

Dear Alumni and Friends,

There are some pretty big changes coming to Lincoln Christian University. We wanted to take an opportunity to explain to you what is happening here, give you some ways to connect with us for more information or to ask questions, and then ask for your help.

### **What is happening?**

Focusing on Lincoln Christian University's mission to *nurture and equip Christian leaders with a biblical worldview to serve and lead in the church and the world*, on February 22, 2022, President Silas McCormick and Board Chair Tamsen Murray, announced a bold initiative to create a new model for Christian higher education that is responsive to a new era of Kingdom work.

### ***The new model makes three primary changes to what LCU presently does:***

- First, though it continues the University's commitment to providing biblical, theological, and worldview educational opportunities for Kingdom leaders through academic degree programs, it narrows those programs to those most directly tied to vocational ministry -- specifically seminary programs along with two undergraduate programs in Bible & Theology and Christian Ministry. It may be helpful to think of this as Seminary+, our Seminary plus two undergraduate programs.
- Second, it dramatically expands non-credit educational opportunities in the form of workshops, retreats, conferences, curricula, and the like created by and led by LCU faculty.
- Third, it adapts to the fact that more and more churches are developing their own leaders in their existing contexts. In the new model, LCU will offer the biblical, theological, and worldview components of our curricula, and a number of partner churches will offer the practical ministry training through internship and residency experiences as well as serving as a voice in the creation of workshops, curricula, conferences, and consulting services on issues facing churches today.

This approach builds on the strength of both partners and creates a model that can be replicated in some fashion at any church that desires to nurture and equip its leaders. We're calling this effort "LCU to You," because it means we will be reducing the number of activities and offerings on our main campus in Lincoln, and instead taking them out to the churches.

The new model will involve offering courses and training sites for our students in collaboration with partner churches, including Eastview Christian Church in Normal, Illinois, Harvester Christian Church in St. Charles, Missouri, West Side Christian Church, in Springfield, Illinois, as well as others we anticipate adding in the coming months. We will also continue to offer courses online and at our main campus in Lincoln, Illinois.

Importantly, ***nothing about our mission, vision, core values, philosophy of education, or statement of faith needs to be changed to adopt this new model.*** We will continue to serve the local church by preparing students for ministry with biblical education and practical training experiences through our church partnerships. In fact, narrowing our program offerings, and reducing the expense of residential undergraduate education will allow us to focus on what we do well and carry forward our historic dedication to Kingdom growth for years to come.

### **Why is this happening?**

While we were excited to enroll our largest class of new residential undergraduate students in five years this fall and are experiencing our best fundraising year in a decade, these steps

forward are not enough to offset the impact of 15 years of declining enrollment, including an approximately 50% decline just in the last ten years.

Unfortunately, declining enrollment has more than just financial consequences; it negatively affects the morale of students, faculty, and staff as well. We have also been listening to our constituents here on campus. In recent years, political and cultural differences have caused friction on our campus, and generational differences regarding how people resolve conflict have made that worse.

Additionally, our physical campus has not seen substantial renovation in over a decade, and the community of Lincoln and Logan County itself has seen economic decline just like many other rural, Midwestern communities. Visiting prospective students see a campus that often has fewer people than their church, facilities that are inferior to their high school, and a town that has fewer amenities than their own, and in this malaise, the sense of community that they expected, and so many of us experienced ourselves during our own time as students just isn't here. It is utterly heart-breaking, but pretending that it isn't happening solves nothing.

It would be one thing if this was a unique situation, but we have seen substantial operating surpluses in only one of the last ten years, and net operating deficits have totaled more than \$3.5 million over the last nine years. Though this year has been better, it is not enough to address years of unaddressed financial need. There is good news here, though: although our long-term sustainability is grim, our short-term financial position is stronger than it's been in a decade. This means that **we have a unique opportunity to do something bold to carry our mission forward into the future.**

We know for many reading this, the losses in this reorganization are profound. We will close many of our undergraduate programs (we will continue to offer a BA in Christian Ministry and a BA in Bible and Theology), and offer a far more limited residential undergraduate experience. But in no way do these changes reflect a rejection of the thousands of lives changed by this campus and these programs. We deeply believe in their immense worth and are grateful for the many people who have, over the years, nurtured these students, these programs, and this campus. Unfortunately, a ten-year decline in enrollment and the ongoing costs of operating a campus far larger than our enrollment can support led us to a point where the entire mission was in jeopardy.

