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REFLECTIONS ON THE LIVING TRADITION

## Creighton University's Magis Catholic Teacher Corps: The Living Tradition of Jesuit Education

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“What a great program!” This is a common response to our description of the Magis Catholic Teaching Corps at Creighton University,<sup>1</sup> whether to a new acquaintance or a stranger on a flight en route to a recruiting event or a visit with a current teacher. Rooted in the transformative spirit of Jesuit education, the Magis program represents the dynamic partnership between Jesuit higher education and P–12 catholic schools. Magis provides recent college graduates an opportunity to live out their vocation as Catholic school teachers while earning a master’s degree at Creighton University, living in an intentional community, many in under-served communities, while deepening their faith through the Ignatian tradition. As the director of and a professor in the program, we are privileged to guide these educators, offering spaces where they can flourish in their creativity and endeavor with love. In reflecting on the opportunities Magis provides and the necessity of applying our Jesuit educational mission in innovative ways, we would like to highlight how these young educators inspire hope and renewal in a world that too often feels weary and broken.

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1 For more on the Magis Catholic Teaching Corps, see the website, <https://www.creighton.edu/magis>.

### What is “Magis?”

The Magis Catholic Teacher Corps takes its name from the Latin term *Magis*, or the “more,” used by St. Ignatius in the *Spiritual Exercises*. In Jesuit circles the word has evolved in recent decades to suggest resisting the status quo, going out on the frontiers, magnanimity, generosity, and striving for the more universal good.<sup>2</sup> The program aspires to achieve the “more” through the holistic formation of Catholic school teachers, placing and guiding young educators in often marginalized and underserved Catholic schools in the Midwest and Arizona. As a two-year post-graduate teaching service program, Magis offers recent college graduates a chance to live out their vocation as full-time Catholic school teachers while completing a fully funded graduate degree at Creighton University. Intentional community living with others in the program in a shared house and faith formation in the Ignatian tradition supports the participants’ journeys as reflective practitioners through coursework, spiritual formation programming, and community-building initiatives.

The program began the planning stages in the 2001–2 school year and admitted its first students in the summer of 2002. The idea was conceived by a financial supporter in Omaha who admired the ACE Teaching Fellows at the University of Notre Dame and sought to replicate the model at Creighton. Professors and administrators were eager to take up the mantle, and despite early challenges, the program found its footing and continues to thrive. Since 2002, Magis has graduated 212 teachers in 22 cohorts and has another 28 participants enrolled for the 2025–26 school year.

Magis Catholic Teacher Corps began in the Archdiocese of Omaha, where teachers were placed in schools near Creighton’s campus. The program expanded to the Pine Ridge Reservation in western South Dakota, into the dioceses of greater Nebraska, eastern South Dakota, northwest Iowa, and the Omaha and Winnebago tribal communities of northeast Nebraska. In recent years, Magis teachers have worked in schools in Kansas City, Minneapolis, Milwaukee, Tucson, and a new Phoenix community opened in 2025.

During their two years in the program, these new teachers come to understand what it means to be and to do more as they provide valuable support to their schools and the next generation of Catholic school students. Perhaps more importantly, however, these young teachers are often transformed by their engagement in new communities and successes, big and small, inside and outside the classroom.

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2 Barton T. Geger, S.J., “What Magis Really Means and Why It Matters,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 1, no. 2 (2012): 16–31.

### Student Experiences

We make a point to warn potential applicants this program is *not* an easy way to earn a free master's degree. Still, for applicants who feel called to work with young people and to push themselves to personal, professional, and spiritual growth under often challenging circumstances, Magis is often an outstanding fit. A big reason for this is the program's emphasis on providing individual support. In exit interviews, our students repeatedly highlight the support they receive as one of the most significant benefits of the program. They reflect on being known, being loved, and being seen. They are part of a university and school communities that are cheering for their success and offering them ways to thrive through meaningful work.

