

together

INTERCONGREGATIONAL | INTERCULTURAL | INTERGENERATIONAL



TOGETHER

WE ARE PEOPLE OF HOPE

With the “turning of the year” to 2021, most everyone seems to be in a hope-filled disposition. Can you count the times you have heard “I’m so glad to have 2020 behind me,” or “The vaccine will be coming soon,” or “Things have got to be better than last year?”

Yes. We are indeed a people of *hope*!

Participants in *Together* can be heard uttering some of these same statements. In particular, *Together* participants eagerly anticipate the Program returning to CTU’s campus for the Fall Term of 2021. While it is too early for CTU to make any official statement about the return to face-to-face courses, one can feel such anticipation in the 5400 block of South Cornell Ave.

In this and the next two *Together* Newsletters, you will hear from current participants. Nicole Varnerin, SND, writes in this issue. Nicole was accepted into CTU and *Together* last spring and had planned to move from Cleveland to Chicago for the Fall Term. Like countless other university students across the United States and other countries, Nicole’s plans changed drastically with the Coronavirus pandemic. I invite you to read Nicole’s column to understand how *Together* helped her engage in her classes at CTU and establish community with women in Riverside, MI, and Chicago, IL.

On February 4, two of the *Together* women, Nicole and Jane, participated in our virtual information session. We hope that they, along with Haerok Na, will join our future sessions. Also present for these sessions are Herb Quinde, Director of Enrollment at CTU, and Ryan Hoffmann, Associate Director of the Religious Formation Conference.

The February 4 Zoom provided attendees with first-hand information about how the *Together* Program has helped them stay engaged in their studies and connected to their virtual community. You can view this session by clicking <https://vimeo.com/508131612/0bc460c8b4>

As always, don’t hesitate to reach out with questions about the program or other ways I can help communities discern if this is a good fit for members. While we’re virtual these days, we’re still *together*.

Maribeth Howell, OP
Together Program Coordinator

Application materials for the fall 2021 cohort are available online! Visit the *Together* website:

WWW.TOGETHER-FORMATION.COM

**Miss the February information session?
Register for the next one in April!
Click on the *Together* website link above.**

TOGETHER NEWSLETTER | WINTER 2021 EDITION

TOGETHER

NETWORK, SUPPORT, & CONNECTION

About a year ago, I took the plunge and applied to the Pastoral Studies program at CTU. I anticipated moving to Chicago and living in community with other students, attending classes across the street. The *Together* Program was a big part of my decision to attend CTU. Community is very important to me, and I knew I wanted to live in an intentional, supportive community while studying. *Together* provided that opportunity. Comparing my expectations of a year ago to the reality that was my first semester is somewhat comical. As time went on through May, June, and August, all I had were more questions and more opportunities to let go of my plans. *Together* staff made that uncertainty more bearable. I don't think a week went by this summer where I did not email the program director with more questions.

When CTU announced that it would be conducting classes in a hybrid model, *Together* staff connected me to the right people at CTU to organize my quarantine and living situations. I already felt like a part of the CTU family, even before ever setting foot in the building. When Fr. Mark Francis, then President of CTU, announced that all Fall courses would be conducted online, plans changed once again. Instead

I would not have survived 2020 without *Together*.

of living in community on campus and eating meals with the CTU community, I found myself remaining in Cleveland and attending class through my webcam. Knowing that the *Together* Program would also meet virtually made the transition easier. Throughout the semester we met once a week for a speaker or prayer and faith sharing and another time to build community among the participants. My relationships with the other *Together* participants and our twice weekly meetings were essential to surviving this highly unusual semester. When I was having trouble being in Chicago mentally and Cleveland physically, another participant felt the same way. When I was

looking for advice on classes for the spring, my *Together* community was ready to help. When I felt nervous about participating in CTU virtual events, I could count on at least one of the other participants to also be there.



My *Together* community also helped me to make the decision to switch from a Masters degree in Pastoral Studies to a Masters in Divinity. Early on in the semester we had a meeting with Sr. Barbara Reid which planted a seed. She talked about women religious obtaining MDiv degrees as a matter of justice. Because we often work closely with priests who have MDiv degrees, it is important for us to be as qualified. This spoke to my internal feminist, who before entering religious life studied electrical engineering, a highly male-dominated field. After several months of study, I realized that I loved studying theology, and my mind wandered to that conversation with Sr. Barbara. It might not be so bad to spend another year in school. I floated the

idea past the other *Together* participants, and they encouraged me to talk to a former *Together* participant who had also decided to move from the MA to the MDiv degree. After a conversation with her, I knew that I was called to pursue an MDiv at CTU!

The *Together* Program has been so much more than a community. Together is a network, a support system, and a connection to CTU when I am not physically present. I would not have survived 2020 without *Together*.



Mariane Fahlman, OP explores *Healthy Ways of Dealing with Stress* with Together participants on November 5th.

Joye Gros, OP covered *Theological Reflection* with the group on November 19th.



Mary Pat Garvin, RSM talked with participants about *How to Deal with Conflict in Community* on January 14th.

Sandra Schneiders, IHM provides an *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* on February 11th.



TOGETHER PROGRAM ANNOUNCES TWO FORMATS FOR FALL OF 2021

RESIDENTIAL FORMAT

- Participants will live in community while engaging in full-time study at CTU
- Participants will meet for weekly ongoing formation sessions with *Together* Distance students via Zoom on Thursday evenings

DISTANCE FORMAT

- Participants will live outside of a *Together* residence and engage in full-time study through CTU's online or face-to-face courses
- Participants will meet for weekly ongoing formation sessions with *Together* residential students via Zoom on Thursday evenings
- Participants will meet weekly at a mutually agreed upon time with other *Together* distance students, for the purpose of building a supportive community of learners

The *Together* program is co-sponsored by the Religious Formation Conference and Catholic Theological Union. Currently, the program is supported by a grant from GHR. Funding for this program will expire in the summer of 2021, at which time a nominal fee will be charged for both residential and distance *Together* Participants.

For additional information about the *Together* program, please contact Maribeth Howell, OP, Coordinator of the *Together* Program at mhowell@relforcon.org or 313-319-1236.

Before applying to the *Together* Program, students must be accepted into a program of full-time study at CTU. All applications for financial aid must be submitted by March 1, 2021. Contact Herb Quinde for information regarding financial aid at hquinde@ctu.edu or Text "CTU" to 58052 to learn more.



At left: former participant, Tracy Kimme, SC gives a "thumbs up" outside her door in the *Together* community.

**Collaborative partnership sponsored by Catholic Theological Union
and the Religious Formation Conference**



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Questions? Please reach out.

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