

**February 22, 2022**

Dear Friends of Cristo Rey Philadelphia High School,

Our first newsletter, written in 2011 (one year before we opened), was sent to 185 email addresses. This version (#73) will be my last. It will be sent to more than 4,000 readers.

Even in 73 newsletters, I couldn't begin to capture the story of Cristo Rey in all its richness and subtleties. So, at least for now, in this last try, I'll offer some answers to your most frequently asked questions.



## **FAQ #1: Are you proud of what Cristo Rey has become?**

Of course I am! And I am especially proud of how it happened.

Cristo Rey came to life because of the single focus of a large and diverse community of collaborators: “what is best for our students?” Our mission requires many hands to work together: young and old, black and brown and white, rich and poor, businesspeople and educators, liberals and conservatives, Christians, Jews, Muslims ... supporters and critics, too. We all feel a deep satisfaction, an existential joy, in doing something important – doing something that is so obviously good – and doing it together.

I am proud that our community of collaborators has tried to create something modeled by what Jesus taught in the gospels. We are a mission that prioritizes love above all; a mission for and by people of all faiths; a mission that rejects notions of exceptionalism.

In the prayer of Oscar Romero, we are reminded that: “Our work is only a fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God’s work.” All of us in the community of Cristo Rey are pleased to have a part in the “magnificent enterprise.”

## **FAQ #2: Why did you start Cristo Rey?**

As a devoted son of Philadelphia, I am ashamed of the injustice of the system of education in our city. It seems senseless to me that, year after year, we tolerate the enormous waste of human potential that our current system of education causes. Education should be a solution to the problem of poverty, but, in Philadelphia, our system of education perpetuates poverty.

Cristo Rey is an attempt to help students and families break the cycle of poverty.

Of course, our little school is not a solution to this complicated problem of education in Philadelphia, but Cristo Rey does demonstrate that a solution is possible. In fact, there are many examples of excellent schools in Philadelphia – proof that we have the know-how to offer affordable quality education to everyone.

We all know that the return on investment for quality education is tremendous, and we know that the cost to our community of low-quality education is debilitating. Nevertheless, right now, our current situation demonstrates that we simply lack the will to solve the problem.

### **FAQ #3: What's next for Cristo Rey?**

We are proud that Cristo Rey has become “the school that works,” and we are also excited by the road ahead. In our next chapter, we will provide an even better experience for our students, and we will grow to offer the experience to more students.

I'm thrilled to pass the leadership of this fine school to Tom Shoemaker. He is committed to our mission. He understands that the role of President is a calling and not a job. He genuinely believes in the potential of our students, and he knows that they will become the future leaders that Philadelphia needs.

### **FAQ #4: If you knew in advance everything that you would have to do to start Cristo Rey, would you have done it?**

The answer is almost certainly no! The newsletters almost never described our failures or tragedies or disappointments, but there were many. For example, I never anticipated going to so many funerals or fighting for our survival in a pandemic. But somehow, we endured the setbacks to celebrate exhilarating successes. And because of the whole experience, Philadelphia has a good school that will last forever, and many lives, including my own, have been enriched beyond measure. Maybe that's why God keeps secrets!

### **FAQ #5: What will you do now?**

As rewarding as our work has been, it can only be viewed as a beginning, or as a tiny example of what might be possible. Our mission proves that all kids can succeed if they get a fair chance. But thousands of kids in Philadelphia don't get a fair chance, and there are thousands of more adults who never got a chance.

There is plenty of good work to be done.

I am deeply grateful for your interest in the story of our beginnings. Your reactions to our newsletters have been inspiring. Most importantly, I hope that, by participating in our story, you have sampled the joy of contributing to the “magnificent enterprise.”

Sincerely,

John McConnell  
Founder and President



