



TO: CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY TEXAS STAKEHOLDERS

FROM: DR. DONALD CHRISTIAN, PRESIDENT & CEO, CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY TEXAS

SUBJECT: RESPONSE TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL VISITATION REPORT FROM PRESIDENT MATTHEW HARRISON OF THE LCMS

DATE: APRIL 21, 2023

Over a year ago, The Lutheran Church - Missouri Synod engaged in an Ecclesiastical visitation of Concordia University Texas. A report from that visit will soon be made publicly available. As we reflect on that visit and the report, we are grateful for the opportunity to engage in a thoughtful and constructive conversation with the LCMS about our commitment to Lutheran theology and identity. While we fully supported President Harrison's visit as the Ecclesiastical supervisor of the University at that time, we are disappointed in the way the visitation was conducted and the many statements in the report that do not accurately reflect the ways that Concordia University Texas lives out its Lutheran identity.

We believe that the unstructured approach to information gathering during the visit resulted in an unrepresentative and inaccurate portrayal of Concordia University Texas. Furthermore, we are disappointed that President Harrison included in his report unsupported and inaccurate statements about CTX, which do not reflect the depth of our commitment to Lutheran identity. That commitment is evidenced by our values, campus ministry, ongoing training and learning, required coursework, partnerships with LCMS churches and schools, and the role of the School of Ministry. We have a robust and active University community, and we take seriously our vocation to broaden minds and engage students in critical thought while sharing the Gospel.

The Concordia University Texas Board of Regents and administration are committed to remaining faithful to our Lutheran identity and the teachings of the Church. The report does not accurately represent this commitment. We will not provide a detailed rebuttal to the report's specific claims in this memo. However, we will continue to provide answers to specific questions we receive on the Lutheran identity page of our website.

Furthermore, we have concerns about the focus of the visitation report, which spends a significant amount of time discussing the decision of the Concordia University Texas Board of Regents to become the sole governing body of the institution, even though this decision did not occur until about seven months after the visit. It is important to note that the stated purpose of the visit was to assess the University's Lutheran identity and culture. Yet, much of the report focuses on governance issues unrelated to this purpose.

In the following sections, we will address more of the broad themes and inaccuracies in the visitation report.

Visitation Structure and Methodology

We must express our disappointment with the structure and methodology of the visitation. We do not believe that it was structured in a way that allowed for the best information to be gathered from members of our community. We had hoped for a thorough and transparent assessment of the University, but we found that there was no clear set of standards or criteria for evaluation and no clear process or timeline for reporting after the visit.

It is essential that we highlight our concern about the lack of transparency and consistency in the interview and data-gathering process because the report mentions that University employees seemed to have been coached on their answers. Let us be clear, the University did not receive a list of questions, standards, or measures the visitation team members would use for evaluation before the visit, leaving us with no means by which to prepare employees ahead of time for individual interviews.

We also want to note that throughout our history as a University, we have maintained an open and transparent relationship with The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod. We have consistently welcomed feedback and guidance from Synod as we work to fulfill our mission of providing a Christ-centered education to our students. We have eagerly and willingly participated in regularly scheduled past visits from the Concordia University System (CUS). Concordia University Texas has consistently met the Lutheran identity standards outlined by the Concordia University System. We believe there were many opportunities for the Concordia University System and the Office of the President to provide pastoral and Ecclesiastical guidance if they believed there were areas in which we needed to improve. Unfortunately, we were made aware of their concerns only after we had begun exploring a new governance model and almost 9 months after the visitation.

Higher Education and Diverse Ideas

The report highlights several speakers engaging with students, faculty, and staff on our campus with diverse ideas. Concordia University Texas is a liberal arts institution of higher education. We teach literature, philosophy, the sciences, human behavior, leadership, and many other disciplines—all aspects of God’s created world. In such a learning community, students are invited to learn about a wide range of ideas and perspectives. Learning happens in community as we realize that each discipline and each vocation is connected to each other as part of God’s world.

In such a learning community, we study the diversity of the human experience and welcome all voices to the table, even those who might challenge us to think differently. Teaching and learning in this way expose students to broad learning—and does so in a Lutheran context and with Christian faculty and staff who can help them process these ideas. This is our distinct calling as a Lutheran higher education institution.

