

# The Benefits of Online Learning for Adults

*A profile on how education builds confidence for sharing the faith*

BY VIRGINIA LIETO

About six years ago, I decided to hang up my auditor's hat and give my life to God. Then 54, I was too young to retire, so what would I do? I wanted to take my two greatest passions—my love for my Catholic faith and my gift for public speaking—and put them together into one job. Yet I lacked confidence in stepping out and speaking about the faith without some additional education. The last thing I wanted to do was to steer someone in the wrong direction.

I decided to make an appointment with the director of evangelization for my diocese. I found him to be a wealth of information. He provided me with a plethora of possibilities to consider in search of a master's degree in theology—including on-campus, hybrid, and online learning. He coached me to seriously consider all three means of earning a degree and weigh the pros and cons. When all was said and done, I elected to go with the online learning mode of earning my master's degree. Here's why:

**AFFORDABILITY**—Working online means that students are not taking up space in a classroom. Therefore, some schools offer the degree at a much lower price than the on-campus or hybrid routes.

**FLEXIBILITY**—Some colleges and universities offer courses with flexible start dates for their online

*How might you serve God if you were given some additional education? If you are self-disciplined, organized, and self-sufficient, online learning might be the best thing for you, too.*

programs. With online learning, students can work on their assignments at any hour of any day—even 3:00 a.m. in their pajamas from their own home! The program I chose was also self-paced, so I was able to set my own deadlines for assignments, given certain parameters for completion. In contrast, an on-campus



PHOTO: STOCK-ASSO/SHUTTERSTOCK

## HIGHER EDUCATION LEARNING OPTIONS

These schools offer theology degrees via online study. Search each school's website for full details and tuition for undergrad, graduate, or continuing education.

### Augustine Institute

[AugustineInstitute.org](http://AugustineInstitute.org)

### Catholic Distance University

[CDU.edu](http://CDU.edu)

### Franciscan University

[Franciscan.edu](http://Franciscan.edu)

### Holy Apostles College and Seminary

[HolyApostles.edu](http://HolyApostles.edu)

### Loyola Institute for Ministry

[LIM.loyno.edu](http://LIM.loyno.edu)

### Saint Joseph's College

[SJCME.edu](http://SJCME.edu)

### St. Leo University

[Online.SaintLeo.edu](http://Online.SaintLeo.edu)

### University of Dayton

[UDayton.edu](http://UDayton.edu)

### University of Notre Dame (STEP)

[Step.ND.edu](http://Step.ND.edu)

course offers courses at set times in designated places. Some hybrid formats offer specific courses only at specific times (on-campus, when all students come together at a set date).

**NO TRAVEL**—In the three years it took me to earn my degree, I never left my own computer, which I set up on my dining room table. If I had gone the on-campus route, it would have meant moving, as there are no colleges in my immediate area

offering a master's degree in theology. If I had chosen the hybrid route, I would have been required to attend a mandatory on-campus session at least once yearly. Such travel can be expensive.

For me, it was a rather easy choice to choose the online learning route to earn my degree. Now, with degree in hand, I can attest to the following:

\* I am more confident. When I speak, I know that my words are true to the Deposit of Faith.

\* I have grown exponentially spiritually, having been awakened to the likes of St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis de Sales, St. Teresa of Avila, and others.

\* I now possess a deeper appreciation for Church teaching and Sacred Tradition. I have a deeper understanding of why the Church takes the stance it takes on certain "hot-button" issues, and with that increased confidence, I am prepared to defend the teaching.

For all of these reasons, I am now able to share my faith more easily. Now that I have my Master of Arts in pastoral theology, God certainly keeps me busy! I blog routinely on the virtues on my own website. I speak on the Catholic faith and offer day retreats. I've authored two children's books on the virtues. I am currently writing a book for adults, too. Lastly, I am an adjunct professor of theology for my alma mater, Saint Joseph's College, where I teach four undergraduate courses through their online theology program.

How might you serve God if you were given some additional education? If you are self-disciplined, organized, and self-sufficient, online learning might be the best thing for you, too. Whatever path you take to get that degree—online, hybrid, or on-campus—I pray that the Lord will put you to work the way he has done for me. "The harvest is abundant but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2).



Virginia Lieto, MA, is an adjunct professor for the online theology program at St. Joseph's College of Maine. She is a speaker, blogger, and the children's book author of *Adventures of Faith, Hope and Charity—Finding Patience*.



## Make a Difference

Earn a Bachelor of Arts in  
Theology with an Emphasis in  
Pastoral Studies **100% online.**

Graduate with the skills you need to be an  
effective pastoral leader for the Catholic  
Church of the 21st century.

[online.brescia.edu](http://online.brescia.edu)  
[buonline@brescia.edu](mailto:buonline@brescia.edu)

