

FAITH AND LEARNING AT CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
A PRIMER FOR FACULTY MEMBERS
Cario draft, 8 September 2014

Purpose and Focus

The purpose of this primer is two-fold. In a succinct format the primer will:

1. Provide faculty members a survey of Concordia's institutional stance as a Lutheran, and Christian, organization.
2. Give faculty members a clearer sense of institutional expectations about relating faith and learning.
3. Provide schools and departments the opportunity to explore the connection between faith and learning in their own contexts, so that we can better meet CUW university-wide learning outcomes.

In an effort to be as explicit and concrete as possible, I have included examples regarding faith and learning as it pertains to the teaching of my own experience and discipline, history. Those examples will always be identified in italics. I recognize that my examples do not necessarily translate directly into other disciplines.

Concordia University as a Lutheran Institution of Higher Education – What does this mean?

- A. Concordia University is an institution of The Lutheran Church – Missouri Synod (LCMS) and a member institution of the Concordia University System. Please note that present-day Lutheranism is rather broad in its spectrum of beliefs; LCMS generally sits on the more conservative and confessional side of theology (and many social/political issues).
 1. Key administrators (president, CAO, CSAO) are required to be rostered members of the LCMS.
 2. Concordia gives preference to Lutherans as it hires faculty members.
 3. Faculty members sign an academic freedom statement which identifies that they will respect the doctrines of the LCMS in their teaching, service, and scholarship.
 4. Key LCMS emphases when it comes to academics:
 - a. Acknowledgement that salvation comes by faith alone, and that faith is a gift of God;
 - b. Respect for Scripture as the inspired, inerrant Word of God;
 - c. Respect for human life, including at both ends of the lifespan;
 - d. Acknowledgement of God's creating hand;
 - e. Respect for traditional marriage and a biblical view of sexuality.
- B. Concordia University's function is paradoxical in that it is an institution that has responsibilities, according to Martin Luther's two-kingdom theology, in both kingdoms. In short, God actively works in our world in two ways (or kingdoms). He continues to provide for the physical needs of this world through such left-hand kingdom entities as governments, educational institutions, secular vocations, families, etc. He provides for the salvation of

humans through the universal Church, the right-hand kingdom. (For a good succinct discussion of two-kingdoms theology, see Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *The Spirituality of the Cross*, 1999, pp. 91-106.)

1. As an institution of the kingdom of the left, Concordia University has the responsibility to educate students in a quality fashion.
 - a. It sets appropriately high academic standards, expects that our students will reach them, and helps them to meet those standards.
 - b. It cooperates with agencies in the civil realm to ensure accreditation standards for a strong educational experience.
 - c. It encourages students to address issues and problems from various viewpoints.
2. As an institution of the kingdom of the right, Concordia University has a responsibility to educate people holistically (mind, body, and **spirit**). That shows itself in a number of ways:
 - a. It prepares students in LCMS church work programs for their vocations in the church. That preparation includes doctrinal preparation as well as faith development.
 - b. It prepares its Christian students by providing opportunities for understanding basic Christian doctrine from an LCMS perspective, providing opportunities for faith development, and providing opportunities for connecting faith issues with their other educational opportunities.
 - c. It prepares non-Christian students by introducing them to Christianity in academic and non-academic settings, encourages them to examine their own beliefs, and has them encounter and address the nexus of faith and other issues.
 - d. Concordia's Theology Department, consisting of LCMS clergy with advanced degrees, functions in many ways as other Arts & Sciences departments, providing all undergraduate students with an introduction to theology as an academic discipline and way of thinking. The department's additional core responsibility is to – while respecting other religious viewpoints – present the Good News as the worldview from which Christians can understand the world. That provides the theological basis by which faculty and students can explore the nexus of faith and learning in their own disciplines.
 - e. Concordia provides various points of entry for the Holy Spirit to be able to do the work of giving and strengthening faith.
3. As an institution of the kingdom on the right, Concordia uses Christian values in its relationships with its constituents. As a Lutheran institution, Concordia encourages its faculty and staff members and students to strive to use law and gospel properly as they deal with each other and with other constituents.

Christianity brings much of value to the scholarly life. These values include:

1. A strong interest in the search for truth. What better place is there than the university for the search for truth? Our post-modern world encourages IHEs to explore competing truth

claims. In a very important way, each of our disciplines promotes a set of truth claims, a set of understandings by which the discipline makes sense of the world. At the same time, Christianity articulates objective truth; in fact, Jesus proclaimed, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but by me.” (John 14:6) How do we resolve this tension? How do we at this university honor the truth claims of our disciplinary studies and the Truth of Christianity?

