



# **OUR LUTHERAN IDENTITY**

**A Brief User-Friendly Guide  
for Marketing, Advancement, and Admissions**



This e-booklet serves as a simple reference for Marketing, Advancement, and Admissions. The contents assist professionals in these offices with language and concepts related to our Lutheran identity and tradition.



Across the history of the church, Christian instruction and higher education have always faced challenges, and this remains the case for our times. Those who work in admissions, development, and marketing know this first hand. For CUNE, a key decision we have examined over the past several years and have now resolved is whether to function as a university with a Christian heritage that is affiliated with the Lutheran denomination -or- to embrace and practice as Christian educators our Lutheran theological tradition, intentionally employing that identity in the distinct ways through which it serves God's entire church and God's world. We have chosen the second option.

The purpose of this reference guide is modest. Its purpose certainly is not to function as a doctrine test, style manual, or buzz word generator. Rather, it can be one tool among many to use when preparing or reviewing the ways we present CUNE to our constituents. (There will not be a quiz. However, one of the resources available on p. 8, "Spiritual Setups—Presuppositions About God and Us," is a set of multiple choice questions that can help you see why language and terms make a difference in how we express our Christian convictions.)

We who have prepared this guide hope that you find it helpful, positive, encouraging, and also a bit provocative as it prompts you to continue reflecting on your ministry and important contributions here at Concordia.

### **Contents:**

1. A Brief Rationale
2. A Starter Document—The List-of-Ten
3. A Content Sampler
4. A Terms and Expressions Sampler
5. A Lutheran Tradition Crib Sheet
6. Selected Brief Books
7. Other Selected Sources
8. Suggested Use of This Booklet
9. What About the Bible?

Attach, print, or copy and share as needed.

## 1. A Brief Rationale

In a variety of settings, the faculty, staff, and administration have and continue to devise practical means to further understand and enact our Lutheran identity. We are doing this in ways that are winsome, inviting, and in which the Gospel predominates, ways that reflect Jesus' words in John 12:3, "When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people to myself." At the same time, we recognize this very Gospel of Christ is also an offense and stumbling block for all sinners, as Paul explains in 1 Cor. 1:18-31 where he elaborates on Jesus' admonition earlier in John 6:61-62, "Do you take offense at what I say? Then what if you were to see the Son of man ascending where he was before?" The Lutheran Reformation has crafted a versatile set of Biblically grounded themes around these two dimensions of Jesus' lordship. These themes simultaneously relate the Christian both to the world and to the kingdom of grace to which Christ calls us, always connecting one *to* the other yet without mistaking one *for* the other. This set of reformation insights about how the Gospel intersects with the world provides a lively and robust context for Christian higher education as a great blessing to the entire church and to the world.



2. **A Starter Document—the Expanded List-of-Ten:** The Lutheran Reformers in the 1620s at Wittenberg University in, Saxony, Germany, drew from its study of the Bible several key insights about the Gospel. These include such themes as Law and Gospel, Christian liberty, and the theology of the cross. You may already have seen our "List-of-Ten" summary of those insights as a handout or at our Two Kingdoms web site,



<http://wp.cune.edu/twokingdoms/the-lutheran-tradition>.

The following link takes you to an expanded version of that list which briefly connects each insight to higher education. Keep in mind that numbering the inclusions to ten is simply as a matter of convenience. These themes along with others can be catalogued in different ways, but the list-of-ten does serve as a useful summary and reference:

<http://wp.cune.edu/twokingdoms/files/2013/03/Key-Reformation-Themes-a-Summary.pdf>

The aim of previewing or reviewing the List-of-Ten is not to shoehorn formal theology into materials that needs to be concise for our constituents. These materials have only a brief window of opportunity to draw the observer's attention. Our aim is to sharpen our delivery in ways that do not put off or distract the reader but provide a distinct setup that interests and engages the reader in our Lutheran identity.

**3. A Content Sampler:** Language is fluid and words take on changing denotations and connotations as culture and times change. Therefore, this sampler is suggestive, not prescriptive. In examining these content examples drawn from early drafts of materials for our constituents, you will notice how sometimes a word or phrase intended in one sense may mean or convey something quite different within an established theological or church tradition. The aim is not to find fault or quibble over terminology (see 2 Tim. 1:14 and Titus 3:9) but to patiently craft language that communicates effectively with our constituency. Here are five examples from various drafts and documents for Concordia's marketing, development, and admissions. (Note: thanks goes to colleagues who sifted through several documents for content. These inclusions are for compare-and-contrast analysis and revision; no criticism of the source is intended.)



