

Billiken Teacher Corps aims to make impact

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The College of Education and Public Service at St. Louis University is forming the Billiken Teacher Corps, in which college graduates seeking a master's degree will teach in urban Catholic schools in the archdiocese and live together in a Jesuit mission.

The program combines service and teaching. According to an announcement from SLU, it will help faith-driven college graduates have "a transformative impact on Catholic schools in the St. Louis metro area and live the Jesuit mission of serving a higher purpose for a greater good."

Members of the teacher corps and the schools where they will serve haven't been selected, though the process is underway.

Jesuit Father Christopher Collins, director of SLU's Catholic Studies Program, noted the role Catholic education has played in lifting people out of poverty. "Both the material and spiritual needs of the marginalized are addressed uniquely in the course of Catholic education, and we are confident the Billiken Teacher Corps can address those needs at this challenging point in St. Louis history."

The program seeks to attract graduates who want to care for those most in need. It will offer students:

- Full tuition remission (37 credit hours mostly through intensive summer coursework) for a master's degree in teacher preparation while completing Missouri teaching certification
- A monthly stipend
- Nominal rent for a community living experience at St. John the Baptist Parish in south St. Louis.

Applicants will apply to the program through St. Louis University graduate school admissions and finalists will be interviewed by both the university and St. Louis Archdiocese school administration. The program will start with a summer retreat and coursework, with teachers beginning to teach full time in the fall.

Al Winkelmann, associate superintendent of elementary school administration with the archdiocese's Catholic Education Center, said the center's staff "is pleased to be partnering with St. Louis University on the Billiken Teacher Corps. It is a program that has the potential of providing faith-filled, talented and dedicated individuals for our Catholic school communities."

The Billiken Teacher Corps is similar to a program at the University of Notre Dame.

"We will be able to attract highly talented and motivated candidates from across the country who wish to make a two-year commitment to serve in an urban Catholic school," said John T. James, director of SLU's Institute for Catholic Education. "The candidates benefit by growing as individuals within an intentional faith community, and by completing a master's degree in education with state certification while performing their two years of service."

The elementary students benefit by being taught by talented, motivated and faith-filled young people under the supervision of SLU faculty and staff. "The university benefits by advancing our mission and strengthening the pipeline of Catholic educational opportunities for all by supporting urban Catholic education in the city," James said.

Members of the teacher corps will be assisted in living the Jesuit mission of men and women for others through their work, living in community and spiritual formation.

Some information for this story was provided by St. Louis University.

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