

January 30, 2026

Dr. Russell Dawn, President
Concordia University, Chicago
7400 Augusta Street
River Forest, IL 60305

1333 S. Kirkwood Road
St. Louis, MO 63122-7295
800-248-1930 ext. 1252
cus.edu
cus.info@cus.edu

Dear Dr. Dawn,

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

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, Chicago, 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, Chicago. 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, Chicago

October 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 Chicago (CUC). The visitation team comprised six members: **Rev. Douglas Gaunt, Dr. Timothy Preuss, Rev. Dr. Joshua Hollmann, Rev. Dr. Lucas Woodford, Rev. Jason Braaten, and Mr. Thomas Habitz**. 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 visitation team engaged extensively with the institution, completing document review, conducting interviews with faculty, staff, students, administrators, and observing campus life. Over the course of the visit, the team observed a university community deeply committed to its Lutheran identity and earnest in its pursuit of excellence in Christ-centered higher education. As the report reflects, these visitation days were productive and encouraging opportunities for dialogue, evaluation, and mutual support.

This formal visitation was conducted under the bylaw revisions established by **2023 Synod Convention Resolution 7-04b**, utilizing the **Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS)** and the corresponding **LIMOS Evaluation Tool**. The visitation process serves both formative and summative purposes: it fosters institutional growth through intentional and measurable programs that advance Lutheran identity and mission, while also enabling clear and objective assessment of strengths and areas in need of improvement. These dual aims guide the observations and recommendations presented in this report.

CUC demonstrates a clear and intentional loyalty to its ecclesiastical mission as a Christ-centered institution grounded in the Lutheran Confessions. Its mission, vision (“truth, freedom, vocation”), and core values are communicated consistently across the campus and reflected in the life of the university. Leadership at every level expresses strong alignment with these commitments, and the campus community exhibits genuine joy and confidence in living out its Christian identity. Church work programs remain central to CUC’s institutional life and exert a positive influence across disciplines, while other colleges—most notably nursing—embody and extend the university’s mission through their own aligned statements and practices.

Daily chapel, spiritually engaged classroom environments, intentional residential ministry, and robust student leadership contribute to a vibrant spiritual and academic culture. The university is undertaking significant curricular revision to ensure that all academic programs—undergraduate, graduate, and adult—more fully integrate the pillars of truth, freedom, and vocation. Strategic efforts to enhance recruitment, strengthen student life, and expand the institution’s Lutheran footprint within the surrounding region further demonstrate CUC’s desire to serve faithfully and effectively.

The administration and Board of Regents maintain a strong, healthy, and transparent working relationship, unified in their commitment to uphold LCMS doctrine, the LIMOS, and the mission of the CUS. The board describes its approach as shared governance, and the university benefits from clear policy development, consistent oversight, and active participation by regents who view theological clarity as essential for the institution's integrity and wellbeing. Planning processes—ranging from strategic initiatives to campus master planning—reflect forward-looking goals aimed at advancing academic rigor, strengthening Lutheran identity, and ensuring institutional sustainability.

This report summarizes the team's major findings, identifying notable strengths as well as areas for continued growth. It offers recommendations designed to support CUC's ongoing commitment to Christ-centered formation, faithful Lutheran confession, and educational excellence. It also explores how CUC's Lutheran identity shapes academic inquiry, student life, governance, planning, and community engagement, and how the university seeks to form students for lives of thoughtful vocation, Christian service, and faithful witness in the Church and the world.

Identity Standard I – Ecclesiastical Mission and Goals

CUC (Concordia University Chicago) is a Christ-centered institution with the Lutheran Confessions as its foundation. Its ecclesiastical mission and goals are clearly communicated in its Mission Statement, Vision Statement (“truth, freedom, vocation”), and Core Values statement. Faculty, staff, and students express joy and excitement around the Christian mission, and there is strong leadership and alignment that is producing quality outcomes.

Church work programs are at the heart of CUC's ministry in terms of prioritization, and they are growing in strength and numbers. The faculty and students of those programs have an outsized and positive influence across the campus.

Other colleges extend the university mission by adopting and living out their own individual mission statements. The largest program, nursing, stands out in this regard. Faculty regularly act as Christian mentors to students. The student experience is intended to be one of formation for Christian vocations and life.

While LCMS students are a distinct minority in the student body, strategic efforts are being made recruit more of them, and to positively influence the non-Lutheran students. With respect to faculty, there are many disciplines in which it is difficult to recruit Lutheran instructors. In response to this challenge, new hires are required to pass a theological interview to ensure mission fit, and all faculty take an eight-week “Mission and Identity” course that effectively communicates the pillars.

Interview Specifics:

- Among administrators, the “truth, freedom, vocation” vision is understood as a way of life, not just a work-based slogan.
- Communications campaigns (such as the current “Stand Tall”) are ecclesiastical mission-focused, perform well, and are championed by President Dawn.
- All first-year students are required to take a course which explores personal vocation and Christian identity development.

