Concordia University System

Deaconess Program Standards

Approved September 2026

Prologue:

A Lutheran deaconess is a Synod-trained woman who is a certified, called, and commissioned minister of religion prepared to serve in congregations, recognized service organizations, missions, and institutions of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Programs prepare candidates to carry out the diaconal functions of mercy work, spiritual care, and teaching the Christian faith. The Concordia University System Deaconess Program Standards specify the instructional, formational, and experiential expectations that prepare students for commissioned ministry as Lutheran deaconesses.

These standards supplement the general CUS Church Work Program Standards and ensure that deaconess candidates are equipped as faithful theologians and compassionate and collaborative servants in the ministry of the Church. Formation of a Lutheran deaconess includes the development of Christian character, diaconal skill, servant leadership, and a commitment to the vocation of sharing Christ's mercy on behalf of the Church. Institutions may structure curricula and their outcomes differently while demonstrating alignment with these standards.

Standard 1: Biblical Knowledge and Interpretation

The program requires students to complete a major in theology which incorporates a comprehensive understanding of the canonical books of the Old and New Testaments as the inspired Word of God, equipping them to interpret biblical history, literature, and theological themes with a Christocentric focus.

Standard 2: Confessional and Doctrinal Articulation

The program prepares students to confess, articulate and teach the articles of the Christian faith as found in the Book of Concord and the main doctrines of the Lutheran Church, through the required major in theology.

Standard 3: Church History and Context

The program teaches the history of the Christian Church, including LCMS history, mission, and ministry, and develops the student's understanding of various denominations and world religions to contextualize diaconal service.

Standard 4: Vocational Understanding

The program teaches students a comprehensive understanding of the LCMS deaconess as a called and commissioned office of the Church, grounded in its theology, history, and practice.

Standard 5: Integration of Theology and Practice

The program equips students to integrate theological knowledge specifically training for Law and Gospel distinction and proper application within diaconal practice, specifically for the core deaconess functions of mercy work, spiritual care, and teaching the Christian faith.

Standard 6: Personal and Professional Habits

The program cultivates habits essential to the deaconess office including fostering regular worship, a robust devotional life, personal wellness, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Standard 7: Servant Leadership and Virtues

The program develops servant leadership and virtues essential to the deaconess vocation, forming students in integrity, compassion, empathy, hospitality, humility, curiosity, competence, professionalism, collaboration, and respect for people from diverse perspectives.

Standard 8: Supervised Field Experience

The program requires structured, supervised field experiences and internships, allowing students to integrate theological knowledge and diaconal skills in practical ministry settings.