

March 9, 2025

Dr. Michael Thomas, President  
Concordia University Irvine  
1530 Concordia West  
Irvine, CA 92612

1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

800-248-1930 ext. 1252  
cus.edu  
cus.info@cus.edu

Dear Dr. Thomas,

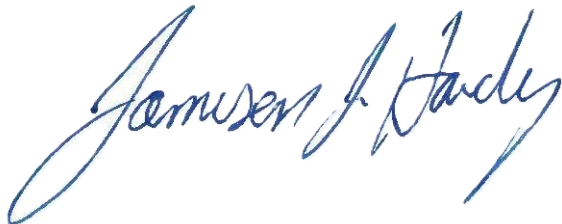
Greetings to you and the Lutheran community of faith at Concordia University Irvine.

The 2025 Formal Visitation of your university by The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is complete, and the report of findings by the visitation team has been submitted. Having received your institution's review of the report, **the Concordia University System is pleased to report to you that we affirm without concerns Concordia University Irvine and each of its implemented church work programs.**

This letter includes a copy of the report. The letter of determination and a copy of the report will be posted publicly on the Concordia University System website at [www.cus.edu](http://www.cus.edu). We are honored to support and affirm the vital work being done at Concordia University Irvine. We will continue to pray for you, help you, and work with you to further the tradition of excellence in Christian education built on the strong Lutheran Confession of Jesus Christ.

The Concordia University System is blessed to boast in the Lord and His gifts of outstanding universities. May His grace strengthen you as we form and educate pious people across many godly vocations in the Church and the world. We thank God for His many blessings, and we thank you for your faithful confession. God bless you all.

In the strong name of Jesus Christ,



The Reverend Dr. Jamison J. Hardy  
President

## Visitation Report

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod

Formal Visit to Concordia University Irvine

January 13-15, 2025



1333 S. Kirkwood Road  
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295

800-248-1930 ext. 1252  
cus.edu  
cus.info@cus.edu

The Concordia University System (CUS), in fulfillment of Bylaw 3.6.6.1.a.2, conducted an in-depth ecclesiastical formal visitation at Concordia University Irvine. The visitation team was comprised of six members, including **Rev. Andrew Herzberg, Rev. Dr. Chad D. Kendall, Dr. Meghan Sleezer, Rev. Eric Skovgaard, Rev. Zachary Viggers, and Mr. James Wolf**. CUS President Jamison Hardy and Vice President Douglas Spittel assisted the team. The final visitation debrief was observed and supervised by CUS Board of Directors Chairman Mark Braden, representing the Board in accordance with bylaw 3.6.6.4.2. The team spent three days on the campus of Concordia University Irvine, interacting with the campus community and conducting group and individual interviews. As the report states, these visitation days were productive and positive times of interaction with the university.

This was the first formal visitation conducted under the bylaw revisions created by the 2023 Synod Convention Resolution 7-04b, utilizing the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS) and the associated LIMOS Evaluation Tool.

The formal visitation process is intended to support both formative and summative functions. Based on the LIMOS, it shall engender local development and provide for outside monitoring of formative processes, engaging all institutions fully in intentional and measurable programs intended to advance their expression of Lutheran identity and accomplishment of mission outcomes. It shall also enable the drawing of summative conclusions, concretely identifying strengths and weaknesses in institutions and programs, ultimately to provide clear rationale for decisions about continuation or termination of affirmation.

**Special Circumstances and Context:** Concordia University Irvine continues its commitment to upholding and strengthening its Lutheran identity. There is a clear institutional commitment to preserving doctrinal integrity while engaging a broader student population. The university's outreach efforts to LCMS congregations and the intentional structuring of theological programs have resulted in continued and increasing student participation in faith-related discussions and activities. The institution emphasizes alignment of its operations with confessional Lutheran standards and continues that effort across the university.

**University Overview:** Concordia University Irvine was established in 1976 and has since grown into a well-respected institution within the Concordia University System. The university's mission is centered on Christ, preparing students for service in the Church and society while maintaining a firm commitment to Lutheran theological principles. According to Concordia University Irvine's official mission statement: *"Concordia University Irvine, a Lutheran Christian university, guided by the Great Commission, develops wise, honorable, and cultivated citizens to serve society and the church."* The institution's strategic plan emphasizes mission alignment, academic excellence, and student vocational formation. Ongoing initiatives, such as the Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) training program, have reinforced Lutheran identity among faculty and staff, ensuring that the university continues to operate in alignment with its foundational mission. The university upholds five core convictions: being **Gospel-Centered**, ensuring that all students and staff engage with its mission under the guidance of God's Word and the Lutheran Confessions; **Faithfully Relevant**, offering rigorous, holistic programs rooted in the Lutheran intellectual tradition to prepare servant leaders for contemporary challenges; **Sustainably Excellent**, stewarding time, talent, and resources wisely to empower all members of the Concordia community; **Courageously Loving**, fostering a community of humility, responsibility, and charitable conversation; and **Relentlessly Hopeful**, trusting in Christ's reconciliation of the world and carrying out its mission in confidence despite worldly challenges.