Identity Standard II – Spiritual and Academic Life

Chapel is offered daily Monday through Friday, and uses the church’s liturgy and hymnody. Chapel services are well-received by the campus community, attendance is highly encouraged, and efforts are made to schedule classes at hours that are not in conflict. Hourly employees may attend during working hours. Spiritual life is evident within dormitories and on the athletic fields too, where RA’s and church work students routinely lead in organization of devotions and prayer for the benefit of residential students and athletes.

Academically, the General Education curriculum is being unified for each college by revising the UELO’s (University Essential Learning Outcomes) to directly align with the three pillars of truth, freedom, and vocation. This effort is designed to add faith-based discussion to the classroom, and to ensure that the university’s spiritual underpinnings are evident in all courses and teaching tools. It is crucially important to the fulfillment of this standard that theological faculty is involved in the curriculum redesign, which is not currently in evidence.

The church work programs prepare students with courses that explicitly and thoroughly cover the Lutheran Confessions. The church work students are in separate class sections that allow for robust discussion of this material. We observed numerous instances of church work students and faculty initiating positive interactions across other colleges and areas of campus life, which reflects well on the character of those individuals as well as the culture of the institution. We believe that these types of interactions are vital to its Christian mission and should be encouraged wherever possible if they are not otherwise institutionalized.

Consciously integrating Lutheran theology as a meaningful part of all graduate and adult learning programs is an area for growth and improvement. The predominance of adjunct faculty can also pose a challenge to upholding Lutheran identity, and they face a lower threshold of theological screening than full-time faculty.

Interview Specifics:

- The nursing program shows initiative by adopting its own aligned mission statement, incorporating the Creator's perspective and prayer for patients in class work, and collaborating with the Deaconess program for spiritual care in difficult situations.
- Theology and Music programs are closely connected, and sacred music has a place of importance on campus.
- The Math department has exclusively Lutheran faculty, and uses spiritual analogies to encourage students to live out their vocations in the future. A new course is being planned that teaches "Math in the Order of Creation."
- The Theater program has been restructured, and productions are reviewed for theology by Dr. Chad Kendall.
- The banner for the *Blackboard* app that all students and faculty utilize has a variety of spiritual tools and Bible verses are featured daily.

Identity Standard III – Student Recruitment and Student Life

The university makes spiritual life a priority in content and relationship. Lutheran students, and church work students in particular, act as leaders in campus spiritual life. Students from other backgrounds are encouraged in their faith, in a winsome manner. The campus is a caring multi-ethnic community that students are quite comfortable in.

The Admissions staff clearly understand and embrace their duty to present CUC as an institution with "Christ at the Center". They also encourage and train other recruiters (student workers, tour guides, and coaches) to be open and honest about Concordia's identity as a Lutheran, Christian institution of higher education.

For recruitment in church work, the Prepared to Serve tuition support program has attracted new students to CUC. The population of church work students is increasing, with plans to continue the growth, especially through the introduction of the Classical Lutheran Educator Program.

CUC is well-networked with local Lutheran schools and congregations, but it could benefit from greater awareness within its surrounding region generally. While some students enjoy the benefits of being close to a large, dynamic city, others are more comfortable in the cloistered setting that River Forest provides.

Student organizations are organized on the basis of various identities and affinities. The Office of Campus Engagement and the faculty advisor review their mission and purpose statements annually.

Interview Specifics:

- Students cited strengths of the experience being the quality of faculty and their caring nature, small class sizes, and family atmosphere. Individualized attention to students in smaller environment is also benefit to retention.
- Chapel, dorm devotions, and other activities focused on worship and Christian fellowship have a positive influence on campus life, led by Chaplain Raddatz. Residential ministry coordinators are LCMS students chosen to be spiritual life representatives on their floors.
- Regarding awareness of university mission among students, “truth, freedom, and vocation” was vaguely known by a group of upperclassmen, but “Christ at the Center” and the “Stand Tall” campaign was readily known by them.
- The prevalence of online courses, especially the general education classes, in certain programs of study, were cited to be less inspiring and challenging, and therefore are likely to be less contributory to a rich Christian life experience on campus.
- The theology faculty indicated that the non-church work students taking the required theology courses are “not antagonistic anymore because Admissions is doing a better job of communicating who we are and what we’re about.”
- The music department plays an important role in recruitment and student activities, as it maintains distinctive level of quality while other music programs in the area are in decline.

Identity Standard IV – Planning and Resourcing

The Focusing Our Future strategic plan is the active roadmap for achieving the university vision. It is comprehensive in the sense that it references campus development, the student experience, and the vitality of the faculty and staff. CUC is also developing a new strategic plan that represents the first, three-year phase of President’s vision over the next 15 years. Regents, alumni, faculty, focus groups, and other stakeholders are engaged in the development process, prior to its rollout to the broader campus community in Spring 2026. The strategic plan will lay direction for university to strive for more academic rigor while remaining Christ-focused, and it will produce a prescriptive set of action plans.

There is also an active, wide-ranging committee with over 40 members that are working to develop and implement a campus master plan (to replace the 2021 version). An element of this plan under consideration is building a central dedicated chapel that does not share space with other departments and that is a focal point and draw to the campus for outsiders.

