

JOINT STATEMENT

FROM: LCU President Silas McCormick and OCC President Matt Proctor

DATE: October 11, 2023

FROM LCU PRESIDENT SILAS MCCORMICK

In 1944, Lincoln Bible Institute was founded by Earl Hargrove, and the school quickly gained a sterling reputation for preparing men and women for ministry in the local church. Over the course of the next nearly 80 years, Lincoln Christian University—born out of Lincoln Bible Institute—continued that good work while also educating *all* students, undergraduate and graduate alike, to live out their faith consistently and considerately in the world, regardless of their profession.

In 1942, two years before LBI's founding, Ozark Christian College (then called Ozark Bible College) was founded with much the same mission and has, for over 80 years, been deeply faithful in their own kingdom work. As our slightly older sister school, we have enjoyed a long relationship, and the sibling bond between Ozark and Lincoln has never been more meaningful than it is now.

The last several years have been challenging for higher education and particularly for *Christian* higher education. We have felt deeply our own share of challenges. Our mission to nurture and equip Christians with a biblical worldview to serve and lead in the church and the world has remained the same, but in February 2022, we announced a radical shift ([here](#)) in our programming and educational delivery. These changes have seen some marked success, particularly with our Lincoln Christian Institute initiative. However, we have continued to see a steep decline in enrollment, as well as a partial decline in giving.

At the end of summer 2023, LCU's leadership concluded (1) we were not likely to be able to proceed independently as an institution, and (2) we should pursue collaboration with a sister school. This inspired a conversation between the leadership teams of Lincoln Christian University and Ozark Christian College—and eventually, the boards of both schools. The two colleges reached a resolution, described below, and institutional conversations are ongoing with regard to further implications of the resolution.

Pending approval by our respective accrediting bodies, at the end of the academic year, May 31, 2024:

- Lincoln Christian Seminary will be acquired by Ozark Christian College.
- Ozark Christian College will retain the name “Lincoln Seminary” to celebrate the legacy of our institution's contributions to the kingdom.
- Ozark Christian College will adopt our HLC- and ATS-accredited Master of Divinity degree, as well as our Master of Arts degrees in Biblical Studies and Bible and Theology, and merge our MA in Ministry into their own MA in Christian Ministry.
- Any current Lincoln Christian University seminary students in the above-named programs who continue at Ozark are guaranteed zero loss—no increase in tuition, no increase in degree requirements—and all degrees have a fully online option.
- For current LCU students in other programs—our Bachelor of Arts degrees in Christian Ministry and Biblical and Theological Studies and our Master of Arts degrees in Counseling, Theology, and Organizational Leadership, or any others: we will help each student find a “home” for your continued education that reflects sound stewardship of the work you've already done.
- Lincoln Christian University will cease academic operations. That is, we will no longer be offering academic credit or degrees. However, some non-academic activities will likely be necessary while we resolve any outstanding debts and assets.

There is no small amount of grief behind this news, but it is Christian grief of high order—*not without hope*. We are grateful for the continued ministry of Lincoln Christian Seminary in name and with excellence via a sibling who cares deeply about and for us and our mission.

There is much to be shared in the days to come, and we are all hurting. We would very much appreciate your grace and patience. We will aim for timely and clear communication that will include, but not be limited to: FAQ documents for students, donors, and alumni; ongoing announcements concerning LCU's regional presence and its campus; and information related to Ozark's acquisition of the Seminary.

In the meantime, we do want to make a request of you: please help us finish this academic year well—from now through May 31, 2024. A good finish for us means a good start for our sister school who has come alongside us in a time of need and will carry on our work. To put it simply: please continue to give, and please continue to pray.

At Convocation in August, we continued our long-held tradition of beginning the academic year with the doxological statement that closes out Jude (verses 24 and 25), and it seems fitting to conclude this announcement in the same way: *"To him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy—to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore!"*

And to that we, along with you—and all of us with Jude—say, "Amen."

FROM OCC PRESIDENT MATT PROCTOR

Second Timothy 4 rings with both sadness and hope. After a long and fruitful ministry, Paul—now a death row prisoner—is saying goodbye, "The time for my departure is near. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." But before he leaves, Paul passes the leadership baton to Timothy, "I give you this charge: preach the Word!" As Joshua followed Moses, as Elisha followed Elijah, so Timothy will carry Paul's ministry into the next generation. "God buries his workmen," wrote Charles Wesley, "but carries on his work." Timothy preached for the next 30 years, and in the midst of sadness, there was hope.

