

# MISSION STATEMENT, REVISED

## NEW VERSION FOREGROUNDS THE SEMINARY'S IDENTITY

*On January 22, 2026, CTSFW President Dr. Jon S. Bruss spoke to Symposia attendees about the Seminary's strategic plan, starting with an explanation of the recent revision of CTSFW's mission statement. Following is a lightly edited transcript of his remarks.*

*By Jon S. Bruss*

I'm going to begin by asking you to imagine what CTSFW might look like fifteen years from now if we are able to execute faithfully and well on everything I'm going to talk about in the next fifteen minutes, starting with the revision of our mission statement.

I'm going to back up a little bit. As part of our strategic plan, we're undergoing a curricular revision right now. We've operated with the present curriculum for about twenty years. The curriculum is good, but we think it can be even better. New faculty have come on board, so it's a good time to revisit it.

The first step we took in that curricular revision was to go back to our mission statement and ask ourselves whether the mission statement was functioning for us like we hoped it was going to function, particularly knowing the landscape of American theological education in the year 2025, which is when we completed this work.

We discovered that there are some things that we thought we needed to insist upon right in the mission statement, not in a tertiary or quaternary document somewhere, buried off on the website. The first line of the revised statement (see image on page 5) is from the old mission statement: "Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne." The old mission statement resumes with

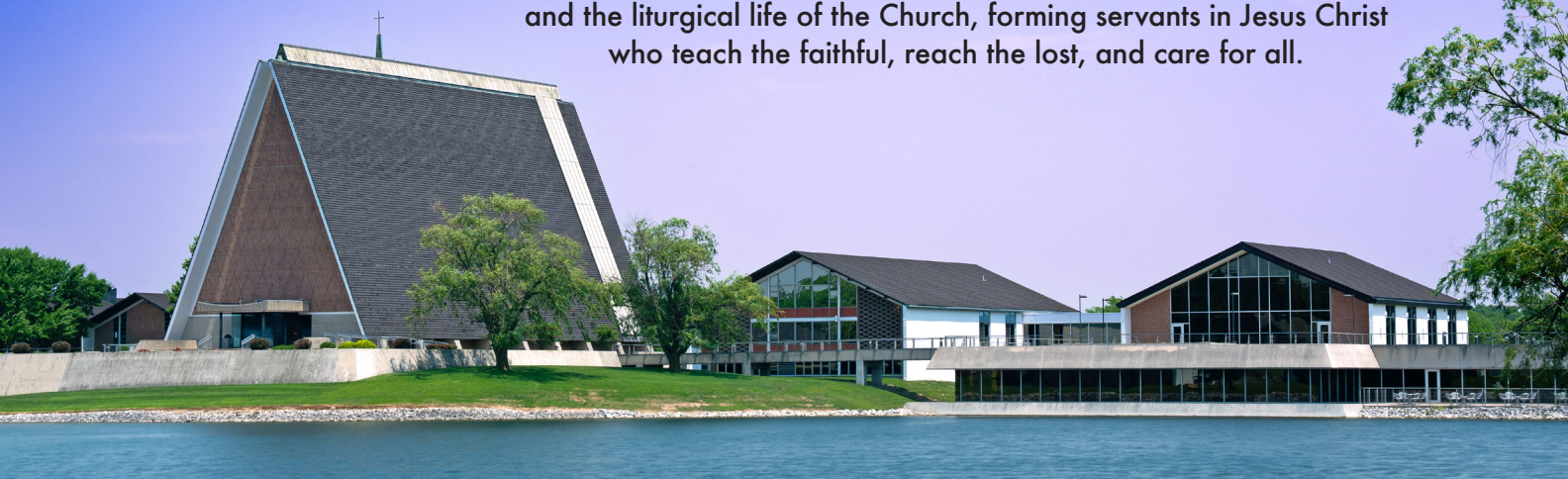
the words "to form"—"CTSFW exists to form servants in Jesus Christ who teach the faithful, reach the lost, and care for all." All the material in the middle has been added.

