

# ‘That’s the Win’

## *Building meaningful relationships with students at Cristo Rey*

BY RICK MOORE

**C**risto Rey Jesuit High School is something of a hidden gem in Catholic education in the Twin Cities, figuratively and literally. The school is nestled in a largely commercial district in the Midtown area of South Minneapolis, and you’d likely never pass by it in your everyday travels. And there are marvelous things happening here for the 415 students in grades 9–12, more than 98 percent of whom identify as minorities. For starters, there’s the success of the students.

“What’s amazing about Cristo Rey is the graduation rate,” says Christopher Heng, the school’s senior manager of marketing and communications. “We have a 100 percent graduation rate and a 100 percent college acceptance rate [for every year since our inception in the fall of 2007].”

One of many unique aspects of the school’s model is its Corporate Work Study (CWS) program, which connects students to one of 140 partner organizations to gain real-world work experience. Most of the partners are for-profit companies, but some are nonprofits—including The Basilica of Saint Mary, which began its relationship with Cristo Rey 15 years ago.

The work study program is a primary funding mechanism for the school, and about 43 percent of students’ tuition is paid through their CWS. Each student is required to participate and spends one day of the week, August through June, at their work study job, earning academic credit that appears on their transcript.

“We’re the only high school in the entire state of Minnesota that has a work-study program,” says Kesiiah Kolbow, director of the Corporate Work Study Program. “It’s a way to offset the expense of a college prep education, [which] is expensive because it’s private. And our work study partners make a college prep education affordable

to families who otherwise wouldn’t be able to afford it because of systemic racism and other [systemic] economic factors.”

Maury Navarro Quiroz worked at The Basilica last year as a senior before graduating in the spring of 2023. He performed a variety of tasks, including putting together packets for school kids, learning how to livestream weekday Masses, and translating physical copies of music into digital files to become printouts for the choir.

“I thought it was a very valuable experience,” he says.

“It was nice to work with former Basilica staff members Ben Caduff and Teri Larson. They helped me learn more about what I can do to impact my future.”

“Not only are students doing real meaningful work to support The Basilica, but the students are developing an affinity for that community and building really meaningful and lasting relationships,” adds Kolbow. “That’s the ‘win.’ We know in our world today, it’s about who you know, it’s about how you know them, that really makes the difference in employment opportunities, and just makes people’s lives better.”

Yes, the program helps Cristo Rey students pay for a part of their tuition, which Navarro Quiroz says is important. But there’s more.



Maury Navarro Quiroz, livestreaming weekday Masses, worked at The Basilica as a senior before graduating in the spring of 2023 through the Cristo Rey Jesuit High School Corporate Work Study (CWS) program.

“It’s not only because it helps pay a part of our tuition that it’s beneficial,” he says. “It also gives us the real-world experience of the work that we could be doing in the future and helps us make connections with people. I think that’s probably the most important part is learning how to build those connections and maintain those relationships.”

“I can say very confidently that [Navarro Quiroz] graduated from high school knowing that he was seen, heard, and valued by The Basilica,” adds Kolbow. “And that’s a win in my book.” ✚

*Rick Moore has been an active volunteer and parish member for about 20 years. He’s also been a mentor for Hennepin Connections since its inception.*