In fact, Luther’s two-kingdom understanding of the role of Christians allows us to explore competing truth claims where it is appropriate pedagogically. There will be times when the truths of a discipline align with the Truth of Scripture. *In some important ways, Christianity is a religion based on history. Christians claim that Jesus Christ was an historical figure; people are certainly able to evaluate the historical evidence about Jesus as a human who was a historical figure. What little historical evidence we have appears to support that there was a historical Jesus. Some disciplinary truths are not addressed by Scripture. While the Bible refers to many historical events, its primary function is not to be a history book. Thus, it should not be evaluated as a whole in that light. Historical conventions are not always useful in making sense of the Bible. While historians can examine the evidence about his life, death, and even his resurrection, it is beyond a historian’s realm to evaluate Jesus’ claims about himself. Historians, for example, would have trouble using historical evidence and historical methodology to prove that Jesus was (or wasn’t) God. It is important to note that there are times when a disciplinary truth contradicts Scripture. For example, a marxist understanding of human nature, a belief that humans are primarily economic beings, explicitly contradicts a Biblical understanding of the human condition. (By the way, that doesn’t mean that marxist historians get it all wrong; they provide a strong antidote to other excesses in historiography.)*

It is valid for students in a discipline to explore the truths of that discipline, even if those truths contradict Scripture. For example it is ok for university students to struggle with the competing truth claims about the origins of the universe (though probably not in a math class). Our academic freedom statement reminds us that we are to honor the truth claims of the Bible as valid while recognizing and exploring other truth claims.

This search for truth can sometimes lead to criticism of aspects of Christianity as a human institution. As an American historian I can’t evade the impact of slavery on American history. Antebellum Lutherans were not united on their understanding of slavery. A number of Lutheran denominations condemned the institution of slavery in the early nineteenth century. The LCMS, an immigrant church body that incorporated in 1847, did not condemn slavery before the end of the Civil War. C.F.W. Walther, one of its leaders, argued that the church did not have the jurisdiction to make a judgment in this discussion because antebellum US laws legalized the institution. I would argue that

this led our synod to support of the wrong side of the Civil War and an unwillingness to encourage its members to confront the evils of slavery.

2. An interest in all of God's creation, as we are asked to be stewards of it. Therefore, learning is a valuable and valued experience.

As a historian, I understand the value of exploring how humans have related to the natural world around them. I am able to use the biblical view of stewardship as the key principle to understand how humans have – and have not – lived up to their stewardship of God's creation.

3. A humility toward teaching and learning because we understand that we have limited knowledge and that sometimes even the knowledge we have can be wrong. This encourages an active community of scholars and learners, as even the instructor can learn from the learning experience.

Concordia's Students

Concordia University does not discriminate on the basis of religion in its recruiting of students and acceptance of students. Concordia educates students of many faiths and those of no faith. A good number of students attend the university because it is faith-based. In fact, Concordia remains committed to preparing people for service in LCMS ministries with its Lutheran teacher education, pre-seminary, lay ministry, and church music programs. At the same time, some students who are enrolled at Concordia do not highly value Concordia's faith connection.

Concordia's goal regarding students (and potential students) begins with ensuring that Concordia is very transparent that it is an LCMS – and thus Christian – institution. Further, students should expect that individuals, courses and academic programs address faith issues (where appropriate) in an effort to help them develop in mind, body, and spirit. While respectful of differing faiths and points of view, the institutional perspective is clearly a Lutheran one.

The Role of Faculty Members

Assumptions

1. Faculty members are Christians who are willing to explore “the nexus of faith and learning” in their teaching and their Concordia students' learning.
2. Faculty members are willing to explore the faith connections in their own disciplines and share appropriate connection with their students when this could enhance learning.
3. While many faculty members are not members of an LCMS congregation, that diversity adds to the learning opportunities for our students.
4. All faculty members will adhere to Concordia's academic freedom policy and its limitations.

Our Christian faith calls all faculty members to be witnesses of their faith. Already in the Old Testament, the prophet Isaiah reported “‘You are my witnesses,’ says the Lord, ‘and my servant

whom you have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am He.”” (Isaiah 43:10) Luke reports that Jesus described the purpose of his life, death, and resurrection to his fellow travelers to Emmaus and then reminded them, “You are witnesses of these things.” (Luke 24:48) In his second letter to the Thessalonian Church, Paul called the Christians there to be witnesses to their fellow believers and to others. Paul uses another analogy to describe the role of Christians in the world, ambassadors for Christ, people representing our Savior in their dealings in the world.

Concordia encourages its faculty members to be Christian witnesses to their students. A witness is willing to share with others what s/he has heard/seen/experienced. A person can witness both by actions and by words. Our students should see how Concordia instructors treat each other and their students, how they react in difficult situations, and the priorities that they make in their professional lives. In the Concordia context, witnessing also means that a faculty member has reflected on how her/his faith has impacted her/his own disciplinary experience and vice versa. It also means that s/he is willing to share (where appropriate) the nexus of faith and discipline in his/her life. Sometimes it means using Christian vocabulary in one’s discussions.

