

# Forester

A PUBLICATION OF CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

SPRING 2024



DR. RICHARD FISCHER:  
STANDING TALL  
FOR 50  
YEARS

Concordia  
University  
Chicago

Spring 2024

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## ON THE COVER

Looking back on 50 years at CUC since his hiring in 1974, Dr. Rich Fischer says, "God must have wanted me here—there is no other way to explain it."

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“ AT CONCORDIA, I FELT ENCOURAGED...TO USE MY UNIQUE GIFTS AND TALENTS TO SERVE IN WHATEVER SITUATION I ENCOUNTERED.”

—Stacy Widstrand BA '10, p. 35



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**MISSION** Steadfast in Jesus Christ as revealed in the Holy Scriptures, Concordia University Chicago promotes academic rigor in its liberal arts and professional programs; grounds students in objective truth, integrity, and excellence; and practices faithfulness to the Confessional teachings of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, as it forms students for vocations in church, family, and the world.

**VISION** Concordia University Chicago is a Christ-centered Lutheran university where truth, freedom, and vocation form students for lives of influence and service for the common good.

**CORE VALUES** We at Concordia University Chicago embrace these Core Values as essential to living together in a vibrant and influential Christian academic community and as productive citizens of the Church and world.

- **CHRISTIAN FAITH.** The Christian faith is an integral part of our community.
- **THE INDIVIDUAL.** As a member of God's creation, each person is unique and is blessed with inherent worth.
- **EXCELLENCE.** We strive for excellence in who we are and what we do.
- **INTEGRITY.** Our community demonstrates the accord between our beliefs and practices.
- **SERVICE.** Recognizing and addressing the needs of others is a response to God's love for us, and a reflection of God's love for them.

# President's Column

Stand Tall. Those two simple words are the foundation of Concordia University Chicago's new recruitment and branding campaign. Whether you've encountered giant banners on campus bearing those words, watched the new anthem video on our website, or engaged with a member of our faculty or staff at a recent event, you've likely been exposed to the phrase. And if you've not yet encountered our renewed brand, you're in for a treat—this edition of the Forester is centered around it.

So what exactly does Stand Tall mean and how does it connect to our service, individually and collectively, to the Lord, the Church, and the common good? First, Stand Tall connects us to our Christian values, both those ingrained in the identity of the University and those that guide each of us as God's redeemed. Many of those values are clearly evident on pages 36-41 of this edition, where our alumni share their engaging stories of how they are standing tall in their vocations.

Second, Stand Tall reflects our unabashed Lutheran identity and timeless Christian mission of providing an education that's steeped in God's truth. Concordia-Chicago remains committed to the eternal calling of preparing faithful students in the Word. We understand that God created us in His image, we fell from that image and became enslaved to sin, and are redeemed

in Christ. Many of our peer institutions in higher education have moved away from an education with Christ at the center, but not Concordia-Chicago. Instead, we stand tall for it.

Standing tall is not easy. It requires a strong heart. Thankfully, Concordia-Chicago's heart is fortified by our pillars of truth, freedom, and vocation. Informed by these pillars, certain parts of our work lie at the heart of who we are and what we strive to accomplish—providing nourishment to the entire Concordia-Chicago experience. Our approach is intentional and interdisciplinary, providing a strong foundation in the faith and personal formation through a challenging academic curriculum. That curriculum brings faith and reason together. This heart is why Concordia-Chicago is so crucially important to our students, the Church, and the broader community.

Our church work and music programs, for instance, have served as part of our heart, forming students through the fundamentally important disciplines of theology and the liberal arts, even while those disciplines are disappearing from other educational institutions. Concordia-Chicago has equipped students to reach and strengthen untold numbers of the faithful. This legacy of excellence has left indelible marks on our beloved Church. At the same time, we continue to build up our

heart through innovative initiatives that help us deliver on our timeless mission.

This fall, for instance, we will launch our new honors program. Grounded in Scripture and the Great Books tradition, this particularly rigorous program confronts students with enduring questions and ideas about God, humanity, and the virtues. Likewise, our historic commitment to classical education, framed by distinctively Lutheran theology, has guided the creation of the new Classical Educator and Classical Lutheran Educator programs. Meanwhile, the student fellows of our Free Enterprise Center (see story on page 12) are helping to build thriving local communities through an approach to human flourishing that champions faith, liberty, and market-based solutions to poverty alleviation.

You too, individually and collectively, lie at the heart of Concordia-Chicago. Whether you are a current student or alumnus, parent or donor, community member or employee, you are making a difference in the lives of others and serving the Lord in your vocation. You are teachers, caregivers, and musicians. Counselors, pastors, and business leaders. Unshakeable pillars of strength and integrity who live with Christ at the center as you stand tall in service to others and the common good.

Together, we stand tall for truth, freedom, and vocation. Our Lutheran identity and Christian mission—the heart of the University—makes this a reality for our students and the communities we serve. Our heart is why the Church and world need us now, perhaps more than ever.

“STAND TALL CONNECTS US TO OUR CHRISTIAN VALUES, BOTH THOSE INGRAINED IN THE IDENTITY OF THE UNIVERSITY AND THOSE THAT GUIDE EACH OF US AS GOD'S REDEEMED.”



**Russell Dawn**, DPhil, JD  
President



# University Events

## Summer & Fall 2024

### JUNE

**21-23** Dr. Rich Fischer 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion and Concert

**27-30** Golden Alumni Celebration

**29** Patriotic Pops Concert

### JULY

**19** CUC Summer Preview

### AUGUST

**25** Opening Service of the 161<sup>st</sup> Academic Year

### SEPTEMBER

**16** Lectureship in Christianity, Humanities and Public Life

**27** University Band Concert

**28** Maroon & Gold

### OCTOBER

**7-14** Homecoming Week

**12** Athletic Hall of Fame Induction

**14** Undergraduate Visit Day

**20-22** Lectures in Church Music

### NOVEMBER

**1** Wind Symphony Home Concert

**3** Kapelle Home Concert

**10** Chamber Orchestra Concert

**16** Undergraduate Visit Day

### DECEMBER

**6** University Band Christmas Concert

**7-8** Service of Lessons and Carols

**13-14** Fall Commencement Weekend

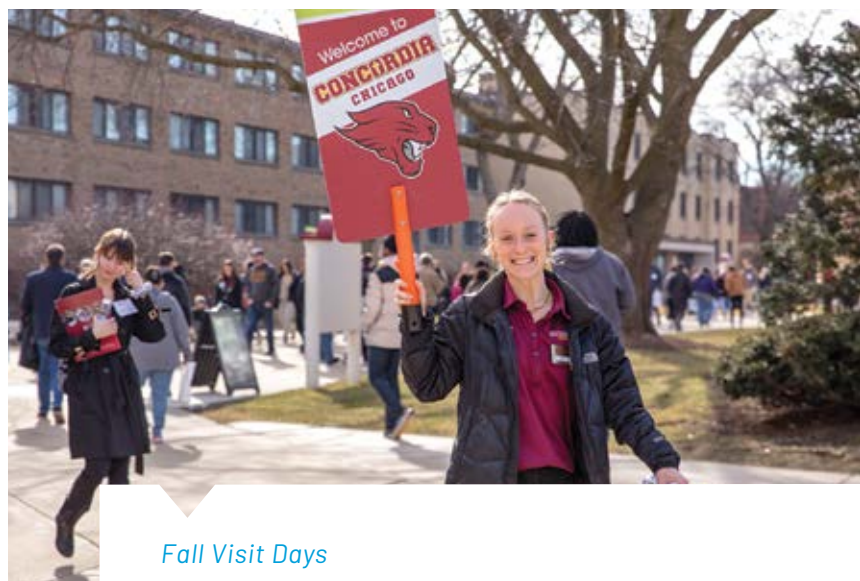
Visit [CUChicago.edu/events](https://CUChicago.edu/events) for the most current schedule and full event details.



### Golden Alumni Celebration

**June 27-30**

Members of the classes of 1974 and earlier are invited to a special Golden Celebration Weekend. Celebrate and renew the meaningful relationships started at the University with a reception, class dinners, campus tours, a special Chapel service and the Patriotic Pops concert. Find details at [CUChicago.edu/alumni](https://CUChicago.edu/alumni).