### 3.1

"Concordia creates an environment where students can excel in rigorous academics, flourish in extra-curricular activities that prepare them for their future and, most importantly, grow in their faith."

A re-write:

"Concordia sustains a community of Christian higher education where students learn that God has called them to a life of faith and of service to others, where rigorous academics enrich that faith and equip them for service, and the entire campus advances their vocation in every way."

Points of contrast include the focus on vocation as God's call to us (rather than as occupational training) and that a personal Christian faith (essential as that is) is not an add-on or bonus to one's individual college experience; rather, the Christian faith of the church is what defines our entire higher education community in which we each participate.

### 3.2

"Concordia University, Nebraska: Where excellent academics intersect with Christian values and our grace-focused, Lutheran tradition."

The use of "intersect" fits well with the Lutheran tradition and current interest in the relationship of Christian higher education to the culture. No need to overuse it, but good to keep it on the list.

A reference to values can also be appropriate but may require a second look depending on context. "Values" is regarded as a weak word by some readers. One concern is that it is a placeholder term for unspecified goods. "Christian values" can mean quite different things to different people. Another concern is that while the Christian faith includes values and virtues, Christianity is not about "values." Politicians, environmentalists, and the Better Business Bureau have values. Christianity is about Jesus of Nazareth who says he is the Lord of all creation. This claim goes way beyond values.

Alternate words might be *convictions* or *commitments*. However, we don't want to come across as strident, overbearing, or sanctimonious. Another possible substitution might be *identity*:

"Concordia University, Nebraska: where excellent academics intersect with our grace-focused, Lutheran tradition and Christian identity."

Yet many people *are* interested in hearing about values even when those values are not itemized. It may be the right word for us in some of our messages.

### 3.3

"Concordia's Christ-centered, supportive community of friends and professors respects your personal experiences and beliefs while providing a stimulating academic environment that strengthens your Christian identity and prepares you to learn, serve, and lead in the church and world when you graduate."

An alternate text:

"Concordia's Christ-centered, supportive community of friends and professors regards your personal experience and beliefs with respect, yet challenges you with a stimulating academic and faith-formative environment. We're a university that strengthens your Christian identity and prepares you to learn, serve, and lead in the church and world."

The chief contrast here is about personal experiences and beliefs. We certainly strive to deal with each student with the highest respect and engage all students in discourse in respectful ways. But we don't necessarily convey respect for all their ideas, positions, and their references to their personal experiences as being authoritative. Rather, we—both professors and peers—constantly challenge students in all these ways. We examine beliefs and claims in respectful and amiable ways, but not all beliefs and claims are equal or credible.

### 3.4

"No matter what your faith is, you can grow."

An alternate text:

"No matter what, your faith can grow."

The first text from an admissions view book draft is the original call-out quote from a student and demonstrates how language used conversationally and in the context of a larger discussion can, when used as a quote clip, distort its intent. The first text standing alone implies that participants at Concordia University can pursue any sort of faith project at Concordia and expect the university to support that project. This is a common and popular idea in our society but is not the case at Concordia. Concordia University examines and challenges faith claims, including the claims of Lutherans, other Christians, and non-Christians. Given the context of the call-out quote in an admissions brochure, the alternate text (used with the student's permission), while still open to further interpretation, is less problematic.

### 3.5

From her professors who taught her how to give glory to God through her gifts and talents to the life-long friendships that nurture and develop her faith formation, Chara's aptitude to serve the people of South Africa is linked Concordia."

An alternate text:

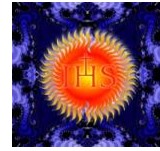
Chara's professors taught her how Christ's giving himself into death for all empowers her to make her life a living gift to others. The life-long friendships she has formed will nurture her faith for years to come. And now these Concordia connections have prepared her to serve the people of South Africa as friend and teacher [or \_\_\_\_\_ ].

