



CONVENTION WORKBOOK

REPORTS AND OVERTURES 2023

WE PREACH!
CHRIST CRUCIFIED

68TH REGULAR CONVENTION
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
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in the best sense. Pursue, retain, and appropriately compensate theology professors. Place them at the center of the university's life. Let them bring theological insight to administrative decisions and student concerns. One of your theology faculty spoke at length with members of the Black Student Union and was well received by these Christian students. He helped them to see the goodness of the Bible's perspective on race and racism and to understand that diversity need not include errant views of marriage and human sexuality. Be uncommon by requiring regular catechesis for all faculty in Lutheran doctrine. Catechesis takes years, not a single hour in a day of new faculty orientation.

Be uncommon by calling a theologian pastor to be the next president of CUWAA. Let him fill his cabinet with the people he needs to assist him with the knowledge and experience he lacks. That worked for President Ferry, and the institution was blessed remarkably because of it. It can work for the next president too.

Be uncommon by focusing on what Concordia can do better than all other universities, not by trying to look like all the other universities. Be competitive by being truly uncommon. Double down on the liberal arts. Emphasize philosophy, languages, rhetoric, critical thinking, ethics, and biblical humanism. Read the Scriptures, Luther, Dante, Milton, Aristotle, and C.S. Lewis more than Kendi, Hannah-Jones, DiAngelo, and Gladwell. Emphasize the uncommon nature of a science faculty that values science and confesses a Creator. Celebrate and strengthen what Concordia has, before looking to acquire what it does not have.

Be uncommon by training students not primarily for careers but for vocations in the God-ordained estates of church, family, and society. I know you believe this.

Concordia can thrive. It can be a modest-sized but mighty institution that exposes students awash in secular ideologies and identities to the washing and renewal of the Holy Spirit, giving them eternal baptismal identities. It can be a powerhouse in the LCMS' wonderful CUS, churning out zealous and faithful church workers and pious, well-rounded, deep-thinking laymen and laywomen who will be assets in their Lutheran congregations and broader communities. It can draw students seeking an excellent liberal arts education free from the narrow-mindedness of modern progressivism, and then graduate them equipped with the knowledge of genuine truth, beauty, and goodness. It can do all this and weather the storms threatening higher education. But its current trajectory is too common. What it needs is something truly *uncommon*: a crystal-clear confession of Jesus Christ.

By God's grace, Concordia can be an uncommon beacon of hope, a university set on a hill, built on the foundation of Jesus Christ. As the CUW seal says, *Timor Domini principium sapientiae*. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom."

Matthew C. Harrison, *President*

R64

Ecclesiastical Visitation of Concordia University Texas

By the Office of the President,
The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

This report was publicly promised to the Synod. Since my visitation and delivery of a report to the Board of Regents, the Board of Regents has expressed willingness to reconsider their November 2022 governance decision and to address issues raised in the report. I am very thankful they expressed this willingness along with a commitment to the Synod. I remain hopeful for a positive outcome and our common work together in shared mission and ministry.

Introduction

On April 20–22, 2022, consistent with the duties and responsibilities given my office by the Constitution and Bylaws of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod (LCMS), which also govern Concordia University Texas (CTX), I conducted an ecclesiastical visitation of the university. This is a summary of the report I sent to the CTX Board of Regents (BOR) with some changes made in response to a reply by CTX President Dr. Don Christian.

I announced my intention to conduct this visitation in a March 31, 2022, letter to Dr. Christian. I wrote, in part:

I am taking this action because Concordia has been such a precious blessing to the LCMS, to her Gospel-defined mission, and to countless thousands. This is a fitting time for a visitation, as the CTX Board of Regents recently expressed its desire to administer the university in a manner less directly connected to the national Synod. I am also acting because of concerns addressed to me by lay and clergy members of the Synod, CUS representatives, current and former faculty, and students of CTX.

CTX has been established by the congregations of the Synod, and its Board of Regents and administration are responsible to them for its faithful operation. The congregations allow the school great freedom in accomplishing its mission, but that mission is defined "within the broad assignment of the Synod" (Bylaw 3.10.6.1). Concordia, as an "agency" of the Synod, has a sacred responsibility to operate in accord with the bounds of the confession of the Synod ("the written Word of God as the only rule and norm of faith and practice," and in accordance with the Symbolical Books of the Evangelical Lutheran Church), as expressed in Article II of our Constitution.

The President of Synod "has the supervision regarding the doctrine and administration of . . . all such as are employed by the Synod" (Article XI B 1 b). "It is the President's duty to see to it that all the aforementioned are acting according with the Synod's Constitution, to admonish all who in any way depart from it, and, if such admonition is not heeded, to report such cases to the Synod" (Article XI B 2).

