

## Education

# University-sponsored e-learning program reaches new heights in 2020



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By [Jacob Fisher](#) – Staff Reporter, Dayton Business Journal

Following the cataclysmic growth of e-learning this year, an online religious education initiative sponsored by the University of Dayton is seeing greater interest than ever before.

The Virtual Learning Community for Faith Formation (VLCFF) – an adult religious education and faith formation program sponsored by UD's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives – experienced record enrollment this year, posting 7,568 registrations across its portfolio of more than 100 courses.

VLCFF, the brainchild of Sister [Angela Ann Zukowski](#), comes from humble beginnings. The program began 20 years ago with just a few partner dioceses and a handful of distance-learning courses.

Since then, it has grown to encompass tens of thousands of participants in 77 countries, with courses taught in three languages in partnership with 88 dioceses.

In 2020, as the Covid-19 pandemic prompted a spike in virtual learning, VLCFF's popularity grew even more.

"There are many people who have often pondered engaging in ongoing education or faith formation, but (indicated) they did not have the time," Zukowski said in a statement. "The fact that people are confined to their homes with a new perspective of engagement and activities with their life has opened new portals."

VLCFF is no stranger to the digital solutions that have emerged during the pandemic. Five years ago, the UD-sponsored program began using Zoom videoconferencing technology to host online webinars.

Familiarity with that platform came in handy this year, enabling VLCFF to leverage Zoom for its classes.

"For Sister Angela Ann and her team, there was no rethinking what teaching and learning should look like," [Eric Spina](#), president of UD, said in a statement. "With a successful online model already in place, they were poised to reach even more ministers and parish leaders with faith formation classes."



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A bulk of VLCFF's enrollment growth stems from courses taught in foreign languages. Courses taught in Spanish, for example, posted more than 1,000 registrations this year.

The program has also grown by expanding its course portfolio. At the early onset of the pandemic, VLCFF rolled out a free, three-week class called "Hope in Times of Crisis" that has since been completed by more than 300 people. It was the second-most-popular course in 2020.

As remote learning becomes more commonplace, VLCFF plans to continue enhancing its e-learning suite to forge new partnerships and attract new students, Zukowski said.

"We will discover new online learning styles, methodologies, and creative learning in the immediate future," she said. "We have only begun the journey into the 21st century."

Sponsored by UD's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives, VLCFF mobilizes university resources and partners with dioceses around the world to provide courses and pastoral needs that fit within the context of contemporary culture. Since its inception, the program has hosted more than 7,200 classes for more than 59,000 participants.