The first text leads with a long dependent clause which requires effort to clarify. The alternate text is longer but clearer. (Its length can be shortened by deleting content as desired.) The alternate text puts the emphasis first on what God does for us, not on our activities of "giving God glory" and our exercising our gifts and talents for God. (See below on The Glory of God.) It then moves to how a Gospel-informed faith and its formation within Christian community at Concordia have moved Chara to respond through her service in South Africa. This is called "because...therefore" theology: because of what God has already done for us in Christ, we therefore can respond in thanks and service to others.

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An old quip about Lutheran theology goes that "you can't say one thing." Lutheran theology understands and examines the "two-ness" of what God is always doing: two words, law and Gospel; two natures of Christ; two kingdoms; our two kinds of righteousness, etc. The problem for admissions, marketing, and development is that this two-ness becomes word, and this is not helpful where brevity is essential. This two-ness need not always be addressed but will remain a challenge for writing copy.

4. **A Terms and Expressions Sampler:** As we see in the Content Sampler above, certain themes, concepts, and terms related to our Christian identity are commonly used in our communication with constituents (while others are not—we need not discuss the Trinity or the dual nature of Christ in such communication.) The following examples of terms and expressions (in no special order) include some additional discussion and themes to consider when preparing our materials:



God's plan: God's will, human agency, God's sovereignty, and personal choice are all important themes in the Lutheran tradition. Luther, in fact, wrote a book on the matter in response to an on-going debate in his times about God's omnipotence, human decisions, and the freedom of the Gospel. The name of the book is *On the Bondage of the Will* in which he works out a very careful and nuanced response to the issues. For purposes here, we exercise restraint when saying things about God's plan and God's will. God's will is that sinners be saved through the grace of Christ. Beyond that, we don't much use the language of "God has a plan for my life," popular as this expression is in many Christian circles.

God's Kingdom: We Christians are used to thinking about God's kingdom. Jesus announces God's kingdom of grace as he begins his ministry (Mk. 1:14). He teaches us to pray, "Thy kingdom come," in the Lord's Prayer (Mt. 6:10). So it takes a little re-acclimating to think and write in terms of two kingdoms. But understanding the Bible's two kingdoms doctrine, which Luther uses as his framework for relating church and world, is essential for communicating about Lutheran higher education. Until the close of the age and Christ's return, God is always working with us through his two kingdoms. Both kingdoms are his, and he is accomplishing his eternal purposes through his activities in both. For two brief introductions to the two kingdoms, see these links: [A Brief Summary of the Two Kingdoms](#) and [The Lutheran Tradition and the Two Kingdoms](#).

Conventional and peculiar: Another instance of Lutheran "two-ness" that follows from the two kingdoms perspective is that much—perhaps most—of our ministry and service is conventional and ordinary, but sometimes the Gospel compels us to speak or act in unusual and even alarming ways. We function in lots of ordinary ways as we live and operate in God's left-hand kingdom with its temporal concerns. Peter describes this mode in 1 Peter 2:11-17. However, we also see many instances in the Bible where disciples are called to act in ways that are contrary to the world's practices and expectations (cf. Rom. 12:1-2). Consider many of these episodes recorded in the Gospels, Acts, and Paul's letters. Peter describes this mode in 1 Peter 1:18-25. We can look for opportunities to portray both these modes at Concordia to our constituents.

The glory of God: This term is related to Luther's theology of the cross in which he cautions Christians about laying claim to God's glory. Luther does not dismiss the expression, but he does alert us to the human tendency to locate God in the spectacular and majestic rather than finding God's glory in the shame and humility of the cross—which is counter-intuitive to human reason. The expressions, "to the glory of God," and, "give God the glory" are not about us giving God what is already his (that doesn't make much sense when we think about it). Rather, "giving God glory" is better understood as displacing any ideas we have about what is glorious, whether about our lives or about God, and replacing them with crucifixion and death without which there is no resurrection and ascension. In this sense, only Good Friday is glorious. It is in this sense that Bach—a Lutheran—completed each of his musical

manuscripts with the initials SDG, "*Sola Deo gloria*." He knew where God's glory is located for sinners.