Composition and Methods of the Visitation

The visitation team:

Rev. Dr. Matthew C. Harrison, President, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Rev. Joe Hoem, Board of Directors, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Michelle Kazmierczak, JD, Board of Regents, Concordia University Chicago, River Forest, Ill.

Rev. Dr. Thomas Korcok, associate professor, Concordia Lutheran Theological Seminary in St. Catharines, Ontario

Dr. Gerhard Munding Jr., chairman, Board of Directors, Concordia University System

Rev. Dr. Scott Murray, third vice-president, The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod

Rev. Dr. Paul Philp, director of institutional research and integrity, Concordia University System

Dr. Bradd Stucky, Board of Regents, Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, Ind.

Rev. Dr. Dean Wenthe, president, Concordia University System

Over the course of three days on the CTX campus, the visitation team interviewed 53 individuals, met with both the CTX leadership and the CTX Equity Team, attended chapel, and ate lunch in the campus dining halls.

The visitation team asked questions related to Lutheran identity, the mission of the university, the faculty's use of a biblical worldview in their approach to controversial topics, the proposed change in the university's governance, campus life, and other related topics. At the end of many interviews, I asked how loved and supported students and faculty felt on campus. The visitation team did not quarrel with interviewees and did not push back on answers given. The team asked clarifying questions when appropriate or necessary. Summary statements from the interviews and related comments were included as an appendix to the report given to the BOR.

Dissimilar to their experience during prior ecclesiastical visitations, the visitation team to CTX felt unwelcome and carefully managed while on campus. The team was repeatedly asked not to interact with students or faculty outside of the interviews. Almost every interviewee was accompanied by a "support person," which in most cases was a supervisor.

One member of the visitation team observed, "From the very beginning the reception from the administration was not welcoming. ... Almost everyone we were allowed to meet with was accompanied by a supervisor or support person. This made it difficult for us to get a real look as to what is happening on campus. I was certainly made to feel like I [as a representative of Synod] was the bad guy, and we had no right to be on campus."

This sentiment was echoed by nearly the entire visitation team. They believed their time on campus was unproductive, that most of the interviewees had been prepped with common talking points, and that having a superior as a "support person" caused interviewees to give guarded answers.

The Concordia University Texas Proposal

Though I have been made aware of several concerns from former faculty members of CTX, the final precipitating event for our visit was the BOR's February 2022 announcement of their desire to seek separation from the LCMS through a restructuring of its governance model.

All interviewees were aware of the proposal to create a new model for governing CTX apart from the Synod, though interview-

ees had differing degrees of familiarity with both the proposed model and the current model of governance. One person revealed to the team that even as a new employee he was made aware, as early as June 2021, of the university's plan to seek independence from the Synod.

The draft document "Reimagining the Relationship: A proposal from Concordia University Texas to Separate from LCMS Governance," proposes a "model of governance in which the institution is solely governed by the CTX Board of Regents while continuing to align itself with the LCMS." To explain this proposal, the document also provides the rationale for separating from the Synod.

CTX views the move away from the Synod as one in the "long tradition of Lutheran social service, medical, and military ministries" that have distanced themselves from their parent church bodies. "To meet the above challenges, nimble, focused, and local control is essential so that issues can be quickly addressed by those most close to the institution. This proposed governance change would equip the institution's local board to address complex issues in the most efficient way possible, ensuring that decisions can be made in a way that best serves the church and local constituents, much as is done in a congregation."

When asked to identify the hindrances of Synod oversight that keep CTX from responding to complex issues efficiently, interviewees named two: (1) the slow process for getting approval for a loan from the Synod Board of Directors (BOD), and (2) the prior approval process, which slows down hiring or removes some job candidates from consideration.

These arguments fail to hold up to closer scrutiny and fail to justify the university's desire to completely change its governance model to one that is a novelty in the history of the LCMS. In fact, the CTX BOR minutes from the Sept. 6, 2019, meeting blame the lender, not the Synod, for failure to get a loan on the school's timeline. Regarding the second concern, prior approval is only required for the hiring of the university president and members of the theology faculty. Administrators we spoke with only mentioned one hire that was impeded by the prior approval process.

