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Posted on Sat, Dec. 17, 2005

Catholic high school looks for anchor in national network

Associated Press

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. - A Roman Catholic high school in Birmingham that survived financial difficulty has linked with a national network of college prep, work-study schools.

Officials at Holy Family High School in Ensley hope the link will bring more financial stability and academic excellence.

"It's a good day for the whole community and the students," said Principal John Ippolito of his school's acceptance into the Cristo Rey Network. Cristo Rey means "Christ the King."

It means Holy Family, which has about 140 students, will be eligible to receive grant money to pay for capital improvements that may be required and other needs, said Jeff Thielman, Cristo Rey's vice president. School officials will assess those needs in 2006.

The 62-year-old Holy Family will officially open as a Cristo Rey school in the fall 2007, Thielman said.

One of the first steps will be taken in January, with the hiring of a school president, said the Rev. Robert Crossmyer, pastor of Holy Family Catholic Church.

The president will be chief executive officer and public face of the school, a position similar to that of a college president.

School officials next school year also will recruit staff and students for 2007.

The school's mission will remain the same: to offer college prep education to disadvantaged youths who might not otherwise have the opportunity, Thielman said.

Cristo Rey's 11-school network is modeled on a structure developed in 1996 by Jesuits in

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Chicago. The schools offer college-prep academics to low-income students.

While tuition is lower at Cristo Rey schools, students still help pay for it by working one day a week in an entry-level clerical job, such as a receptionist, with one of the school's business partners. Four students share one job, and the money they earn goes toward tuition.

In the program, the school day and year are longer to allow students to complete their academic requirements.

Information from: The Birmingham News



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