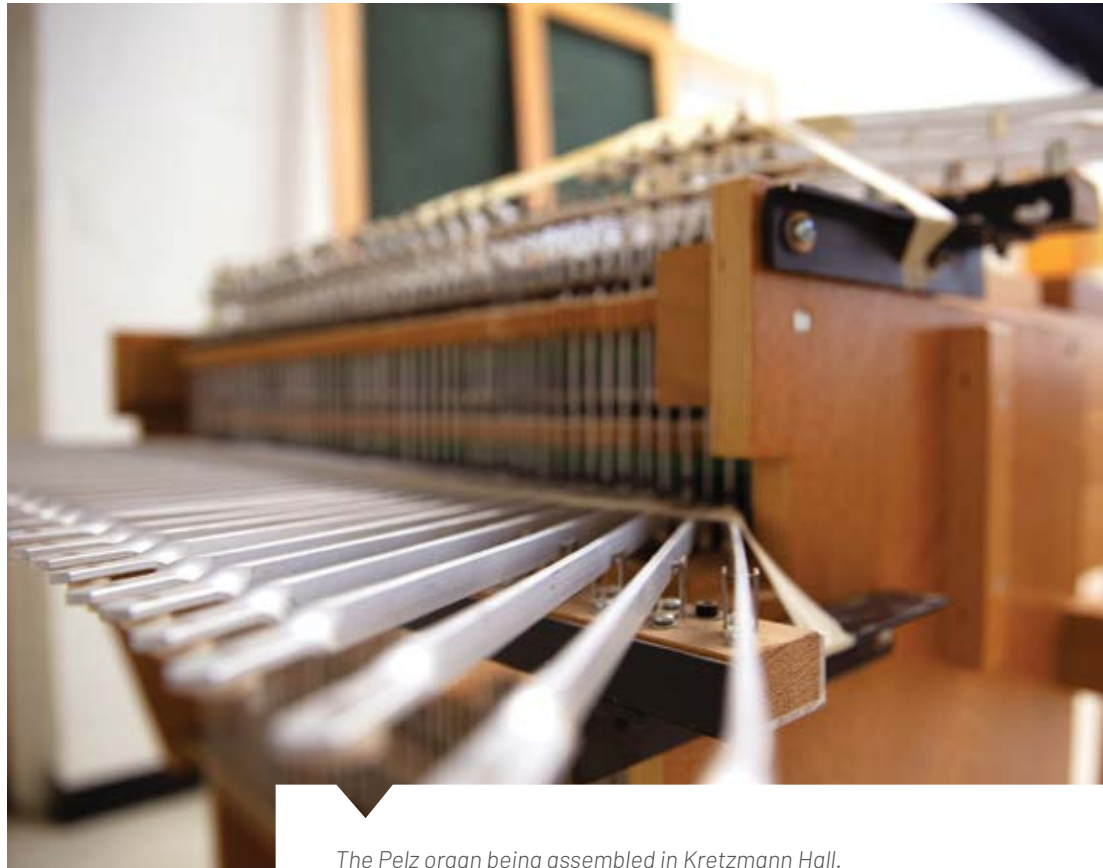


### Fall Visit Days

**October 14 & November 16**

The best way for future CUC Cougars to discover more about the University is to visit in person! Explore our beautiful River Forest campus and envision a promising and purposeful academic experience. Register for either of our fall visit days, or schedule an individual appointment, at [CUChicago.edu/visit](https://CUChicago.edu/visit).

## CUC News



*The Pelz organ being assembled in Kretzmann Hall.*

TO LEARN MORE ABOUT  
DR. WALTER PELZ AND  
TO HEAR A RECORDING  
OF THE ORGAN, HEAD TO  
[CUCCHICAGO.EDU/PELZ-ORGAN](http://CUCCHICAGO.EDU/PELZ-ORGAN).

### **Music Department Receives Donated Pipe Organ of Walter L. Pelz**

Music students now have the unique opportunity to practice on a rare pipe organ as the result of the recent donation from renowned composer, choral director, organist and educator Dr. Walter L. Pelz BA '48. The organ was built by the Martin Ott Pipe Organ Company of St. Louis, MO, in 1984 for the Pelz home. Several years ago, Pelz and his family decided that they would like to donate the instrument to Concordia University Chicago.

Pelz has composed several hundred compositions including verses and offertories, anthems, solos, cantatas, hymns, choral symphonies and organ works—many with instruments. His compositions have been performed in churches, colleges, and on radio and television in the United States and Europe. Pelz studied organ at the American Conservatory of Music while attending Concordia Teachers College (now CUC). He earned his master's degree in organ and church music from Northwestern University, and his doctorate in theory and composition from the University of Minnesota.

The organ is now located in Kretzmann Hall, Room 214, which was designed for the inclusion of a pipe organ during its most recent renovation. Current music students have already begun practicing on the organ, playing it during lessons, studio classes and small performances.

## Innovative, Redesigned MBA Program Announced

The updated Master of Business Administration (MBA) program, which will begin this summer, has been modernized to provide students the skills they need to work in an environment where the use of data analytics, design thinking and AI are critical to individual and corporate success. Future students who enroll in the program will experience a reworked core curriculum aimed at preparing students to thrive, not only in the current environment but in their careers for years to come. Separately, a redesigned accounting specialization tied to upcoming changes in the CPA exam will also be rolled out this summer.

"These transformative program changes will streamline and modernize our MBA and underscore our commitment to being at the forefront of educational initiatives," says Dr. Lynn Hunnicutt, dean of the Concordia-Chicago College of Business. "I look forward to welcoming students into this new program, and to seeing how they will take this learning out to the world around them."

This overhaul of the Concordia-Chicago MBA will include a core curriculum broken into three distinct sections—Foundation Skills (12 hours); Thinking and Applied Artificial Intelligence (6 hours); and Business Strategy, Integration and Leadership Development (6 hours). Learn more about the updated program at [CUChicago.edu/MBA](http://CUChicago.edu/MBA).

## Partnership with Resilience Healthcare Brings Opportunities to Nursing Students

Concordia-Chicago and Resilience Healthcare announced an exciting partnership that will bring new education opportunities for current and future nurses and help address nursing shortages in Chicago's West and North Sides.

The partnership will provide training opportunities for CUC nursing students

“THESE TRANSFORMATIVE PROGRAM CHANGES WILL STREAMLINE AND MODERNIZE OUR MBA AND UNDERSCORE OUR COMMITMENT TO BEING AT THE FOREFRONT OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES.”

—Dr. Lynn Hunnicutt,  
dean of the College of Business

at Resilience Healthcare's West Suburban Medical Center and Weiss Memorial Hospital. Concordia-Chicago's nursing faculty and facilities will also provide ongoing professional development for current Resilience nurses.

The University has a long history of affiliating with local health care providers as part of its nursing education programs. Partnering with community medical institutions rounds out the student learning experience in the real world, and Concordia-Chicago is excited to expand their presence in the communities surrounding West Suburban and Weiss Memorial hospitals.

"The health of our community is threatened by the ongoing shortage of nurses," says Dr. Eli Hestermann, vice president for academic affairs. "At the same time, college nursing programs have difficulty finding places for their students to gain practical clinical training. Partnerships like this are vital to closing both of these gaps and improving health and educational outcomes for the people we serve."

## College Leadership Updates

The Colleges of Health, Science & Technology (HST) and Theology, Arts & Humanities (TAH) led successful searches for new deans this winter. Dr. Suzanne Walsh was welcomed into her new role as dean of HST. Walsh has dedicated more than 20 years of service to CUC as a professor of exercise science. She has previously served as chair of Exercise and Sports Science and assistant dean for undergraduate students in HST.

Deaconess Kristin Wassilak BA '86, MA '96 was named the new dean of TAH. Wassilak directs the Deaconess program and has been connected with CUC almost continuously since graduating. She previously served as interim dean for the College of Arts and Sciences and assistant dean of TAH.

In the College of Education, the Office of Field Experience welcomed a new director, Katie Pece MA '07, a former Lutheran school teacher. Since Pece stepped into the role last summer, the College has established nine new school partnerships as it works to place student-teachers in public and private schools.



Dr. Suzanne Walsh



Deaconess Kristin Wassilak  
BA '86, MA '96



Katie Pece MA '07



## Recent Grants Enhance Service to Students and Community

Concordia-Chicago is celebrating several recent grants that will help the University continue to grow and thrive. The Nursing Division received grant of \$142,500 from the Illinois Board of Higher Education. The new simulation lab equipment will provide students with a virtual reality learning system, emergency crash carts and defibrillation activities, and geriatric- and pediatric-simulated learning.

CUC was also honored to receive a Lilly Fellows Small Grant of \$3,000 to initiate a common vision and approach among the athletic staff, placing vocation at the center of coaching, sportsmanship and interactions with students. Additionally, the Center for Gerontology was approved for a \$138,387 Kott Trustees grant, which will be used to support CUC programming for older adults. Securing this grant permits the University to work and grow in an important area of ministry as an institution.

Lastly, the University was awarded a grant of \$62,790 from the Consortium of Academic and Research Libraries in Illinois (CARLI) through Illinois SCOERS: Support for the Creation of Open Educational Resources. CUC will use the grant to prepare College of Business students by updating required content in two core courses with open access materials, which will be available for the Fall 2024 semester.

## University Flips the Switch to All-Electric Cooling Plant

This spring, Concordia University Chicago took a significant step toward creating a more sustainable campus when a new primary air conditioning plant was brought online. The University's previous system comprised two natural gas water chillers dating back to 1964 and 1989.



*The new electric chiller system will provide a significant cost savings to CUC and help meet community sustainability goals.*

"We were fortunate to have far exceeded the recommended lifespan of both units," says Glen Steiner, CUC's associate vice president for operations. "As we began investigating options to upgrade our cooling plant, one of our primary considerations was ensuring that the new equipment was much more energy efficient and environmentally friendly."

In partnership with the engineering firm Martin Peterson Company of Kenosha, WI, CUC conducted a thorough study of the campus' needs and goals. This led to the determination that the new

plant should be electrically driven and compressor based. Converting the power source from natural gas to electric supports decarbonization, which involves the reduction of carbon dioxide and greenhouse gas-based emissions. The project also aligns with the Village of River Forest's goal of enhancing the community's quality of life through sustainable practices that conserve natural resources, specifically reducing the utilization of fossil fuels by electrifying the University's cooling system.

