

# together

COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER | SPRING 2022



**INTERCONGREGATIONAL ■ INTERCULTURAL ■ INTERNATIONAL**

# TOGETHER

## THE SPIRIT OF THIS COMMUNITY

In mid-June of this year, I will complete my term as Coordinator of the *Together* Program. The grant that the RFC had acquired to finance my position will expire at the end of June, and just prior to that time, I will be engaged in my Congregation's General Chapter.

It has been a privilege for me to have spent almost two years with the women of *Together*. When I began, in August of 2020, we had hoped that three women would be living on the seventh floor of the old CTU building. Within two or three weeks, we learned that CTU would not be holding any face-to-face courses due to COVID. As a result, two sisters, Jane and Nicole, remained with their respective communities in Riverside, MI, and Cleveland, OH. Haerok, of South Korea, lived in a room in the 5401 building but took her courses online. During that time, we formed a warm, supportive community. The four of us met via Zoom every Thursday evening for either prayer and faith sharing, or to participate by listening and interacting with a guest presenter. The three sisters also spent Zoom time just "hanging out" with one another. Their time "together" allowed them to share their hopes and dreams, anxieties and frustrations. In May of that year, Jane and Nicole arrived in Chicago for a graduation dinner for Haerok at my apartment. The three other members of the RFC, Ellen Dauwer, SC, Kathy Kandefer, BVM, and Ryan Hoffmann also joined us for Haerok's surprise celebration.

During the spring and summer of 2021, three new sisters decided to join the *Together* Program. Youngmi Bae, SC, of the Korean Province of Seton Hill, Pulane Makepe, CP, from Botswana, and Kelly Williams, RSM, of Georgia. While all of us at the RFC were thrilled that *Together* was expanding, it was necessary to find a new, LARGE residence for this growing community because CTU had announced that they would be selling the building that had previously housed *Together*. Fortunately, a 4000 sq. ft. apartment, with six bedrooms, three baths, two sunrooms, and a large living and dining area was found and it has become *Together's* "home." The sisters have shared prayer, study, friendship, and holidays throughout their first year "together" in wonderful new ways.

A sixth sister, Ji, CBS, plans to join *Together* for the coming academic year at CTU. This will make a "full house!" At the same time, we are aware that three of this community of six will be completing their studies in May of 2023. This means that *Together's* current home will have room for three new participants. While one sister has already expressed her interest in joining the *Together* community for the fall semester of 2023, that means that there could be room for two other new members!



As you read the entries of four of the program's participants (Pulane is currently in the Holy Land with two CTU faculty and other students), I invite you to listen to the spirit of this community of young sisters. The opportunity offered by *Together* is like no other program! These sisters study at a highly recognized graduate school of theology, engage in communal living, and participate in ongoing formation with an intercommunity, intercultural, and international group of young sisters!

**I hope Congregations will give serious consideration to providing one or more of your newer members with the opportunity of a lifetime!**

Remember, in the fall of 2023, we anticipate two spaces for new participants in the current home of *Together*. If additional women are accepted into the program...well, I guess that that will be a delightful challenge for the next *Together* Program Coordinator!

Peace and blessings,  
Maribeth Howell, OP, PhD, STD

Interested in joining the *Together* community?  
Visit our website: [www.together-formation.com](http://www.together-formation.com)



## JANE ASELYNE, IHM

It has been my custom to travel home to be with my family for Easter in years past. But this year, I stayed in Chicago to celebrate with the *Together* community. Over the last ten months, we have come to know each other on a deeper level, and we enjoy spending time together.

Since we all come from various cultures and backgrounds, we've found creative ways to celebrate different holidays, birthdays, and community feast days. For Easter, we decided to spend the Triduum at St. James parish. We attend St. James regularly, and they have a wonderful, welcoming community of dedicated parishioners and religious who help make the liturgies unique and engaging.

On Holy Thursday, we had a special dinner before attending mass. Good Friday allowed us to reflect and take time to pray after a busy final exam week. On Holy Saturday we hosted some other young sisters for a game day as we anticipated the excitement of the Easter Vigil. On Easter Sunday morning, we celebrated with a waffle bar brunch—complete with all the toppings and even some Easter candy sent to us from our families and communities.

Walking through the Triduum with Kelly, Nicole, Pulane, and Youngmi was a great gift because it showed me again that Christ is alive in each of us in unique ways. How we express Christ's love differs based on our personalities, interests, and cultural mores, but we are united as one in the Body of Christ.