Resourcing is on the rise in certain ways as prior debt has been reduced. The endowment and other program resources need to be promoted and increased. The campus has significant capital improvement needs that are not currently budgeted for.

Interview Specifics:

- The nursing school is the largest program at CUC, and additional resources could produce more market-competitive faculty salaries.
- The success of church work recruitment, which is correlated with offering scholarships and tuition discounts that reduce revenue per student, could become financially burdensome to the university. For this reason, CUC has in place a resource plan that directly accounts for this possibility and thereby avoids these unintended effects.

Identity Standard V – Governance, Leadership, and Administration

CUC has demonstrated its allegiance to the LCMS over many years. Under President Dawn, that connection has remained very strong, and is evidenced by active involvement and commitment to the Concordia University System at large. Dr. Kendall also meets with his counterparts in the CUS. These leaders are committed to proactively upholding the integrity of the CUS.

The Board of Regents develops policy and defines expectations regarding academic freedom as well as conflict resolution guidelines for faculty, staff and students. The Regents are familiar with the LIMOS and work to ensure that the CUC actively upholds them. The Board describes its approach as shared governance, and there is strong alignment between the board and the senior leadership of the university. The Board members have undergone Synod-mandated training, and they are very involved in the formation of the strategic plan.

The administration shares information with the Board when issues do occur. The administration knows that the Board is there for consultation and support, and is utilized to this end. The Board also plays an important role in vetting faculty hiring recommendations as well as recommendations for continuing contracts, and advancement in rank and tenure for fulltime faculty.

Interview Specifics:

- The Executive Committee of the Board has been structured to include an ordained pastor as Mission Steward, whose sole purpose is ensuring the LIMOS are front and center in all decisions.
- When asked about how they navigate the difficulties between doctrine and diplomacy, one regent stated, “Doctrine wins.”
- The regents view clarity in our doctrinal stance as showing kindness to those who either desire to attend or be employed at CUC.

Identity Standard VI – Assessment of Effectiveness

Regarding the revision of the general education curriculum to be in alignment with LIMOS and the ecclesiastical and educational goals of the university, a list of University Essential Learning Outcomes (UELLOs) have been developed as an assessment tool. The UELLOs align with the guidelines found in the Synodical Handbook. CUC has done extensive preparation to address the LIMOS questions associated with the formal visitation. CUC is very much a willing and eager participant with the visitation team and with the CUS Board of Directors.

Interview Specifics:

- Employee reviews now include a question on performance relative to the values of the institution.

Identity Standard VII – Handling and Resolving Concerns of Constituents

In campus worship, Lutheran liturgy, hymns, and preaching are the foundation. To provide education on the nature of the services, and to make the community more conversant in the purpose of these forms, Chaplain Raddatz provides written and oral liturgical catechesis.

In the classroom, it is common for students to demand clear conversations and conclusions in subject matter, especially in the sciences. CUC has sponsored an “Apologetics Boot Camp” to prepare students for defending their faith in the future, and to address controversial questions proactively. If this effort is fully established, it would be worthwhile to consider making it available to a wider audience in the community.

Interview Specifics:

- Dr. Kendall is completing the development of a course on unity and civility that engages students on how they've been taught to interact, engage, and bring about change according to a Scriptural model. The course was initially developed by a committee that included faculty members, a representative from President Harrison's office, a representative from LCEF, a staff member at a different Concordia, and LCMS pastors.
- Dr. Kendall has worked with faculty to develop case studies and has conducted discussions on Christian ethics to address potential stumbling blocks to faith among students.

Conclusion

The visitation team gives thanks to God and commends President Dawn and Concordia University Chicago for its steadfast commitment to its mission as a Christ-centered Lutheran university, grounded in the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions. Throughout the visitation, the team observed a campus culture that speaks openly and joyfully of Christ, and leaders—administrators, faculty, staff, and students—who understand their work in light of the university’s ecclesiastical purpose and confession.

The team was encouraged by President Dawn’s clear, energetic, and faithful leadership, which has strengthened unity across the university and reinforced the centrality of “truth, freedom, and vocation” in both academic and institutional life. CUC has been blessed with a strong sense of community, where Lutheran identity is expressed through daily chapel, intentional mentoring, robust church work programs, and a shared commitment to form students for thoughtful Christian vocations. Across colleges and departments, the visitation team witnessed a sincere desire to uphold the university’s Lutheran character and extend its mission into every discipline and program.

The level of concord in confession, cooperation in governance, and fraternal Christian love evident among regents, administrators, faculty, and students is notable. While the report offers several constructive suggestions for continued growth—particularly in strengthening theological integration across all academic programs, enhancing collaboration between the theology faculty and other departments, and addressing long-term resource needs—the team found that CUC is faithfully living out its identity and mission.

Overall, the visitation team affirms Concordia University Chicago’s success in fulfilling its purpose as a Lutheran institution of higher education and offers these recommendations in the spirit of encouragement, partnership, and continued strengthening of its Christ-centered mission.