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University of Dayton Chancellor Leads International Effort to Establish Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies

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NEWS RELEASE

(Editor's Note: The official announcement of plans to establish the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies will be Tuesday, May 9, at Harvard University's Center for the Study of World Religions. John T. Noonan Jr., jurist and scholar, will give an address, "An Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies: The Need, The Possibilities," at 5 p.m.)

UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON CHANCELLOR LEADS INTERNATIONAL EFFORT TO ESTABLISH INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED CATHOLIC STUDIES

DAYTON, Ohio — More than two dozen of the nation's leading Catholic and Christian scholars are trying to establish a free-standing, fully endowed research institute to conduct scholarly research on Catholicism.

The Rev. James L. Heft, S.M., chancellor and professor of faith and culture at the University of Dayton, is leading an international effort to establish the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies. It will not be affiliated with any of the nation's nearly 240 Catholic colleges or universities, but its research would support curriculum development on all the campuses.

A Catholic foundation in Europe has offered a \$10 million challenge grant. The organizers, whose efforts are supported by the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, are seeking \$60 million to build a residential center in a major urban area and create an endowment to support 20 to 25 fellows annually. The settings have been narrowed down to Boston, Chicago, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Princeton, N.J., and Washington, D.C. Hugh Dempsey, a Greensburg, Pa., businessman who previously raised money to preserve and restore the Vatican's artistic treasures, is leading the fund-raising effort.

Heft, former chair of the board of directors of the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities, is optimistic that the funds can be raised but concedes that the effort is a gamble.

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"This is a real departure for the Catholic community, which has been accustomed to supporting its established, local charities and has often left leadership in building intellectual institutions to religious orders," he said. "But with those orders shrinking in size, they need to be supplemented with creative, new initiatives. We hope that there will be Catholic supporters or other sympathizers who can understand that in a globalizing culture and dot-com world that often shoulders faith aside, Catholicism must be second to none in developing its intellectual resources."

The Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies will not be a policy-oriented "think tank;" rather, it will support basic and path-breaking research. The scholarship could focus on issues ranging from human rights and the social teachings of the Catholic church to bioethics and technology. The center will be modeled after the country's other four major research institutes — the Institute for Advanced Studies in Princeton, N.J.; the Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto; the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington, D.C.; and the National Center for the Humanities in the Research Triangle in North Carolina. For a year, selected professors will reside at the institute, exchange ideas with other scholars and conduct research.

Scholarly research on Catholicism and other religious areas is often given low priority and little support by universities and funding sources, according to Heft.

"I have not met a scholar yet who's not thrilled by the possibility of a center — especially those scholars who want to root their research explicitly in religious soil," he said. "If we don't support distinctive religious scholarship now, I don't know who will do it in the future. We're at a critical point in Catholic higher education in this country. We can't expect religious identity to be carried just by campus ministers and theologians alone. It has to be carried in the heart and the intellect of many of the faculty."

The concept for the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies was shaped over two years by the Commission on Catholic Scholarship, a private, voluntary association of Catholic lay people, clergy and members of religious orders. For more about the institute's goals and objectives, see www.ifacs.com.