# Standing Tall for Our Mission



This spring season, we celebrate all of the reasons we Stand Tall for Concordia University Chicago.

We Stand Tall for Faith. Everywhere at CUC—from the classroom to the dorm room to the Chapel and the playing field—we seek to keep Christ at the center of all we do. This recalls a beautiful passage from Jesus' sermon in John's gospel: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus, with the rich Gospel, is our foundation at Concordia-Chicago.

We Stand Tall for Community. CUCelebrates is a time each spring when our vibrant community stands together to support the University's mission and the students we serve. This March, we joined together in a celebration of school pride, fun activities and successful fundraising for all of the people and programs that make a CUC education distinctive.

We Stand Tall for Generosity. Thank you to everyone who pledged their selfless support of student scholarships at Maroon & Gold 2023. In the fall, Maroon & Gold moves to a beautiful new venue at the Eaglewood Resort & Spa in Itasca, IL. We invite you to join us Saturday, Sept. 28 for a celebration of individuals who have made significant contributions to the University and beyond. Our Maroon & Gold 2024 honorees are Dr. Kara Bratton PhD '20, Katrina Jurica BME '14, Dr. Kirk Farney and Dr. Richard Fischer.

We Stand Tall for Commitment as we celebrate Dr. Richard Fischer's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an educator and as the long-serving conductor of the Wind Symphony and University Band. We are exceptionally grateful to have him continue sharing his passion for music through teaching and conducting, while also serving as a resource to the wider church and international community. Come to campus Sunday, June 23 to enjoy a special anniversary concert celebrating Dr. Fischer's legacy.

We Stand Tall for Excellence as we enshrine new members into the Athletic Hall of Fame. Celebrate with us on Oct. 12, as we recognize those individuals who best exemplify the mission, spirit and philosophy of both the University and its athletics program. We are proud to see CUC core values of Christian Faith, the Individual, Excellence, Integrity and Service reflected daily in our student-athletes and alumni.

We Stand Tall for Achievement. We are especially proud to celebrate the nearly 800 students who make up the spring graduating Class of 2024. This milestone provides time for reflection upon the rich traditions of education, faith, servant leadership and innovation that define our institution. The Pillars that stand tall in front of Addison Hall call to mind the leadership, resilience and faith of the Class of 2024.

Congratulations!

God's blessing,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Jeff Hynes".

**Jeff Hynes**

Foundation President and CEO

Vice President for University Advancement



# A Note from Alumni Relations

By: [Emily Kober BA '09](#), Senior Director of Alumni Relations



In February, the alumni relations team headed to Phoenix, AZ for the 2024 Best Practices in Ministry Conference hosted by Christ Church Lutheran. It was a wonderful weekend reconnecting with many alumni, friends and families!

We are proud of all the alumni who attended and led sessions at the conference. Over 30 Concordia-Chicago alumni presented sessions, including

Scott Nagy BA '89; Krista Nagy BA '89; Tim Bayer BA '05; Dereem Hoff MA '21; Trisha Depasquale BA '08; Rev. Dr. Douglas Krengel BA '87, PhD '19; Sharon Tieman BS '84; and Katie Pece MA '07.

We ended the weekend with an alumni gathering at a local restaurant. It was an enjoyable evening of fellowship and great conversations as we connected with over 40 alums. You can view the event and session photos on our Facebook and Instagram pages @CUChicagoAlumni. Stay tuned for future Cougars Connect events across the country.

We also look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events during the year. Save the dates for an alumni Band/Wind Symphony reunion weekend June 21-23, including a concert celebrating Dr. Rich Fischer's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; the class of 1974's Golden Celebration reunion June 27-30; Maroon & Gold, our signature fundraising gala, Sept. 28; and Homecoming Week Oct. 7-12 with the Athletic Hall of Fame Oct. 12. ▲



Cougars Connect Alumni Gathering, Phoenix, AZ, February 2024.





Presenters **Scott Nagy BA '89** and **Krista Nagy BA '89** connect with attendees after leading a session titled "Blessed and Sent."

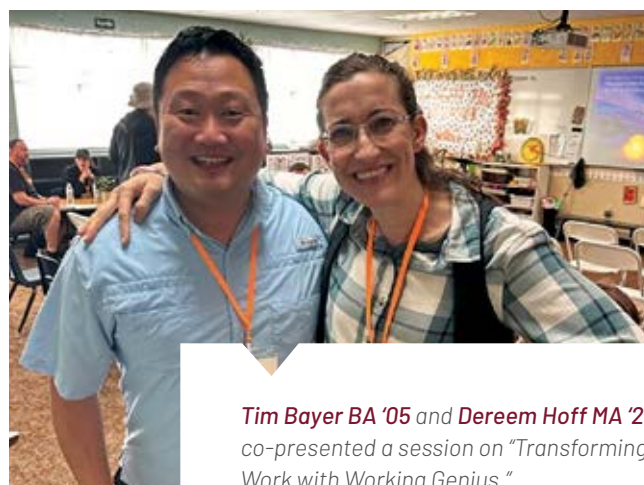
**Trisha Depasquale BA '08** visits our booth after presenting a session on how she develops and incorporates "Passport Adventures" into the classroom.



**Sharon Tieman BS '84** and **Katie Pece MA '07**, director of field experience at CUC, presented on "Connecting Church and School to the Community."

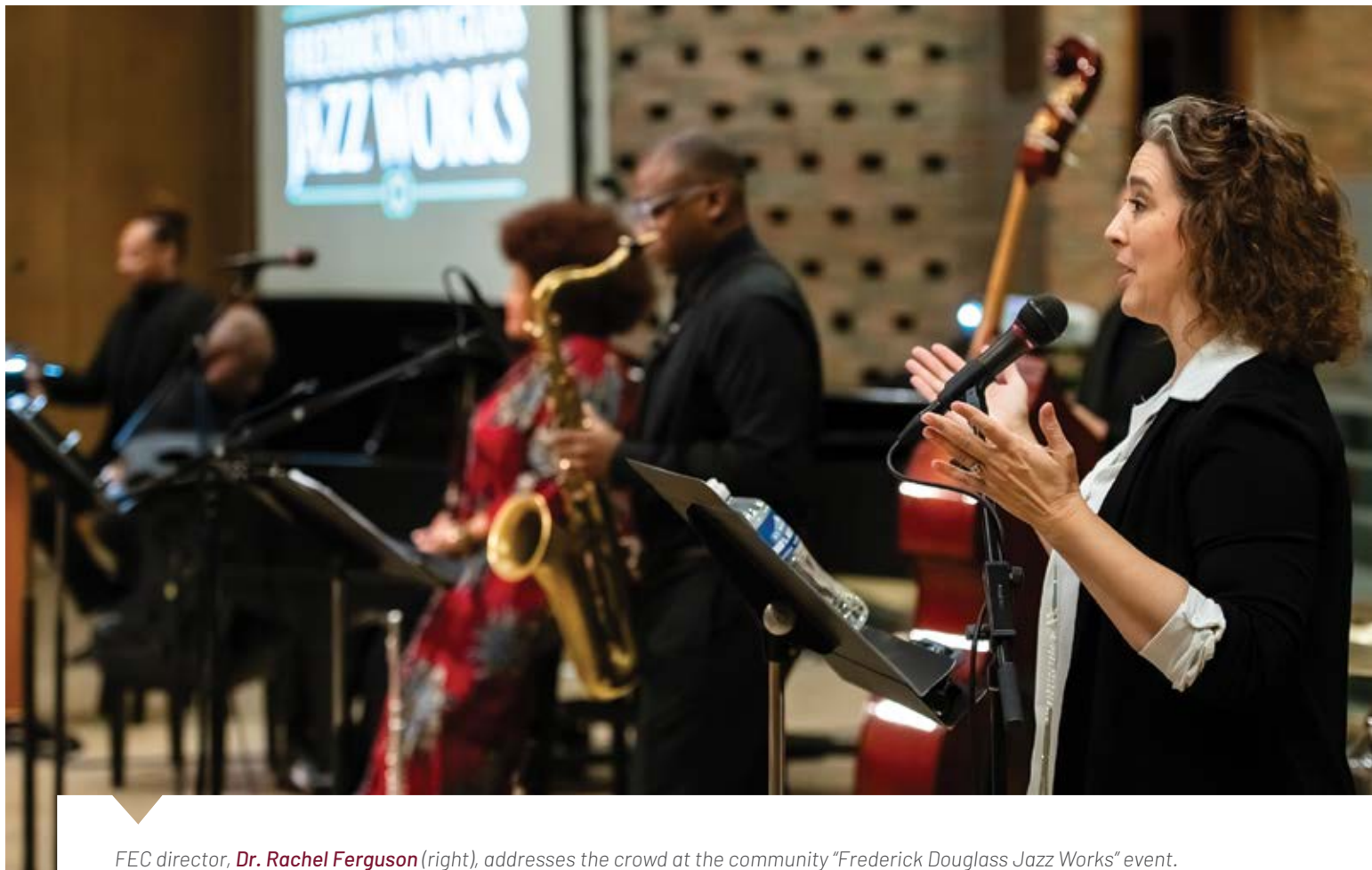


**Rev. Dr. Douglas Kregel BA '87, PhD '19** presents on "Learning to Speak Modern Mom as a Missional Language."



**Tim Bayer BA '05** and **Dereem Hoff MA '21** co-presented a session on "Transforming Work with Working Genius."

To consult with a CUC Foundation philanthropic advisor, **call toll free at 866-448-3867** or email **foundation@CUChicago.edu**. Meet the entire Foundation team at **CUChicago.edu/Support**.



