

2-7-2000

## Church Education in the New Age of Cyberspace to be at the Heart of the New UD Colloquium

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### Recommended Citation

"Church Education in the New Age of Cyberspace to be at the Heart of the New UD Colloquium" (2000). *News Releases*. 8815.  
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UNIVERSITY OF DAYTON



Feb. 7, 2000  
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**NEWS RELEASE**

**CHURCH EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF CYBERSPACE  
 TO BE AT THE HEART OF NEW UD COLLOQUIUM**

DAYTON, Ohio — The Institute for Pastoral Initiatives at the University of Dayton has received \$19,500 in financial support from Our Sunday Visitor for a distance-education colloquium that organizers say will act as a model for future collaboration between dioceses and universities.

“Going the Distance: Theology, Religious Education and Interactive Distance Education” is slated for Nov. 3 and 4. Sessions will be held on campus and at Bergamo Center, 4400 Shakertown Road.

It’s intended to be a first step in establishing a network of Catholic colleges and universities to explore innovative approaches for using electronic communication, such as the Internet, digital telephone services and video-conferencing, in religious education, said Sister Angela Ann Zukowski, M.H. S.H., the coordinator of the colloquium.

“Distance education is no longer a fad,” said Zukowski, director of the Institute for Pastoral Initiatives and an associate professor of religious studies at UD. “It has become a significant reality that is shaping education, culture and our world every day.”

The institute has been tracking courses in theology, religious studies, catechetics and adult religious education being offered on the Internet and live through video-conferencing. Research shows that few dioceses are using the Internet for religious education, but a growing number of Catholic colleges and universities are beginning to explore the potential, she said.

“We hope the colloquium will contribute to the evolution of interactive adult distance

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education in theology and religious education as well as find ways for Catholic institutions of higher learning to work collaboratively together and with dioceses to shift the paradigm for alternative teaching and learning in a new media age," Zukowski said. One goal is to provide practical resources for diocesan and parish leaders to form partnerships for distance education, perhaps by using the resources of nearby Catholic colleges and universities.

The Institute for Pastoral Initiatives sponsors several long-distance learning initiatives, including a *Catechist Magazine*-based course for catechism teachers in remote locations and interactive religious studies courses taught by Zukowski at UD for students located at Chaminade University in Hawaii. Organizers are now working with dioceses in Ohio, Indiana and Kentucky to establish a virtual learning community for religious education and faith formation.

Twelve to 15 pioneers in distance education for the mission of the church will participate in the November colloquium, and papers from each of them will be published in the proceedings.

Current factors in the Catholic Church point to the need to take advantage of new communication technologies, Zukowski said. "Our goal is to integrate interactive distance education as a means of supporting the local ministry of the church," she said. "The downsizing in diocesan staff across the country demands that alternative means for offering adult religious education be available to our catechists and adult religious learners in the parish. The lifestyles of people today demand that alternative times and places be defined for engaging in Catholic higher education as well."

Our Sunday Visitor, which has been working with the University of Dayton for the past 10 years in the training of religious education teachers and lay leaders, publishes periodicals, books, programs, and offertory envelopes to communicate the Gospel, support the teachings of the church and encourage Catholic teaching, spirituality and moral perspective.