History has always been part of my life; some of my earliest memories deal with historical people, events and sites. I always knew that I wanted to do something with my life regarding history – I just didn’t know what. When I decided to go to graduate school for a Ph.D. in history, I had no idea where my historical study would focus. Relatively quickly in the process of discerning a dissertation topic (plus the preceding preparation for it and a faculty mentor for that topic) I recognized that I have always been drawn to historical topics dealing with religion. That’s clearly a function of my background as a pastor’s kid born and raised in the LCMS, having attended Lutheran elementary schools and Concordia Chicago. I am convinced, from my own experience, that my professional and scholarly choices have been influenced by my faith life.

Reflecting and sharing on the nexus of one’s faith and one’s discipline most often fits when one explores the “big questions and themes” of a discipline. Following is a list of the most common Lutheran themes that have an impact on academics:

1. Vocation: Lutheran understanding that God works in the world every day through people serving others. All of our academic programs contain a vocational aspect to them; they are ways by which individuals can serve others. Our professional programs, for example, prepare students not just for a job or even a profession, but for a vocation, a way in which God serves humans through them.

The concept of vocation is also useful in individual professional relationships with students. I found that I was most effective in advising and mentoring students when I used the concept of vocation in helping individuals as they explored their next steps after college.

2. Paradox: the use of “both/and” an explanation rather than “either/or”
This is an important concept for me as an historian. I get to explore historical events that are not usually clean and neat. Life tends to be messy; that is also true of life in the past. My explanations of people and events in the past can be more nuanced and accurate, I believe, when I use the idea of paradox.
3. Law/Gospel (sin/grace): human nature generally assumes that “you get what you pay for,” that one’s success in life is shaped by one’s own actions. Christianity certainly acknowledges that there are consequences to actions. Nevertheless, Lutherans particularly emphasize that no one can meet God’s standards. Christianity offers the good news that God gives people good things they don’t deserve, starting with the gift of salvation. As Christians (little Christs), we have the opportunity to demonstrate redemptive qualities to our students, when appropriate.
In my study of history, I’ve come across a number of instances that can only be explained by people making decisions through the lens of grace and redemption.
4. Human nature: that paradoxical understanding that people created in God’s image are also infected by sin. Scripture clearly sets high standards for people and God holds us accountable for our actions. Therefore, Christianity clearly supports such concepts as justice, social justice, and love of neighbor. Concordia endorses an emphasis on ethics which helps students think through issues of right and wrong.
Historians study humans and their activities in the past. My understanding of human nature, shaped by my religious beliefs, helps me provide nuanced understanding of human actions at the same time as identifying evil. Adolf Hitler, for example, loved his dogs and was a very patriotic German. A contemporary of Hitler, Franklin D. Roosevelt, while a great US president, cheated on his wife. Both were humans scarred by sin; I still have an opportunity as a historian to make judgments about their impact on the world.

The 10 commandments might come most quickly to mind if one is looking for a Christian ethical framework. To explore ethical dimensions in many disciplines, the Lord’s Prayer provides an intriguing alternative way to posit a Christian ethical standard as compared to other ethical frameworks, identifying what is important to Christ.

Another way to approach the exploration of faith and learning is through the use of the traditional creeds. The Apostles Creed describes God’s work in our world, which has implications on all our disciplines.

1. The **first article** of the creed describes God’s creating work.
 When we attempt to explain/understand the world around us, we are connecting to the first article. God has created the world in which we live. His creation includes the natural world (biology, chemistry, physics, geology, environmental science), and the world of logic and mathematics (math, computer science, philosophy). By deepening our knowledge of His created world, we connect to Him. Thus we can frame the STEM

fields as human attempts to fulfill our roles as good stewards by understanding His creation.

God as creator can also connect us to our own creative impulses. When we create/perform music, art, dance or theatre we are honoring God's creation and in a small, imperfect human way we are acting as He did. We can thus view art, music, drama, and literature/language as our own connection to God's creative nature.

2. The **second article** describes God's redemptive work.

Because of the Fall, we are imperfect sinners. This means that our human affairs will often be messy, irrational, full of mistakes, and sometimes immoral or cruel. (That is why Jesus' death and resurrection is the ultimate undeserved gift). The need for redemption colors our understanding of all academic disciplines and restricts our understanding of the world; we are all subject to error and our knowledge is necessarily limited and imperfect. In particular, this view of human nature assists us in understanding human affairs in history, the social sciences, the humanities, social work, law, business and education. It can also be valuable in all the health care and church work vocations when we are confronted with the problem of physical, emotional and spiritual suffering. (A useful resource in this area is our own Dr. Greg Schulz, *The Problem of Suffering: A Father's Hope* CPH, 2012.)

3. The **third article** describes God's sanctifying work.

The Holy Spirit strengthens and supports Christians in their individual and collective journeys. This article encourages Christians, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to practice the concept of vocation. Concordia's mission is to prepare students to serve Christ in the church and in the world. As Christians, we serve Christ by serving our neighbors. Some faculty members may choose to embed service directly in their courses or in extracurricular work with students. All faculty members are involved in preparing students to serve regardless of discipline or profession.

What does this mean for the Schools and disciplines at Concordia?