The specialists on mission statements tell us that adding length to a mission statement is a very bad idea. My argument has been that it would be a very bad idea if we didn't add to the mission statement. I'll walk you through and tell you why.

The first addition is to say this: "Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne, is an **institution**." The word "institution" juxtaposed with "Fort Wayne" says that this institution has a locale, and if you want to engage with and benefit from the institution, you need to come to this locale, to Fort Wayne. There are bricks and mortar here, and the way we do theological education is in the flesh, face to face. This is how—and I can give you the biblical argument until the day is done—this is simply how we have done theological education in the church from the time of Adam until now.

Saint Paul gives us a few letters. Go through those letters and see how often he says, "I wish I were with you" (Rom. 1:11–12; 1 Thess. 2:17–18; Gal. 4:20; Phil. 1:8). When he wrote to Timothy and Titus, he was giving them pastoral advice in a particular situation, not their seminary

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education. Theological formation, pastoral formation, takes place in the flesh, face to face. Right now, with the controversy in our church body, which I hope will be settled soon, and the controversy in anti-sacramental American Protestant theological education, which isn't going to go away anytime soon, we need to say that we are a bricks-and-mortar institution, and you've got to come to Fort Wayne, Indiana, to find us. We're going to

**CTSFW exists to carry out our mission—making confessional Lutheran pastors to proclaim the Gospel in church and world.**

Again, it's important to put this against the backdrop of the larger Protestant world. There are many formerly denominational seminaries out there that, for the sake of institutional survival and for the sake of maintaining whatever programming they think is really important for themselves, have drifted from their denominational moorings. Let me give you one example. There used to be a seminary in the Midwest that included its denomination

insist going forward that what you experience every year here at Symposia—deep study of Lutheran theology and fraternal interaction—is the experience of every student who graduates from this seminary with an MDiv or AR to be a pastor in the church.

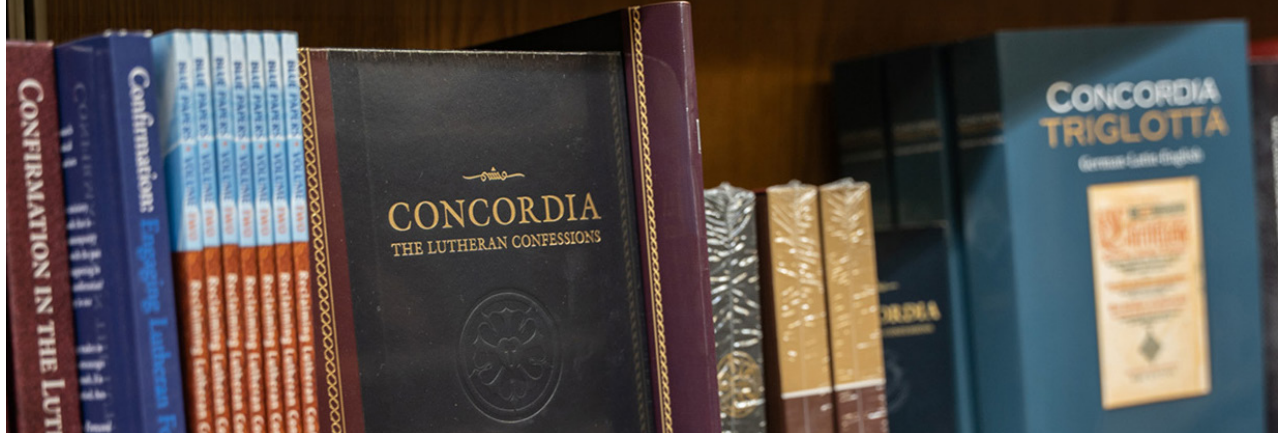
The second addition: “Is an **institution of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod.**”

in the name of the seminary. Guess what it's called today? They've dropped the denominational affiliation, and that change is recent. Why? Because they're looking to preserve the institution, but they're not looking to preserve the mission of the institution. CTSFW exists for no other reason than to carry out our mission, which hasn't changed from the start—making confessional Lutheran pastors to proclaim the Gospel in church and world.

