

Protocol for Synod Formal Visitation

The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod, at its 2023 convention, enshrined in the bylaws a process for the ecclesiastical visitation of all the Concordia University System (CUS) campuses. This process of annual visitation takes place over the course of a triennium, consisting of two informal visits and one formal visit. The informal visits, which are conversational and formative in scope, are conducted by the CUS Board of Directors, a member of the Council of Presidents, a Chief Mission Officer, and CUS staff, fostering a sense of teamwork. A report is prepared following the informal visit that is presented only to the president of the institution. The formal visitations, also conversational but more extensive in scope, are both formative and summative, conducted by a team representing the Synod, led by the President of the CUS, and provide for preparing a report to be included in the Synodical convention workbook.

3.6.6.4.1 Synod colleges and universities shall undergo Synod visitation with respect to the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards, both comprehensively as institutions and with regard to the specific requirements of each implemented program intended to result in candidacy for one of the Synod's categories of commissioned ministry or in preparedness for seminary study.

(a) Ordinarily each college or university shall receive a formal institutional and program visitation at least once in each Synod national convention cycle. These regular, formal visitations shall attend to both formative and summative elements, evaluating present performance relative to the Standards but also fostering, monitoring, and advancing initiatives in pursuit of the Standards. A focused review of a specific alleged breach of the Standards, however, may be initiated by Concordia University System at any time.

This visitation process is intended to bring our beloved Synod closer to its universities and foster open and productive dialog between the regents, administration, faculty, staff, and other interested official entities of the several campuses of CUS. The Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards (LIMOS) and their attendant Evaluation Tool are the basis for conversations throughout the visitation process. The LIMOS are intended to be used as a road map for the way in which we walk together faithfully in Lutheran doctrine, practice, and Christian love. The Synod, her pastors and people, care deeply about our Concordia University System schools and desire for them to be the best Lutheran universities in the world, educating and spiritually forming people to serve God and their neighbor in church and secular vocations.

This protocol document delineates the process of conducting a formal visitation. Unlike the informal visitations, all conducted by the CUS Board and Staff, each formal visitation is conducted by a different team selected by the Synod, led by the President of CUS. Although each team will be highly qualified, all the team members may not be familiar with the procedures and protocols involved in a visitation. For this reason, it is important that all parties adhere to the procedures as they are outlined in this protocol document to avoid bias or confusion.

The President and Vice President of the Concordia University System are the staff facilitators who will be present at all Synod Formal Visitations to assist the team and the university with questions or issues relating to logistics, policies, or procedures during the visitation. The staff is present to bring continuity to the process across the campuses and teams and to facilitate the conversation in any way possible. They are the lead team and points of contact for the visitation process. Please contact them anytime during the formal visitation process, and they will do their best to assist you.

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Synod Formal Visitation Team Members:

Each visitation team will be constituted of not less than four and not more than seven members nominated by the Institution Advisory Council, the Council of Presidents, the Board for National Mission, the Synod Board of Directors, members of the Concordia University System Board of Directors, and President of the Synod :

- A member of a peer institution board of regents.
- A member of a peer institution administration.
- A member of a peer institution faculty.
- A District President who has ecclesiastical supervision of a peer institution faculty.
- At least one member of the LCMS Ministerium.
- At least one lay member of an LCMS congregation.

CUS Staff Facilitators

- CUS President, Team Leader
- CUS Vice President, Team Facilitator

University Representatives (as provided by the institution):

- President (first meeting and last meeting with visitation team)
- President's Designee, if assigned
- Chief Mission Officer
- Campus Chaplain
- Chief Academic Officer
- Deans
- Dean of Students
- Theology Faculty
- Variety of faculty in other departments
- Admissions/Enrollment Management
- CFO (from a general overall health and wellness perspective – a spiritual matter)
- Anyone else on the cabinet
- Representatives of the Board of Regents and the Foundation Board
- Church Work/Pre-Sem Students
- Non-Church Work Students
- Cross-section of Staff (non-faculty), including facilities management

3.6.6.4.1 (h) An institution receiving a visitation team shall be notified in advance of the membership of the team. Either the institution or any member of such a team may challenge the participation of any member on the basis of actual partiality or the appearance thereof. Concordia University System shall have in place a procedure for responding to any such challenge within 30 days. A finding by Concordia University System of actual partiality or the appearance thereof shall disqualify the member from participating in the visitation. Concordia University System may at its option replace any member so disqualified or continue with the reduced visitation team.

