

The Good News

300 South George Street, Charles Town, WV 25414 ♦ 1-888-254-4CDU ♦ www.cdu.edu

The mission of Catholic Distance University is to communicate the mind and heart of the Church in a digital world. Using distance education, the university educates teachers and learners worldwide in Catholic theology, the liberal arts, and faith development for the growth of faith, ecclesial service, and leadership for the New Evangelization.

A Publication for CDU Donors & Friends

March 2021

From Our President



Who among us did not celebrate the end of 2020? Even if we enjoyed good health and had not lost loved ones and friends to COVID, we all welcomed the new year with great hope for the end of the pandemic and a return to normal life. We are still very hopeful as we begin the holy season of Lent.

While the CDU headquarters in Charles Town is generally quiet these days with only our IT director, director of operations, and local staff onsite, most of us are working from home. Our university chapel remains quiet with the red sanctuary light reminding us that our Lord Jesus is present and watching over CDU even with very few staff there to offer worship and love.

The work of CDU continues, and the staff are at home with technology and daily meetings via Zoom and Google Meet. The Board of Trustees is preparing for transition as we welcome Mr. Stephen Pryor as Board chair on March 15, 2021. The staff leadership is finishing an implementation plan for the first year of our new 3.5 year strategic plan, which focuses on growth and financial sustainability, institutional effectiveness, and program development. With new staff and procedures in admissions, we have seen 11% growth in student enrollment in the last few terms. The implementation of Populi, the new cloud-based student information system, is moving forward and will be ready to launch by the end of June.

CDU's partnership with the International Federation of Catholic Universities (IFCU) will continue as CDU teaches international faculty to excel in distance education and online pedagogy. Faculty at universities in the Philippines will take the next training module in April. Two additional modules are planned for universities in other global regions in 2021.

With so much energy and hard work devoted to accreditors in 2020, we now await the decisions of their accrediting boards in late February and early March. The Student Life Center that is home to our co-curricular programs has added significant activities and opportunities for student interaction. One of our students' favorite instructors, Alissa Thorell, a moral theologian, serves as faculty advisor to Student Life. She works with Mary McKay, director of Student Life, to oversee the programs and assessment.

I could not mention Student Life without thanking George Muñoz for stepping up as alumni president. He is a recent MA graduate who is planning a great event for alumni and the university. Stay tuned! We are also reaching out to alumni to help support our fundraising goals.

Finally, the new year has also reminded us that we live in the shadow of the cross. Our longtime board leader, brilliant strategic thinker, benefactor, friend, nuclear physicist, business executive, and cheerleader for this university and its mission, Dr. Joseph V. Braddock, stepped into eternity very quietly on Saturday, February 6. We keep bombarding him with intentions and favors, and we have great confidence that he continues to work overtime to ensure the success of this unique university.

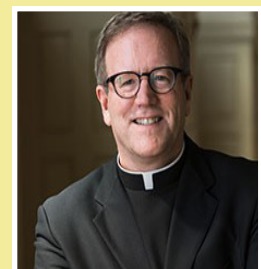
May the entire CDU community encounter our Lord in life-changing ways in this Lenten journey of 2021.



Dr. Marianne Evans Mount

Gala 2021

Despite the challenges of 2020, the CDU community is growing. During the pandemic, friends, donors, students, and alumni have reconnected to support and pray for CDU. We are grateful and eager to see you again. The 2021 Gala is planned for November 18th, and we look forward to honoring Bishop Robert Barron with the Founder's Award. Mark your calendars, because it will be a celebration that you will not want to miss.



Assessment Reveals Growth and Results

Institutional outcomes are regularly assessed using multiple strategies that include both direct and indirect measures of student learning. The assessment program indicates that CDU's degree programs produce their intended outcomes, are educationally effective, and produce satisfied students who are well-equipped to teach the Faith. The results of the latest assessment are a testament to our mission to communicate the mind and heart of the Church in a digital world using distance education.

MA (Theology) students who graduated in 2020 achieved an average GPA of 3.90 over an average of 4.9 years. Eighty-nine percent of those who graduated from 2014–2020 are currently in Church-related ministries. For the 2019–2020 terms, students successfully achieved each MA program outcome, and the retention rate was 93.3% for the MA (Theology) degree program and 100% for the MA in Theology and Educational Ministry degree program.