## YOUNGMI BAE, SCSH

I have been a member of the *Together* program since the fall semester of 2021. I am from Korea

and I am currently pursuing an M.Div. at CTU. As with all processes, at first, we can't see around us well because we're adapting. Then, little by little, the surrounding situation begins to be detected, and it brings about inner dynamics. Like this, the second semester I spent with the *Together* members was a time to discover these dynamics. Among the *Together* members, I am the most vulnerable due to English being my second language. This is a great barrier to my present life and a precious pathway of grace. When I talk to members of the group, I sometimes don't understand exactly what being said. Therefore, even if I want to actively participate in the conversation, I sometimes feel sorry because I can't. Moreover, in Korea, we have established relationships by communicating with people around us with humorous words, but this is often not possible here. This gives me a sense of alienation that I don't live like myself. Moreover, when there is an issue that needs to be repaired in the house I live in, I am in a position to be helped rather than to help. This makes me very vulnerable. *What is God's will to allow me to live a completely different life than before? What does God show me here?*

First of all, I'm practicing accepting the obvious fact that there are many things I can't do. I am used to helping, but now I'm spending time learning how to get help.

Second, I experienced the good will of the *Together* members very often in this semester. They have always helped me happily and actively. In the meantime, my good will has often been a sense of duty, so their good will encourages me to change my fundamental attitude toward good will. I appreciate that I was able to



learn how to give something joyfully to the need through my members.

Third, the most impressive moment with the members this semester taught me the essence of being together, like the title of the program. One day we watched a movie together, and I got a phone call in the middle of watching the movie. When I came back to them, the members stopped the movie and waited for me to watch the movie with them. I was sorry, but it surprised me at their thought that it is much more important to be and to do together. Living together is bound to cause discomfort. Sometimes, *Together* members see a way to be indirect first. It can be important to accept others' ways of being and accept them as they are; it is an act that requires great patience and love.

As such, I spent a semester with challenges, learning, comfort and support. In this way, I am gradually getting colored by the people who are with me in this space.

*Pictured above: The Together community took a few days on the other side of Lake Michigan in April to reflect and rest as they closed out the 2021-2022 academic year. We pray they have a blessed and life giving summer!*

**#TOGETHERCOMMUNITY**



### NICOLE VARNERIN, SND

I had the pleasure of renewing my vows in February with the *Together* Community (pictured above). My provincial Superior and Formation Director made the trip out to Chicago from Cleveland. It was beautiful to see how the *Together* community took care of me leading up to my renewal. They each used their strengths to help me prepare for the day. Jane and Youngmi arranged a beautiful ambiance with my community symbols and arranged for flowers and a card to celebrate the day. Pulane sang and led prayer for us. Kelly graciously learned a version of the Magnificat on her guitar and took care of supper. And we all learned my community's traditional Suscipe.

Meanwhile, my Sisters of Notre Dame community had sent cards to support me. Renewing vows is an annual event for me. This year it looked

a little different, but it continued to remind me of the prayers and support of my sisters – regardless of what community they come from.

### KELLY WILLIAMS, RSM

*Together!* Our community has joked throughout the year that together is our favorite word. We really have lived it this year.

Throughout the year, we have had countless game nights and movie nights. We've gone on adventures and spent wonderful time in prayer. We have danced, tried new things, laughed, and cried together.

We appreciated the lecture series provided by CTU via Zoom that allowed us to share in those lectures as a house. Often one of us would be interested in a particular lecture and the rest of us would join in which led to beautiful discussions and insights.

One of the things we have talked about as a house has been that we not only enjoy one another's company, but that we celebrate each other. We rejoice in one another's gifts! Throughout the year we have recognized and named one another's gifts and learned what challenged us as well.

As the academic year came to a close, one of the most beautiful experiences was actually in the stress of finals. What could be a time of strong isolation in getting work done was really a grace filled experience of reaching out to one another when we could lend support whether it was taking on more when others had more pressing work approaching or just offering presence to those of us who work better with company!

It has been a graced experience to be together and I'm looking forward to our continued adventures *Together!*

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



**ReligiousFormation**  
CONFERENCE

**Questions? Please reach out.**

**Religious Formation Conference**

**Email: [rfc@relforcon.org](mailto:rfc@relforcon.org)**

**Phone: 773.675.8362**

**1525 E. 53rd St | Suite 716**

**Chicago, IL 60615**