Vocation: Vocation does not refer to occupation although it can include occupation. Many Christian traditions have some concept of vocation. Today, most of these understandings are in some way indebted to Luther's study of the Bible's teachings of the priesthood of all believers and his treatise called "An Appeal to the Ruling Class." Here Luther explains that all Christians are called through the Gospel by the Holy Spirit to faith and to living out that faith in a life of service within all their relationships and opportunities. The point is that we not use the concept of vocation as a reference to career preparation, a college major, or some intended occupation. Every baptized two-year old Christian has a vocation, as does every retired Christian octogenarian. This Biblical understanding of vocation is a distinctive and helpful theme in our communication to constituents.

Prepositions: The third sentence in the entry above says that "all Christians are called *through* the Gospel *by* the Holy Spirit *to* faith and *to* living out that faith *in* a life of service *within* all their relationships and opportunities." Notice the prepositions. The use and location of prepositions conveys much about our identity and our theological tradition. In his brief essay, "Some Concluding Prepositions," (see *A Teacher of the Church* in Section 6), James H. Pragman, who was chair of the Theology Department here at CUNE for many years, points out that "One could write the theology of the church on the basis of the prepositions used to describe the church's life and work." For example, the Reformers, including Luther, insisted that Christ is first *for* us before he is *in* us. For them, this distinction was not a matter of semantics or splitting hairs but of how God works: accomplishing our salvation for us by Christ's work alone prior to the Holy Spirit's creating faith in us to trust in Christ's work. Our campus literature is not intended to function as technical theology, but it deserves a proofread for prepositions.

Experience: Experience can be a good teacher. But not always. One's subjective experience with God is important. But not always accurate. Our experiences, whether with God or in college or any time in life, are personal and often powerful but not authoritative—which is a peculiar thing to say in our culture where experience and emotions usually trump all other authoritative claims. We need not drop the expressions, "college experience" or "personal experience," since these are part of the current language of the higher education industry. We may want to keep an eye on how and how often we use this phrase.

The real world: Here is another expression that need not be dropped but is worth examining. "The real world," "real life," and similar usages may imply that some counterpart such as college or faith or the church is not real. In 1 Cor. 7:29-31, Paul alerts Christians to a rather different perspective on reality when he insists that the form of this world is, in fact, passing away and that we should consider carefully what is "real" and what is not. His words point us to Scripture's doctrine of the two kingdoms about which this guide booklet includes several references.

These examples are indicative, not complete or conclusive. Usage and expressions can vary appropriately with context and audience. Don't let the examples curb your productivity. We hope these discussions will assist with your creative processes and revisions. As you



examine other resources linked through this booklet, watch for other terms, expressions, and concepts that can inform our work.

## 5. A Lutheran Tradition Crib Sheet

The user needs to be careful with "answer sheets" such as this one. Terms and expressions vary with usage and context and are employed by different sources for different purposes. Nevertheless, our work can sometimes be aided by scanning ideas and terms as a brainstorming exercise. With that caution, here is a list of words and phrases that may help when composing materials to communicate the mission and work of higher education at Concordia. (These terms have been used by the faculty and staff in our discussions about the Lutheran tradition.)



- causes
- celebration
- Christ and culture
- commitments
- connecting to sources, roots, tradition, and meaning
- context (our Lutheran tradition and community) / content (our instruction and activities)
- conventional and peculiar
- convictions
- development
- dialectic
- encounter with the Gospel
- equipping
- formation
- formation: faith formation, spiritual development
- God at work
- Gospel character, a
- Gospel temperament, a
- higher education
- Identity
- in-reach and outreach
- intersection (rather than "integration")
- Lutheran higher education as an unusual conversation centered on grace
- mission
- multiversity, utiliversity
- not a flattened secularism but higher education with depth and meaning.
- other world narratives
- our campus climate and culture
- outreach
- penultimate and ultimate
- priesthood of all believers
- pursuits
- Reformation insights about the Gospel

- scholarship (as in the act of scholarship)
- *semper ref* (short for *Ecclesia semper reformanda est*, the church is always reforming)
- service
- simultaneous
- spiritual learning community
- strategies (as in left-hand kingdom strategy and right-hand kingdom strategy)
- studies
- teaching the tension (tension is useful, fruitful condition in the Lutheran tradition)
- temporal / eternal
- tension
- the historic church, the Great Church, the orthodox church, the entire church
- the world's normative secularism
- theology of the cross (rather than a theology of glory)
- to light (you are the light of the world, Mt 5)
- to salt (you are the salt of the earth, Mt 5)
- to seed (parable of the sower. Mt 13))
- tradition as a baseline for compare/contrast
- two kingdoms doctrine, framework, perspective, world view
- utiliversity, multiversity
- world and Word

**6. Selected Brief Books:** Dozens of books, including several multi-volume sets, are available for learning about the Lutheran tradition. The following selections are brief (most are 100 pages or less), readable, can be read in part or in full, and are pertinent to Lutheran higher education. We'll list Gene Veith's *The Spirituality of the Cross* first, then add others in no special order.



