

New Catholic high school coming to southwest Detroit in fall 2008

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Southwest Detroit will be home to a new Catholic high school in the fall of 2008. It will use a model that puts students from low-income families to work to help pay tuition.

Announced at a news conference this morning on the city's east side, Detroit Cristo Rey High School will open with 100 to 125 students — all freshmen — in the former Holy Redeemer Catholic High School in southwest Detroit.

Each year, for the following three years, a new freshmen class will be added, with total enrollment after five years estimated to reach about 500, said Sister Canice Johnson, project director for the school's planning committee.

Church, community and school leaders hope Cristo Rey will offer a fresh, attractive approach to education in the city.

The school is to open at a time when Detroit Public Schools and the Archdiocese of Detroit have been shuttering buildings as children flock to charter schools and other districts.

To help defray the cost of tuition, the students will work one day a week at entry-level jobs established through partnerships Cristo Rey has built with 23 companies.

At most Catholic schools in the area, students pay an average of \$6,000 to \$8,000 a year in tuition. At Cristo Rey, organizers say the tab will drop to \$2,200 a year.

"We know that some families won't be able to pay that," Johnson said, adding that many will receive help from private gifts and donations. "We have a lot of development to do."

The average family at similar Cristo Rey schools nationally earns about \$33,000 a year, Johnson said.

"Yes, we are an exclusive school," she said. "If you make too much money, you can't come here."

The Cristo Rey model (Spanish for "Christ the King") has worked elsewhere. Eighteen Cristo Rey schools now operate across the country in such urban areas as Chicago, Cleveland, New York and Los Angeles.

They boast graduation rates that exceed the public school systems in their communities. Chicago's Cristo Rey school graduates 89% of its students, and 96% of Cristo Rey's 2005 graduates went on to college.

“Now, with the opening of Detroit Cristo Rey High School, we will have the opportunity to help offer quality education at affordable prices to boys and girls all over the City of Detroit,” said the Rev. Thomas Sepulveda, pastor of St. Anne de Detroit Parish, which is a cosponsor of the school along with the Sisters, Servants Immaculate Heart of Mary.

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