**Key Strengths and Areas for Growth:** Concordia University Irvine demonstrates strong leadership commitment to its Lutheran identity and mission alignment, ensuring that theological principles remain central to institutional decisions. The Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) initiative has provided a robust faculty development program that reinforces theological consistency and deepens faculty understanding of Lutheran doctrine. Student engagement in faith-centered programs and discussions

continues to increase, reflecting the university's intentional efforts to cultivate a Christ-centered campus environment. The university has also strengthened its connections with local LCMS congregations, fostering relationships that benefit both students and the broader church community. The university is addressing a continued need for enhanced theological training for faculty across all disciplines and improvements to student spiritual formation to ensure that doctrinal fidelity is consistently maintained in the academic curriculum and campus worship life.

---

## **Identity Standard I – Ecclesiastical Mission and Goals**

The university is appropriately centered on Christ and demonstrates its commitment to the doctrine and practice of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). In conversations with administrators, faculty, staff, and students, the intentionality of Lutheran Identity was repeatedly mentioned. The executive leadership's role in the strategic plan is clearly Christ-centered and aligned with the mission, vision, and financial foundation. The university actively fosters new faculty and staff with a strong Lutheran identity through internal mentoring and training initiatives, ensuring that hiring decisions require explicit commitment to Lutheran doctrine. The Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) program reinforces Lutheran theology among faculty and staff, and the theology department serves as a key anchor for maintaining confessional integrity across disciplines. Outreach efforts to LCMS congregations have strengthened relationships between students and the broader church, and university administrators frequently reference Lutheran doctrine in institutional decision-making.

### **Interview Specifics:**

- **President Michael Thomas** underscored the importance of hiring practices that prioritize confessional integrity, ensuring that faculty and staff align with Lutheran doctrine.
  - **Dr. Steve Mueller (Chief Mission Officer)** emphasized his role in ensuring theological consistency across all faculty training and curricula, with a three-year Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) process reinforcing Lutheran theology.
  - **Dr. Peter Senkbeil (Special Assistant to the President)** confirmed that Concordia University Irvine's strong Lutheran identity is driven by the Great Commission and reinforced at all leadership levels. Additionally, Dr. Senkbeil referenced books and documents used in hiring and training, such as: *God at Work* by Gene Veith, *The Idea and Practice of a Christian University* by Scott Ashmon, *Lutheran Higher Education at Concordia University: Belief and Application*, *The Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) training program*.
  - **The Board of Regents** regularly reviews hiring standards to ensure faculty composition is at least 75% LCMS-affiliated by 2030.
  - **Athletic Director Crystal Rosenthal**, though not LCMS, insists that students respect Lutheran doctrine and actively seeks LCMS congregations for student-athlete worship during travel.
  - **Dr. David Loy (Dean of Christ College)** emphasized that all church work programs report to Christ College, which serves as an anchor for theological identity on campus.
- 

## **Identity Standard II – Spiritual and Academic Life**

Spiritual and academic life at Concordia University Irvine is deeply integrated with its Lutheran mission. Faculty integrate Lutheran theology across multiple disciplines, ensuring faith formation is embedded throughout the curriculum. Small-group theological discussions enhance students' understanding of Lutheran doctrine, and faculty mentorship plays a significant role in supporting pre-seminary and theology students. The university places a strong emphasis on vocation, connecting faith with academic pursuits through a structured approach to catechesis. Chapel services provide a range of Christian worship styles and liturgies.

### **Interview Specifics:**

- **Pre-seminary students** praised faculty mentorship, noting that theological discussions have deepened their engagement with their studies and personal faith.
- **Graduate faculty members** integrate faith into their disciplines, with each Canvas course shell containing a Christian message and devotion.
- **Campus Pastor Quinton Anderson** discussed the role of chapel in spiritual formation, emphasizing small groups and engagement opportunities like Abbey West.