As part of the admissions process, Magis teachers are introduced to Ignatian spirituality and Ignatian discernment. They are encouraged to notice their interior movements, God's activity perhaps nudging them towards a specific city or type of school, or whether Magis is even the program or path for them. Securing a full-time teaching position in one of our partnering P-12 Catholic schools is built into the acceptance process. Magis staff support both the applicants and school administrators throughout the interview process, drawing on notions of Ignatian discernment to emphasize transparency and mutual fit. By working closely with both parties, the office seeks to facilitate transparency regarding goals, hopes, and concerns. Such discernment often leads to placements that are highly rewarding for both the schools and the applicants, fostering a strong foundation for their two-year commitment to the school.

Spending summers on Creighton's campus, located near downtown Omaha, provides an immersive experience for each year's cohort, with intensive in-person coursework, seminars, guest speakers, and opportunities to explore campus and the wider metropolitan area. Living in residence halls and sharing meals fosters strong bonds and lasting friendships, many of which are decades old (some have resulted in marriage). Participants also engage in retreats, weekly faith-sharing, daily and weekly mass and spiritual direction, reflecting on and sharing their spiritual growth. During the school year, Magis teachers balance their school schedules, university coursework, and building relationships with their housemates through activities like exploring their city, maintaining the house, hosting community dinners, welcoming guests, praying together weekly, and enjoying social outings. At their schools, they coach sports, drive school buses, moderate extracurricular activities, direct school performances, tutor students, lead in-services at faculty meetings, and generally go above and beyond to help the students and build up the school community where they teach. Along with personal prayer practices and local worship,

teachers gather virtually each month via Zoom for large-group prayer and small-group faith-sharing. Communal and spiritual connections are further strengthened by an in-person fall retreat in Omaha, a mid-winter virtual retreat (with a care package), and a late spring graduation celebration.

### **Who are these Magis Teachers?**

Magis teachers embody the Ignatian mission of Creighton University by living Jesuit values of service, justice, education, community, and faith. The program tends to attract young people who believe that education is their best chance to make a difference in the world. While they often come in with grand visions of impacting their future students, the service they do in their schools and communities and the relationships they build ensure that, ultimately, they are the ones who are most changed.

The Catholic schools that employ Magis teachers are often struggling and thriving at the same time. They are schools that exude an ethos of love and care for all, and schools that demonstrate a community feel that models what Christ offers in his prophetic messages, but they are also schools that may struggle for a variety of reasons, from staffing shortages to the consequences of community poverty. Magis teachers spend two years in the sacred space of a classroom with students who are yearning, seeking, hoping, and too often struggling. Our teachers challenge themselves to meet their students where they are, building meaningful relationships as they strive to engage them in the complex process of growth.

Nearly a dozen of our graduates were drawn to the program because *they* were taught by Magis teachers. There are dozens of stories of Magis teachers who picked up and moved to Omaha, an unfamiliar city without a glamorous reputation (having never visited Creighton, the name may be vaguely familiar because of its prominence in Division 1 basketball). Many of these teachers have stayed and continue to populate the metro area's Catholic grade schools and high schools. Some have married and started families or persuaded other family members to join them.

Many of our teachers are graduates of Catholic schools from across the country. They often come from Jesuit high schools, Catholic universities, or Newman Centers at public universities. Some move halfway across the country, embracing apostolic availability to serve and establish roots in the Midwest, while others stay close to home in places like Milwaukee, Omaha, Kansas City, or Arizona, eager to make an impact in their communities. Many were raised Catholic, some are converts, and others are not Catholic but share a deep respect for and enthusiasm for Catholic schools and their values.

