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This August in San Antonio, the UD Center for Catholic Education's Lalanne Program opens its fourth community of urban Catholic educators.

The community's four teachers — two of them from UD — will bring the 2008 Lalanne corps to 22 teachers. Lalanne's other communities are in Dayton, Cleveland and Indianapolis.

Lalanne, starting its 10th year this fall, aims to direct strong teachers to under-resourced Catholic schools and improve retention in Catholic education. It appears to be making a difference, said Debra Sanderman, director of Lalanne and a member of its first cohort in 1999. After completing her Lalanne service at Chaminade-Julienne High School in Dayton, she remained there another six years before taking her current post in 2007.

"We have very good retention in Lalanne," Sanderman said, noting a troubling statistic for education: Based on analysis of estimates (1999-2000) from the National Center for Education Statistics, approximately one-third of America's teachers leave teaching sometime during their first three years of teaching, and almost half leave during the first five years (from "No Dream Denied: A Pledge to America's Children," a 2003 report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future).

"That's one of the reasons Lalanne started," said Jacinta Mergler, coordinator of teacher activities in the Center for Catholic Education. She maps Lalanne's strategy: "We have a mentor at the school for each teacher. At night, the teachers grade papers together, and they can talk about what they're going through and share ideas for solving problems."

Lalanne staff members visit classrooms twice a year to observe and evaluate teachers, and participants also receive spiritual support, Sanderman said — fitting, since many Lalanne educators choose Catholic education in response to a calling or a sense of mission. In the summer, participants take classes at UD toward their master's degrees.

"Of our 80 graduates, more than 90 percent are still in education, and of those, half are still in Catholic education."

Having committed to Lalanne, the members of the San Antonio community will teach two years at three San Antonio Catholic schools. After they're done with their first graduate classes at UD this summer, they'll take up residence in the former rectory of a Marianist-led diocesan parish across the street from St. Mary's University. Each participant, considered a volunteer, receives a stipend from the school. Lalanne provides each participant with health care, graduate tuition and lodging.

"San Antonio is an ideal expansion site for the Lalanne Program because of its Marianist connection and resources such as St. Mary's University and the Catholic schools office of San Antonio," said Sanderman, whose goal is to soon add a fifth city and have 30 Lalanne teachers in service each year.

Both of the UD graduates in the San Antonio community are assigned to St. Leo the Great, a grade school. Anita Lukey, a foreign language education graduate with a minor in religious studies, will teach middle-school religion; lay Marianist and Urban Teacher Academy graduate Emily Wagner, whose degree is in early childhood education, will teach second grade.

In order for a Catholic school to qualify for Lalanne teachers, at least 35 percent of its students must qualify for free or reduced-price lunches by federal standards. A school also can qualify if it receives Title I funding, which is earmarked for schools with high percentages of children from low-income families.

The Lalanne Program is named for Father Jean Baptiste Lalanne, S.M., the first disciple of Marianist founder Blessed William Joseph Chaminade.