This feels like a 2 Timothy 4 moment. After a long and fruitful ministry, Lincoln Christian University is saying goodbye, and we at Ozark grieve her departure. We know well LCU's great kingdom impact—the thousands of "Lincoln leaders" sent into the harvest fields—and we give thanks for how well our sister school "fought the good fight." But before LCU leaves, a baton is passed to OCC. Lincoln began when Earl Hargrove's famous sermon cast a vision to the Illinois churches, "The preachers are coming!" Since 1942, that same vision has guided Ozark, and as we now adopt Lincoln's seminary, we carry on that work. The preachers are still coming, and in the midst of sadness, there is hope.

When President McCormick first approached us at OCC, the connections between the two schools were clear: similar missions, similar constituencies, shared HLC accreditation, shared Restoration Movement heritage. The OCC leadership team—President Matt Proctor and Executive Vice Presidents Chad Ragsdale, Damien Spikereit, and Jim Dalrymple—are all Lincoln seminary alumni and former Illinois preachers. At least eleven of our current professors are Lincoln alumni, as well as recently retired stalwarts like Dr. Mark Scott, Dr. Gary Zustiak, Dr. Terry Bowland, and Dr. Woody Wilkinson. These connections, along with OCC's financial and enrollment health, suggested the conversation might be fruitful.

When we spoke, President McCormick shared the story of Lincoln's most recent chapter. In the fall of 2019, among other challenges, they faced an overwhelming \$9 million debt. President McCormick and his team went to work, and in February 2022, they announced significant changes to focus the college tightly on ministry preparation and debt elimination. Since then—through the sale of campus property, hard-but-necessary budgeting decisions, and the

generous support of their faithful donors—they have slashed the debt to \$3.1 million. By the end of the 2023-24 academic year, it should be at \$2.6 million. When they cease academic operations May 31, 2024, Lincoln Christian University will work to finish paying the remaining amount, but rather than face academic closure under a massive, all-assets-swallowing debt, the Lincoln leadership has instead preserved something of great value to pass on to future generations.

Thus, as the conversation continued, both schools—including the respective boards—prayerfully decided to enter into a more formal kingdom partnership, a “passing of the baton.” As LCU President McCormick shared, **on June 1, 2024, Lincoln Christian Seminary will transfer to Ozark Christian College, changing its name to Lincoln Seminary at Ozark Christian College, along with LCU’s \$3.8 million student scholarship endowment.**

Such an announcement naturally raises several questions, which I will try to answer below. While the information overlaps with what LCU President McCormick shared, I often tell my students, “Repetition is the key to learning.” At the risk of repetition, I share the following in the hope of clear communication:

What exactly is involved with OCC embedding Lincoln Seminary as part of our college?

- Pending approval from the accrediting bodies—the Higher Learning Commission (HLC), the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), and the Association for Biblical Higher Education (ABHE)—OCC will offer in fall 2024 some of the Lincoln curriculum: namely, the MA in Ministry, the MA in Biblical Studies, the MA in Bible and Theology, and the Master of Divinity degree.
- Pending approval, all current LCU students in those programs will be able to continue at Lincoln Seminary at Ozark Christian College and are automatically accepted. For more information, email our Director of Graduate Studies Chrissy King at king.chrissy@occ.edu.
- For students in the graduate degrees NOT offered by Lincoln Seminary at OCC, LCU is making teach-out arrangements with other educational partners.
- For graduate students that continue with Lincoln Seminary at OCC, we are guaranteeing “no loss”: no raise in tuition and no additional time to complete their degree than at LCU.
- While we cannot make that guarantee to current LCU undergraduate students, we are working on a transfer agreement for LCU undergrads that guarantees all their LCU credits will transfer to OCC. For more information, email our Admissions Department at admissions@occ.edu.

Where will Lincoln Seminary’s operations live?

- Through May 31, 2024, Lincoln Christian Seminary will continue to operate in Lincoln, Illinois, and online as part of Lincoln Christian University. Students may still enroll for spring 2024 classes at lincolnchristian.edu.
- Beginning June 1, 2024, pending accreditors’ approval, Lincoln Seminary will begin operating on OCC’s campus in Joplin, Missouri, as well as online. OCC will not be operating an Illinois campus and, with a few possible exceptions, will not be hiring LCU’s Illinois personnel.

What are the reasons for Ozark adding a seminary?

