

The Unwavering Fortress of Faith: Why the Concordia University System Remains the Beating Heart of Lutheran Higher Education

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In an era defined by secularization and shifting cultural paradigms, higher education faces an unprecedented existential crisis. This is seen clearly by the closures of many smaller religious colleges and Universities across this country. Institutions across North America struggle to define their purpose, often jettisoning traditional foundational values in favor of transient societal trends. Attempting to appeal to the changing tides of culture and the shifting sands of popularity. Yet, amid this turbulent landscape, the Concordia University System (CUS) stands as a beacon of clarity, steadfastness, and spiritual purpose. The schools of the CUS remain committed to biblical truth and the confessional integrity on which our church body was founded. The universities of the CUS provide a model of higher education that does not merely educate the mind but forms the soul and strengthens Christian values.

At the center of the CUS identity is an unyielding commitment to a distinctively Lutheran Christian witness. This witness is not a peripheral marketing veneer or a historical vestige relegated to chapel walls; it is the bright light and core of academic life across every campus. This re-dedication and re-commitment to being distinctively Lutheran was the response to the LCMS convention resolution 7-04B at its 2023 national convention. 7-04B led to a church-wide recommitment to leaning into what makes us distinctive and to being proud to be called Lutheran.

The Theological Foundation of Lutheran Higher Education

The cornerstone of the Concordia University System's academic philosophy is the clear confession of Jesus Christ as the Redeemer of the world. In a world grasping for truth, CUS institutions proclaim that ultimate truth is found only in God's Word. This reality is captured in the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of John:

"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." (John 8:31–32)

For Concordia institutions, education is fundamentally about freedom—the freedom gained through Christ's truth, which enables students to engage critically with the world without falling captive to its falsehoods. Freedom comes only from a Savior who gave His life for the world and rose to conquer sin and the Devil.

This educational perspective is rooted in the biblical understanding of vocation (*Vocatio*). As the Lutheran Confessions explicitly state in the *Augsburg Confession* (Article XVI), civil ordinances, legitimate professions, and secular occupations are good works ordained by God through which Christians express faith and love toward their neighbor. Lutheran higher education does not draw a sacred-secular divide that diminishes "ordinary" daily work. Whether a student is preparing for full-time professional church work or entering nursing, business, law, or engineering, their work is recognized as a holy calling to serve God by serving others and loving the neighbor.

Furthermore, as the *Formula of Concord* (Solid Declaration, Article I) affirms, human nature, though corrupted by original sin, remains God's creation, possessing gifts of reason, intellect, and creativity that are to be cultivated for His glory. The CUS institutions honor this truth by maintaining academic standards and robust intellectual inquiry, seeking to equip whole persons—mind, body, and spirit—for service in the Church and the world. While this has been the institutions' hallmark historically, today it is a defining reason students choose a Concordia campus. With 5 faithful presidents and 5 faith boards of regents, the CUS schools are poised to enter the next millennium with confidence and courage.

Remarkable Growth in Church Work Programs

Higher education at large has suffered overall enrollment declines, shifting demographics, and decreasing interest in traditional religious studies, largely due to the demographic cliff and societal pressures. However, the Concordia University System has witnessed a counter-cultural reality. Over the last seven years, despite the macroeconomic and demographic headwinds facing American colleges, CUS campuses have seen notable growth and renewed vigor across their Church Work programs. Many factors contribute to this reality. The church's initiative, Set-Apart-to-Serve, in partnership with the CUS focus on Lutheran Identity, are contributing factors. Likewise, the desire for concrete awareness of life and deeper knowledge of faith has collided to create a perfect-storm environment for this growth and increase.

At a time when many young people are searching for authentic meaning, stability, and purpose, CUS institutions have seen a rising tide of young adults stepping forward to answer the call to serve as future pastors, deaconesses, directors of Christian education (DCEs), directors of parish music, and Lutheran school teachers. For this we shout aloud, "The Lord be Praised."