FEC director, **Dr. Rachel Ferguson** (right), addresses the crowd at the community “Frederick Douglass Jazz Works” event.

## Cultivating Healthy Communities and Young Leaders: CUC’s Free Enterprise Center

By: **Eric Matanyi**, Associate Vice President for Communications and Marketing

With the cooperative goals of developing healthy communities and cultivating CUC students with the virtues conducive to a free society, the University’s Free Enterprise Center (FEC) serves as an exceptional entity in the Chicago region. In just three years, the Center has grown from an idea into a major regional hub for activities relevant to free enterprise in the lives of our students, faculty and the surrounding communities.

“We believe that real relationships between our students and our neighbors can lead to solutions that support dignity and reduce dependence,” says Dr. Rachel Ferguson, FEC director and assistant dean of the College of Business. “By cultivating virtuous leaders who embrace the role of free enterprise in developing healthy communities, we are working to toward building a better life for the members of our communities who stand to benefit most from a flourishing economy.”

Ferguson launched the FEC in 2021, building upon her impressive resume as an academic, author and community organizer. Her background in building strong relationships between ministry-based and economic development organizations in the St. Louis, MO area made her the perfect fit for Concordia-Chicago.



The author of *Black Liberation Through the Marketplace* and dozens of related articles, her successes include roles with the Freedom Center of Missouri, a nonprofit civil rights litigation firm focused on economic freedom and government transparency; ReThink 315, a Christian apologetics ministry focused on contemporary questions; and LOVETheLOU, a neighborhood stabilization ministry.

The Center recently launched its Student Fellows program, which is limited to a total of 10 high-achieving students each academic year. “I want to help students understand God’s call on their lives in business, in charitable efforts, as citizens of our nation and as citizens in the kingdom of God,” Ferguson says. The program is also poised to grow exponentially thanks to a recent \$20,000 grant from the Charles Koch Foundation.

Specifically, students participating in the fellowship will engage in unique opportunities designed to equip them to be agile and generous stewards of their skills and resources. In addition, this select group of students, along with the Honors program students, have exclusive access to a private library of more than 400 volumes dedicated to free enterprise-related topics. The resources comprise the entire book collection of the external Liberty Fund, from which the FEC received this generous donation from last year.

Providing opportunities for students to do good work in the community is perhaps the Center’s most important goal. Ferguson explains, “Business students should know that they make this world a better place when they do good work and do it well.” These opportunities are being realized via the neighborhood stabilization model, as Ferguson continues to build inroads with spiritual and community leaders in the nearby Austin and Maywood neighborhoods. A recent \$50,000 grant from the D.K. Kim Foundation will support exploration of how best to meet the needs of residents through empowering solutions that honor their dignity.

Seeking to effect long-term economic change in these communities, the FEC is focused on employing the neighborhood stabilization model of effective



*FEC-sponsored events, like the Business Leaders Breakfast, engage local leaders in solutions-based discussions.*

“ I HOPE EACH AND EVERY MEMBER OF THE EXTENDED CONCORDIA-CHICAGO COMMUNITY TAKES ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO ENGAGE WITH OUR VISION FOR A MORE JUST, PROSPEROUS AND FREE WORLD.”

—Dr. Rachel Ferguson

philanthropy. In short, the relationships Ferguson and her students are building will be integral to the future ability to provide nonprofit resources and grant funds disbursement to the community partners that can have the greatest impact on improving quality of life for both local businesses and residents alike.

“We can spend the next 40 years allocating money and resources and not stabilize anything, if we invest in the wrong approach. It’s really worth thinking through how we’re investing, who we’re investing in and what’s truly transformational,” Ferguson notes. “You want to invest in the people that are on the ground—they’re going to be hyper-local, they’re going to be personally present, they’re going to be invested long term.”

From a broader educational perspective, the FEC also connects the University’s internal and external communities through an ongoing series of high-impact events featuring speakers on topics related to its mission. A biannual Business Leaders Breakfast, for instance, attracts local

entrepreneurs and small business owners to keynote presentations by regionally and nationally known speakers. Recent presenters have included Illinois Policy Institute President Matt Paprocki, author and educator Dr. Anne Rathbone Bradley, and Pulitzer Prize-nominated author Clifton Taulbert.

Other recent high-profile events for the Center have included hosting Frederick Douglass Jazz Works with the Ruth Naomi Floyd Ensemble; and a panel discussion with the American Enterprise Institute, moderated by Ferguson and featuring Pastor Corey B. Brooks, founder and CEO of Project H.O.O.D. “We are just getting started,” exclaims Ferguson. “I hope each and every member of the extended Concordia-Chicago community takes advantage of the opportunity to engage with our vision for a more just, prosperous and free world.”

To learn more about the Free Enterprise Center, attend an upcoming event and learn how you can get involved, visit [CUChicago.edu/FEC](http://CUChicago.edu/FEC). ▲



## College Students Need Pastoral Care, Too

By: [Rev. Simeon Raddatz BA '13](#), University Chaplain

When Concordia-Chicago's University Chaplain position first became vacant, my wife, Lauren BA '14, and I wondered together, "Who will be the right individual to fill that vital role?" It was hard for either of us to imagine anyone besides Pastor Leininger filling those shoes because he had faithfully served CUC and her students, including us, for so long. At that time, it did not remotely dawn on us that the new chaplain could be me. I was contentedly serving the saints of Trinity Lutheran Church in Pekin, IL.



**Pastor Raddatz** speaks the *Benedicamus* at the conclusion of his installation service.

In fact, I was finally doing there what I had always envisioned. Ever since I began to contemplate the ministry as a youth, I only ever had in mind traditional parish ministry. I had grown up watching my father in that role: preaching, conducting the liturgy, visiting, baptizing, catechizing, marrying, commending the dying into the Lord's hands and comforting the grieving. By the time I was in high school, he had taken me under his wing as a sort of "pre-pre-seminarian." It was in large part through my father that the Lord put it into my heart early on to consider the ministry. That led me to enter the pre-seminary program at CUC and then go on to Concordia Seminary, St. Louis.

As I was completing the Master of Divinity at Concordia Seminary in 2017, I considered staying an extra year to pursue a Master of Sacred Theology (STM). I decided, though, that it was time for me to be sent out into the field and to begin in the ministry. Besides, I knew that "the harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few" (Luke 10:2). I also knew that many congregations were eager to fill pastor vacancies.

Six years later, even more of our Synod's congregations are waiting for a pastor. That fact made my recent decision to leave the parish even more difficult. Not only had my family formed close bonds and friendships with the members of Trinity and within the Pekin community, but I also knew that I would be leaving Trinity without a pastor and that the vacancy could take some time to fill.

At the same time, the youth of the church, who go away to college, need pastors. I readily admit that, as a parish pastor, it was hard to care for the college-aged youth



*Pastor Raddatz with family during his installation as University Chaplain.*

“ I ALSO HAVE THE OPPORTUNITY TO HELP THOSE STUDENTS WHO DO NOT HAVE A PASTOR BY FILLING THAT ROLE UNTIL I CAN EVENTUALLY CONNECT THEM WITH A LOCAL PASTOR AND CONGREGATION.”

—Pastor Raddatz

when they would leave for school. The distance alone makes it difficult for even the well-intentioned pastor to care for this unique population. He might see them over break. He might call or text them several times throughout the year. All that seems far too little, though, given the major life transition they are navigating, often alone. A far more ideal solution is for these students to have a pastor close by, with whom they can meet face-to-face for pastoral care.

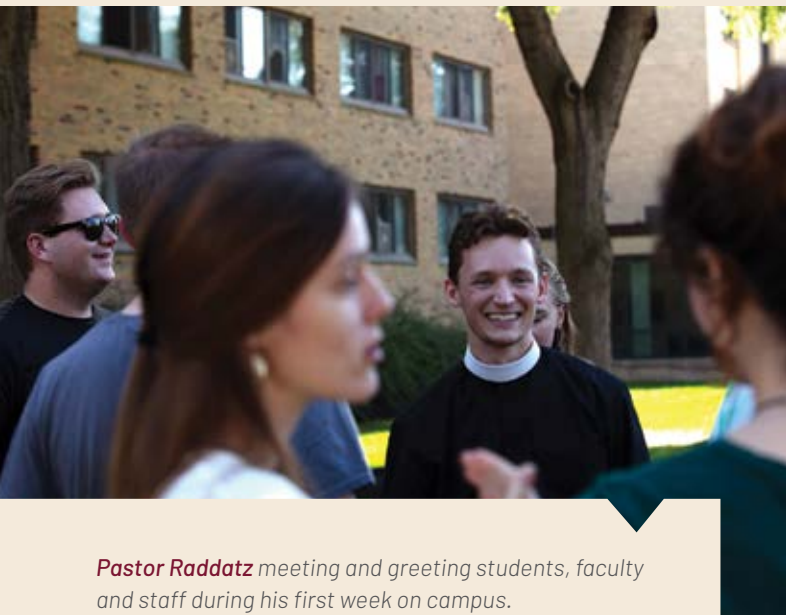
That was one of the reasons that compelled me to take seriously the call to Concordia-Chicago’s chaplaincy. Now, as University Chaplain, I get to assist other pastors in caring for their college-aged members at CUC. I also have the opportunity to help those students who do not have a pastor by filling that role until I can eventually connect them with a local pastor and congregation.