- **Dr. Scott Stiegemeyer** incorporates theology into the nursing program and teaches bioethics from a Lutheran perspective, helping students integrate faith with professional ethics.
  - **Some Students** expressed ideas for enhancing chapel consistency, such as increasing the use of the Lord's Prayer and the Apostles' Creed in their daily services.
  - **Dr. Scott Ashmon (Provost)** highlighted that all undergraduate students take foundational theology courses, ensuring that Lutheran theology is naturally embedded in the curriculum.
- 

### Identity Standard III – Student Recruitment and Student Life

Concordia University Irvine actively recruits Lutheran students while maintaining an environment which is open to a broader population that is willing to engage with the mission and vision of the university. Targeted recruitment efforts focus on students from LCMS high schools and congregations, and Lutheran students hold prominent leadership positions in student organizations. The university offers specific scholarships and 80% tuition assistance to qualified students pursuing church work vocations, reinforcing its commitment to developing future church leaders. Faith formation is intentionally incorporated into residence hall programs, where students are encouraged to participate in small group Bible studies and theological discussions. Additionally, student organizations frequently engage in service projects centered around faith, including mission trips and outreach initiatives in the local community. Church work students actively lead informal theological discussions on campus, further fostering engagement with Lutheran teachings. All church work programs provide additional opportunities for students to grow in their theological knowledge and participate in ministerial training activities. Student-athletes also have opportunities to engage in faith discussions, but additional efforts may be needed to ensure that spiritual formation is more fully integrated into the athletic experience.

#### Interview Specifics:

- **Admissions officers** described targeted recruitment strategies, including outreach to LCMS high schools and churches, with financial aid incentives for church work students.
  - **Church work students** actively lead informal theological discussions, fostering engagement with Lutheran teachings across campus.
  - **Athletic directors** expressed a need for more intentional integration of faith in sports teams, suggesting that student chaplains be appointed for each team.
  - **Student leaders** reported that many leadership positions in student organizations are held by Lutheran students, reinforcing confessional identity.
  - **Softball players** mentioned they primarily engage with Lutheran doctrine through Friday chapel services and required coursework, highlighting an opportunity for deeper theological integration.
  - **Residence Life staff** emphasized the importance of small-group Bible studies and community-building initiatives that reinforce Lutheran values in dormitories.
- 

### Identity Standard IV – Planning and Resourcing

Concordia University Irvine's financial planning and resource allocation are intentionally aligned with its Lutheran mission, ensuring sustainability and the preservation of confessional commitments. Financial aid prioritizes students pursuing church work vocations, and donor engagement has increased due to clearer mission articulation. The university has established dedicated scholarships and grants for church work students, further strengthening its commitment to preparing students for service in the church. Theological oversight is a key factor in institutional decision-making, with budget allocations ensuring support for programs that reinforce Lutheran identity. Budgeting priorities reflect commitments to theological education, including funding for faculty development programs, student theological initiatives, and improvements to worship spaces on campus.

Facility planning includes dedicated spaces for worship and theological study, with ongoing efforts to expand chapel facilities and enhance sacred spaces for student reflection and spiritual growth. The university is also investing in technological resources to support remote theological education, enabling students who may not be on campus to engage meaningfully with confessional Lutheran teachings. Additionally, partnerships with LCMS organizations and donors have led to increased funding for campus ministry programs and outreach initiatives.

### Interview Specifics:

- **Financial officers** confirmed that donor support has increased due to clearer articulation of the university's mission and Lutheran identity.
  - **The Board of Regents** aligns financial planning with Lutheran mission objectives, prioritizing funding for church work scholarships and theological programs.
  - **University leadership** emphasized recent investments in facilities, including a new chapel expansion and theological learning spaces.
  - **Master Plan discussions** highlighted long-term development goals, including a new sports facility with Biblical messaging throughout, chapel expansion, and a long-term plan for the physical and academic expansion of the multi-million-dollar acquisition of Spectrum campus.
  - **Faculty** discussed funding allocation, noting that theological training and mission-driven initiatives receive dedicated financial support.
  - **VP of University Operations Tim Odle** described efforts to ensure that all campus facilities reflect Lutheran values, with explicit Christian messaging in every new building.
- 

### Identity Standard V – Governance, Leadership, and Administration

Concordia University Irvine's leadership structure ensures strong theological oversight in decision-making processes. The administration collaborates closely with the Board of Regents to uphold Lutheran identity. The Board of Regents has prioritized confessional faculty hiring, and institutional policies consistently reinforce the university's mission and values. Faculty and staff undergo required theological training, ensuring that governance structures support doctrinal fidelity and mission alignment.

University leadership has also taken steps to integrate Lutheran theological principles into administrative decision-making, ensuring that policies and practices align with the university's mission. The President's Cabinet meets regularly to review theological and institutional alignment, and faculty members are encouraged to contribute to governance discussions that impact mission fidelity. In addition, leadership development programs emphasize confessional Lutheran teaching as a key competency for administrators and department heads.

