



News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

## **University of St. Thomas welcomes first GRACE cohort**

HOUSTON ( June 17, 2008) – A new group of University of St. Thomas students moved into the UST residence hall on June 5, but this is no ordinary class of incoming students. These are future educators looking for a different approach to graduate education, one which requires a greater commitment, more dedication, and spiritual exploration than a traditional Master’s in Education tract. They are the first cohort of the Gulf Region Academy for Catholic Educators (GRACE), a new graduate program which will train educators for Catholic schools.

Their unique situation has prompted them to become fast friends. Over the next two years, they have committed to live in faith-based community and support each other while they take on the challenge of simultaneously teaching in a Catholic school, completing a Master in Education and obtaining Texas teacher certification.

Cohort members include two UST graduates: Meris Chaumont and Leigh Sherman; two University of Texas graduates: Humberto Carmona and Luc Tran. Sharon Winski just graduated from Creighton University in Omaha, Nebraska. John Bates V currently teaches at Strake Jesuit High School. Bates is participating in GRACE in situ (in place), where he will complete the same sequence of classes, but not live among his fellow students.

Meris Chaumont graduated in May from UST with a degree in theology and a minor in philosophy. She originally planned to apply to ACE, Notre Dame’s version of GRACE. “But being a UST graduate, I really wanted to be in the first cohort of GRACE,” Chaumont said. “I think the community aspect is going to be fun. We are already getting along great. This is going to be an incredible experience. I’ll get the teaching experience while I earn my master’s degree and get the support from my cohorts who are going through the same thing.”

Often described as the “Catholic version of Teach for America,” GRACE is a partnership between UST and the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston. The Archdiocese will provide housing for the students after the group completes their summer classes and moves off the UST campus. As of August, the students will begin paid full-time teaching positions in Catholic schools. As Catholic school teachers, they are eligible to receive discounted University tuition.

Dr. Robert LeBlanc, UST School of Education dean and director of GRACE said the program differs from the typical experience of pursuing a master’s degree in education, because GRACE cohorts are completely immersed in the program, and they benefit from a stronger professional mentoring and spiritual support system.

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GRACE is an integrated program of study and supervised field experience which introduces students to the profession of education. The faith-based community living also offers opportunities for retreats and other spiritual growth activities.

“This partnership between the University of St. Thomas and the Archdiocese shows that both entities are reaching out and inviting young men and women into the ministry of Catholic education,” said LeBlanc. “The critical component in any school is dedicated and well-prepared teachers. By completing the master’s program and certification and all the other components of the program, GRACE will be able to introduce additional highly trained teachers into schools.”

Superintendent of Catholic Schools Sister Kavina Keating, CCVI, echoed the same sentiments, adding that, “These young people bring great energy, enthusiasm and creativity to the schools where they serve,” she said. “I like the comprehensive nature of the GRACE program. It addresses spiritual aspects of teaching as well as academic development. The key is these students will not just be any teachers, they will be distinctively prepared for Catholic schools.”

GRACE is the newest member of the University Consortium for Catholic Education, an alliance of 14 universities which offer similar programs including University of Notre Dame, Boston College, University of Portland, Seton Hall, Loyola Marymount University, Loyola University Chicago, Valparaiso University, Christian Brothers University.

University of St. Thomas, dedicated to educating leaders of faith and character, is a private institution committed to the liberal arts and to the religious, ethical and intellectual tradition of Catholic higher education.

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