

A**L****U****M****N****I****September 2022****Alumni Corner- Jessica Elliott '19**

Jessica Elliott is currently living at home, treasuring her time in Illinois. On September 10, 2022, she will be leaving home to enter as a postulant with the Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal (CFR). After graduating from UI with a Master of Social Work in May 2019, she spent two years working at Merci's Refuge, a Christian residential counseling program for women in Champagne, IL. From there, she spent eight months in Atlantic City, NJ with the CFRs, serving as a missionary with four other women, all discerning their next steps with the Lord. After a whirlwind of a summer, the Lord opened the door to her entrance. Jessica says, "He provided for me financially through the generosity of others. God has continued to be especially evident in His care for me over this time as Good Shepherd, providing the people, conversations, and circumstances that I am needing in this time of rest and preparation. When I enter, I will be taking one day at a time, growing in surrender, courage, trust, and God-willing, continue into the novitiate and eventually make vows of poverty, chastity and obedience as a Bride and Handmaid of the Lord."

Jessica relates that her experience at the Newman Center had a major impact during a pivotal time in her life. She says that she knew she was being called to be discerning a religious life; yet she was freshly out of a long-term relationship after the first semester of graduate school. It was during her second semester that she began coming to the Newman Center. She attended a retreat, got more connected then began spiritual direction with Laurie Harris (former Director). Jessica states that Laurie, Fr. Jeff, and the FOCUS missionaries helped her through her years at UI. She felt known and cared for by Fr. Jeff and continues to have a relationship with him and Laurie. Eventually, Jessica became the Graduate Fellow for graduate students as well as co-fellow of Service and Social Justice; expanding her involvement at the center.

It was through the Newman Center that she first met the CFRs! She attended the Institute on Religious Conference at Mundelein Seminary in Spring of 2018, where she first encountered the existence and beauty of the Sisters. It was at the SEEK 2019 (FOCUS) Conference where she spent a lot of time with the Sisters and says, "That was when my discernment came alive and blossomed. Without the alignment of being at the University of Iowa, getting involved in the Newman Center, the new presence of the FOCUS missionaries and Laurie walking with me though a very intensive time, I do not think my life would be where it is now. The Lord is always working!"

When asked about any holy moments that she may have experienced, Jessica mentions that it was during her time in graduate school and involvement at the Newman Center that she came to accept her vocation to be the Bride of Christ. She says she wrestled very intensely during this time. Through time with the Lord and incredible support she was, little by little, able to surrender to Him and find joy in the reality that her heart was designed to be His alone. "I remember a special time of prayer in the Adoration Chapel, where in prayer Jesus and I were sitting near a peaceful river. I felt as though, in silence, He placed His hands around my heart, surrounding mine with His. He then brought my heart into His," she shares.

Thank you, Jessica, for sharing your story with us! Please pray for Jessica as she enters as a postulant in September with the Community of the Franciscan Sisters of the Renewal.