### **Why this particular model?**

The silver lining here though, is that it was really all of you who led us to this model; and it is clear that a new way of training the next generation of leaders for the church is needed. At the same time our long-term financial picture was becoming clear, we were also engaged in an extensive strategic planning listening tour funded by the Lilly Foundation. Those conversations clearly showed that our constituents value us for offering academically rigorous biblical, theological, and worldview educational opportunities, and in addition to the graduates we produce, we are appreciated for the educational conference events, job postings and placement assistance, pulpit supply, and church leadership consultation services we offer to hundreds of churches every year.

There were also some, however, who thought that our commitment to training ministers would be better met by offering more of those educational experiences alongside church staff members in real-life settings.

This model tries to focus on our strengths, and partner with those who can mitigate our weaknesses.

There are other reasons for this model as well. Many of you likely have heard that a former student who identifies as transgender recently filed a Title IX Complaint against us claiming that students should not be able to use federal financial aid at a school that requires students to conform their behavior to a traditional Christian understanding of human sexuality. One of

the advantages of this new model is to give us an opportunity to work toward a future in which we are not reliant on governmental aid for our students.

It's also important to note that churches are increasingly teaching practical ministry skills on their own, and they are doing so with excellence and innovation. All indications are that this is the future for many of our churches. Our new model allows our students to benefit from learning ministry skills in that context and it allows our faculty to not only round it out with our strengths of bible, theology, and worldview, but also make it available beyond a classroom to people at all levels within the church.

***This really is a remarkable Kingdom opportunity.***

**What can you do to help?**

This will be hard work. And we cannot do it without the support of our thousands of alumni, hundreds of churches, and numerous other friends.

We have three very specific requests for you: (1) we ask for your prayers. This is certain to be a very difficult and emotional transition period; (2) we ask that you continue to support us at your current level (or more) for the first two years of the transition. ***The greatest risk for this failing is the transition period of the next 24 months.*** We are convinced there is an amazing Kingdom opportunity here and that once we can get our feet underneath us, people will see it. We're asking you to help buy us that time. Finally, (3) we ask that you give us an opportunity to address your questions or concerns.

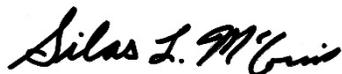
Having a lot of questions is perfectly reasonable. We want to talk with you about them; you can call us at 217-732-3168 or email us at [info@LincolnChristian.edu](mailto:info@LincolnChristian.edu). We've also created a website where you can find more information at [lincolnchristian.edu/LCUtoYou](http://lincolnchristian.edu/LCUtoYou).

We know this is asking a great deal of you. This is a hard letter to read. This new model isn't the Lincoln we experienced. But we stand at a tipping point. One in every three students has left LCU since the pandemic started. Our residential student population is smaller than at any time prior to 1950. Doing what we have been doing is not sustainable - and giving up is not acceptable.

Our mission is as important today as it has ever been. Fortunately, we have an opportunity to pursue a new model with fantastic partners and write a new and amazing chapter in Lincoln's story. But we need your help. Our only chance to bridge the transition year and launch this model is with the strong financial support of people like you. Others faced with similar situations have merged, closed, or compromised their identity or integrity. We are focusing on the very core of our identity and staking out a path to a brighter future.

Would you please give generously to this effort so that we know you're with us?

Yours truly,



Silas McCormick  
President



Tamsen Murray  
Chair, Board of Trustees

*This text is a summary of the larger, more complete explanatory memorandum produced by President McCormick and his Leadership Cabinet and approved by the Board of Trustees. That complete memo is available to read [here](#).*