

April 25, 2025

Dr. Bernard Bull, President
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Dear Dr. Bull,

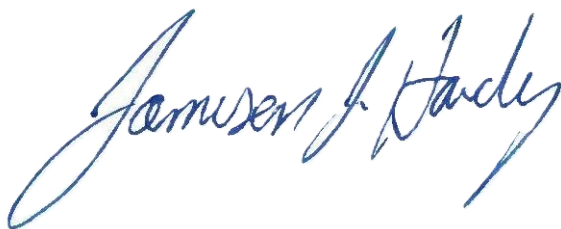
Greetings to you and the Lutheran community of faith at Concordia University, Nebraska.

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, Nebraska 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. We are honored to support and affirm the vital work being done at Concordia University, Nebraska. 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, Nebraska

February 10-12, 2025

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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, Nebraska (CUNE). The visitation team comprised six members: **Reverend Dr. Donald Fondow, Reverend Dr. Aaron Moldenhauer, Dr. Matthew Hurtienne, Reverend Dr. Michael Gibson, Reverend Josemon Hoem, and Mr. Mark Stern.** 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 two days on the campus of CUNE, 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 second formal visitation conducted under the bylaw revisions created by 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 Christ-centered mission outcomes. It shall also enable the drawing of summative conclusions, concretely identifying strengths and weaknesses in institutions and programs, and ultimately providing a clear rationale for decisions about the continuation or termination of affirmation.

This report provides an evaluation of Concordia University Nebraska (CUNE), focusing on its success in fulfilling its mission as a distinctly Lutheran institution of higher education. Based on observations and interviews with faculty, staff, and students, the evaluation explores the university's commitment to Christ-centered education, the integration of faith and learning, and the fostering of a vibrant Christian community.

CUNE appears to be effectively living out its mission. The strategic plan seems to be on track, and there's a sense that CUNE is indeed a Christ-centered university. This is evidenced by the consistent modeling and confession of faith by the administration, faculty, staff, and coaches. President Bull's leadership has been instrumental in keeping the mission and vision of the university at the forefront. Theology faculty play an influential role, with a clear emphasis on pointing all students to Jesus.

The visitation process involved document review, interviews with faculty, staff, students, administrators, and observation of campus life. This report summarizes the team's key findings, highlighting areas of strength and opportunities for growth. It also includes recommendations aimed at supporting CUNE's continued commitment to its Lutheran identity and its pursuit of excellence in all areas of university life.

A major strength of CUNE in maintaining Lutheran identity is its status as what President Bull describes as a "critical mass institution", meaning, for CUNE, having a critical mass of LCMS students (about 50% of undergraduates) who help shape a Lutheran ethos on campus. As such, CUNE is intentional about Lutheran identity and teachings, integrated throughout the college experience, so that all students experience an unavoidable and distinctly Lutheran Christian environment. CUNE also benefits from a multi-generational culture, with many students being the second or third (or more) generation of their family to attend, and many faculty and staff being alumni. This helps maintain and transmit a cohesive and distinctive Lutheran culture on campus.

This report will delve deeper into these aspects, examining how CUNE's Lutheran identity shapes the academic experience, student life, and community engagement. It will also explore the university's efforts to foster spiritual growth among students and equip them for lives of service and leadership in the Church and the world.

Identity Standard I – Ecclesiastical Mission and Goals

Concordia University Nebraska (CUNE) is a Christ-centered community rooted in Lutheran Confessions and Scripture. Affiliated with the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), CUNE emphasizes Jesus Christ's incarnation, atoning death, and resurrection within its educational framework. This commitment expands from the chapel to the classroom, integrating faith and learning in all disciplines. Students engage in inquiry through biblical truths, fostering a holistic Christian approach to scholarship, mentorship, and service.

CUNE's mission nurtures the spiritual formation of students, faculty, and staff. The university acknowledges the Holy Spirit's role in calling individuals to faith and cultivates a deeper understanding of God's grace. Promoting a holistic Christian lifestyle, CUNE equips students to navigate their faith in the world while upholding Lutheran values. This focus on spiritual growth, alongside academic excellence, creates a unique environment where faith and reason converge.

Interview Specifics:

- The institution's mission and vision promote Lutheran identity.
- Hiring practices focus on individuals dedicated to disciplinary catechesis and the faith formation of students.
- About 25% to 30% of students are in church work programs and 80% to 90% of faculty are members of Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod congregations.
- The president envisions CUNE as cultivating a vibrant campus community.

