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An 'uplift' for the West Side; New Catholic high school to open next year

The religious order that runs the elite prep schools St. Ignatius and Loyola Academy plans to launch a new inner-city high school in the struggling Austin community next year.

When the Jesuits -- Catholic priests who belong to the Society of Jesus -- open **Christ the King** in fall 2008, with an estimated 120 freshman boys and girls, it will be the first new Catholic high school on the West Side in 85 years, officials said.

The priests aren't just bucking a trend of Catholic school closings. They see themselves as returning to their early mission -- educating the less fortunate.

"When they were founded, Loyola and St. Ignatius first taught Catholic immigrants who were on the lower socio-economic rung. They were looking for an uplift," said the Rev. Chris Devron, a 40-year-old Palatine native who is the president of **Christ the King**.

Loyola, in Wilmette, and St. Ignatius, in Chicago, evolved into elite -- and pricey -- prep schools, although they do offer financial aid to those in need.

In 1996, the Jesuits tried something different, opening Cristo Rey Jesuit High School to serve the heavily Hispanic Pilsen-Little Village area. Students work entry-level corporate jobs one day a week to help pay for the other four days of instruction. More than a decade later, Cristo Rey's enrollment tops 500.

Christ the King will have a similar work-school arrangement. Salaries from students working in "corporate internships" will cover 75 percent of tuition, and they will have to come up with \$2,400 a year out of pocket.

One difference from the other local Jesuit high schools: **Christ the King** will draw students from a substantially black community that is less than 10 percent Catholic.

The school will temporarily share space with a charter school at Washington and Central until a new campus -- slated to open in 2009 -- can be built in the 5000 block of West Jackson.