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Lalanne in Lansing

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A program that helps train and retain strong Catholic school teachers and places them into under-resourced Catholic schools is expanding into Michigan.

The Lalanne Program, created by the University of Dayton's Center for Catholic Education, will place seven teachers this fall at six Catholic schools in Lansing, Charlotte and Flint, Michigan.

The program is designed to meet the needs of beginning Catholic school teachers and improve their retention in Catholic education. Teachers make a two-year commitment to a Catholic school while living together and pursuing professional and spiritual development.

The Lalanne program's expansion into Michigan is part of a strategic plan to transform Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lansing, said Sean Costello, the diocese's associate superintendent of Catholic schools.

The diocese published *Maintenance to Mission* in December 2010 that cast a vision to make its schools "truly Catholic," Costello said.

"So we started looking for programs that could help us with this mission, programs that share our belief that teaching is not just a profession but is also a ministry," he said. "What I love about the Lalanne program is that you have young men and women who give witness to their faith by giving two years of their lives to the Church. The Lalanne teachers are also ideal for us because the program is really about creating specifically Catholic school teachers."

Carrie Altick, who will teach at Resurrection Catholic School in Lansing, understands this difference, and she is drawn to Catholic schools for their distinctiveness. Raised in Catholic schools, she did her student-teaching in a public school.

"I saw how much easier it is to emphasize character education, service and social justice in a Catholic school," she said. "And I also will have a lot of opportunities to get involved in the Lansing community."

Both Altick and Jason Rader, an education and math double-major who will teach at Powers Catholic High School in Flint, said it was the offer of support that most attracted them to the program.

"I heard a lot from professors and teachers that so many teachers leave the field in the first few years," Rader said. "It's a great opportunity to have community and support from other teachers who are going through the same things."

According to a report from the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, approximately one-third of America's teachers leave the profession sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave during the first five years.

"That first year as a teacher is really about survival," said Jacinta Mergler, Lalanne Program director. "Teachers need support in those early years, and these teachers are mentored and live together with others who are experiencing the same challenges and who can share ideas for solving problems and build community."

The success of the program is in its retention rate. Of the 116 Lalanne graduates, more than 90 percent are still in education, and of those, more than 80 percent are still in Catholic education, Mergler said.

Lalanne staff members visit classrooms twice a year to observe and evaluate teachers, and participants also receive spiritual support, Mergler said. In the summer, participants take classes at the University of Dayton toward their master's degrees.

Three teachers will live in the former rectory of St. Therese of Lisieux Parish in Lansing, and four will live in the former rectory of Blessed Sacrament Parish in Flint. Each participant, considered a volunteer, receives a stipend from the school. Lalanne provides each participant with graduate tuition, summer room and board, and ongoing mentoring and support.

The seven teachers headed to Michigan will comprise the program's fifth and sixth communities, and bring the 2012 Lalanne corps to 29 teachers serving 25 schools. Lalanne's other communities are in Dayton, Cincinnati, Cleveland and Indianapolis.

The Lalanne program began in 1999 and is named for Jean Baptiste Lalanne, S.M., one of the founding members of the Society of Mary, established by Blessed William Joseph Chaminade.

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