

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

August 1, 2012 at 11:45am

Grant will help nuns in Asia get theology degrees in U.S.

by Monica Clark

The Jesuit School of Theology in Berkeley, Calif., is embarking on a pilot program to give women religious in China, India and Vietnam full scholarships to earn advanced theological degrees at the school thanks to a four-year grant of \$375,000 from the Henry Luce Foundation. The theology school is part of Santa Clara University.

In a press release announcing the grant, Jesuit Fr. Thomas Massaro, dean of the school, said the program will focus on religious sisters "in underserved communities in Asia, where the potential for supporting positive social change is extraordinarily high." The first cohort of three sisters is expected to arrive at the Jesuit School of Theology for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Religious communities in some Asian countries are experiencing significant growth, but there are few venues for their sisters to pursue advanced theological training or spiritual leadership development, school officials said. Those selected to attend JST are expected to return to their countries to become leaders in theological education and social ministries that impact positive social development.

Two faculty members will travel to Asia in January to network with religious communities to assess the educational needs of their members and to identify potential candidates for the scholarships. They will be looking for sisters who have not have an opportunity for theological education outside of Asia and who are qualified to earn their first master's, Master of Divinity or Bachelor of Sacred Theology degree.

A committee of JST personnel and members of the wider community will make the final decision from the pool of qualified applicants, school officials said.

The school is currently raising funds to support additional students to bring the scholarship group to as many as six sisters at a time.

The scholarships will cover room and board and transportation in addition to tuition. Recipients will also receive follow-up support through the worldwide Jesuit network.

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