- *The Spirituality of the Cross* by Gene Edward Veith (Concordia Publishing House, 1999). For several years now, Veith's little book has served as a helpful introduction to several key Lutheran themes. This is the book to start with or re-read.
- *The Christian's Calling* by Donald R. Heiges (Fortress, 1984). Currently out of print but widely available, this older book still works as one of the best introductions to the doctrine of vocation. A solid grasp of what we mean and don't mean by vocation is important. See also *God at Work* by Veith or, for the classic standard, see *Luther on Vocation* by Gustaf Wingren.
- *Lutheran Higher Education: An Introduction* by Ernest Simmons (Augsburg Fortress, 1998). This thoughtful 84 page discussion serves as a way to reflect on what can make the Lutheran university distinct from other kinds of higher education and whether we at Concordia agree with Simmons' assessment.
- *A Teacher of the Church*, Russ Moulds, ed. (Wipf and Stock, 2007). Here are twelve essays from Moulds, Blanco, Janzow, and others who examine what the church's teaching ministry does and what it should look like.

- *On Being a Theologian of the Cross* by Gerhard Forde (Eerdmans, 1997). The author sets out Luther's radical view on the Gospel by explaining the difference between a theology of the cross and a theology of glory. Lutheran higher education is, in many important ways, about works: classes, grades, achievements in the performing arts and athletics, and careers. Luther's theology of the cross is about justification as God's work for us empowering our works in a sanctified life. For a follow-up to the relationship of justification to sanctification, see *The Genius of Luther's Theology* by Robert Kolb and Charles Arand (Baker Academic, 2008) and its explanation of the two kinds of righteousness God has for us.
- *Lutheran Slogans: Use and Abuse* by Robert Jenson (ALPB Books, 2011). Jenson's very short chapters assume a bit of theological background, but most readers with some church experience will find his observations about this selection of Lutheran themes interesting.
- *Lutheranism 101*, Scot Kinnaman, ed. (Concordia Publishing House, 2010). This general handbook, fashioned after the *Dummy's Guide* series, includes articles from forty different writers across six topic areas. Not explicitly for higher education, but it does have some helpful starter parts and pieces.

These books rely on both a basic understanding of the Bible and on a number of writings that Luther published (after he was required by his spiritual director, Johann von Staupitz, to study and learn the Bible) to help the church with its return to the Gospel. Luther used his position at Wittenberg University to carry out his activities in the Reformation. Most of his writings are collected in 54 volumes called "Luther's Works." But two books that contain the writings usually cited for our key themes are:

- *Martin Luther: Selections From His Writings*, ed. John Dillinger (Anchor, 1958)
- *Martin Luther's Basic Theological Writings*, ed. Timothy Lull, William Russell, and Jarislov Pelikan (Fortress, 2012).

7. **Other Selected Sources:** The contents listed here provide background that relates the Lutheran tradition to higher education and education practices. They are useful for gaining perspective and developing an orientation to how we present an academically lively and rigorous higher education at CUNE that is congruent with our convictions and directed toward God's promises in the Gospel.



[The Lutheran Difference](#) by Mark Noll. The noted church historian, Mark Noll, wrote this article in 1992, anticipating that the Lutheran tradition would have much to contribute as the church and society commenced a period of rapid change. The essay remains current today.

[Education for the Real World: Foundations of Lutheran Education](#) by Susan Mobley. This 45 minute video presents the practical conditions and events that influenced Luther and Melancthon as they re-crafted education and moved the church out of the medieval world

and into the Renaissance. In this engaging talk, Dr. Mobley (Concordia University Wisconsin) presents her topics at a brisk pace while covering the key themes and events. Very good for those seeking a concise overview of the context and history for education and the Reformation or as an introduction for those interested in doing some further reading. Closes with a short Q&A session also well worth viewing.