Another thing that compelled me to take seriously this call is the Church’s general need for pastors. That might at first seem ironic: I left a congregation in need of a pastor because another needed me. The Church needed and needs more pastors—period.

The role of CUC’s University Chaplain also encompasses oversight of the University’s pre-seminary program. As a result, I now have a direct role in recruiting, encouraging and forming young men who are themselves contemplating the pastoral office. In this way, the Lord is using me to serve the larger Church, helping to fill their need for new pastors.

I never envisioned being where I am now—as University Chaplain at my alma mater—and it is still sinking in. What comforts me, though, is that the Lord has always known that He would call me here. “In Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:16). He already knows how He will put me to His good use, and, being that our Lord Christ is head over all things for the sake of His church, He knows how He will provide for us all until He comes again.

Thanks be to God. ▲



*Pastor Raddatz meeting and greeting students, faculty and staff during his first week on campus.*





# Behind the Scenes of "Stand Tall," CUC's New Brand Campaign

Giant 30-foot tall banners adorned the sides of Krentz Hall, the Chapel of Our Lord and Geiseman Gymnasium, surprising those arriving on campus the morning of Sept. 27. "Stand Tall for the Gospel," "Stand Tall for Truth" and "Stand Tall for Excellence," they proclaimed, with larger-than-life portraits of Concordia-Chicago students accompanying the statements of strength. The visuals were unavoidable, spurring student selfies in front of them along with much social media chatter. Supplemented by more than 60 eye-catching light pole banners and sidewalk graphics adorning the campus, the installation heralded

the official launch of the University's new Stand Tall brand campaign.

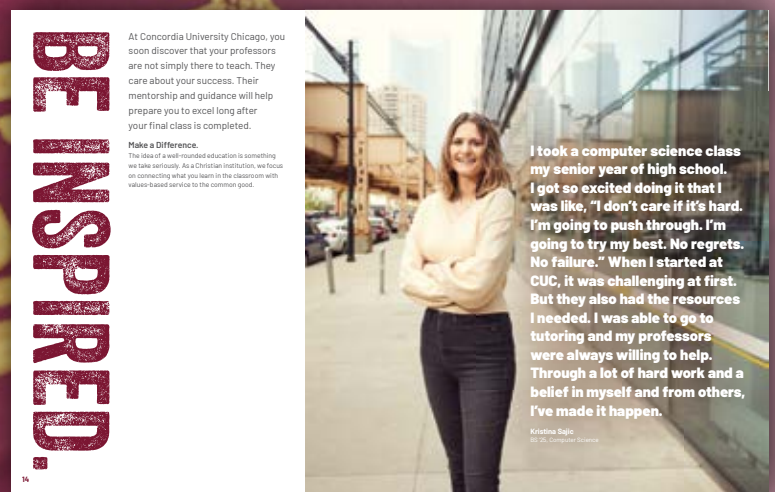
A line of students, faculty and staff, eager to grab a free Stand Tall T-shirt and stickers, snaked through the lower level and up the stairs of the Koehneke Community Center. Meanwhile, individuals and small groups hurried around campus in search of scavenger hunt clues hoping to win one of the coveted prizes that included branded Bluetooth speakers and wireless headphones. Crossroads Dining Hall lunchgoers left with their drink in a 24-oz. reusable cup proudly bearing the new campaign graphics. An





“WE’RE HARD AT WORK TELLING THE CUC STORY THROUGH THE EYES OF OUR STUDENTS AND ALUMNI. THEIR INSPIRATIONAL JOURNEYS, COUPLED WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE VALUES THAT CONNECT THEIR EXPERIENCES AND VOCATIONS, IS TRULY WHAT VALUES-BASED POSITIONING IS ALL ABOUT.”

—Eric Matanyi, associate vice president for communications and marketing



Far Left: A 30-foot "Stand Tall for Excellence" banner surprised those arriving to campus on Sept. 27, 2023.

Middle Left: CUC students in "Stand Tall" gear at the 2023 Homecoming Football game.

Left: A "Stand Tall" banner now hangs in the lobby of Krentz, reminding students of CUC's mission.

Right: Pages from the new Viewbook—a recruiting tool for prospective students.





updated website design was revealed the same morning and related social media garnered some of the highest digital interactions of the year. The excitement on campus was palpable.

The Stand Tall campaign, however, was only one element of a much larger initiative that completely redefined CUC's overarching brand strategy. Flash back to the fall of 2021—the world was slowly emerging from the effects of the pandemic. Already facing mounting changes to and challenges within the marketplace, higher education institutions nationwide were grappling with how to survive. Luckily, CUC had already outlined ambitious, yet actionable, steps to do so in its five-year strategic plan, *Focusing Our Future 2025*.

Among the initiatives defined with the plan was a call to completely redefine the way the University represented itself publicly by better connecting its brand to

its mission, vision and, most importantly, the Lutheran faith. It was clear that external expertise was required to assist in the ambitious endeavor. Based on their extensive experience producing award-winning higher education marketing and prior familiarity with the Concordia University System, and LCMS doctrine and values, CUC selected BVK of Milwaukee, WI as its partner firm and hit the ground running.

"Not only is the BVK team highly respected as thought leaders in the higher ed space, but many of them are members of LCMS congregations themselves," says Eric Matanyi, associate vice president for communications and marketing at CUC. "This built-in understanding of the faith proved a significant asset to their work with us." In partnership with the University's Communications and Marketing Services department, 18 months of comprehensive work commenced.

Ensuring that the resulting brand strategy took into account feedback from all CUC constituent groups, the collaborative team embarked on extensive qualitative and quantitative research. This included 20 focus groups, individual interviews, nearly 2,000 digital survey responses, an in-depth assessment of actual and aspirational competitor schools, and an audit of CUC's current marketing and communications operations to ensure that the resources were in place to carry the new brand forward.

To set CUC apart in the increasingly competitive higher ed market, BVK introduced a concept that would become the hallmark of CUC's new brand strategy—values-based positioning. "For several years now, major national brands have been connecting with consumers through commonly shared values," Matanyi says. "For instance, marketing from Patagonia—the ubiquitous outdoor gear company—focuses on their dedication to sustainability and saving the planet in their messaging instead of discussing the products they sell."

In much the same way, CUC's new brand framework focuses on the overarching value of integrity as the basis of both its inward and outward messaging platforms. Defined as an aspirational value that reflects the state of being

**TO SET CUC APART IN THE INCREASINGLY COMPETITIVE HIGHER ED MARKET, BVK INTRODUCED A CONCEPT THAT WOULD BECOME THE HALLMARK OF CUC'S NEW BRAND STRATEGY—VALUES-BASED POSITIONING.**





Far Left: The new “STAND TALL” wall in the hallway corridor of Addison/Krentz highlights several CUC student “heros” and their inspirational messages.

Left: Students were asked what value they stood tall for on brand roll-out day. Video testimonials were used to reinforce the brand message on social media platforms.

Right: Student “hero” images are incorporated into undergraduate recruitment materials.

Live a life fulfilled by **purpose** and **meaning** and become a living example of what it means to serve a cause greater than yourself – to **STAND TALL**.

[CUChicago.edu/visit](https://CUChicago.edu/visit)

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*Student volunteers “cheer” during the shooting of the Stand Tall recruiting video.*

whole and unwavering, it is also a mark of living faithfully as a Christian and having a greater purpose in life based on God’s call. At CUC’s core, integrity in Christ means being true to God’s Word and one’s calling, and enables resilience in the face of opposition.

From a visual perspective, redefining brand strategy involved modernizing the look and feel of content in both traditional and digital mediums as well as incorporating a welcoming, inspirational and empowering design to bring the value of integrity to life. This was ultimately realized visually through “hero images”—students confidently posed, standing tall for values that they personally identified with. Bold, sleek new University fonts were selected to enforce the Stand Tall

messaging, with the goal of helping CUC collateral stand out amid a crowded competitor field. Likewise, athletics and the University proper now share a single set of maroon and gold colors, strengthening visual recognition across the institution.

Another significant visual change that was considered involved a possible redesign of the University logo. While many versions were drafted, in the end, the strength of the existing pillars imagery continued to resonate most strongly with audiences. A minor typography update reducing the size of the “Chicago” geographic modifier visually aligned the logo with those of several Concordia sister schools, thereby strengthening the association between them.