- The University strategy emphasizes Scripture as the foundational source and standard.
 - The president interviews all final employment candidates for each position to ensure fit.
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Identity Standard II – Spiritual and Academic Life

Concordia University Nebraska (CUNE) has woven its ecclesiastical mission and goals into the fabric of campus life. It examines how faith is expressed and nurtured through campus worship, ensuring alignment with Lutheran theology and practice. This includes assessing the content of chapel services, the use of hymns and liturgy, and the approach to sacraments like communion. After discussion with the visitation team, CUNE will continue to evaluate and connect daily chapel services to the expectations of the LCMS and the LIMOS. CUNE cultivates spiritual growth outside of formal worship settings, such as through residence hall devotions and support for those inquiring about the Lutheran faith.

Furthermore, CUNE's commitment to Lutheran identity shapes academic life. It explores the integration of faith and learning in the curriculum, the role of theology courses, and the specific training provided for students pursuing church work vocations. There is evidence highlighting an emphasis on hiring and retaining LCMS professors and ensuring all faculty understand and uphold CUNE's mission. Finally, CUNE incorporates its ecclesiastical identity into significant campus events like matriculation and commencement, ensuring that these occasions reinforce the university's commitment to its Lutheran heritage.

Interview Specifics:

- Faith formation courses are offered/required.
- Sacraments under the care of St John Lutheran Church (next door). They follow the communion practices of St John and closed communion.
- Student retention is a priority - currently 83% for first year, close to 85% goal in strategic plan.
- Course evaluations have been used to determine if students find their classes meaningful to their faith and lives but are under revision for stronger assessment and feedback.
- Faculty are encouraged to involve students in discussions about faith that extend beyond the classroom.
- Theology faculty view it as their responsibility to support colleagues throughout the institution, including coaches. The critical mass strategy instills confidence in the face of demographic challenges by fostering distinctive Christian communities to mitigate generational decline.
- History and Literature of Old Testament and New Testament intentionally named. Present history and literature while showing hermeneutics that sees Christ at the center of Scripture.
- In the graduate school, CUNE is keeping their focus and identity. All syllabi have a “share the faith” emphasis. Streaming chapel services are offered to online students to participate.
- New faculty and staff are required to attend essential faith formation classes offered by CUNE. Other faith formation initiatives are strategically offered for all faculty and staff.

Identity Standard III – Student Recruitment and Student Life

CUNE's admissions process intentionally emphasizes the University's unique character and mission. Recruitment materials and staff interactions clearly present the faith-based environment and opportunities for spiritual growth that set CUNE apart. Furthermore, CUNE prioritizes recruiting students from LCMS congregations and those interested in church work programs, offering specific financial aid packages to support these students. This commitment to a "credibly Lutheran student peer group" fosters a campus culture where faith is both affirmed and lived out.

Student life at CUNE is also designed to support and nurture students' spiritual and personal development. The University provides resources like a student health center and counseling center staffed by individuals committed to practicing in harmony with Lutheran doctrine. Residence life programs and policies promote a Christian lifestyle, and student conduct guidelines are rooted in Biblical principles. Extracurricular activities like athletics, music, and performing arts are integrated with the University's mission, ensuring that all aspects of student life contribute to a Lutheran Christian experience.

Interview Specifics:

- CUNE has a dedicated church work recruiter
- 98% of student athletes report being Christian.
- A head coach think tank meets every two weeks to talk about recruitment strategies; circulate information on LCMS high schools.
- Building an enrollment that meets the Lutheran mission, not just filling seats.

Identity Standard IV – Planning and Resourcing

CUNE's strategic plan, known as the SALT and LIGHT plan, serves as the guiding framework for all university initiatives. This plan explicitly articulates CUNE's Lutheran Christian identity and outlines how this identity will be upheld in academics, campus life, and faith formation. The physical spaces on campus, such as the chapel and campus ministry offices, are intentionally designed to be visible and prominent, reflecting the importance of faith in the CUNE community. Furthermore, the University's Master Plan includes provisions for maintaining and enhancing religious symbolism and artwork, ensuring that the campus environment reinforces CUNE's mission.

