



**PRESIDENT'S
COMMENTARY**

God's work

SOME SAW AN EYESORE. SISTER ANGELA ANN Zukowski, M.H.S.H., saw the future.

In the early 1980s, on the cusp of the information technology revolution, a huge satellite dish — the brainchild of Sister Angela Ann — was installed in a campus parking lot to receive religious programming from the Catholic Telecommunications Network of America.

This satellite dish stood as a symbol of faith — the belief that technology could be harnessed to share the gospel message.

In those pioneering days, Sister Angela Ann copied CTNA programs and drove the video cassettes to regional cable stations. She co-produced and hosted video teleconferences for CTNA and then, with the advent of the Internet, ventured into distance learning with the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation. VLCFF has grown to become the premier provider of e-learning to the global Catholic Church.

And talk about impact. In its two decades, the VLCFF has delivered 137 courses to nearly 60,000 adult learners in English, Spanish and Arabic in 88 dioceses in 77 countries on six continents (see story, Page 12). It's grown largely by word of mouth, but its flexible, 24-7 faith formation classes fulfill a need in dioceses, from the Diocese of Anchorage, Alaska, to the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Arabia.

"We had our finger on the pulse and created a new way of being a Church in a digital milieu," says Sister Angela Ann, who leads UD's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives with boundless energy and vision. "It's a ministry. It's God's work."

This is what our Catholic, Marianist university is all about. We serve the Catholic Church and the human community to respond to the needs of our times. As the VLCFF celebrates its 20th anniversary, I found myself pausing to reflect on a few of the myriad ways we're faithful to our religious mission.

We strive to form people of faith as we educate the next generation of theologians and lay leaders. Through the Forum for Young Catechetical Learners, students give up their Saturdays to develop the foundation to teach religion classes. Through



Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, M.H.S.H., has earned recognition as a global champion of Catholic education.

the Lalanne program, faith-filled teachers learn to serve in parochial schools as they live together in community and earn their master's degrees. In a field with a high turnover rate for young teachers, a remarkable 89 percent of Lalanne's 200 graduates are still teaching, mostly in Catholic schools.

We strive to be a prophetic voice — whether it's our faculty and staff hosting a listening session on racism in collaboration with the Archdiocese of Cincinnati or our students tackling migration through stories of tragedy, courage and hope.

We strive to interpret the signs of the times and respond with compassion and faith. Through our Empowering Children with Hope and Opportunity program, counselors and mental health professionals are equipping students in urban Catholic classrooms with skills in resiliency, empathy, problem solving and peacemaking.

This work is more than a reflection of our mission as an engaged Catholic university. It's God's work.