### Interview Specifics:

- **The Board of Regents** emphasized their commitment to hiring mission-aligned faculty, with regular reviews ensuring theological consistency in governance decisions.
  - **President's Cabinet** meets regularly to assess theological alignment in university policies and decision-making.
  - **Dr. Steven Mueller** reinforced that non-Lutherans cannot vote on matters of Lutheran identity, including theological curriculum and certification of LCMS church-work candidates, ensuring that theological integrity is preserved.
  - **Marketing and Strategic Communication VP George Allen** collaborates closely with the Chief Mission Officer to ensure public messaging aligns with Lutheran identity.
  - **Faculty members** participate in governance structures, contributing to decision-making processes that uphold confessional integrity.
- 

### Identity Standard VI – Assessment of Effectiveness

Concordia University Irvine employs systematic assessment measures to ensure that its mission and values are effectively upheld. The university integrates theological oversight into curriculum evaluation and institutional planning. The VMV program serves as a primary instrument for assessing faculty and staff alignment with Lutheran doctrine, and student engagement in theological discussions is tracked as part of institutional effectiveness measures.

Regular faculty and staff evaluations include measures of theological integrity and adherence to the university's mission. Course syllabi and academic programs undergo periodic review to ensure that Lutheran doctrine is consistently integrated into coursework. The university also collects student feedback on spiritual formation, theological instruction, and vocational preparation to guide ongoing improvements. Additionally, accreditation processes involve a theological review component, ensuring that external assessments align with Concordia University Irvine's Lutheran identity.

### Interview Specifics:

- **The VMV program** is a structured training initiative that ensures faculty and staff alignment with Lutheran doctrine.
  - **Faculty evaluations** include measures of theological fidelity, ensuring that curriculum and instruction adhere to Lutheran teaching.
  - **Students** appreciate structured theological engagement, particularly the foundational theology courses that shape their faith and academic pursuits.
  - **Course syllabi** undergo regular theological review, ensuring Lutheran doctrine remains central to academic content.
- 

### Identity Standard VII – Handling and Resolving Concerns of Constituents

Concordia University Irvine has structured mechanisms for addressing concerns related to its mission and identity. Faculty and staff are encouraged to voice concerns through formal channels, and student feedback is actively considered in shaping university policies. The university has established a grievance process that includes faculty and student representation, ensuring that concerns are addressed in a fair and mission-driven manner.

Faculty concerns regarding theological training are being addressed through expanded development initiatives, including workshops and discussion forums focused on Lutheran doctrine. The university's leadership also engages alumni and church leaders to receive feedback on how Concordia University Irvine can better serve the Church and uphold its mission.

### Interview Specifics:

- **Leadership** described structured feedback processes, including mechanisms for faculty and student concerns related to mission integrity.
  - **Faculty** noted ongoing improvements in theological training, ensuring all disciplines integrate Lutheran teaching appropriately.
  - **The university's grievance process** includes faculty and student representation to ensure concerns are addressed fairly.
  - **Alumni and church leaders** provide feedback on how Concordia University Irvine can better serve the Church and uphold its mission.
- 

### Conclusion

Concordia University Irvine continues to demonstrate a firm commitment to its Lutheran identity, as evidenced by strong leadership, theological integration, and mission-driven governance. The university's faculty and staff actively participate in theological training, ensuring that Lutheran doctrine remains a focal point of education and student engagement. The Vision, Mission, and Vocation (VMV) program has played a crucial role in reinforcing confessional integrity among faculty, staff, and students alike. Faculty members are dedicated to mentoring students in their faith, and student-led initiatives further enhance spiritual growth. The Board of Regents remains vigilant in maintaining theological consistency and is proactive in addressing concerns related to Lutheran identity.

Three key findings emerged from the visitation:

1. **Faithful Leadership and Institutional Alignment** – The leadership team, led by President Thomas and CMO Mueller, has successfully strengthened the university's theological foundation. Hiring policies ensure mission-aligned faculty and staff, while faculty governance structures uphold confessional integrity.
2. **Student Engagement and Theological Formation** – The university provides a robust theological education for students, offering multiple avenues for engagement, including chapel, academic coursework, and student-led theological discussions. However, further efforts could be made to enhance faith integration in athletic programs.
3. **Chapel Consistency and Worship Practices** – The chapel is a cornerstone of student spiritual life and the university is working to emphasize its Lutheran identity and core convictions by seeking greater consistency in its various worship styles and liturgies.

Concordia University Irvine has positioned itself as a leading institution for confessional Lutheran higher education. Continued emphasis on maintaining theological consistency, refining worship practices, and broadening spiritual engagement opportunities will further strengthen its mission and identity. We commend Concordia University Irvine for its commitment to and living out of the Lutheran Christian faith.