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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 18, 2026

Building Momentum Together: Cristo Rey Orange County High School Raises More Than \$2 Million at 3rd Annual VIVA Gala

More than 400 community and business leaders celebrate “The School That Works” at Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort; pioneering founder of national Cristo Rey network honored

DANA POINT, Calif. (April 18, 2026)—Under the theme “Building Momentum Together,” Cristo Rey Orange County High School raised over \$2 million at its 3rd Annual ¡VIVA! Gala, held at the Waldorf Astoria Monarch Beach Resort in Dana Point. The milestone evening celebrated three years of growth and community impact, honored Father John Foley, S.J., the founder of the first Cristo Rey school in the nation, and drew more than 400 Orange County prominent philanthropists, corporate partners and community leaders.

Funds raised will support that shared momentum—helping ensure Cristo Rey remains an affordable option for students who might otherwise be unable to attend a Catholic, college-preparatory high school, one that offers a distinctive, year-round, real-world work experience as part of its curriculum. The Santa Ana-based school, which opened in 2023, is completing its third year of operation and building on each year’s progress to grow its reach and impact.

“The Cristo Rey Orange County team has built an extraordinary high school for students from working-class families. The overwhelming turnout and generosity of so many community and business leaders at this year’s ¡VIVA! Gala is further evidence that Cristo Rey’s mission is working—changing lives and preparing young people to be tomorrow’s leaders. We are grateful for the tremendous momentum we have from so many believers in our mission,” said Stephen Holte, Founding President, Cristo Rey Orange County High School.

The ¡VIVA! Gala’s success was made possible in part by the generosity of 31 sponsors whose commitment to Cristo Rey’s mission was central to the evening. WCM Investment Management served as the event’s Presenting Sponsor for the third straight year. Tim and Alanna Psomas were Platinum Sponsors. Birtcher Anderson & Davis; Carmela and Ben Du; Michael and Debbie Felix Family; MJP Architects; St. John Vianney Chapel & Our Lady of Mount Carmel; and Woodside Credit joined as Gold Sponsors. Their leadership and philanthropy, alongside the full roster of sponsors, reflect the deep and growing investment the Orange County business community has made in Cristo Rey and the students it serves.

The success of this year’s gala is especially significant as construction continues on Cristo Rey’s new 63,000-square-foot campus in south Santa Ana. The new campus on South Harbor Boulevard in the heart of Orange County is on track to welcome the school’s first senior class when it opens this fall for

the 2026–27 academic year. It will mark another major achievement in the school’s short but remarkable history.

“From the beginning, our vision was to acquire a home for a permanent campus to ultimately serve 500 students, faculty and staff members for years to come. The success of this year’s ¡VIVA! Gala and the growing support from our passionate donors, corporate partners, and the broader Orange County community is making it happen,” Holte said. “It is a testament to a shared belief that a high-quality, faith-based education should be available for all students regardless of income. Our students are dreaming big, and our loyal support base is providing critical resources and opportunities to transform those dreams into reality.”

The Most Rev. Kevin W. Vann, D.D., J.C.D., D.MIN Bishop of Orange gave the opening prayer kicking off the Gala, and another of the evening’s highlights was honoring Father John Foley, S.J., Chairman Emeritus of the Cristo Rey Network. Father Foley served as the founding president of Cristo Rey Jesuit High School in Chicago—the first school in the network—when it opened in 1996 and he is considered the founder of the national Cristo Rey movement. From those origins in Chicago’s Pilsen neighborhood, he became a tireless national and international ambassador for the model, helping replicate the model to the 41 campuses that exist today. His pioneering leadership laid the foundation that has since transformed the lives of tens of thousands of students from working-class families across the country, including those now thriving in Santa Ana.

Owners and top executives from many of the 60 Orange County companies partnering with Cristo Rey’s and its unique Corporate Work Study Program attended this year’s VIVA Gala. The work study program develops confidence, professional capabilities and social skills in students who spend one day a week during the school year working onsite or remotely at area businesses. The roster of Corporate Work Study partners is a virtual who’s who of Orange County business: City of Hope, F&M Bank, Rady Children’s Health, SchoolsFirst Federal Credit Union, Slater Builders, Hoag Hospital, Sperry Commercial and Sperry Equities, Brown and Streza, and Northgate Markets, among others.

“Our goal is not just to graduate students, but to send mission-driven young adults into the world who will serve and give back. Cristo Rey connects the key pillars important to success in a young person’s life: faith, college, career and service,” said Oscar Gonzalez, Chair of Cristo Rey Orange County Board of Directors and co-Chief Executive Officer of Northgate Markets. “It is proving to be transformational, and I could not be more excited about the impact the school is having on the next generation of business and community leaders.

Gloria Preciado, chief of staff at City of Hope Orange County and a member of the Cristo Rey Board of Directors, told the gala crowd her involvement with the school is deeply personal because of her own upbringing.

“The first time I walked into Cristo Rey to speak to the students, I saw myself.” said Preciado, a first-generation Filipino who was raised by her single mother in a challenging environment. “I knew I wanted more for my life and I knew it was possible in my heart. But I didn’t know how to get there. And that is why partnering with Cristo Rey is so meaningful because now we get to be that door for those students.”

The evening unfolded across a series of memorable experiences at the Waldorf Astoria. Guests gathered for an opening cocktail reception on the hotel’s spacious ocean view lawn at sunset before moving into the grand ballroom for a multi-course dinner, followed by a spirited live auction that contributed significantly to the fundraising total. Throughout, Cristo Rey students served as ambassadors for the school, sharing their personal journeys with guests and offering a firsthand look at the program’s impact.

Among the Cristo Rey students greeting guests and sharing their stories of success, was Azusena, a junior and a member of the Cristo Rey's founding class. During the formal program, she told her story about when she first learned about Cristo Rey as an eighth-grade student in Santa Ana. Azusena and her family worried the private high school would be out of reach financially and she might not fit in socially while having to make all new friends.

"Well, three years later I'm still here! Attending Cristo Rey has opened many opportunities and I have grown and accomplished many things that I never imagined possible," Azusena proudly told attendees during the formal program. The past year, she has worked at Brown & Streza, a leading Orange County law firm, in general administration, human resources and accounting all the while excelling in school and becoming one of the 6 Cristo Rey students who have become prestigious Simon Scholars.

"The Corporate Work Study program has made it possible for me to gain a deeper understanding of what career path I would like to take," Azusena said. "I can't thank the school enough for its commitment to helping students achieve our dreams and pushing us to our full potential. Coming to Cristo Rey was a journey, perhaps even a sign of God's path for me."

For more information, about Cristo Rey Orange County High School, please visit www.cristoreyoc.org. If you are interested in becoming part of the Corporate Work Study program and hiring students to work for your company or organization, please contact Vice President André Feijóo at 714-439-9626 x 301, afeijoo@cristoreyoc.org. If you are interested in supporting Cristo Rey Orange County's broader mission, please contact give@cristoreyoc.org.

About Cristo Rey Orange County High School

Cristo Rey Orange County High School is a Catholic, college-preparatory high school in Santa Ana, California that provides a transformative education to students and families with limited economic resources. The school's innovative Corporate Work Study program allows students to gain valuable professional experience while earning a portion of the cost of their education. Every student is placed in a professional job five full days a month during business hours, all four years of high school. While Cristo Rey is new to Orange County, it is part of a proven national model of 41 high schools in the Cristo Rey Network nationwide. www.cristoreyoc.org.

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