CTSFW, by labeling the fact that we serve The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and are of The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod and teach Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod people and our partner churches, is saying that we are forever committed to serving our church body, and I think that's a good thing. Students come to CTSFW not to learn generic pan-Lutheran theology. They come to learn Missouri Synod Lutheranism.

This is a great assurance to the people in the pews. The people in the pews don't want a generic early Luther Lutheranism; they want confessionally determined Lutheranism. That's the Lutheranism they've known all along. They want it for themselves, and their children, and their grandchildren.

The third addition is a set of three commitments: **“committed to the Holy Scriptures, the Lutheran Confessions, and the liturgical life of the Church.”** We debated how to say this over and over again, and the reason is that the threefold commitment is not an equal commitment. We are not committed to the liturgical life of the Church in the same way as we are to the teachings of



the Holy Scriptures, and anyone who gets confused about that can come back to seminary, and we'll talk about that.

The term “**the Holy Scriptures**” is terribly important. We didn't say the Bible. We didn't say the Scriptures. We said the Holy Scriptures, and by that we mean to indicate the verbally inspired and inerrant Word of God. This is where the Missouri Synod simply plants its stake, and we are not going to depart from that. We are always going to treat Holy Scripture as the verbally inspired Word, His communication to us, down to the word.


Next, we're committed to **the Lutheran Confessions**. Here, we could have put in more, to say “quia subscription” and similar things. That's what's intended by this. We never want the Lutheran Confessions to be shelved, to be forgotten, to be not informative, actually, of the way our pastors and graduates do the work of ministry to which they're called in their congregations. We are, in fact, duty bound to preach and teach in accord with them, to talk about the things that they talk about, not exclusively, but they shouldn't be forgotten. So we want to foreground that. It's also worth noting that both the Holy Scriptures and the Lutheran Confessions are here in the mission statement to underscore a primary text orientation, but that discussion is for another day when we talk about the curriculum.

Finally, we have a commitment to **the liturgical life of the Church**. The fullness of what we have in Christ, given to us in and through the Scriptures and faithfully propounded in the Confessions, comes to life as the church gathered around the Lord's Word and Sacraments. The gathering, the way in which we gather around the Word and Sacraments, is through an order—of prayer, praise, proclamation, administration of the Sacraments. God is a God not of confusion but of order (1 Cor. 14:33), and we want to maintain that. We want to use that as a forming element for all of our students so they're prepared when they go out to conduct their ministry in accord with the orders of the church. That's a formative element. In fact,

the *ordo* itself, even if you added nothing else, would give you Christ.

Then, of course, we've got the same words we had before: “**forming servants in Jesus Christ.**” Jesus Christ is formative for the students. We expect students to stand *vice Christi*, as the Apology says, “in the place of Christ” (Apology VII and VIII 47). They are little Christs in their congregations who serve their people sacrificially.

We're forming servants in Jesus Christ who have a threefold job. Number one: to **teach the faithful**. That includes our preaching, our catechetical instruction, our Bible classes, the whole nine yards. Number two: **reach the lost**, which is also critical. Concordia Theological Seminary is a mission seminary. Our thumbprint on world missions for The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod is huge. Our involvement in church planting through our graduates is huge. We want to continue to be at the forefront of those sorts of things. Number three: **care for all**. In *The Pastor*, Wilhelm Loehe says that the pastor ought to keep a sort of medical kit with himself all the time. That was in the nineteenth century and was one of the expressions of the pastor caring for all. Today, that's carried out through the office of deaconess and through the love exhibited in the congregation toward one another and toward the world around them. It's also carried out by pastors who care for the people entrusted to them even as they teach the faithful and reach the lost.

So that's the new mission statement. It conveys not only why we're here but who we are and whom we serve. That clarity is essential for making sound decisions, both big and small, about formation here at CTSFW and our service to the church. 



Dr. Jon S. Bruss is President of Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne.



Scan the QR code to read more about CTSFW's strategic plan.