The proposal to separate from the Synod is also based on the false assertion that the closing of three Concordias over the past four years is evidence of the failure of the current governance model. The closures of Concordia College Alabama, Selma, Ala.; Concordia University, Portland, Ore.; and Concordia College New York, Bronxville, N.Y., were not the result of too much oversight from the Synod. They closed because of financial pressures and declining enrollments. Their relationships to the Synod and financial assistance from both the Synod and her entities allowed them to stay open much longer than they would have if they were self-governed and separate from the Synod. Over the past 16 years, the LCMS has given over \$92 million in support to the Concordia University System.

The CTX BOR identifies concerns about the governance changes proposed by the LCMS BOD 7-03 Task Force as the primary rationale to seek separation from the Synod. The final form of the task force's proposal to the Synod in convention in 2023 is uncertain, and no one can know what the Synod in convention will decide. Moving to separate from the Synod before the 7-03 recommendations are finalized or before the Synod in convention has taken any action on the recommendations of the 7-03 Task Force is imprudent and premature.

Moreover, though the proposal anticipates five “problematic possibilities” should the Synod in convention pass the current proposals of the 7-03 Task Force and should a school eventually lose its ecclesiastical accreditation, all five could happen as a result of CTX’s separation from the Synod. These are the five concerns:

- The sudden loss of eligibility for participation in Concordia Plans
- The removal of the ability to call certified church workers
- The discontinuation of LCMS accepted church worker programs
- The loss of standing as an LCMS institution, causing a possible loss in financial support and harming the overall reputation of the institution
- A confusion of leadership, mission, and direction as a third-party committee—a new model of ecclesiastical oversight in the 7-03 recommendation—exerts outside influence that is *confusing in its execution* (emphasis added)

Even the CTX BOR proposal admits that “CTX will not be able to certify [church work] students” and will need to partner with another LCMS institution that would certify students for church work. Separation from the Synod would cost CTX its standing as an LCMS institution. In order to avoid the proposed “new model of ecclesiastical oversight” of the 7-03 recommendation, CTX proposes its own *new model of ecclesiastical oversight*. This new model is most certainly “confusing in its execution.”

The desire for separation from the Synod is not new, as even the proposal mentions discussions in 1976 and 2003 about governance independent from the Synod. Was 2019 Res. 7-03 really the impetus, or has the desire for independence been simmering for a while?

Before the 2019 Synod convention, which passed Res. 7-03, ELCA emeritus professor Rev. Dr. Darrell Jodock presented at a faculty development series at CTX in July 2018. Jodock has written extensively on the nature of Lutheran higher education, much of which is available online. Jodock’s church affiliation and long-term professorate at an ELCA school (Gustavus Adolphus College) reflect a public confession of a Lutheran identity not in concert with what most LCMS Lutherans understand Lutheranism to be about.

In his presentation at CTX (which was available online, and which one of the visitation team members listened to), Jodock argued for a Lutheran university as a “third path” between sectarian religious institutions and non-sectarian institutions. This third path is both “Lutheran and inclusive,” deeply rooted in religious tradition but also an understanding and welcoming way of diversity and inclusivity. Jodock told the CTX faculty that the vocabulary of a “Lutheran identity” does not work for other faith traditions. Instead, he argued, we must talk about “Lutheran values” to which everyone is more willing to subscribe. This is an insidious move to eschew a confessional identity borne out of Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions and to replace this identity with a set of “values” for how to see the world through the same critical eyes as, some suppose, Luther had. Jodock rejected universities being tied to church bodies, as such affiliation automatically subjects colleges to religious authorities. Jodock reasoned that since Luther challenged ecclesiastical authority, so should Lutheran universities. Finally, in Jodock’s vision of a Lutheran university, Lutheran identity is reduced to the area of vocation, which supposedly “enhances the educational experience.”

This is a pauper’s Lutheran identity, lacking the essence of what Lutherans believe and confess. But it sets the stage for CTX’s move away from the Synod’s ecclesiastical authority.

The doctrine of vocation is not the fullness of a confessional Lutheran identity, rooted in Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions. Instead, Jodock’s presentation on vocation functions as a Trojan horse, in which is hidden an attempt to make the imagined renegade ghost of Luther the Geist of a Lutheran university.

If Lutheran hospitals and social service agencies are the model for separating from Synod governance, the natural question is, “Is there any such institution still faithful to its confessional moorings?” Is there a hospital that bears the name “Lutheran” and does not perform or prescribe abortions? Is there a Lutheran adoption agency that has severed its ties with a church body that does not place adoptees into same-sex households? For that matter, is there any example of a university or college, founded by a traditionally conservative church body, that after severing its ties with its mother church body continued to remain faithful to that body’s public confession? The weight of historical evidence is stacked against CTX remaining faithful to the doctrine and practice of the LCMS once such a separation has occurred.

