

Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (<https://www.ncronline.org>)

September 22, 2011 at 11:38am

Diocese gives Wheeling Jesuit \$1.2 million

by Colleen Rowan by Catholic News Service

WHEELING, W.Va. -- Bishop Michael J. Bransfield of Wheeling-Charleston announced a \$1.2 million grant from the diocese to Wheeling Jesuit University to assist with student recruitment in the diocese's seven Catholic high schools and to help facilitate growth in the university's health sciences program.

"Today we gather to celebrate the continued relationship of the Catholic diocese here in West Virginia and the only Catholic institution of higher education in the state, Wheeling Jesuit University," Bishop Bransfield said at a Sept. 19 news conference. "The funds will be used to support students from our seven Catholic high schools as they aspire to attend Wheeling Jesuit and to also assist with planned growth in the health science disciplines at Wheeling Jesuit."

Both are very important initiatives to him, Bishop Bransfield said, because they relate so closely to work started decades ago in the diocese, but most recently emphasized since his installation as bishop in 2005.

Richard Allen Beyer, president of WJU, thanked Bishop Bransfield for the grant and for his wisdom and guidance.

"It truly is a special day for Wheeling Jesuit," Beyer said. "As the bishop mentioned, Catholic higher education and health care in the state of West Virginia are important, and most important to Wheeling Jesuit University. We are grateful for the funds that the bishop has granted to our institution."

Beyer noted the three main themes for uses of the funds, which are significant progress in health science academics quality, execution and growth; marketing and enrollment push for health sciences; and enhancement of health science/research sciences, noting that the university's HEALTHeWV project has 38 clinics in the state and has ongoing research projects on diabetes and obesity.

Wheeling Jesuit's health sciences program includes nursing, respiratory therapy and nuclear medicine,

among others. Beyer said the grant will allow the university to enhance the program and help lead more students from the diocese's Catholic high schools to WJU for degrees in this field.

"We need to take our institution to the next level of excellence," Beyer said, "particularly the investment in academic support and student support as well as in enrollment growth in health sciences and to attract students -- particularly students from the seven Catholic high schools in West Virginia -- into the field of health sciences."

Beyer said that Jesuit education has consistently sought to educate "the whole person" -- intellectually, professionally, psychologically, morally and spiritually. The idea of helping others was the original goal of St. Ignatius Loyola and the early Jesuits. Beyer also noted Bishop Bransfield's 2006 pastoral letter "A Church That Heals" on health and well-being in West Virginia, which challenged all educational institutions to help overcome the challenges to the state's health and health care delivery.

"Catholic education and Catholic health care have been a part of diocesan life in West Virginia for more than a century," Bishop Bransfield said. "It is encouraging for me to see that Wheeling Jesuit University has embraced the opportunity to work with our seven high schools, to provide more opportunities for our families to attend WJU, as well as answering the challenges I set forth in two of my pastoral letters that discuss health in West Virginia."

One of the diocese's mutual relationships in West Virginia is with WJU, Bishop Bransfield said, and it is important for the diocese and the university to work together.

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"Among other shared goals," he said, "is the importance of providing students from our seven diocesan high schools access to the quality educational programs that Wheeling Jesuit offers. So many parents, both Catholic and non-Catholic alike, look to our Catholic school system for outstanding instruction, quality curriculum and a faith-based environment from preschool through high school. It is important for these and all families in West Virginia to have continued access to the world-class opportunities that Wheeling Jesuit provides at the undergraduate and graduate levels, all offered in our finest Catholic tradition."

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