The 2020 graduates of the BA in Theology degree completion program fulfilled program requirements with an average GPA of 3.61 over an average of 3.8 years. Most students who enroll in the program either are seeking a Church-related ministry or desire to study the Faith more deeply to participate in volunteer ministries in their parishes in the future. Of the 2016–2020 alumni, 80% of undergraduate alumni are working or volunteering in Church-related ministries. For the 2019–2020 academic terms, students successfully achieved each BA program outcome, and the retention rate was 87.2%.

In 2020, those who received the Associate of Arts degree

in Liberal Arts with a concentration in Catholic Studies were awarded the degree with an average GPA of 3.76 over an average of 3.8 years. For the 2019–2020 terms, students successfully achieved each AA program outcome, and the retention rate was 84.4%.

One-hundred percent of students completing end of program surveys in 2020 stated that they had achieved their learning goals, would recommend CDU to another, expressed satisfaction with their studies, and indicated that they are equipped to teach the Faith.

From fall 2019 to December 2020, the number of program students increased 11.2%. Beyond the numbers, outcome must ultimately be measured in the way that alumni use their gifts and talents in service to the Church—whether that be formally or informally. Perhaps the most significant effectiveness statement is that CDU has been an accredited distance education institution for more than 37 years, being the first to offer online Catholic education in the United States, and is committed to educating students in Catholic theology, catechetics, and evangelization for years to come.



New Course Offered in Conversational Spanish for Ministry



Dr. Francesca Mirti

Conversational Spanish for Ministry, taught by new faculty member Dr. Francesca Mirti, provides the foundations necessary to converse in Spanish and is designed for all students who wish to build their Spanish conversational skills and especially those involved in ministry to Hispanic communities. A variety of cultural texts will be used for conversational practice, and active participation in dialogues, conversations, presentations, and interviews will prepare students for effective pastoral work. Because this course is conversational, it requires participation in weekly live meetings via webconference.

Dr. Mirti is an educator and researcher who holds a doctorate

from Stony Brook University and has 10 years of experience teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. She is currently in Spain completing a Master's degree for American educators of Spanish while collaborating with the Serafic Province of the Immaculate Conception of the Italian Capuchins to transcribe and translate from Spanish the pastoral letters of Mons. Eusebio S. Mari, Apostolic Vicar in Colombia from 1954 to 1965.

Dr. Mirti has taught foreign languages at Baylor University, Stanford University, Vanderbilt University, Penn State, the Colorado College, The College of New Jersey, The University of Texas at Austin, and Texas Tech University. Spread the word about this exciting new course and join us in welcoming Dr. Mirti to the CDU team.

Two Online Apologetics Seminars for just \$199

CDU's online seminars can be completed at your convenience during the dates posted. While you can enroll in the seminar of your choice, why not make a commitment to your Faith and enjoy both? Do not miss this special \$199 package offer. Enroll today at <https://cdu.edu/online-seminars/>.

Why Do We Need the Church? (July 19 - August 9, 2021)

Over half of American adults do not regularly attend church and only 20% of Catholics born after 1970 attend Mass. This seminar will equip you to credibly, convincingly, and compellingly explain and share why we need the Church, the sacraments, and the Mass. This seminar is taught by Steven R. Hemler, president of the Catholic Apologetics Institute of North America (CAINA)



and author of *The Reality of God: The Layman's Guide to Scientific Evidence for the Creator* and *Search No More: The Keys to Truth and Happiness*.

The Art of Evangelization through Apologetics (October 4 - October 25, 2021)

Learn to share the good news of Jesus Christ. While articulating the truth of the Gospel, we need to start a conversation, build trust, serve, and then propose who Jesus Christ is. To quote St. Bernadette, "Our job is to inform, not convince."

This seminar is taught by Allan F. Wright, an author, professor, and international speaker who has a passion for scripture and the Catholic faith and is a popular guest on Relevant Radio and also has a show on Radio Maria.