Other peculiar statements about CTX’s relationship to the LCMS can be found in recent BOR agenda and minutes:

- September 2019: “Need to determine if we are still independent of the LCMS. If we determine we’re not—need to notify SACS-COC. We can say we are a multi governance system.”
- February 2020, discussing Res. 7-03: “We embarked on a new structure this past July, having all departments other than philanthropy report to Kristi Kirk. ... You can have great confidence that the leadership of Concordia is deep and very results oriented, with a focus on mission and margin.”
- Minutes from the February 2021 BOR meeting: “Time for us as a board to resolve that we oppose the changes of 7-03 committee. As we are not in alignment with the committee, and they are not listening to our proposed changes. [sic] Other schools may join us in opposition, but it’s difficult to see any other school taking the lead.”
- Minutes from the April 2021 meeting: “Proposal: The Board of Regents, in its meeting of April 16, 2021, commission the president to prepare and present models of alternative governing structures to the board and relationships to be considered alongside the 7-03 proposed bylaws; and that the board, after exploring and studying the risks and rewards of each of the models, determines which one best serves the school, the church and its constituents. The models presented will continue to align CTX with the church in a way that is faithful to the doctrine and practice of the LCMS, allows for a sustainable future, and meets the long-term vision of the University.”
- September 2021 State of the University Report about DEI: “As we take seriously the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion, we are ever mindful of how that work is influenced by, understood through, and lived out in accordance with our Lutheran identity. There are many words and phrases in this work that have been co-opted or misconstrued by various groups. Our mission must always align with these initiatives.”

- September 2021 Governance Exploration: “The work on which the board is embarking will set the institution on a path in which it can thrive and move ahead. Having explored options and making a conscious decision allows the institution to embrace its governance relationships and make important decisions for the future.”
- December 2021 President’s Goals for 2020–2021 include “By February 11, 2022, the Board has decided on the governance structure that reflects its future relationship with the LCMS. . . . I continue to explore this topic with multiple people, seeking advice and best practices. I believe that the Board is on track to make a decision no later than February 11.”

Despite repeated clarifications from the LCMS Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) that, in accord with the Scriptures, presidents of CUS universities must be men, CTX’s proposed new bylaws are vague on the president being male, making no mention of his role as theological overseer of the university and changing pronouns to the generic and grammatically incorrect “their.” Of the president of any institution of the Concordia University System, LCMS Bylaw 3.10.6.6 says, “He shall serve as the spiritual, academic, and administrative head of the institution.” The proposed new bylaws for CTX, however, describe the duties of the president differently: “The President shall be an executive officer of the University and serve as the head of the University.” Not only does the proposal remove CTX from the ecclesiastical oversight carried out by the President of the Synod, the CUS, and the Synod in convention, but it also removes any responsibility for ecclesiastical headship from the president.

CTX’s proposal to separate from the ecclesiastical oversight of the Synod brings into question CTX’s faithfulness to a Lutheran identity before such a separation might occur. If CTX is already robustly and faithfully Lutheran, one could perhaps expect such a divorce from ecclesiastical oversight to yield—at best—no diminishment of the university’s Lutheran identity. Not one of the visitors, nor any careful student of the history of formerly church-affiliated universities, expects such a separation to result in the university’s increased faithfulness to a scriptural and confessional Lutheran identity. Therefore, this is the pressing question: If the current status quo is the ceiling for a Lutheran identity following a separation of CTX from the Synod, how faithful is CTX presently to such a Lutheran identity?

Lutheran Identity

What does the evidence show regarding CTX’s Lutheran identity? Interviewees assured members of the visitation team that the university has a clear, distinct Lutheran identity. Few, however, articulated what a Lutheran identity is. Some interviewees talked about vocation and preparing students for lives of service. Some interviewees spoke of the paradoxes of Lutheran theology. Some faculty told us they were glad to be able to talk about faith in the classroom; others told us that a Lutheran identity is not part of their jobs.

In order to maintain alignment with LCMS doctrine and practice, the CTX BOR drafted *Concordia University Texas—A Demonstration of its Lutheran Identity* (DLI), “a framework by which CTX will live out and demonstrate faithfulness to its Lutheran identity.” This document notably states that CTX will continue to subscribe to Article II of the LCMS Constitution, despite a pending proposal to separate itself from the Synod. The document’s major

shortcoming, however, is its failure to articulate a Lutheran identity. Merely saying “we are Lutheran and we agree with what The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod teaches” fails to offer anything meaningful whereby the teaching and practice of the university might be evaluated using the DLI, which is its expressed function.