*“Christ at the Center” was selected as CUC’s new tagline. The phrase stands as a complement to the Stand Tall recruitment campaign in the slightly altered CUC logo.*

“One final piece of the puzzle,” says senior vice president for advancement, Jeff Hynes, “was ensuring that the University’s 160-year history of placing Christ at the center of everything we do was clearly evident in all communications, particularly those targeted to prospective students. It became clear that a tagline that authentically identifies us as a Lutheran/Christian school was right under our noses.” And so “Christ at the Center” was selected as CUC’s new tagline. The phrase stands as a complement to the Stand Tall recruitment campaign, but will also remain a permanent part of the University’s identity long after the particular campaign evolves or ceases.

“While the official brand rollout might seem like the culmination of this work, it is really only the beginning,” Matanyi says. “Now that we have a clear, comprehensive framework to guide us, we’re hard at work telling the CUC story through the eyes of our students and alumni. Their inspirational journeys, coupled with an understanding of the values that connect their experiences and vocations, is truly what values-based positioning is all about.” ▲

We want to know what values you Stand Tall for and how CUC has played an integral role in your life’s journey. Email us at [PR@CUChicago.edu](mailto:PR@CUChicago.edu) to start the conversation.





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“THERE IS NOTHING  
PERMANENT  
EXCEPT CHANGE.”

—Heraclitus



▲ STUNT, derived from traditional cheerleading, was officially recognized by the NCAA as an “emerging sport.”



▲ A new scoreboard, one of numerous facility upgrades in the last few years, enhances the game-day experience at Cougar Stadium.

## THE TIMES, THEY ARE A-CHANGING

By: [Jim Egan BA '82](#)

Have you ever considered, as alumni, how often you look back on your college days and ponder how much things have changed? As a proud alumnus and former sports information director at CUC, I tended to think of athletics as a slowly evolving organism (emphasis on “slowly”). Then came the day not long ago when I said to myself, “What was I thinking?” realizing how much has changed in a short amount of time.

The COVID-19 pandemic hit our world in March 2020 and upended everything in our daily lives, including CUC’s athletics program. Two of our track athletes, Kayla Armstrong BA ’22 and Simone Wilson BA ’21, for instance, were in North Carolina preparing to compete in the





▲ The men's and women's tennis teams made their return to gameplay in 2021, after a hiatus.

NCAA III Indoor Nationals when the meet was abruptly canceled. The competition was never held, although both athletes eventually earned All-American status and would go on to further successes in subsequent years. The pandemic derailed a promising season for men's volleyball; following a 4-22 campaign in the inaugural season of 2019, the 2020 Cougars were owners of a seven-match winning streak and a 14-3 overall record when the curtain rang down on the remainder of the season. The baseball, softball, lacrosse, track and field, and tennis teams were also unable to complete their spring seasons, with practice and gameplay the following fall also severely affected.

When intercollegiate athletics was given the green light to resume, we saw some unusual occurrences, such as an extra year of eligibility granted to student-athletes and a spring 2021 season of fall sports (including a three-game football schedule). Sports would eventually return to their normal times of year, but several changes were still to come in River Forest.

In 2022, a new women's sport was added. Derived from traditional cheerleading, STUNT made its debut, buoyed by the NCAA recognizing it as an officially sanctioned "emerging sport." For those unfamiliar, a STUNT match consists of two teams who execute skills-based routines in such categories as partner stunts, jumps and tumbling, pyramids and tosses,

and team routines. Under the direction of head coach Cheetah Farrar, who is completing her first year at CUC, this 13-member squad is fast finding a place in the hearts of Cougar fans.

While the newer sports find their niche, CUC has also welcomed an older sport back to the fold. Both the women's and men's tennis teams suffered from a combination of dwindling player numbers, a vacant coach's position and finally the pandemic. The coaching dilemma was resolved in 2021 with the hiring of Lenno Lasn. Since then, the teams have

resumed competitive schedules, and the roster numbers continue to increase. A sign of encouragement came when the men's team played in the 2023 NACC tournament. We look forward to these improvements reflected consistently in future win-loss records.

Not to be forgotten on our list of changes are a recent facility face-lifts. The tennis teams' resurrection was boosted by a resurfacing of the courts. The softball field was refurbished, and a press box was installed to protect game staff from the elements. The baseball field's latest improvement was a branded turf halo around home plate. And teams playing in Cougar Stadium are benefitting from a new, state-of-the-art video board. Improvements on the horizon include a new roof for Geiseman Gym in the summer of 2024 and a resurfacing and re-turfing for Cougar Stadium, planned for the summer of 2025.

While the importance of top-notch facilities cannot be understated, overall visibility of CUC athletics has skyrocketed due to the innovations and improvements in athletic communications. Take a look at your favorite Cougar team's webpage at [CUCougars.com](http://CUCougars.com), for instance. Chances are you will find several of their contests available to watch free of charge, in the comfort of your own home, with high-quality camera work and game announcing. You can also find new video



▲ Alumnae **Sydney Paulauskis-Lauher** and **Kayla McCloud** have significantly improved the athletic programs' digital presence and broadcast productions.



▲ *Members of the STUNT team defy gravity as they practice at CIT.*

features including weekly interviews with coaches and players, and other fun and informative features on each team. This is possible due to CUC's investment both in technology as well as in its communications personnel.

Fittingly, former CUC student-athletes are at the forefront of this communications revolution. CJ Selner BA '15, MBA '18 served as athletics communications director from 2017-22 and laid the groundwork for much of what you see today. His work in revolutionizing the broadcasts was most noticeable when CUC hosted an NCAA III Baseball Regional and Super Regional in 2019 that helped garner national attention.

Kayla McCloud BA '21 is the current athletic communications director, with Sydney Paulauskis-Lauher BA '22 as her assistant. The former women's basketball and softball student-athletes respectively

have continued to strengthen athletics' digital visibility, building a team of student workers that have gained invaluable knowledge and experience in areas ranging from broadcasting to production. In fact, the next generation of "Cougar Kids" is moving on already with recent graduates Carter Gledhill BA '23 and Parker Kelley BA '23 now preparing for broadcasting careers.

Taking a further look at the impact the department is having at CUC, consider the case of current senior Emily Balaban, four-year member of the women's basketball team. Balaban came to CUC as an education major but also had a love for sports management. Through getting to know McCloud and following in her footsteps, Balaban realized that "seeing Kayla's work opened my eyes to a career in sports that I did not know even existed." Following her sophomore year, Balaban

flipped her major and minor, placing the primary focus on sports management. At present, she plans to continue her education at grad school in the University of Washington's intercollegiate athletic administration program.

The exciting developments over the last few years show that changes in athletics are not limited to team rosters, as new players supplant graduating seniors each year. At the same time, there is one constant we can rely on—that CUC athletics will continue to exist with Christ at its center and will forge ahead with excellence and integrity. In considering the constant nature of change, let us consider the wise words of Jimmy Dean (the breakfast sausage guy, not the actor who died young): "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination." ▲



# FRIEND, CLASSMATE, TEAMMATE:

## Kate Johnson reflects on honor of being named Lincoln Laureate

By: [Anna Seifert](#), Communications Associate

Kate Johnson says growing up in Nebraska, with its culture of kindness, helped form her into the thoughtful and caring person she is today. She also credits her parents for setting an example of gracious behavior—all qualities that likely factored into her being named a Student Laureate of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois last fall. The prestigious Lincoln Laureate award is given annually to one student, nominated by their professors, from each of the four-year colleges and universities in Illinois.

“As an out-of-state student, I never imagined receiving an award given to honor the students of Illinois,” Johnson says. “I am blessed to have been able to come to a school in a new state and know that my impact has been seen and appreciated.”

The Abraham Lincoln Civic Engagement Awards are bestowed upon students based on their leadership abilities and desire to make a difference in the world through civic engagement, both on campus and beyond. Johnson attended the ceremony in Springfield in November where she received a certificate signed by the governor, an educational stipend, a Lincoln medallion and a tour of the Illinois Supreme Court building.

She says she felt honored to meet students from all the different universities and to see what it meant to represent Concordia-Chicago to the state of Illinois. “I was so eternally grateful because of what the award represented. To know that I am believed to be a person of good merit. To know that others saw the work I put in to contribute to Concordia University Chicago as a friend, classmate and teammate,” she says.

Johnson has played on the Cougar women’s lacrosse team since her freshman year. She reflects, “I had previously never played a day of lacrosse prior to my arrival at CUC, but through the wealth of opportunities on campus I was able to learn and share the same love for the game that my teammates and coaches have. The women on the team ... have become like family to me.”

She has also served on the executive board of the Student Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), an experience that has helped her make a positive impact by establishing communication between athletes, administration, and other areas and clubs on campus. After she graduates in May with her bachelor’s in sports

management, Johnson plans to pursue a master’s degree in sports psychology—she hopes to expand her potential as she works to serve and advocate for athletes.

“People here made me feel like I belonged when I arrived here four years ago,” Johnson says. “What I have enjoyed most about my experience has been the opportunity to make connections and experiences with people of different backgrounds and cultures. I am proud to say Concordia University Chicago is my home.” ▲

“ I AM BLESSED TO HAVE BEEN ABLE TO COME TO A SCHOOL IN A NEW STATE AND KNOW THAT MY IMPACT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPRECIATED.”