Prison Ministry

Incarcerated Catholics are not immune to the impact of COVID-19; the pandemic has only increased their isolation. Despite the challenges, many of our brothers and sisters behind bars are using their time to learn and grow in their faith. CDU's enrollments in free digital courses for the incarcerated have grown 110% in 2020 to 345,000 free courses taken. CDU now offers 30 courses in English, seven in Spanish, and three certificate

programs to the incarcerated. We are grateful for your support of the underserved.



Theological Librarian Publishes Article about Online Library as Engagement Booms

Theological Librarian Sister Rebecca Abel recently published an article, "Online Library at Catholic Distance University," in *Theological Librarianship*, an open access journal for peer-reviewed articles, essays, and reviews on subjects at the intersection of librarianship and religious and theological studies.

Sister Rebecca has been CDU's theological librarian since 2015. She is a Sister of St. Benedict based in Ferdinand, Indiana. Her order lives faithfully the 1,500-year-old tradition of Benedictine life: they seek God together, pray daily, and share their lives and ministries with others. Sister Rebecca served as librarian of the North American College in Rome, Italy, for 17 years and earned her B.S. in Education from St. Benedict



College and an M.L.S. from Ball State University.

Under Sister Rebecca's direction, the online library has significantly grown its collection to provide ample online resources and e-books in a user-friendly format. Library requests doubled in 2020, and library usage has increased to nearly 70,000 engagements per year. Sister Rebecca also assists students and faculty with research, locates resources, and provides guidance to students in writing. The library added Project Muse this year, which is an online database of peer-reviewed academic journals and electronic books.

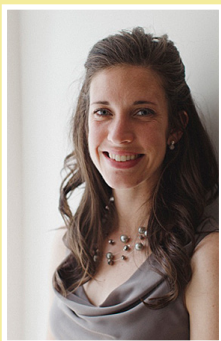
Read Sister Rebecca's article here: <https://serials.atla.com/theolib/article/view/1931/2202>.

Student Information System Upgrade Is Underway

Over the last few years, CDU has moved most of its core technology solutions to the cloud because cloud computing offers better resilience, flexibility, scalability, and cost savings. Before Fall registration opens, CDU plans to migrate its Student Information System (SIS) to Populi, a modern, cloud-based SIS designed for higher education that offers a user-friendly interface, a robust reporting tool, and built-in integration with CDU's email, calendar, and Canvas Learning Management System. The significant cost savings will allow us to further invest in technology resources that will help us better serve our students.

Thorell Named Faculty Advisor for Student Life

Professor Alissa Thorell has been named faculty advisor for Student Life, a role in which she will act as a liaison between



Professor Alissa Thorell

Student Life and the Faculty and participate in both Faculty meetings and Student Life cohorts. As faculty advisor to the Student Life Co-Curricular Programs, Dr. Thorell will respond to questions, engage in the Theological Conversations discussion board, and host a weekly video office hour. Working with the Student Life team, she will evaluate student involvement, address the needs of students and faculty, and assist with planning additional co-curricular offerings for students such as colloquia, symposiums, and more. Dr. Thorell is a vibrant leader who will continue to innovate and improve CDU's online engagement.

Have You Visited cdu.edu Lately?

Learn why students choose CDU by viewing the campus tour video on our website at <https://cdu.edu/why-choose-cdu/>. We hope you will share the link with others who have a heart for God and a passion to learn.

While we were unable to honor graduates at the annual Academic Convocation Mass due to the pandemic, we are pleased to celebrate the Class of 2020 with a slideshow presentation. Enjoy it at <https://cdu.edu/2020-graduates/>.

Enjoy a presentation about *The Genealogical Adam and Eve*



Dr. Joshua Swamidass

CDU hosted Dr. Joshua Swamidass, a computational biologist at WUSTL, to present his book "The Genealogical Adam and Eve" to the CDU faculty. The book argues that it is quite consistent with human genealogy that all people alive in the world today or even in first century Palestine descended from a single couple. Swamidass asks provocatively if and how the Church can present that story alongside the conventional biological story of human evolution that took place over millions of years. Responses to his book were delivered by two members of the CDU faculty: Dr. Marcellino D'Ambrosio and Dr. Cathy Gara.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X-2AKeVZq-SU&t=344s>