Some exceptionally bright and talented Magis teachers, like Lauren and Rob, have returned to their respective alma maters, offering energy and enthusiasm alongside their former teachers turned colleagues. Ximena is the first native Spanish speaker and first-generation teacher in her school and has forged deep connections with her students' families. Jayla is the first teacher of color that most of her students have had, and the impact on her students is profound. Our Magis teachers and graduates who identify as LGBTQ+ offer a safe space and a role model to all students, particularly those who may not feel as welcome in a Catholic school. Several Magis graduates have joined religious life over the years; the program currently has two graduates who are members of women's religious orders, one who is a Jesuit priest, and several discerning religious life after Magis graduation. Many more have made long term commitments to elementary or high school teaching in Catholic schools, all signs of discernment and dedication to the values of the program.

### **Measuring Success**

One clear way the program measures success is through graduate retention in Catholic schools and the field of education. As of this writing, nearly 90 percent of Magis graduates have remained beyond their two-year commitment, as teachers in K–12 Catholic or public schools or joined religious life. Over 76 percent remained in Catholic schools, and many work more broadly in the field of education—in museums, colleges and universities, youth ministries, or diocesan offices. Of the four most recent graduating classes of Magis Catholic Teacher Corps, incredibly, one hundred percent of the graduates have remained in Catholic schools beyond their two years in the program.

But statistics are just one way to measure success. Much more important is our students' faithfulness to the *Graduate at Graduation* characteristics that guide our programming: exemplifying pedagogical excellence, displaying servant leadership, seeking God in all things, practicing discernment, valuing community, and promoting justice. These characteristics are guided by the dedication to excellence, a focus on students, grounded in knowledge and love of Jesus Christ and contributing to the betterment of society, central to the mission of both Creighton and the Magis Catholic Teacher Corps. It is the stories of these young teachers and their embodiment of our grad-at-grad principles and the mission of Creighton that best illustrate the success of the Magis program.

The work that John and Liam do to craft impactful classroom experiences for diverse learners exemplifies pedagogical excellence in the Ignatian tradition. Their approach not only deepens students' understand-

ing of the subject matter but also fosters an awareness of meaningful issues, inspiring values-driven action. John, a high school math teacher and recipient of the Archdiocesan Teacher of the Year award at the Archbishop of Omaha's annual Dinner for Catholic Education, delivers creative and engaging lessons that inspire his students. Similarly, Liam demonstrates this excellence through his passion and innovation in teaching high school physics. During his tenure as department chair, Liam revamped the science curriculum, connecting physics experiments to the lives of students on the reservation. His enthusiasm even extended beyond the classroom, as he built a makeshift—and wildly popular—ice skating rink on school grounds, blending community engagement with concepts explored in class.

Servant leadership provides a framework for teachers to model empowerment and faith-filled generosity, always prioritizing the well-being of their students and school communities. In the fifteen years since he graduated from Magis, Oscar's career has exemplified this approach. Starting as a high school Spanish teacher, he advanced to department chair and eventually became principal of a Catholic K–8 school with a significant Spanish-speaking population. As principal, he elevated academic standards while weaving family and cultural traditions more intentionally into the school's identity. Today, as director of the Catholic school system, Oscar oversees six schools, including the state's first dual-language Catholic school. His commitment to servant leadership earned him the title of Administrator of the Year in the archdiocese, reflecting his dedication to empowering students, families, and colleagues. Similarly, Christopher embodies servant leadership through his transformative contributions to education. After teaching high school science on the reservation, he stepped into a leadership role, guiding the school's academic initiatives through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. His efforts ensured continuity in learning during an extended period of online education necessitated by strict tribal health regulations to protect elders and vulnerable community members. Now, Christopher's leadership has taken a new direction as the founding director of Seattle University's Catholic Schools Teacher Corps, which welcomed its inaugural cohort in the summer of 2025.

The Ignatian practice of seeking God in all things reflects a faith-filled worldview that encourages finding hope and consolation even amidst struggles and brokenness. Ryan embodies this perspective by following in the footsteps of his father, a high school theology teacher. At his prep school, Ryan seeks out students on the margins—those grappling with suicidal thoughts, difficult home lives, or a lack of recognition as athletes or top academic performers. Through his unique blend of energy, passion,

and patience, he offers these students a listening ear, words of encouragement, and the steady presence of a faith-filled mentor who affirms their dignity, unique gifts, and potential.