—Kate Johnson BA '24



**Kate Johnson** (center) with officers of the Lincoln Academy in Springfield, IL.

# A CALLING TO TEACH, MOTIVATE AND INSPIRE

## DR. RICH FISCHER'S 50 YEARS AT CUC

By: **Anna Seifert**, Communications Associate  
Illustrations by **Andi Whipkey**

It's hard to imagine anyone loving their job more than Dr. Richard Fischer, distinguished professor of music and the Fred and Jane Wittlinger Endowed Chair for Music Performance. His face lights up when he reflects on what he's done, and he gestures animatedly as he talks about what he still wants to accomplish. After 50 years as Concordia-Chicago's director of bands, he is as passionate about it as ever.

Dr. Fischer and the Wind Symphony have performed concerts in almost every state in the nation, as well as Canada, Europe, China and South Africa. They have played at countless music festivals and conferences, including the New York City Wind Band Festival at Carnegie Hall as the showcase ensemble in 2014 and 2019.

Under Fischer's direction, the Wind Symphony has commissioned and premiered numerous wind band compositions, and recorded 16 albums of sacred wind music, which are played daily on radio stations across North America.

Frequently in demand as a presenter, guest conductor, clinician and adjudicator all over the world, he has conducted the LCMS Youth Gathering Wind Symphony seven times since 2004. He is also the recipient of the first endowed professorship in the University's history. Fischer's professional affiliations include the College Band Director National Association, World Association for Symphonic Bands and

Dr. Fischer at 11 years old in 1961.





Ensembles, National Association for Music Educators, Illinois Music Educators Association, and the National Band Association.

The list of his accomplishments and honors could go on for pages. While that speaks to his immense talent and dedication, it doesn't tell the story of how a young Rich Fischer became known as "Doc," professor and conductor beloved by generations of students.

"I grew up less than five miles from here, in Bellwood, and we were very poor. My mother and grandmother really wanted me to be involved in music. They saved up bottle deposit money until they had \$50, and they bought me my first trumpet in fourth grade," Fischer says. He started playing in the band at McKinley Elementary School, and also taking private lessons from the band director at St. Paul Lutheran Church in Melrose Park. "In sixth grade they started me on French horn, and I really took off on that instrument—you couldn't get me away from it," he says.

It was in seventh grade that Fischer had his first intrinsic experience with music. "My father belonged to a record club.

He got one record that had German written on it, and he didn't know what it was, so he gave it to me. It was the Berlin Philharmonic playing New World Symphony by Dvorak. I sat by the record player, listening to the English horn solo in the second movement. It brought me to tears," he remembers. "Though I had been playing for a while, it was the first time music had touched my heart."

## TRIAL BY FIRE

As joyful as Fischer finds his work today, it was anything but easy for the first few years. In 1974, he was playing in the Chicago Metropolitan Brass Quintet with Roger Gard, who was band director at Concordia (River Forest). When Gard told the quintet he was moving away to take a position at another university, Fischer asked who was taking his place as Concordia's band director. "Gard asked if I was Lutheran. When I told him I was, he said I should contact department chair Dr. Paul Bunjes and apply. I had just graduated with my bachelor's degree, had no experience, and looked like I was about 14 years old!"

The hiring committee of Dr. Bunjes, Dr. Richard Hillert and Dr. Thomas Gieschen interviewed Fischer and let him audition, but indicated they were looking for someone with a master's degree and 10 years of experience. Fischer had no expectation of landing the job, so he left for the summer to tour the West Coast, Hawaii, Australia and New Zealand with a small

orchestra accompanying a choir. While he was in California with the touring group, he got word from his mother that he needed to call the hiring committee. They said they would like to hire him temporarily, until they found a permanent replacement.

"Besides student-teaching, I had never taught a day in my life. I realized very quickly how little I knew," he says. Fischer started in September, and conducted his first concert on Nov. 10 in the South Gym. The morning after the concert, President Zimmerman's secretary called Fischer to a meeting with the hiring committee. "I figured they'd found a permanent conductor—I thought, at least I got to conduct one concert! But they said, 'We see something in you. We want you to continue, and we'll help pay for your master's degree.'"

To this day, Fischer is grateful that the University took a chance on him. "God must have wanted me here—there is no other way to explain it. I was so green," he says. Fischer immediately dove headfirst into learning and improving his skills. Over the next decade, he completed his master's degree, attended many conducting symposiums, and earned his doctorate at Michigan State University, studying under conductor Eugene Corporon.

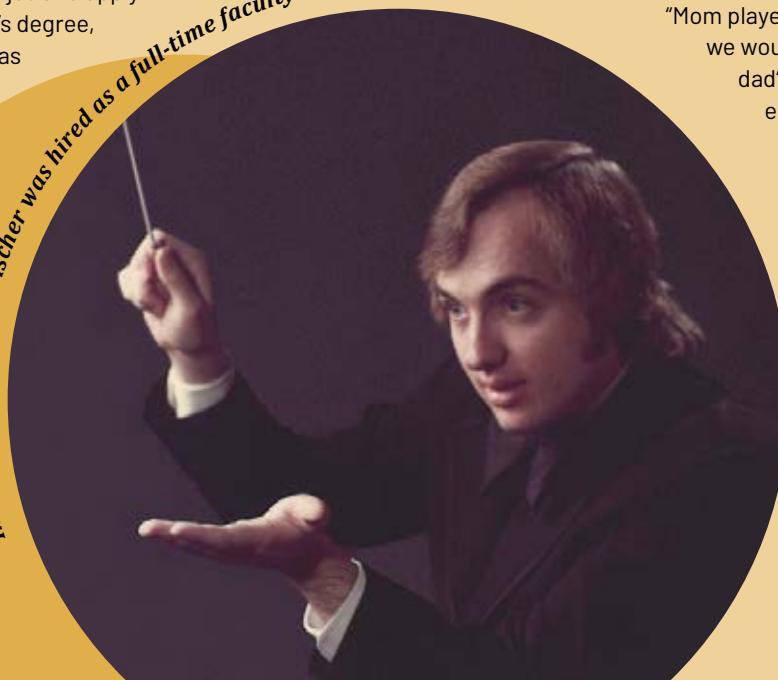
He did all that while continuing to teach at Concordia and starting a family. He married Kathy (Kolb) BA '77 after she graduated, and they went on to have three children: Joy, Julie and Jonathan. His eldest daughter Joy reflected on growing up in a home that revolved around music:

"Mom played clarinet, and of course we would go to most of my dad's concerts. We were encouraged to play an instrument. I played oboe through college, but I never felt like I was pushed into it—music was just always part of our household. We lived right next to campus, so it was easy to go over there to take lessons and things like that."

*Dr. Fischer and his then-fiancee Kathy at the St. Louis Arch during the Spring Tour in 1977.*



*In the fall of 1974, Dr. Fischer was hired as a full-time faculty member.*



# THE WIND SYMPHONY YEARS

In 1987, Fischer changed the name of the Concert Band to Wind Symphony, aligning it with what many universities were calling their premier wind ensembles.

One of the most exciting parts of being the Wind Symphony conductor is the travel, he notes. The group tours a different part of the U.S. each spring and fall, and has performed internationally every few years, although the pandemic forced the cancellation of their last planned overseas trip in 2021.

His daughter Joy laughs as she comments, "I think he remembers every city he went to on every tour!" Indeed, off the top of his head, Fischer says, "My first year we went on a four-day, four-state tour to Wausau, WI; Faribault, MN; a Lutheran high school along the Fox River in St. Charles, IL; and Bridgman, MI."

The Wind Symphony's three tours to China, in 2005, 2009 and 2013, impacted Fischer the most. "We had enormous audiences of 1,300 to 3,000 people—it was incredible. At that time, they were really interested in American music," he says. "But the government had to approve our program. They knew all about me, they knew all about our university and the Lutheran religion. It was exciting, but a little scary. And the sightseeing, wow! We were very fortunate get to visit the Terracotta Army, the Great Wall of China and wonderful museums."

In 1993 he also founded the separate University Band, a community ensemble made up of CUC students, faculty and staff, as well as residents of nearby communities. More than 30 years later, the group continues to perform some of Concordia-Chicago's most popular annual concerts, including the festive Christmas Concert and the outdoor Patriotic Pops Concert.

*Dr. Fischer conducting rehearsal in 1997.*







*The Wind Symphony performing at Carnegie Hall, NYC.*

## TEACHING AND PLAYING FROM THE HEART

These days, what's most important to Fischer is that his bands play from the heart, and that they make a connection with the audience. "I try to inspire my students. We don't simply want to play technically good performances. There's got to be expression and feeling in the music. I talk about faith, love and empathy," he says. "That's how you get people to practice—not by shouting at them. I used to be that way, early on. But for the last 30 years or so, I've realized there's a higher purpose and a better way of doing things."

Joy adds, "Unless they've been in one of his music ensembles, people may not know about his philosophy. And I remember, growing up, noticing that shift in his approach—it became more about making a connection to people."

Wind Symphony alumnus Sam Marquart BA '21 was one of many students who experienced that firsthand. "I remember being on tour in March 2020, and it felt like the world was starting to descend into chaos. We didn't know if our tour was going to get cut short," he says. "Thankfully there was a church in Olathe, KS, that took us in and we got to perform. It was the first time I really experienced that heart that Doc talks about. The entire Wind Symphony felt like a single unit. It was so beautiful and emotional."