The DLI calls for university leadership that “both represents and is committed to” the confession of the faith in Article II of the LCMS Constitution, as well as “a sufficient number of faculty who deeply understand the ethos of Lutheran higher education.” And yet, presently only three members of the leadership team are members of LCMS congregations. The majority of the faculty are not members of LCMS congregations, although CTX leadership suggests improvements have been made in the quantity of LCMS faculty over the last three years. One interviewee described the current process for catechizing new faculty: a four-day orientation in the summer, which includes a half day on “Lutheran ethos.” Neither Luther’s Small Catechism nor the Augsburg Confession, both foundational to a Lutheran identity and prescriptive for a Lutheran ethos, is used.

The visitation team heard from two former faculty members who believed that their quick and quiet dismissals were due in part to their fidelity to the Lutheran Confessions. One other former faculty member grew so tired of secular worldviews and agendas antithetical to a Lutheran identity that he left for employment elsewhere.

The visitation team produced an extensive list of troubling things at odds with the insistence of interviewees that CTX is built on a solid foundation of Lutheran theology, which would positively influence students, even if they were not Lutheran, some of which are listed below:

- The professor of Lutheran identity and mission resigned from the LCMS clergy roster in 2011.
- Speakers on Lutheran identity have included the current dean of Christ College, Valparaiso University, and a former dean of Christ College, Valparaiso University. No interviewee recalled any faculty instruction in Lutheran identity from anyone in the LCMS.
- Non-Lutheran faculty regularly speak in chapel, and the visitation team was told that this practice has BOR approval.
- In anticipation of the visit, some of the visitation team members watched the online CTX chapel service for Holy Tuesday. The service featured a pastor from a local non-denominational church, who invited students to make their first surrender to God.
- A post on the CTX website from an administrator closed with a prayer from Richard Rohr, a Roman Catholic priest who denies that salvation is only through Christ. This prayer began and concluded, “O Great Love . . . we offer these prayers in all the holy names of God. Amen.”
- A CTX webpage on “consent” approaches sexual ethics from a purely secular perspective, without any treatment of God’s design for marriage and sexuality. “Show your partner that you respect them enough to ask about their sexual needs and desires. If you are not accustomed to communicating with your partner about sex and sexual activity, the first few times may feel awkward. Practice makes perfect. Be creative and spontaneous. Don’t give up.”

Any one item in the above list would be concerning alone. As a whole, the items listed point away from a robust Lutheran identity or solid Lutheran catechesis. The DLI says the university “accepts without reservation the Scriptures of the Old and New Testament as the written Word of God and the only rule and norm of faith and practice,” but we did not observe practices being normed by the rule of Holy Scripture. Instead, we heard that the scriptural account of creation is not normative to what is taught in the science department. No science faculty member reported teaching according to the Synod’s biblical doctrine of creation, nor did anyone report hearing anything approaching this biblical view of creation espoused in the classroom. We heard the clear Word of God regarding the monergistic nature of salvation contradicted by having a non-Lutheran speak in chapel and invite students to surrender to Jesus. Members of the visitation team watched this chapel service online before and after the visitation. The Word of God, which is clear in matters of marriage and sexuality, is hardly normative when all that is required for appropriate sexual activity is consent between partners. Subscription to the confession of the LCMS is just an empty phrase if faith mentors in each residence hall floor are required only to be Christian, not Lutheran, and not given any meaningful instruction in the Catechism.

The visitation team was repeatedly told that the university is Christ-centered and “our Lutheran identity infuses everything we do.” During our visit, however, the visitation team simply did not find that. Instead, pop-Evangelicalism, liberal theology of justice, and secular diversity initiatives appear to influence nearly everything. One member of the visitation team observed, “CTX is Lutheran in name only, and they seem to be proud of that fact.”

Another member of the visitation team gave this assessment:

We’re in the College Growth Movement. What sells? How do we market? Young faculty have not had a rigorous academic background, nor a Lutheran background. Without strong academics and strong theologians in the ranks, there’s no one to guide young faculty, no strong theological voice. It’s like a church growth campus.

I am encouraged that many at CTX speak of a Lutheran identity. I have been critical of Concordia universities that have shied away from even using the word “Lutheran” in their promotional materials and marketing strategies. To its credit, CTX continues clearly to use “Lutheran” publicly. The concern of the visitation team is that the Lutheran identity of CTX is superficial, normed and shaped more by other Lutheran church bodies and their theologians, rather than by theologians and pastors within the LCMS who have the theological horsepower to engage cultural issues in a solidly confessional Lutheran way.