We are disappointed that President Harrison consistently took phrases from the mentioned speakers out of context, using them to misrepresent the University's commitment to diversity and Lutheran identity. The short phrases or words, as presented in President Harrison’s report, cannot fully capture the context and nuance of the topics presented by the speakers. We believe the misrepresentation is unfair to the speakers and the University. It is also vital to note that we have trained members of the LCMS on our faculty and as a part of our staff who provide further instruction about Lutheran theology and doctrine. This allows our students to engage with diverse ideas and perspectives while still receiving a robust education shaped by Lutheran theology and teaching that prepares them to enter vocations equipped to hear and engage with the various worldviews they will encounter.

We are proud to have many faculty and staff who are active members of LCMS congregations, including a core group who are on the roster of the LCMS as commissioned or ordained ministers, as well as LCMS trained leadership and our 100% LCMS-led Board of Regents, all who play a crucial role in guiding and supporting the University's Lutheran identity. These leaders ensure that our Lutheran values permeate the University's culture and classroom engagement, and they serve as the leading voices in shaping the spiritual life of our campus community.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

We are disheartened that President Harrison believes CTX has been reluctant or unwilling to allow the Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions to be the source of our mission. This could not be further from the truth. Our Lutheran identity is central to all we do, including our Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work.

We recognize that DEI is an important issue and believe that our efforts in this area align with Lutheran theology. We understand that navigating DEI is complex and requires we approach these issues within the context of the people and communities we serve. As a Christian institution, we believe that following the example of Christ requires us to recognize the individual needs of people in our community and actively seek ways to ensure that every population receives care, concern, and resources according to their unique needs.

The report highlights the visitation team's disappointment in how we handle social issues. However, we want to emphasize that we have never received clear guidance from the LCMS or the CUS on how they would expect our colleges to serve people from diverse racial backgrounds or sexual identities. Despite this lack of direction, we have remained true to our Lutheran identity while serving our Central Texas community. We believe that our commitment to DEI reflects our values and mission, and we are committed to continuing to address these issues in a way consistent with our Christian and Lutheran identity.

Ongoing Faithfulness

We are disappointed by President Harrison's assertion that the University has lost the Lutheran distinctive of repentance, forgiveness, the Word of God, and the sacraments. This is simply not true. Concordia University Texas has always been committed to teaching and practicing these fundamental aspects of our faith, which are central to our Lutheran identity and mission.

We also want to emphasize that we do not believe the visitation report accurately reflects the heart and soul of our institution. We take our commitment to upholding our Lutheran identity seriously, and each employee is deeply committed to the University's mission and ministry. We believe our mission as an institution of Lutheran higher education is essential to who we are. We strive to provide our students with a rigorous academic experience that prepares them to become thoughtful, engaged members of their communities – all within a Christian Lutheran community committed to the Gospel. We believe that our Lutheran identity is an inseparable part of that mission. We will continue to work tirelessly to ensure that our students receive an education grounded in Lutheran theology and teaching. This is demonstrated by our [Demonstrations of Lutheran Identity](#) that ground the University and provide direction for how this identity will be maintained.

At Concordia University Texas, our Lutheran identity is at the very heart of who we are and what we do. It is not just a label we wear but a foundational aspect of our community that we embrace wholeheartedly in the daily life of the University. Our faculty, staff, and leadership are committed to fostering an environment that upholds our Lutheran values and beliefs. We require all students to take coursework in theology. We encourage ongoing learning and development for faculty and staff through regular training and professional development opportunities around Lutheran Identity. Our campus ministry program provides many opportunities for students to grow in their faith, and

we actively partner with LCMS churches and schools to support and strengthen our Lutheran community. Additionally, our School of Ministry is dedicated to training the next generation of church leaders and supporting the work of the LCMS. We are deeply disappointed that President Harrison did not recognize the depth of our commitment to our Lutheran identity and heritage, as it is an integral part of who we are as a University community.

We invite you to learn more about our [Lutheran Identity](#) by visiting our website. You can also learn about our commitment to Lutheran Theology and Teaching in our [Demonstrations of Lutheran Identity](#) approved by the Board of Regents.