.”

Preston’s work recruiting jobs paid off. By the time school started in September, there were more jobs than students. “We didn’t know what to expect when we sent the students to work that first day,” Preston recalls. “We were worried the phones were going to start ringing and people were going to say ‘you’ve gotta come get these kids. This isn’t working’.”

As soon as Preston was back in his office after accompanying the first 25 student-workers into the Loop, the phones did start ringing. But people weren’t calling to complain. They were calling to say thanks.

Gustavo was assigned to O’Keefe, Lyons, and Haynes. It didn’t take him long to impress his superiors. He began by working in the file room, but by year’s end he was spending his days in the County Building researching property appraisals for the firm’s real estate department.

According to Carlos De La Rosa, director of Cristo Rey’s Corporate Internship Program, the program is about much more than just the work experience or funding the school. “Going to work does so much for our students. They’re asked to comport themselves like adults and are held to high standard of accountability. It prepares them in a very unique way for college. The fact that they’re working with professionals with years of higher education, forces the students to think of college as the next



De La Salle North Catholic High School

In 2000, B.J. Cassin, shown here at the opening of De La Salle North Catholic, a Cristo Rey model high school in Portland, OR, created a foundation to help fund the replication of Cristo Rey model schools.



logical step. It makes the students want to go to college. They have glimpsed the possibilities that exist for people with a solid education.”

Going National

In the fall of 1997, Jeffrey D. Thielman, an insurance executive from Boston, MA, visited Chicago to accept a Companions Award from the Chicago Province Jesuits. After graduating from Boston College in 1985, Jeff had spent three and a half years volunteering in Tacna, Peru, where he founded the Cristo Rey Center for the Working Child. During his time there, he worked closely with Fr. Foley. After returning to the United States, Jeff earned a law degree and practiced law for two years before transitioning into the insurance business. During Jeff’s visit, Fr. Foley offered him a job as the school’s director of development.

Though he had no fundraising experience, Jeff took the job. He arrived at Cristo Rey in January 1998, armed with extensive sales experience, an affinity for the school’s mission, and a seemingly inexhaustible reservoir of energy. He also brought his rolodex, which contained the names of many people he’d met while traveling around the United States promoting Tacna’s Center for the Working Child.

One of the folks who had supported Jeff’s work in Peru, B.J. Cassin, came to Chicago in June, 2000, at the invitation of Jeff and Fr. Foley. Jeff hoped Mr. Cassin might make a contribution to the silent phase of the upcoming capital campaign, which eventually funded Cristo Rey’s new gym and cafeteria building.

But it wasn’t to be. When Mr. Cassin asked how he could help, Fr. Foley surprised himself, and Jeff, when he said “Maybe you could do something to help us help the people who are interested in replicating schools like these.” At the time groups from Portland, OR, Waukegan, IL, and the south side of Chicago were inquiring about possibly replicating the model.

Mr. Cassin called the next day and informed Fr. Foley that he would create a foundation endowed with more than \$20 million to support the replication of Cristo Rey model high schools and Nativity and Miguel model elementary schools throughout the United States. B.J. had spent much of his life working as a venture capitalist investing in new companies and ideas that showed great promise. He saw the same thing in Cristo Rey. “I’d been very distressed by the shrinking of Catholic schools, especially in the inner-city,” he explains. “That’s why the Cristo Rey model intrigued me. It was a way to bring high-quality Catholic education back into the inner-city. It was more than just raising money for scholarships. It was sustainable and franchiseable.”

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation agreed with Mr. Cassin and in 2003 contributed an additional \$9.9 million to the Cristo Rey Network. “We have a responsibility to high-quality educational options for all our youth,”

explains Tom Vander Ark, Executive Director of the Education Program at the Gates Foundation. “All students, no matter where they live, should have the opportunity to choose from an array of small, focused high schools designed to give them a solid, personalized education and the promise of a bright future. The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation supports Cristo Rey Jesuit High School’s goal to give more students access to a high quality high school education and its commitment to ensure that all of its students graduate from high school ready for college. The success of the schools in the Cristo Rey Network serves as an important model for other schools and cities around the country.”

There are now 11 Cristo Rey model schools in 9 major metropolitan areas. This year, thousands of students will attend Cristo Rey model schools. Hundreds of graduates of Cristo Rey model schools are currently studying at 4-year colleges and nearly 100 Cristo Rey Jesuit High School students have already graduated from college. Gustavo is one of them. He earned a scholarship to Xavier University where he double-majored in theology and political science, served as president of the Spanish Club and the International Student Society, and helped launch SOL, the Student Organization of Latinos.

The Payoff

Between the time Brad Schaeffer approached Cardinal Bernardin about assuming control of a parish in Chicago and the first day of school, there were plenty of opportunities (and reasons) for the Chicago Province not to open Cristo Rey. There were countless risks. Some Catholic schools in the area were opposed to the idea. The number of Jesuits was decreasing steadily and some thought it imprudent to open a new work when they felt they’d surely struggle to keep the schools they already had open. No one had ever tried to fund a school this way, much less succeeded at it. The school was fraught with potential hazards. The Jesuits were risking their reputation as educators. It was an untested and untried idea, and many said it wouldn’t work, that kids couldn’t handle it, or that businesses wouldn’t participate.

But the Province didn’t turn away. It took the risk. And today it reaps the rewards every summer when students graduate from Cristo Rey Jesuit High School and prepare to go off to college. It reaps the rewards every fall, too, when new Cristo Rey model schools open.

This fall, Gustavo Rodriguez, Cristo Rey’s first student, will begin his third year at Juan Diego Catholic High School, a Cristo Rey model high school in Austin, TX. The first two years he taught technology. This year he’ll begin work as a Corporate Internship Program coordinator. He’s reaped the rewards of his education and he’s now sharing them with others.

The risk, surely, was worth it given the many rewards. ■