ERIC F. SPINA
President, University of Dayton

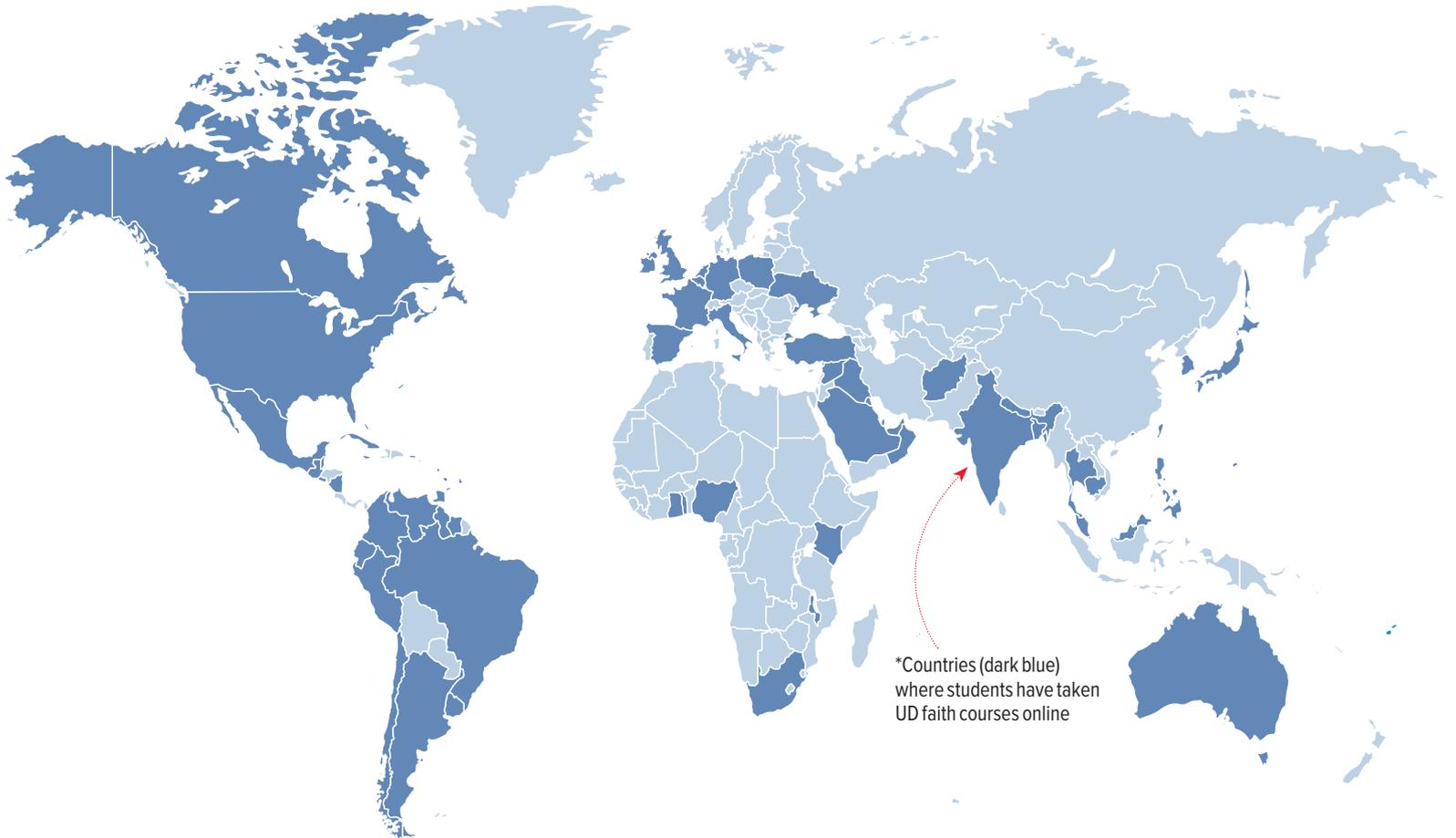


NEWSWORTHY

VIRTUAL LEARNING COMMUNITY FOR FAITH FORMATION

FAITH FLOURISHES

⇒ Modern technology supports a traditional mission



SISTER ANGELA ANN ZUKOWSKI '74 WAS SENT IN 1971 by her order, the Mission Helpers of the Sacred Heart, to Dayton to offer catechetical adult faith formation in parishes and Catholic schools. She thought her stay would be for a year. But the journey took her also to the University of Dayton. She's still at Dayton, and she's still doing adult faith formation. Among the purposes of the University of Dayton are "fostering the Marianist charism of education and formation in faith." Fifty

years ago, UD and the Society of Mary took steps formalizing that commitment to faith; one led to the establishment of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, which Zukowski directs as well as serving as professor of religious studies. Among the institute's initiatives is the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation, which in 2000 began, in cooperation with Catholic dioceses, offering online courses.

In 1970, the Marianist Foundation had established the Center for Christian Renewal at UD. "Initially, the Marianists gave grants



Zukowski in the broadcast studio, 1980s

TIMELINE

Commitment to Catholic continuing education, 50 years and counting ⇒

1970

Center for Christian Renewal is founded by the Marianist Foundation

1978

Sister Angela Ann Zukowski joins UD to enhance Catholic communications

1982

UD installs a satellite dish to download programs from the Catholic Telecommunications Network

1995

UD founds Institute for Pastoral Initiatives to consolidate centers and create partnerships with the Church

for specific projects,” Zukowski said. Under the leadership of Brother Raymond L. Fitz, S.M. ’64, later president of UD, the Center for Christian Renewal gave continuity to these efforts, Zukowski said, by creating a number of mission-related offices — for responsible development, social justice, and outreach to the local community and the Church.

These missions continue today, as Zukowski and other faculty members and administrators of programs directly dealing with the Church meet regularly with Father James Fitz, S.M. ’68, vice president for mission and rector.

They discuss what Brother Fitz saw a half century ago as the purposes of the then fledgling Center for Christian Renewal — service and dialogue.

Those purposes are as alive today as they were in 1978 when Brother Fitz wrote about “programs that give an active, critical and healing presence of the Catholic Christian tradition within the struggles and searchings of the Church in the modern world.”

He wrote also of the University listening and learning from other communities within the Church and then bringing “the resources of a reflected Christian tradition and of contemporary knowledge to the struggles of the Church and the world.”

20 YEARS OF VIRTUAL FAITH FORMATION

7,225
courses

taught in
3
languages

completed by
59,088
students

in
77
countries

in partnership with
88
dioceses and the
University of Dayton Alumni Association

In their words ⇒ Why they chose VLCFF



⇒ “For us who live in an Islamic country, knowledge of the faith is critical to understanding and dealing with other religions. The gradual process of learning about the faith has not just helped me to grow spiritually but has increased my thirst for understanding Christianity and encouraging others to do the same.”

—**Perviz De Souza**
Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates



⇒ “Because I live in the sister isle of Tobago, it’s not as easy for me to participate in programmes on Trinidad. Online study is the best solution for me. VLCFF is a great mechanism for changing lives by deepening spirituality and helping people move closer to our God-given purpose.”

—**Gabrielle Fernando-Garnier**
Mount Pleasant, Tobago



⇒ “The role of being a facilitator for VLCFF allows me to see students growing in their faith and becoming Christians well informed in faith. It is a very humbling experience to lead them in a faith journey. I will always keep trusting in the power of the Holy Spirit.”

—**Ignatius Mvula**
Karonga, Malawi



⇒ “In May 2018, I took my first course, Introduction to the Catholic Faith. VLCFF always gives wonderful and clear information. I have deepened my knowledge and, within the parish, I have put into practice what I have learned and share my new knowledge with the people of my community.”

—**Clara Luz Ramirez de Mancía**
San Cristobal, Cuscatlán, El Salvador

1997

IPI establishes the Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation

2000

VLCFF begins online courses and diocesan partnerships

2001

Zukowski receives *Pro Ecclesia et Pontifice* Medal from Pope John Paul II in Rome

2006

VLCFF adds Spanish language e-courses and a Hispanic forum

2008

VLCFF partners with 25 dioceses

2012

Zukowski receives national Catholic lay leadership award

2019

VLCFF delivers first course in Arabic; Zukowski receives award for outstanding contributions to Catholic intellectual life from the Association of Catholic Colleges and Universities

2020

VLCFF serves more than 88 diocesan partners