Practicing discernment in the Ignatian tradition requires attentiveness and critical reflection, drawing one closer to God and to their own internal compass. It is a way of life that recognizes God's presence in the world and in one's experiences, fostering growth, reconciliation, and purpose. Jason embraced this practice during his first year of teaching, transforming his approach to challenges like students performing below grade level and the pressure to cover all the material in his ninth-grade English curriculum. Through discernment, he shifted his focus to noticing and appreciating small successes, which deepened his faith and commitment to his students, and helped him develop more intentional lessons to foster meaningful growth. Similarly, Ted's journey exemplifies the fruits of discernment. After serving marginalized communities in Ethiopia through the Peace Corps, then in rural Appalachia and inner-city New York, he found his way to Maḥpíya Lúta | Red Cloud Indian School through Magis Catholic Teacher Corps. Nearly a decade later, his discernment led him beyond the classroom to broader roles at Maḥpíya Lúta, where he coordinates grants, mentors new teachers, advances technology initiatives, and supports curriculum development at his Magis placement school.

Magis teachers embody the value of community by fostering relationships rooted in dignity, interconnectedness, and goodwill. They strive to create inclusive classrooms and contribute meaningfully to their school communities, always seeking to include, inspire, and collaborate with others. Jack demonstrated this by building a strong relationship with an immigrant student's family, allowing him to intervene in a sensitive and challenging situation to help the family secure funding for the student's post-secondary education. Similarly, Mia, a recent Magis graduate, works on a groundbreaking initiative at her placement school, creatively integrating students with Down syndrome and autism into the learning community in ways that celebrate and embrace their differences.

Finally, program teachers promote justice by dismantling barriers of inequity and creating opportunities for marginalized students within their classrooms and school communities. Maya prepared her Native high school students from rural South Dakota to present their scientific research at the Advancing Indigenous People in STEM conference. She not only guided their academic work but also helped them raise thousands of dollars through bake sales to fund their trip across the country. Similarly, Christine's journey reflects the transformative power of justice. Raised Catholic in a community that placed little emphasis on social justice, she

found her calling at a school where she now serves as both a theology teacher and social justice coordinator. In this role, she shares her passion for integrating social justice into faith, inspiring her students and colleagues to live out these values.

Such stories highlight the many successes within the Magis community. Through discernment, these teachers have found their unique paths in education, positively impacted the world, and grown in their awareness of God's presence. By deepening their commitment to their communities through servant leadership, they reflect the countless ways Magis teachers embody the program's six Graduate at Graduation characteristics, both during and after their time in the program.


## Conclusion

These Magis teachers bring the Ignatian mission of Creighton University to life, embodying the Jesuit tradition through service, justice, education, community, and faith. They offer hope to the church and the broader world, engaging with others deeply and intentionally while passing on the faith to the next generation. Through the relationships they cultivate, the service they offer to their schools, and their prayerful resilience in the face of challenges, they continue to grow as leaders and disciples. The impact of this "great program" transcends its founding collaborators and casual descriptions to strangers on an airplane. Its participants are the living testaments to the transformative power of Jesuit education, bringing its values to their classrooms, communities, and beyond. May their dedication and gifts continue to enrich the Church and the world for the greater glory of God.<sup>3</sup>

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- 3 If your higher education institution is interested in beginning a University Consortium for Catholic Education program, please contact our UCCE chair, with ACT, at the University of San Diego: [sgreen@sandiego.edu](mailto:sgreen@sandiego.edu) for guidance and support.

For a college student or young professional who would be interested in joining a UCCE program one can find more information here: <http://www.ucceconnect.com/contact.html>.

If you are an administrator at a Catholic elementary or high school interested in partnering with a UCCE program, check out the list of programs and reach out directly to one in your area: <http://www.ucceconnect.com/programs.html>.