Personnel decisions at CUNE are also guided by the university's ecclesiastical goals. Employment criteria for staff and faculty emphasize alignment with CUNE's mission, and ongoing training and formation programs ensure that all employees can accurately represent the university's Lutheran identity. The University budget prioritizes resources for campus ministry, church work preparation programs, and theology, demonstrating a commitment to fulfilling its mission. Finally, CUNE has established assessment and accountability measures to ensure that its

planning and resourcing processes remain aligned with its Lutheran identity, with input from ordained and rostered LCMS faculty and staff.

Interview Specifics:

- Financial model that supports the mission of the University.
 - CUNE depends significantly on its endowment and unrestricted gifts.
 - Job descriptions have key components to outline expectations of mission fit.
 - Chapel attendance and life is one of top five priorities from the President's office.
 - There is a concern about having enough housing in the future and being able to service an increased enrollment.
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Identity Standard V – Governance, Leadership, and Administration

Concordia University, Nebraska demonstrates a strong commitment to its Lutheran identity through proactive engagement with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS). The Board of Regents and administration cultivate relationships with other LCMS institutions through regular communication and collaboration, evidenced by participation in the Concordia University System Institutional Advisory Committee (IAC) and regional leadership meetings. The creation of the Director of Church Engagement position and active involvement in LCMS events further solidify the University's dedication to serving the church. Board members are selected to align with LCMS teachings, and strategic initiatives integrate Lutheran faith into academic and campus life. The president and administration prioritize faculty alignment with LCMS doctrine, supported by ongoing Lutheran identity courses and rigorous hiring practices, ensuring the university's mission remains central to its operations.

The University's governance, leadership, and administration demonstrate a thorough understanding of the LCMS's ecclesiastical interests. The Board of Regents actively ensures curricula, student life policies, and faculty development align with Lutheran doctrine. The recent implementation of the Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS) is being integrated into board training and presidential reviews, ensuring ongoing accountability. The president, acting as the spiritual head of the institution, prioritizes chapel attendance, promotes a Lutheran ethos, and actively engages with LCMS congregations and schools. The administration supports the LCMS's ecclesiastical supervision and maintains clear policies informed by the Lutheran Confessions, with ongoing faculty training reinforcing the integration of faith and learning.

Interview Specifics:

- There is a modeling and confessing of the faith from the President, Administration, Faculty, Coaches, on down.
- President Bull's leadership has kept the mission and vision of the University in the forefront.
- The leadership council has been helpful and meets every two weeks to talk about who has ownership and accountability for certain strategies.

Identity Standard VI – Assessment of Effectiveness

CUNE exhibits strong internal alignment with LCMS values, further development of quantifiable measures to assess the impact of these initiatives would be beneficial. Longitudinal assessment of LIMOS implementation, assessment of community impact within the Lutheran framework are areas for potential growth. Continued development of tracking student engagement, assessing the effectiveness of faculty training, and measuring the impact of church engagement initiatives would provide valuable data for ongoing improvement. They also work with regional and national accreditation bodies. The university weaves a Christian worldview into the curriculum, enriching the academic experience.

Interview Specifics:

- Students reported feeling challenged by their classes and appreciating the opportunities to learn and grow.
- The Science Department has adopted Psalm 119:1 as a foundation as they approach the study of science. Helping students to learn not only the study of science, but to give back to the world in which they live, motivated by their faith in Christ.

Identity Standard VII – Handling and Resolving Concerns of Constituents

CUNE has shown that the University follows effective complaint handling and resolution procedures. They have developed clear and accessible policies that are consistently applied. Many of these procedures can be found in their official handbooks, which cater to different constituent groups and outline the processes for raising concerns, while referencing supporting documentation.

Interview Specifics:

- Grade complaints start with the student and the professor. If needed, complaints are elevated to the dean, and then to the academic office.
- Documented protocol for complaint about the presidency.

Conclusion

The visitation team commended CUNE for its strong Christ-centered culture and commitment to integrating faith and learning. Students, faculty, and staff expressed a shared dedication to the University's mission and praised President Bull's leadership in strengthening Lutheran identity. The team was impressed by the sense of community on campus and the positive student experience, noting particularly the approachability of faculty and opportunities for spiritual growth. Overall, the visitation team affirmed CUNE's success in fulfilling its mission and offered constructive suggestions for continued growth.