Diversity Concerns

CTX’s student population is 55 percent non-Caucasian. Having such a racially diverse student body is truly a blessing from God. Making students of all cultures feel welcome at the university is absolutely laudable. But nearly all secular treatments of diversity, equity, and inclusion also incorporate unbiblical understandings of sex and gender, marriage, and family. By the admission of the Equity Team, in its earliest days of pursuing diversity, CTX was less than careful in adopting these terms and hiring those of different worldviews who do not share our theological foundations.

According to the Equity Team, CTX received the designation of being a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) nearly by accident. The announcement of the HSI designation in a Jan. 16, 2019, post on

the CTX website, however, tells a somewhat different story. One of CTX’s administrators was “charged with leading the institution toward this federal designation [and] established a task force to plan the expansion of campus programs and services as well as education and training for students, faculty and staff.”

This aligns with the university’s 2016–2021 Strategic Plan and its strategic initiative 4.7 to “strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion across campus and support cultural competency in faculty, staff, and students.” In reports documenting the accomplishments of CTX toward this objective, which were removed from the CTX website shortly before our visit, there are some successes to be celebrated but also some accomplishments out of harmony with Scripture and the Confessions.

- In 2017–2018, CTX “collaborated with Jelani Consulting, LLC.” Jelani Consulting focuses on diversity as not simply a matter of race, but also advocates for equity and inclusion for people of the LGBTQ+ community.
- In July 2018, CTX’s Faculty Summer Development Series was led by emeritus ELCA professor Rev. Dr. Darrell Jodock (discussed above).
- In August 2018, the CTX Faculty Summer Development Series (posted online; one of the visitation team listened) featured Dr. Gina Garcia, whose work focuses on “decolonizing” institutions. In her presentation, she said universities must change their mission statements to include diversity, equity, and justice for all. Curriculum, she says, is a colonial tool that is structurally racist and privileges white students. Standardized tests are racist too. And, she argued, we should not “Christianize people” while teaching them “Christian ways of knowing.”
- In 2018–2019, Dr. Kazique Prince, again from Jelani Consulting, “provided Equity and Inclusion Lab focused on a mindset regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion education and awareness.” Dr. Prince was also asked to consult the university regarding the “next steps for Concordia in terms of its commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.”
- In 2019, a chief diversity officer was hired, who the Equity Team admits was not in alignment with a Lutheran identity and whose hiring was a “mistake.”

These concerns demonstrate the value of the current model of CTX’s affiliation with the Synod and show the perils of decisions made hastily based on cultural trends. Even under the ecclesiastical oversight of the Synod, CTX demonstrated its reluctance or unwillingness to allow Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions to be the source of Lutheran identity and mission. Instead, the quickly changing winds of culture seem to hold sway over the university’s day-to-day decisions. The benefits of a system of governance that binds our universities to a national—not a regional—church body; of having regents from the region, district, and beyond; and of having prior approval for theology faculty and university presidents is underscored by the Equity Team’s admission of these mistakes.

Keep Concordia Weird

So what is a Lutheran identity? The Gospel of Jesus Christ is the beating heart of a Lutheran identity. Vocation and lives of service are certainly part of a Lutheran identity, but they are not the heart of what it means to be a Lutheran Christian congregation, university, or church body. Our primary vocation is to believe, by the power of the Spirit, in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Vocation as our

service to neighbor is a matter of the Law, the way God calls those who have received the Gospel to live their lives. But they cannot live God-pleasing lives of service apart from the change worked by the Gospel. [*President Christian responds, "CTX holds that its primary vocation, as Lutheran Christians, is to believe in the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. Any intimation that CTX does not believe or hold this as truth is both misleading and inaccurate. At the same time, the vocation of the university and its employees is also one of education for all who choose to learn here. They learn at the foot of the cross; they learn from those who honor Scripture and the Confessions; and they learn of the saving love of God through Christ."*]

CTX falls short of a robust, vibrant, Lutheran identity. This problem reflects other occurrences of vague, undefined "Lutheran" identities that are rightly criticized as "Lutheran in name only." The *sine qua non* of a Lutheran identity is the Gospel, the full and free forgiveness of sinners for the sake of the perfect, substitutionary death of the incarnate God, Jesus Christ, on the cross. Lutherans rightly confess two kingdoms, over which God rules in distinct ways. He rules His Church through the Gospel, the forgiveness of sins. He rules society through His Law, the ordering of His world according to the pattern of creation. Colleges, like families, straddle both kingdoms. Therefore, to engage the broader culture, to converse in the secular, left-hand kingdom, a Lutheran university must have an inviolable, robust Lutheran identity. This is not a way to survive in academia; it is the *only* way a Lutheran institution will survive in academia, on the bleeding edge of culture, without being Lutheran "in name only."