- Last academic year, Ozark added a graduate studies program, beginning with one degree—the MA in Christian Ministry. For those with a secular bachelor’s degree, we wanted to offer graduate level Bible and ministry education, and we had a strong response, as over 80 students enrolled the first year. Over the next six years, as the program grew and more degrees were added, Ozark’s goal was for the graduate studies program to become a full-fledged seminary.

- “Seminary” is the label most commonly used for an institution offering multiple graduate level Bible and ministry degrees. Like a medical school or law school, a seminary is a specialized, graduate level school that focuses on preparing people for a particular vocation—in this case, ministry.
- Ozark Christian College remains a single-focus institution, and while our primary business is still teaching undergraduates, a seminary allows us to do at a graduate level what we’ve been doing since 1942—training men and women for Christian service.
- The addition of Lincoln’s seminary, then, is simply an opportunity to do more quickly what we were already planning to do.

What are the advantages to Ozark embedding Lincoln’s seminary instead of building its own?

- **Trust.** Since 1952, Lincoln’s seminary has been a trusted name in the Restoration Movement and beyond for graduate level ministry preparation. By adding Lincoln’s seminary, we are connecting with a broad pool of prospective students familiar with and warm toward the Lincoln name.
- **Accreditation.** Lincoln’s seminary is accredited by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS), the standard accrediting body for seminaries. OCC’s current graduate studies program—with one master’s degree—is accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). As we added more degrees in the future, our plan was to enter the six-year process of pursuing ATS accreditation. By adding Lincoln’s seminary, we anticipate—pending approval—that Lincoln’s ATS accreditation will accompany it. This fast forwards our graduate program significantly, setting us up to serve more students more quickly and make a larger kingdom impact.
- **Endowment.** Lincoln has also agreed to send their \$3.8 million student scholarship endowment to accompany the seminary. This, of course, gives Ozark a greater opportunity to bless students financially as they prepare for ministry.
- **Students.** By adding Lincoln’s seminary, we are also able to immediately serve more students as their current students (in the programs we’ll continue) continue their studies at OCC.

Why is Ozark keeping the Lincoln name on the seminary?

- **Honor.** We are grateful for Lincoln’s long legacy of kingdom service, and when a seminary becomes part of a larger institution, it is not uncommon to honor this legacy by retaining in some form the name. (When B.H. Carroll Theological Institute merged in February 2023 with East Texas Baptist University, its name was retained at the B.H. Carroll Theological Seminary at East Texas Baptist University.)
- **Gratitude.** We recognize Lincoln’s significant financial contribution to Ozark’s ongoing graduate studies as they send their \$3.8 million endowment to OCC, and it is not uncommon to express gratitude to a benefactor with a school’s name. (Liberty University’s seminary is named the Rawlings School of Divinity to recognize a \$12 million gift by the Rawlings family.)
- **Connection.** Last year alone, almost 250 churches and over 1,000 individuals gave \$1.9 million to support the work of Lincoln Christian University. As LCU closes their academic operations, we hope this name might open a door to those donors who want to continue supporting biblical higher education and the work of preparing men and women for ministry.

What’s next?

- There are still many conversations to come and more decisions to make on the part of both colleges. We both have multiple constituencies—students, employees, alumni, individual donors, supporting churches, accrediting bodies—so the conversations and decisions ahead will take time.
- We both will share information in as clear and timely a manner as possible. Watch Ozark’s website and social media for updates in the coming months.

How can we pray?

- **Pray for God's comfort.** Lincoln Christian University has dozens of employees, scores of students, thousands of alumni, and tens of thousands of supporters who will grieve the loss of a beloved and life-changing place. Please ask "the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort" to minister to them in the midst of their sorrow. (2 Cor 1:3)
- **Pray for God's provision.** While OCC is acquiring Lincoln's seminary, Lincoln Christian University as an organization remains, with a \$3.1 million debt. They remain committed to aggressively eliminating this debt, so please pray that "God will richly supply" all their needs. (Phil 4:19)
- **Pray for God's wisdom.** As President McCormick shared, conversations remain ongoing about other possibilities between the two schools. Please ask the Lord to give us his guidance and wisdom. (Jam 1:5)
- **Pray for God's strength.** OCC's new Dean of Graduate Studies Dr. Michael DeFazio and his team have a big task ahead as they absorb Lincoln's seminary and prepare to serve Lincoln's students. Please ask for "Christ's mighty power" to work within them. (Col 1:29)