This photo, taken Jan. 2, 2019, shows part of the campus of Mundelein Seminary at the Unive

This photo, taken Jan. 2, 2019, shows part of the campus of Mundelein Seminary at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois, near Chicago. (CNS/Bob Roller)



by Catholic News Service

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Mundelein, Ill. — July 8, 2022

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The University of St. Mary of the Lake/Mundelein Seminary has received a $5 million grant from the Lilly Endowment to help fund development of a project to integrate new pedagogical methods into formation programs for seminarians, priests and lay leaders within the Catholic Church.

The initiative is called the Cor Iuxta Meum (Latin for "After My Own Heart") Project and under the guidance of USML/Mundelein, just outside Chicago, it will involve a broad collaboration among major Catholic seminaries in the United States and the dioceses they serve.

The schools are Mount Angel Seminary in Oregon, Mount St. Mary's Seminary in Maryland, St. Paul Seminary in Minnesota, St. Vincent de Paul Regional Seminary in Florida and St. Mary Seminary in Ohio.

Also included in this collaboration is the Seminary Formation Council, which is dedicated to the training of diocesan seminary formation faculty.

"This initiative is designed to achieve the goals of seminary formation as laid out by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, while also identifying and addressing the future needs of ministerial leadership in local church communities over the coming

decades," said a July 7 news release announcing the grant.

This is an elevated view of the library on the grounds of Mundelein Seminary Jan. 2, 2019, at

This is an elevated view of the library on the grounds of Mundelein Seminary Jan. 2, 2019, at the University of St. Mary of the Lake in Illinois, near Chicago. (CNS/Bob Roller)

The USCCB's "Program of Priestly Formation" lays out norms for human formation, spiritual formation, intellectual formation and pastoral formation and for community. It also includes norms for the continuing evaluation of seminarians.

USML/Mundelein ran a successful pilot program for the Cor Iuxta Meum Project in the 2020-21 academic year. As the project advances, collaboration will broaden to include non-Catholic seminaries and centers for ministry leadership development.

A key component of the project is its focus on "encounter-based" formation. Pope Francis, early in his papacy, stressed the need for the church to engage in "a culture of encounter," the release noted.

"Encounter-based formation," it said, is the principle "that one's self-reflective experience of multiple interpersonal encounters — with parishioners, family, colleagues and others — provides the best preparation for growth in the mastery of theology, the exercise of pastoral skills and the deepening of one's contemplative prayer life."

All these areas are seen by seminary formators as critically important for the development of an effective priest or lay leader.

Adapting the simulation learning method used successfully in the field of health care education for decades is central to the project's pedagogical approach.

The project is being funded through the competitive third phase of the Lilly Endowment's Pathways for Tomorrow Initiative.

This initiative is designed to help theological schools across the United States and Canada as they "prioritize and respond" to the challenges they face in preparing pastoral leaders for Christian congregations now and in the future.

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The USML/Mundelein grant is among a group of grants supporting a limited number of large-scale, collaborative efforts that explore and develop new educational and financial models for theological education.

"Our goal is to help the students become more effective leaders in parish settings, an environment in which their self-knowledge, resilience and capacity for competent, compassionate interpersonal relating are paramount," said a July 7 statement by Fr. John Kartje, USML/Mundelein rector.

"We envision implementing encounter-based pedagogy within our ordained and lay leadership training programs, taking advantage of our university's unique opportunity for forming ordained and lay leaders side-by-side, preparing them for the professional collaborative relationships they will soon be undertaking," Kartje added.

Related: Mundelein Seminary celebrates its 100th anniversary at Chicago event