The three tenets of the CTX mission, to empower students "of all backgrounds to lead lives of critical thought, compassionate action, and courageous leadership," cannot be realized in any student apart from the Gospel, the Good News of a Savior who died on the cross to redeem sinful mankind. This is the essence of a Lutheran identity. Any talk of vocation separated from talk of repentance and forgiveness is pointless, incomplete, and misguided.

In the updated statement on Lutheran identity on the CTX website, and in the accompanying document, "Here I Learn," CTX adopts the phrase "Keep Concordia Weird" as an unofficial motto. I love it.

But vocation is not weird. Lives of selfless service to others are not weird. Unless shaped by the new life in the Holy Spirit, lives of "critical thinking, compassionate action, and courageous leadership" are not weird. Most institutions in the greater Austin area encourage their constituents and stakeholders toward this basic level of weirdness. And if everyone is doing it, it's no longer weird.

What is weird? In the shadow of a city that wants to keep itself "weird," that wants to embrace all forms of sexual preference and gender identity, that celebrates all things against the grain, what is truly weird is the Good News of a God who gave Himself in the place of sinful men. Clinging to and teaching the sacred and unchanging truths of Scripture is weird.

Repentance is weird. Forgiveness is weird. The Word of God is weird. Baptism is weird. The Lord's Supper is weird. And yet, these are what we believe and confess toward the world because they are true, beautiful, and comforting.

CTX seems to have lost these Lutheran distinctives in favor of blending in to a not-that-weird culture of half-religious liberalism. A genuinely Lutheran identity would be altogether weird in Austin. Preaching Christ crucified for the forgiveness of sinners would be weird in Austin. Calling sinners to repentance would be weird in

Austin. Pointing sin-scorched consciences to the rock-solid Means of Grace would be exceedingly weird in Austin.

So I fully agree with the idea of keeping Concordia weird. I just think it should *actually be weird*. CTX should stand out from other Austin, other Texas, other higher education models. Rigorous and unapologetic Lutheran catechesis for new faculty, staff, and students should be the weird norm at 11400 Concordia University Drive on the outskirts of a city where being "progressive" is no longer weird but expected.

To be a campus truly normed by Scripture, where the Gospel is rightly preached and the Sacraments properly administered, would make CTX truly weird. This is my hope and prayer for CTX.

I am encouraged by CTX's willingness to admit past mistakes and reframe conversations in a more Lutheran lens. I am optimistic that the proposed new governance documents do not shy away from stating that the university subscribes to the Lutheran Confessions. I believe the beautiful campus can be more beautifully adorned with the purity of the Gospel. The truth that the university wants to inculcate in her students begins with the Word of God.

We—the Synod and CTX—are in this together. We are allies, not adversaries. We share a common mission of preaching Jesus Christ and Him crucified for the salvation of sinners. We have a united vision of the "weird" future in the resurrection, when "a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, [is] standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev. 7:9), confessing with one voice the salvation found in the one, peculiar, weird, exclusive Savior alone.

Now is not the time for separation, but for closer affinity. Now, the mission of the Synod and the mission of CTX can be best advanced and preserved through greater affiliation, not less. Now is the time for the universities of the Synod to embrace their Lutheran weirdness and cast off cultural banality. Now is the time for the Synod to buck popular trends in higher education and embrace the weirdness of being distinctly and unapologetically Lutheran.

I fully agree with keeping Concordia weird. The weirdness the world needs will be found in a closer relationship between university and church body. The weirdness of Christ crucified for sinners, delivered in perceptible Means of Grace, is best expressed when congregations and their universities continue to walk together. This is the path forward for Concordia University Texas and for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod as a whole. Let's be weird together.

Matthew C. Harrison, *President*

Appendix

Summary of Response to the Synod President's Report on the Ecclesiastical Visitation of Concordia University Texas

President Dr. Don Christian sent a response on behalf of CTX saying, in summary, the following: Concordia University Texas (CTX) is deeply committed to its Lutheran history and tradition and working toward continuing a meaningful and productive relationship with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.

However, CTX criticized the report for being sent so long after the conclusion of the visitation on April 22, 2022; for including findings that were gathered after the visit; for leaving room for subjective conclusions; and, in its opinion, for not including some facts that would provide additional background or supporting

information for readers to draw different conclusions. CTX also took issue with the interview process and complained that it did not receive a list of questions and standards before the visit and, therefore, with no outlined process, it was challenging to ascertain the nature of the visit besides the general expectation for ecclesiastical questions. It also noted that the visitation team visited the university during the week prior to finals, a traditionally hectic time for faculty, staff, and students.

