

# CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY

## WISCONSIN & ANN ARBOR

28 June 2024

Dear Brothers and Sisters of the Michigan and the South Wisconsin Districts and Other Stakeholders,

“Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.” (Galatians 1:3-5 ESV)

In a recent letter to the members of the Michigan District, Pastor Davis, President of the Michigan District, and Dr. Boergert, Chair of the Michigan District Board of Directors, expressed strong disagreement with the actions the Concordia University Board of Regents is taking to address the financial challenges the Ann Arbor campus is facing. Their letter to the Michigan District is attached for your consideration.

It is no surprise that Christians deeply disagree over how to handle challenging situations, even as Paul and Barnabas disagreed over Mark. We realize that the changes that are being made may be unsettling and painful to many students, their parents, alumni, supporters, and our dear faculty and staff. Please know we do not take these matters lightly. But changes must be made. Our Lord delivers certain comfort in the midst of all our uncertainties, “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8 ESV).

The leaders from Michigan use their letter to question the integrity of the University’s Board and Administration. The Regents feel it is necessary to take this opportunity to share essential responses to the claims the Michigan District has publicly presented to its members.

(1) The Michigan leaders reference a “Roadmap to Autonomy” that was developed by a group of volunteers and submitted to the University Board of Regents, who reviewed it thoroughly prior to their June meeting. We must note that the Michigan District has neither released the “Roadmap” to the Church, nor revealed who comprised the group that developed their plan, but has instead asserted the Regents refused to collaborate with these unknown individuals. Alternatively, the Regents and Administration have prioritized transparency and released more data and information than universities in a similar position usually provide. They created a Task Force, whose members are identified by name in their report. The Regents have also published the results of the Task Force’s work on the University web page. In this spirit of transparency, along with this letter, we are now publishing the Michigan District “Roadmap.” We are also attaching appropriate analysis and commentary of the “Roadmap” to demonstrate that the Regents reviewed it thoroughly. We invite readers to place the Task Force report, the “Roadmap,” and the analysis of the “Roadmap” side by side and review them for their merits.

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(2) The Michigan leaders assert that the District and its Church Extension Fund have “demonstrated great capacity, especially in difficult times to support the ministry of CUAA.” While we recognize and appreciate the generosity the Michigan District and Church Extension Fund have shown to the Ann Arbor campus over time, the financial needs of the Ann Arbor campus far exceed these good intentions. Over the past sixty years, the Michigan District and Church Extension Fund have not been able to bring forward the finances necessary to make the Ann Arbor campus sustainable. Over the past ten years, Concordia University Wisconsin has committed ~\$90 million to the Ann Arbor campus. Concurrently, the Ann Arbor campus is unable to generate auxiliary revenue that is sufficient to meet its needs. 25% of the money that should be earmarked for teaching and learning covers escalating athletic costs. The Ann Arbor campus experiences annual average operational shortfalls of \$4-5 million. Today, the Ann Arbor campus is essentially in the same place of financial difficulty that it found itself in twenty years ago and ten years ago. Simply put, the Wisconsin campus can no longer cover those operational shortfalls.

(3) The Michigan leaders state they recognize that the University Regents retain fiduciary responsibility for the Ann Arbor campus. They simultaneously claim the Michigan District’s input has not been welcome throughout this process. In fact, the Michigan District, with an anonymous group operating outside the governance structure of the University, developed a “Roadmap” and presented it to the Regents, who, in turn, received it and thoughtfully reviewed it. The Regents clearly have considered Michigan’s input into the process.

(4) The Michigan leaders express confusion about the role Lutheran identity is playing in this process of change for the Ann Arbor campus. In contrast, we are grateful for our partnership with the Concordia University System. It has played a crucial role in carrying out the work our Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod by-laws define as well as strengthening our University’s alignment with the Church. To be clear: We will do everything we can to ensure our educational efforts at the Ann Arbor campus reflect both our commitment to following Lutheran doctrine and practice and welcoming all whom our Lord brings to our campus.

(5) Along with the Michigan District, we affirm evangelization as an essential component of the work of the Church. At the same time we recognize that CUWAA is first and foremost a *university* of the Church. We are “a Lutheran higher educational community” that is “committed to helping students develop in mind, body, and spirit for service to Christ in the Church and the world.” As a Lutheran higher educational community, we are *of* the Church and we serve a focused educational mission *in* the world. We welcome opportunities for evangelism within this mission without displacing the missional focus on a Christ-centered education.

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(6) The Michigan leaders suggest that: “We will be bound together in Christian love. We will not be bound together by tertiary authorities, e.g. human traditions, ancient theologians, or Lutheran writers. That in and of itself is ‘un-Lutheran’ and borders on heresy.” As Lutherans, we understand the Confessions to be drawn from the Word of God and a true, binding exposition of Holy Scripture. Since all members of Synod subscribe to the Lutheran Confessions, they serve to bind us together in a common confession of faith and are authoritative in our work as a Lutheran university. We reject any implication that this view of the Lutheran Confessions “borders on heresy.” Furthermore, we recognize that the Synod has set expectations for the Concordias in the newly revised Lutheran Identity and Mission Outcome Standards (LIMOS). The LIMOS serve as a concrete framework for documenting our university’s theological commitments. As an institution of the Synod, we are striving to strengthen how we live out our mission in accord with the LIMOS.

(7) Finally, the Michigan leaders express concern about donations to help the Ann Arbor campus and the possible impact changes to the campus may bring to the District. We appreciate these concerns, but there are three relevant points to consider. First, we are grateful that by the Lord’s blessings we were able in a time of dire need to acquire the Ann Arbor campus and support its operation for ten years, accomplishing much good. Second, the Ann Arbor campus is not equal structurally or financially to the Wisconsin campus. Its revenue constitutes 20% of the university’s work. The Ann Arbor campus, by legal definition, is a branch campus of the Wisconsin campus and under the supervision of the South Wisconsin District. Third, finances are the primary driver for necessary change at the University.<sup>1</sup>

Please be assured that we, as Regents of Concordia University, value your support of the Church and this University. We are carrying out work that ensures that our university remains a strong member of the Concordia University System.

We will continue to delineate our efforts to do everything we can to remain physically present in Michigan as we deliver high-quality, mission-aligned academic programming in a model that is financially sustainable over time. We want to provide the best possible Lutheran higher education to our students at our Wisconsin campus, at our Ann Arbor campus, and online. These efforts are an expression of our commitment to be faithful to our calling and true to our mission. Updates will continue to be provided on the CUAA Future website (<https://www.cuaa.edu/about/future/index.html>) as they are available.

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<sup>1</sup> As this article indicates, a university’s fiscal health is defined today—as much as anything—by its cash position, and we must do everything we can to protect our finances going forward: <https://www.forbes.com/sites/ryancraig/2024/06/21/higher-education-financial-responsibility-is-broken/>.

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These changes will take patience, time, and the support of the broader Church. Please continue to keep our University, its leaders, faculty, staff, and students in your prayers. We trust that the Lord of the Church will bless our efforts at this university.

“Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.” (1 Corinthians 15:58 ESV)

In Christ,

The Board of Regents of CUWAA by its Executive Committee

Rev. John M. Berg

Rev. David C. Fleming

Mr. Robert Denkert

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