This growth in church work programs underscores a vital reality: students do not desire watered-down theology or moral ambiguity. They respond to a clear, faithful, and uncompromising Christian confession paired with generous institutional support, such as church work tuition guarantees and dedicated scholarship funds provided by the universities and through gifts to the CUS. The CUS has demonstrated that when an educational system remains faithful to its core mission, it becomes a magnet for those driven by a deep desire to devote their lives to the Gospel. To heed the command of Christ to love the neighbor and to remain faithful even when it becomes unpopular.

The Pillars of the Concordia University System: Our Concordia Institutions

Each university within the Concordia University System brings unique geographic strengths, academic programs, and distinctive campus cultures. Yet all remain united by a shared confession and commitment to preparing leaders for Christ's Kingdom and for service to the world.

1. Concordia University Chicago (River Forest, IL)

Situated just outside the heart of Chicago, Concordia University Chicago (CUC) offers a rich liberal arts and professional education steeped in classical Lutheran heritage.

2. Concordia University Irvine (Irvine, CA)

Nestled in Southern California, Concordia University Irvine (CUI) serves as a key intellectual and spiritual home for LCMS higher education on the West Coast. A clear Beacon for the Church in the westernmost part of our country. Set atop Turtle Rock, the CUI campus overlooks the valley and the world it seeks to engage.

3. Concordia University, Nebraska (Seward, NE)

Concordia University, Nebraska (CUNE) stands as a premier institution for full-time church work preparation within the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. For its entire history, it has been our Teachers College. CUNE stands as a beautiful place in the midst of the Nebraska fields, preparing students to serve the Church and the world.

4. Concordia University, St. Paul (St. Paul, MN)

Located in the Twin Cities, Concordia University, St. Paul (CSP) bridges traditional Christian higher education with modern flexible learning models and career-ready skill sets. Set in the culturally diverse setting of St. Paul, Minnesota, CSP is a bright light of Lutheran Christian values in a heavily diversified cultural melting pot.

5. Concordia University Wisconsin (Mequon, WI) & Ann Arbor (Ann Arbor, MI)

Spanning two residential campuses along the shores of Lake Michigan, Concordia University Wisconsin and Ann Arbor (CUWAA) represent a comprehensive educational network. Classically spoken of as one university on two campuses.

The Christian Witness: Education for Time and Eternity

Unlike institutions that view education merely as a means to financial security, the Concordia University System understands higher education as both biblical stewardship and eternal significance. It prepares people to serve both the church and the world, never separating the two. Whether you are studying in the sun-soaked hills of Irvine, the metropolises of Chicago or St. Paul, the rural farm fields of Seward, Nebraska, or the beauty that is the coastline of Lake Michigan, you are eternally blessed and refreshed.

When a student enrolls at a Concordia University, they enter a community that worships daily, studies Scripture deeply, and pursues academic excellence enthusiastically. They learn that their value does not stem from their GPA, job offers, or social status, but from their identity as redeemed children of God full of potential and loved by Christ.

As the *Large Catechism* stresses in its exposition of the Ten Commandments, the highest priority for any family or Christian community is faithfully instructing the next generation in the fear and knowledge of God. CUS universities partner with parents, congregations, and the broader church to carry out this sacred charge.

A Bright Future Built on the Unchanging Word

The growth of CUS church work programs over the past seven years demonstrates that when higher education stands firmly upon biblical truth, students respond. The universities of the Concordia University System offer more than a degree; they offer a transformational experience rooted in the Gospel. They give attendees a place to be cared for and loved. They are taught the word of God in its truth and purity without fear and trepidation.

As the CUS looks toward the future, its mission remains clear: to cultivate faithful servant leaders who will enter a world in need of hope, armed with academic skill, professional competence, and the light of Christ. In the words of the Lutheran Confessions and the ancient church, our faith and our schools rest secure upon one foundation: ***Verbum Domini Manet in Aeternum***—*The Word of the Lord Endures Forever*.