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3.6.6.4.1 (i) Concordia University System, with the assistance of its Institution Advisory Council, shall provide training for members of visitation teams, according to policies established by Concordia University System.

Cost:

3.6.6.4.1 (j) Direct costs of the visitation process shall be borne by the institution visited, regulated according to a schedule devised, after input from the Institution Advisory Council, and published triennially by Concordia University System.

Before the Formal Visitation:

Due One Month Before Visitation:

3.6.6.4.2 After input from its Institution Advisory Council, the Concordia University System Board of Directors shall implement and maintain policies governing, and shall supervise, the process of formal visitation for the Synod's colleges and universities on the basis of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcomes Standards.

The Concordia University System Board of Directors, in its supervisory role, will approve the following in their final form:

- The Synod Formal Visitation Team
- The Synod Formal Visitation Agenda and Schedule

Due Two Weeks Before Visitation:

3.6.6.4.1 (a) In preparation for visitation and affirmation review, each institution and church work program shall provide, on the basis of a thorough self-study, a written report evidencing compliance with the criteria and core components of the Standards, as evaluated by the stated measurable factors, as well as indicating any relevant explanatory factors and initiated or planned efforts to improve specific aspects of performance relative to the Standards. It shall especially address any issues noted in previous reviews or specifically requested by Concordia University System. The self-study shall be delivered to and reviewed by Concordia University System.

One Week Before Visitation:

The CUS President will hold a teleconference with the Synod Formal Visitation Team members to brief them on this protocol and procedures for Formal Visitation. The team will be asked to appoint a secretary pro tempore who will be charged with compiling the notes taken by the team members during the visitation and preparing the report of the formal visitation to the institution and the Concordia University System. The CUS Staff will provide the Formal Visitation Team with templates for note-taking and reporting to facilitate report compilation.

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The Formal Visitation:

3.6.6.4.1 (b) A visitation team, assembled by Concordia University System upon review of the self-study report or recommendation of its Institution Advisory Council, shall itself review the self-study report and then visit the institution, interacting with its board of regents, administration, faculty, campus ministry staff, and students. An effective visitation, with broad and unimpeded access to campus program information, policies, and personnel, shall be facilitated by the institution. Each implemented or proposed church work and pre-seminary program shall receive specific attention.

Schedule:

- **Visit Monday afternoon, all day Tuesday, and Wednesday morning.**
- **Schedule can be adjusted as necessary/appropriate.**
- The team travels on Sunday night/Monday morning.
- Monday Schedule:
 - Monday after lunch, the visitation team meets (30 minutes)
 - Monday, CUS Staff Facilitators meet with the University President for 1 hour to discuss protocol, begin with prayer, and receive the list of names/times for interviews. The President may invite the designee to whom he has delegated responsibility for representing the University during the visit.
 - The visitation begins with a campus tour (approx. 1 hour).
 - Monday afternoon, meet with the University representatives.
 - Monday afternoon late, the visitation team meets to debrief (30 minutes).
- Tuesday Schedule:
 - On Tuesday morning, the team continues meeting with University representatives.
 - Attend Tuesday a.m. Chapel.
 - Meetings with university representatives continue, lunch is in the cafeteria, and meetings resume after lunch.
 - On Tuesday afternoon late, the visitation team meets.
- Wednesday schedule:
 - Wednesday morning, the team continues meeting with University representatives.
 - Attend Wednesday a.m. Chapel.
 - Meetings with University representatives continue.
 - Visitation team meets (30 minutes).
 - University President/designee debriefs with the visitation team. The CUS Board of Directors, represented by the chairman or the designee of the board, is invited to observe and supervise, in keeping with bylaw 3.6.6.4.2.
 - Visit ends Wednesday around noon.

