News



Rosemont was founded as a women's college by the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in 1921. The small Catholic college near Philadelphia will merge with nearby Villanova, the two schools have announced. (Black Catholic Messenger/Rosemont College)

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Rosemont College, a diverse 104-year-old Catholic institution outside Philadelphia, has announced plans to merge with Villanova University after years of financial struggles and declining enrollment.

The two schools announced the news in a joint statement on March 31, calling the move a "true partnership."

"This merger agreement represents a unique and powerful opportunity for our two institutions given our shared commitment to advancing Catholic higher education, our close physical proximity and deep alumni connections," said Fr Peter Donohue, an Augustinian priest who has served as Villanova's president since 2006.

"We are committed to securing the best possible options for our students, faculty and staff and believe this merger with Villanova offers the best opportunity to ensure that the Rosemont College history and legacy endures," Rosemont president Jim Cawley said in the statement.

The schools have said the transition phase will begin in 2027, until which time Rosemont will continue to operate as normal. Students scheduled to graduate after 2028 will have the opportunity to complete their degree at Villanova.

The merger is one of several similar moves in recent years for U.S. Catholic colleges and universities serving diverse populations. They include the closures of Holy Names University in Oakland, California; Cardinal Stritch University in Wisconsin; and the College of St. Rose in Albany, New York.

Rosemont, which serves a majority-minority undergraduate community, has a Black student population of well over 20%. The properties of nearby Cabrini University, a similarly diverse Catholic institution, were purchased by Villanova in 2024 following the school's closure due to financial woes.

Rosemont was founded as a women's college by the Sisters of the Holy Child Jesus in 1921 and became notably diverse in the mid- to late-20th century. The school went co-ed under financial duress in 2009 and has borrowed $7 million from its endowment since 2020, more than 40% of the original total. This came during five

straight years of operating losses dating to 2018, as enrollment fell roughly 18%.

In 2022, the school received a noncompliance warning from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education due to its financial instability. The commission gave the college a July 2023 deadline to right the ship. The warning status was removed in November 2023.

Throughout Rosemont's financial struggle, the school was noted as a top school nationally for social mobility, with more than 60% of its undergraduates receiving grants for financial aid and graduating to become higher earners.

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According to the Philadelphia Inquirer, Rosemont had talked in 2024 with Alvernia University — a Franciscan institution in Reading, Pennsylvania — about a possible partnership. Cawley declined to confirm the discussions or whether a merger was on the table. He did, however, say that the school was seeking to attract more students who could afford to pay full tuition.

Rosemont currently enrolls about 750 students on 58 acres of land that will eventually become Villanova University, Rosemont Campus.

Some 6,700 full-time undergraduate students attend Villanova, according to the university's website. Another 3,100 graduate and law students are enrolled there.

"Rosemont is proud to announce this next chapter, which will build on our decadeslong relationship with Villanova and preserve Rosemont’s mission," Maria Feeley, chair of Rosemont's board of trustees, said in the March 31 statement.

The two schools said the terms of the merger are subject to approval from the MSCHE and government regulators.

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