[Polytechnic Utiliversity: Putting the Universal Back in University](#) by Reinhard Hutter. In the spring of 2014, Dr. Hutter presented a version of this article to a meeting of the Concordia University System in St. Louis, MO. His ideas were well received, and this article will help the reader consider the difference today between secular higher education and the Christian university.

[A Brief Summary of the Two Kingdoms](#) The Biblical perspective of the two kingdoms informs all of Luther's work in the Reformation and his understanding of the Gospel's relation to the world. This powerful and nuanced concept is especially relevant to higher education. It takes a bit of effort to apprehend and appreciate, and it was misconstrued in many ways in the nineteenth and twentieth century, leading to much confusion. Getting a good grip on this theme will help you avoid inadvertently misrepresenting Lutheran higher education. Many have found the summary of the two kingdoms doctrine linked here helpful as a starter document.

[Spiritual Setups: Presuppositions about God and Us](#) A user-friendly five-page multiple choice exercise to assist with identifying alternate views from different approaches to Christian spiritualities and theological traditions. Good for generating discussion and engagement without disparaging differing ideas, yet useful for distinguishing a number of Lutheran emphases.

[Six Spiritual Profiles](#) A brief (18 pages) introduction to six perspectives on spirituality that are common in the church today. The profiles do not rely on the usual "textbook" denominational differences. Instead, each profile includes a summary of the typical theological concepts we hear from thoughtful "ordinary saints" (an expression from Robert Benne in his book, *Ordinary Saints*, about ordinary Christians and their vocations). This set of six concludes with a profile on Christian liberty, a key Gospel insight from the Wittenberg Reformation and the Lutheran tradition.

[Christian Cyclopedia](#) This convenient reference for general use is a compendium of historical and theological data ranging from ancient figures to contemporary events.

[The Two Kingdoms Collaborative: a think tank for Lutheran higher education](#) The link here takes you to CUNE's web site for our resources in the Lutheran tradition and higher education. Current events and articles of interest to the academic disciplines and Christian higher education are added weekly.

**8. Suggested Use of this Booklet:** This guide is not intended to provide formulas for "religiously correct language" or how to make a sentence authentically Lutheran. As you continue to become more informed about the Lutheran tradition and the other major theological traditions in the church, you will detect certain differences in vocabulary, expressions, and emphasis. For example, among Presbyterians we often hear the expression, "God is sovereign," referring to a theme in John Calvin's theology about God's omnipotence and his prevailing will. But other Christians, including Lutherans, also talk about the sovereignty of God, though sometimes not in quite the same ways. Among Roman Catholics, we hear about the authority of the Bible and the authority of established doctrines and practices in the church, such as the liturgy—a theme that is present also among Protestant churches but not much mentioned. Thus, this guide is not to be used as a cookbook but, rather, as an aid to help us think about the language we use and how it communicates to those we serve.



To that end, we suggest that you page through the booklet and its links once to become acquainted with its contents. Place it on your desktop screen or in a convenient folder for easy reference. Perhaps once a week, explore one of the resources referenced here. Try applying some of the content to a current project to see where you might or might not make any revisions. And discuss that theme, term, concept, or source with others to get additional views.

**9. What about the Bible?** The person who is beginning to explore a theological tradition in the church often wonders—rightly—why the emphasis seems to be on theology and not on the Bible. And the history of theology demonstrates plenty of periods and publications where attention to Scripture has been minimal. In fact, this was one of the conditions of the church that alarmed Luther and precipitated the Reformation along with his translation of the New Testament into German so that all could read it. At times, Lutheran theologians have also gotten more involved in their own internal academic interests than in the content of the Bible. Nevertheless, the key themes at work in the Lutheran tradition are well grounded in the Scriptures and centered in the Gospel. Discussions in the readings suggested in this guide make the assumption that the reader already has a working knowledge of the Biblical narrative and is reasonably well versed at least in the Gospels and Paul's letters. (As a comparison, we today tend to assume that coworkers in our offices already know the computer platform and software applications in common use and that we don't have to explain that "desktop" refers to a screen and not a piece of furniture.) Gaining a good grasp of the Bible is a prerequisite or parallel task for understanding these key themes and terms.

