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A statue of the risen Christ is pictured on the University of Detroit Mercy's McNichols campus

A statue of the risen Christ is pictured on the University of Detroit Mercy's McNichols campus in this undated photo. (OSV News/Detroit Catholic/Valaurian Waller)

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The Society of Jesus — commonly known as the Jesuits — in the United States and Canada will bring together its five current novitiates spread throughout the continent into two new novitiates starting in 2028, with one of the new novitiates to be located in Detroit.

The Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States, which includes five Jesuit provinces in North America, announced the change in a letter sent July 9 to members of the religious community.

According to the letter, which was signed by the leaders of the five North American provinces, the Detroit-based novitiate will be located at Lansing-Reilly Hall, the Jesuit residence on the campus of the University of Detroit Mercy.

In addition to hosting the novices from the Midwest province — which is based in Chicago — the Detroit novitiate will also host novices from the U.S. Eastern Province and the Canada Province.

The other novitiate will be based in Culver City, California, at the current location of the novitiate for the Jesuits' West province, the Novitiate of the Three Companions. Besides hosting novices from the Jesuits West, it will host novices from the U.S. Central and Southern provinces.

The "multi-province" model, as the society's leadership calls it, would "allow us to maintain robust cohorts of novices and provide them with the best formators we could," the provincials said in the letter.

Both novitiates are expected to accommodate up to 30 novices, with the sites ready by summer 2028.

Jesuit Fr. Joseph Daoust, superior of the Detroit Jesuit community, said the rearrangement of novitiates will ensure each location has an adequate number of novices for a proper formation experience, and it will free up other members of the Jesuits for different works in the society.

"Running five novitiates takes an awful lot of Jesuit staff of very good people," Daoust told Detroit Catholic, the news outlet of the Archdiocese of Detroit. "You have to have three or four Jesuits in each of the novitiates, who usually are more senior Jesuits who serve as the formators of the novices. If we could put the novices in only two novitiates rather than five, we would save an awful lot of very valuable manpower for other works of the Society of Jesus."

Daoust added that the number of novices entering each of the five current novitiates fluctuates "quite a bit" from year to year, with anywhere from one to 12 new novices per year.

Consolidation will allow the Jesuits to maintain steady numbers in each of the two new novitiates, including the opportunity to move novices back and forth between novitiates as necessary.

Novitiates host novices for their first two years of religious formation "in the spirituality of St. Ignatius of Loyola," Daoust said.

"It takes two years of formation before they can make permanent vows of poverty, chastity and obedience," he explained. "So the men living here are not technically religious in the full sense; they haven’t taken vows, and they can leave at any time if they want. But they’re here to be trained in order to become vowed Jesuits, members of the Society of Jesus."

Novices go through various Jesuit experiences, including a 30-day silent retreat, apostolic immersion experiences at various Jesuit ministries throughout the country and the world, and extensive study of the Jesuit constitutions and Ignatian spirituality.

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Lansing-Reilly Hall was built in 1926-27 as one of the first buildings on the now-University of Detroit Mercy's McNichols campus to serve as the primary residence for the Detroit Jesuit community.

Among the advantages for moving the novitiate to Detroit, Daoust cited the Jesuits' presence in Detroit — including at the University of Detroit Mercy, University of Detroit Jesuit High School, Loyola High School, Gesu Parish, SS. Peter and Paul (Jesuit) Parish, the Manresa Retreat Center and the Pope Francis Center and Bridge Housing Facility.

"It's a real gift to have all these Jesuit experiences nearby to show the novices what Jesuit ministry is like," Daoust said.

Some slight modifications to Lansing-Reilly Hall will be necessary to house up to 30 novices plus staff on a regular basis, including switching from double to single rooms and minor plumbing and electrical updates to the 100-year-old building. The 18 vowed Jesuits currently living at Lansing-Reilly Hall are making arrangements to relocate to other nearby Jesuit residences.

Moving the novitiate to Detroit also comes as the Society of Jesus prepares to celebrate its 150th anniversary in the city on July 31, the feast of St. Ignatius of Loyola, with a special Mass celebrated by Cardinal Joseph Tobin of Newark, New Jersey, a Detroit native, and Detroit Archbishop Edward Weisenburger.

"I think it's going to make it a much richer experience for the novices in their first two years because it'll be a consistent large community of novices, and even the

interchange between the different provinces is going to be enriching, too," Daoust said.