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Cor Unum Starting to Reap a Harvest

By [Larry Hanson](#) | Sep 24, 2021 | [College Corner](#), [Featured](#), [Local](#)



Taylor Baar (left), Cindi Petre, Jennifer Frank and Reine Assana were part of the Cor Unum program's second cohort. (Photo courtesy of Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology)

The Cor Unum program at Sacred Heart Seminary and School of Theology (SHSST) starts by challenging its graduate students with a simple premise.

"How do you evangelize and heal a fractured world?"

Now in its fifth year, it has formed more than 50 students who are actively evangelizing and healing our fractured world, starting here in the Milwaukee area.

Graduates from the first 12-student cohort are involved in prison ministry, religious pilgrimages, Catholic formation, chaplaincy and social work, and parish ministry. Other graduates include a high school campus

minister, food pantry director, spiritual director, health care providers, a religious podcaster, teachers, coaches and attorneys. All graduates share a common bond in that they want to better share the faith with family, friends and co-workers.

Susan McNeil, the director of lay ministry for the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, has encouraged many of those who serve on parish staffs to join the Cor Unum program.

"The Cor Unum program has been life-changing for the students and graduates," McNeil said. "It has helped them come to understand more deeply their personal call from God, and their personal mission to go out into the world. The students and graduates of the program continue to transform our parish communities and other apostolates in the archdiocese."

Cor Unum was developed when SHSST was looking at how programs needed to be updated in 2016, when the board of directors asked administrators and faculty for a new program that would revitalize lay education. A group of faculty and administrators then developed the program.

The program is built around four major Vatican II documents: *Dei Verbum*, *Lumen Gentium*, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* and *Gaudium et Spes*. These move the students through scripture, fundamental theology, Christology, moral and sacramental theology, faith and culture, and Catholic Social Teaching. The program's aim is that students do not just learn the material but put it into use. Material is related to real world pastoral situations. Students reflect on what they are learning, the fractures they see in the world, and how they can go out and heal these fractures after graduation, be it in ministry, secular careers, or family or parish life.

The program also asks each student to identify a fracture in the world and think about ways to heal that fracture. Personal discernment is pursued by finding one's own Powerful Question, which is each person's unique calling in God's plan.

Twelve students form a cohort that journeys together on Monday evenings and one Apostolic Saturday per month, which include pastoral and spiritual enrichment. Retreats, Masses, Adoration and reconciliation are woven throughout the program. An archeological dig and pilgrimage to the Holy Land is a summer study option. Many students say walking in Jesus' footsteps and digging in the dirt that fell from his sandals is transformative. They never hear scripture in the same way.

Graduates of the program have found the course can alter their view of their future plans.

Dan Sass, a pharmacist who is a graduate of the program, said his path was shaken when he started giving COVID-19 vaccination shots. After giving just three shots, he realized he wanted to work with the elderly.

"These children of God are isolated, lonely, and many cases are forgotten due to COVID for a variety of reasons," Sass said. "They are suffering greatly. Again, the Holy Spirit directed me to do something within my power to do all I can. Due to COVID restrictions, progress has been slow. My hope is to soon be more involved in the nursing home population. The Cor Unum program gave me both the tools and the inspiration to use the time I have left to work in this vineyard."

Taylor Baar, a Cor Unum alum, is a director of faith formation for youth and family ministry and said the program helped him grow intellectually and spiritually.

"I felt better equipped to share the faith with parents and teens at the parish where I was a youth minister," Baar said. "I appreciated how the professors helped to relate what we were learning to our ministries. I also valued the cohort model, because I grew so close to the other people in my group. We are all still connected and praying for each other.

Terri Engsberg is a graduate of the program who is the manager of adult discipleship at Holy Apostles Parish. She is also now an adjunct professor at SHSST leading the next group of Cor Unum students.

"Cor Unum helped me to see that God has a plan for each of us, and we are called to listen, pray and follow that call," Engsberg said.

A recent donor, impressed with the support Cor Unum gives to lay ministers, recently stepped forward and donated \$100,000 for a scholarship endowment fund for the program. SHSST hopes other people feel called to help grow that fund, so more people in the Milwaukee area can answer God's call in their own lives by donating.

For more information about the program, contact Cor Unum alum (and now SHSST employee) Monica Misey at 414-858-4654 or mmisey@shsst.edu for a tour of SHSST or a Zoom meet and greet.