President Christian acknowledged CTX was able to glean insights from the report and has committed itself to the following actions:

- Being more explicit with how Scripture and the Lutheran Confessions shape policy and practices, including the university's statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
- Creating a statement on human sexuality that aligns with the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions that will guide the university's policies and practices.
- Developing a statement of what CTX means when it speaks of its Lutheran identity, using it to inform and norm our work across sectors.
- Creating a practice whereby documentation is reviewed for alignment with the university's commitment to its Lutheran identity.

In concluding, CTX confirmed it is a Lutheran institution of higher education that aligns itself with The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and that the leadership made it clear to its constituents that the president of the Synod had the right to visit the campus and meet with employees and that they remain committed to the teachings and mission of the LCMS and remain a place where Christ is honored, students of all backgrounds are welcome, and students encounter the love and compassion of Jesus.

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Opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters

The following opinions of the Commission on Constitutional Matters (CCM) were issued since the report to the 2019 convention and were selected by the commission's chairman as being of general interest to the Synod (for example, reviews of agency bylaws and policy manuals are not included). Full commission minutes are reported at lcms.org/ccm.

Meaning of *Face-to-Face* (19-2914)

Minutes of July 18–19, 2019

The commission received the following request for an opinion from a member of the Synod:

Question: May the requirement of a “face-to-face meeting” in Bylaw 1.10.5 also be fulfilled by modern digital technology via face-to-face telephone conversation via computers, smartphone and the like using FaceTime or via Skype, where both parties are very much face-to-face, merely separated by a monitor, but in real-time communicating face-to-face?

Opinion: No.

After receiving the request for the opinion, the commission requested input in accordance with Bylaw 3.9.2.2 (b), in this instance, from the Council of Presidents (COP), district presidents being primarily responsible to determine when the requirement of a face-to-face meeting has been satisfied, and staff of the Commission on Theology and Church Relations. A very large number of virtually unanimous responses were received, supporting the conclusion that *face-to-face* means what it says, that is, *in person*. For example:

[P]arties need to make every effort to meet together physically—even if it requires personal financial expense and the use of a great amount of time. Matthew 18 calls us to meet together. A personal meeting has qualities that cannot be duplicated electronically. Meeting personally also shows care for one another demonstrated by the time and effort expended.

Some responses suggested that perhaps in extreme cases a technological alternative to direct physical interaction could be substituted for the in-person meeting. For example:

If for some reason, meeting “face-to-face” would cause an inordinately long delay in the process and hurt the possibility of reconciliation, or if an extreme circumstance exists that does not allow for a personal meeting, an electronic meeting or meetings may be substituted after proper consultation with the parties involved and with appropriate ecclesiastical supervisors.

On the other hand, there was this response:

The only argument that I can muster for conducting such meetings by electronic media is convenience. There is certainly no Biblical argument for doing so. Human convenience does not seem to be a Biblical priority. Since human convenience often detracts from God's purposes, I would not admit it as a valid argument in favor of the proposal.

One response, in particular, crystallized what this commission finds to be the requirement of the *face-to-face* language of the Bylaws of the Synod:

Presuming that Matthew 5:24 and 18:15 are the Biblical foundation for the face-to-face meeting requirement found in the bylaws ...

Jesus' command to go to the brother (ὑπάγε) could not have been understood in any other way, at the time, than having the parties physically meet. ... [T]o adopt the use of electronic media for the purpose of meeting would require interpreting the word “go” (ὑπάγε) to mean “stay.” ... [W]e should be interested very much in following the example given in the Scripture as closely as possible.

The verb in Jesus' command to go to the brother (ὑπάγε) is an imperative. At the very least, such an imperative requires some commitment to making the reconciliation happen. The arguments against physical meetings suggest a lack of commitment due to the cost of time and money. While some may consider such expense a “barrier” to reconciliation ... it is a fruit of reconciliation.

Both texts suggest a high priority on maintaining relationships: [6:24: ὑπάγε πρῶτον διαλλάγηθι τῷ ἀδελφῷ σου, 18:15: ἐκέρθησας τὸν ἀδελφόν σου] ... [C]ommon sense ... suggests that physical presence is the most effective means of creating potential for good communication (e.g., tone, facial expression, body language, the elimination of distractions unique to the individual's location, and presence). ...