Visitation Criteria:

- LIMO Standards.
- Evaluation Tool serves as a guide for discussion.
- Church Worker Program Standards.
- Theses for Campus Worship (when complete).
- Any applicable LC-MS bylaws.

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After the Formal Visitation:

Within 60 Days of Visitation:

(e) The visitation team shall prepare a report of its visit and associated findings, which it shall provide to Concordia University System and the institution within 60 days of the conclusion of the visit. After allowing 60 days for the institution to respond in writing to the team's report, Concordia University System shall, with regard to the institution and each of its implemented or proposed church work programs:

- 1) affirm without concerns; or
- 2) affirm with concerns (notice); or
- 3) place the institution or program on probation; or
- 4) disaffirm, in the case of an initial application, or initiate withdrawal of affirmation; or
- 5) initiate further investigation, with the same or a new visitation team.ⁱ

Within 30 Days of Determination:

(d) The institution reviewed may within 30 days of being notified of Concordia University System's visitation determination(s) submit a written appeal and/or response to Concordia University System's determination. Once Concordia University System has, within 30 days of its receipt, considered and acted upon any such appeal, its determination is final and not subject to further appeal.

(e) Within the above 30-day period for request of an appeal or within seven days of receipt of Concordia University System's negative action on a requested appeal, an institution may state a corrective action plan and request Concordia University System, acting in its sole discretion, to grant a delay of up to six months in the publication of a negative visitation result to allow initiation of the plan. Concordia University System may at its option require a summary of the action plan, composed by the institution and approved by Concordia University System, to be published with any revised visitation outcome.

The Conclusion of the Visitation Process:

(f) At the conclusion of the above, the visitation status of each institution and its programs, together with summary reports of visitation reviews, any imposition(s) of notice or probation, and any withdrawal(s) of affirmation, shall be timely made available to the Synod through a publicly accessible website. The information presented shall be of a depth and character that would allow members of the Synod to evaluate the churchly character, relative value, and mission effectiveness of each institution and program, and to understand concretely the steps being taken to improve the same.

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Endnotes

¹(b) Concordia University System may, if a regular or focused review finds that an institution or program is at risk of not fulfilling the Standards, place the institution or program under a notice of concern, which may, at Concordia University System's option, be made public. Concordia University System may lift the notice at any time it determines the risk has been satisfactorily addressed.

(c) Concordia University System may, upon finding an institution to be in breach of the Standards, either on the basis of a regular visitation report or a focused review, place the institution on probation for up to a two-year period. If Concordia University System determines that substantial progress has been made and that verifiable plans and resources are in place to bring the institution into compliance, then Concordia University System may extend probation once for one year, but to no more than three years total. Concordia University System may lift the probation earlier if the institution is brought into compliance. An institution not in compliance at the conclusion of the probationary period is no longer affirmed by the Synod, can no longer declare graduates qualified for placement, and is no longer commended by Concordia University System to the church.

(d) Concordia University System may, upon finding a church work preparation program to be in breach of the Standards, either on the basis of a regular visitation report or of a focused review, place the program on probation for up to a one-year period. If Concordia University System determines that substantial progress has been made and that verifiable plans and resources are in place to bring the program into compliance, then Concordia University System may extend probation once for up to one year, but to no more than two years total. Concordia University System may lift probation earlier if the program is brought into compliance. A program not in compliance at the conclusion of the probationary period is no longer affirmed by the Synod and therefore its graduates cannot be declared as qualified for initial placement and the program cannot be commended or acknowledged as a suitable program of pre-seminary preparation.

(e) An institution or program under probation has not lost affirmation but is not "in good standing with the Synod" for purposes of these Bylaws.