Several years ago, Fischer started going into the audience after concerts and shaking hands. "I expected they would just say, 'Thanks for coming,' and so on. But many of them shared very personal stories, talking about which piece affected them the most," he says. "I realized we don't know what's really going on in the lives of our audiences—and that what pieces I choose, and how the students express that music, is really meaningful."



*Rich changed from trumpet to French horn in sixth grade, and never looked back.*

**“ I HAVE THE GREATEST WIFE IN THE WORLD. KATHY HAS KEPT ME ON THE UP AND UP, SUPPORTED ME AND ENCOURAGED ME FOR NEARLY 47 YEARS.”**

**—DR. FISCHER**

*On a tour stop in Florida in 1976.*





Fischer says that choosing which pieces to perform in a concert has always been his greatest challenge. He uses “three E words” to help him select repertoire: Entertain, Enlighten and Enhance faith. “Every one of my programs has those three elements in it, and sometimes they cross over,” he says. The program for the Wind Symphony’s recent Spring 2024 tour was one of Fischer’s favorites to date.

One of the pieces performed during that tour was “Praise God, All Creatures,” written by Marquart to commemorate Fischer’s 50th anniversary year. After searching for inspiration for a few months, Marquart came up with the idea to connect the piece directly to the Wind Symphony experience: “After every concert, we would sing the Doxology in a circle and pray and thank God for such an awesome

performance. I figured that would be a cool way bring the audience in, by basing the whole piece off the Doxology and even singing it in front of them. That’s what inspired the composition—a combination of Doc’s heart and his emphasis on how we affect other people, and praising God through the musical gifts that we have.”

After 50 years, many people are ready to give up the daily grind and retire. But not Fischer: “People dream of retiring and getting to do nothing. But I love coming to work every day,” he says. “My gift is to teach, motivate and inspire young people. I have a lot more to offer and I’m still growing myself. I don’t feel I’m done yet.”

“The amount of energy that man has..., it’s really awesome and it’s contagious,” says Marquart.

Fischer is putting some of that energy toward writing a book, titled “Connecting the Head and the Heart: The Things that Really Matter in the Making of Music,” which he hopes will be used as a textbook. “A lot of people don’t know about playing with vulnerability and making a lifelong connection with music. I believe it only happens with good-quality repertoire, played musically well and expressively well,” he says. “Wherever you play, you want to make a difference in people’s lives. That’s what I want to show both aspiring and experienced conductors through my book.”

Fischer is proud of the great heights the Wind Symphony has reached in the last half century, and the doors it has opened for students. Playing at some of the country’s great concert halls, touring all over the world, performing at prestigious festivals—it’s overwhelming when you think about it all at once, Fischer says. “We’re a small school. Small schools don’t usually get to do such amazing things! It’s God that led us to those opportunities.” ▲

*Rich was performing as a soloist with his high school band during his junior year, 1967.*



*Dr. Fischer on a free night while touring with the Concert Band in 1977.*



*Dr. Fischer’s office walls are covered with memories of the last 50 years.*







**Join us for a  
Band/Wind Symphony  
Reunion Weekend  
as we celebrate  
Dr. Richard Fischer's  
50th Anniversary  
Friday - Sunday,  
June 21 - 23, 2024**

**Tentative Schedule:**

- Friday, June 21**
- 4:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m. Check-in
  - Band Welcome and Rehearsal
  - Welcome Reception
- Saturday, June 22**
- Morning and Afternoon Rehearsals
  - 5:15 p.m. Dinner Banquet and Program
- Sunday, June 23**
- 10:00 a.m. Chapel Service
  - Final Rehearsal
  - 1:30 p.m. Concert

*Limited on-campus housing in Concordia Hall is available for a nominal per night fee, includes continental breakfast.*

**If you have questions, please contact Meg Busse at 708-209-3482 or [meg.busse@CUChicago.edu](mailto:meg.busse@CUChicago.edu).**

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# Standing Tall

## BLENDING



*Bryan Widstrand BA '12 & Stacy (Newkirk) Widstrand BA '10*



# in His Presence

## ING WINE AND WORSHIP

By: **Martina Reese**, Communication and Marketing Assistant

On a 400-acre vineyard east of Paso Robles, nestled in California's Central Coast, members of the Steinbeck family are carrying forward a thriving business enterprise. Concordia-Chicago grads Bryan Widstrand BA '12 and Stacy (Newkirk) Widstrand BA '10 are following in the footsteps of preceding generations as they combine the traditional craft of viticulture and winemaking with a living, vibrant Christian faith.

The Steinbeck family's 140-year-old cattle and barley farm became an estate vineyard in the 1980s, growing fruit that was purchased by a nearby winery. A new phase was inaugurated with the launch of the family wine label in 2006. Stacy, a descendant of the multi-generational Steinbeck family agricultural dynasty, returned to the family business in 2018—several years after graduating from Concordia-Chicago—when she and her husband Bryan moved to Paso Robles. Now they, too, are contributing to the Steinbeck family business that has expanded to include processing facilities and a retail tasting room.

### *Following Family Footsteps to CUC*

Bryan Widstrand earned a Bachelor of Arts in theology with an English minor and pre-seminary focus at Concordia-Chicago. The Concordia legacy runs deep in his family: his grandfather graduated from Concordia-Chicago's precursor, Concordia Teachers College, in 1949. His mother, aunt, and older and younger sisters are also CUC grads.

Bryan's family legacy connection to Concordia-Chicago developed into a concrete, personal motivation to enroll after he heard Kapelle, the University's elite chamber choir, on a fall tour performance at his home church, Trinity Lutheran, in Lansing, IL. "[Professor of music] Dr. Charles Brown and I go way back," Bryan reflects. "It was a dream of mine to sing with him in the Kapelle choir, which I first heard when I was 12 years old."

Stacy, too, decided to attend Concordia-Chicago after hearing—as a sixth grader—a tour performance at her family's local church by the University's Wind Symphony under the direction of Dr. Richard Fischer. Once at CUC, Stacy studied parish music as a path to fulfill her passion for leading





*Grape vines take 3 years to mature.*

people in worship. Brought together by faith and music, Stacy and her future spouse Bryan met, fittingly enough, while singing in Kapelle.

### *Graduates Begin Global Adventure*

The Widstrands' life journey after graduation was far from what they had expected or envisioned for themselves. They initially moved to Stacy's hometown of Paso Robles, where Bryan worked as a professional singer, began a job at a wine tasting room in nearby Templeton and obtained an entry-level sommelier certificate. In 2015, the couple was called to the other side of the globe in Tasmania, Australia, where Bryan took advantage of an opportunity with Pipers Brook Vineyard. In a few short months, he progressed from cellar assistant to senior winemaker, setting the direction for his longer journey in that field. "I wasn't equipped to do that job, but I became equipped," Bryan remembers—a recurring experience that has propelled him through unfamiliar territory.

In 2018, with encouragement from Stacy's mother, the young couple, now the proud parents of two children, moved back to Paso Robles to work with the family business. Bryan embraced the challenge and was elevated in 2022 from assistant winemaker to winemaker.

"The work itself is varied each day, mentally and physically demanding, artistic, scientific, and creative all at once," Bryan explains. "Being in the vineyard among the vines, choosing the fruit from which to make wine, assessing aromas and flavors for blending, and sharing the finished product and the stories that went into the wine are all a part of my passion."

### *Facing Unknowns with Certain Faith*

As Bryan's career path has led him repeatedly into business situations for which he was not formally prepared, yet his strong faith empowered him to embrace the opportunities presented to him.



*Tasmania is known for its stunning views and new world wines (Wineglass Bay pictured).*



"When you find yourself in a place unexpected, do not be afraid," Bryan counsels. "Because the One who made the paths before you did so expertly, and expertly knows you and made you and loves you beyond your ability to comprehend, and He will not let you fail."

Bryan's journey through "places unexpected" has also provided numerous opportunities to share his Christian faith through music and the Word. He attributes his confidence in doing so to his Concordia-Chicago experience. While working in Tasmania, he was unexpectedly asked by a powerful CFO "Can you tell me, if I do bad things, will that send me to Hell." Bryan recalls that, as a Christian, he was prepared to explain the Gospel due to his bachelor's in theology with a focus in biblical languages and his training under [former campus] Pastor Jeff Leininger.

### *Building a Faith Community with Music*

Stacy, who holds a bachelor of arts in music with a director of parish music certificate, is also drawn to share the Light of the Word through music and community. Today, she and Bryan serve as worship co-directors of Trinity Lutheran Church and School in Paso Robles. Trinity Lutheran is directly descended from the first Lutheran church in the area, founded by Stacy's great-great-grandparents in 1885. Today, the Widstrands' worship style pulls from traditional and contemporary, including original works, all pointing to the glory of Christ.

"While I was at Concordia," Stacy recalls, "the overarching passion from my professors and directors was toward bringing the message of the Gospel and touching hearts through music. I felt encouraged to develop that passion myself and to use my unique gifts and talents to serve in whatever situation I encountered."



*Paso Robles, CA is a historic town known for wine & hot springs.*

"In my current role as music director," Stacy continues, "I love using many types of music to help people to have a deeper understanding of who God is, what He has done for them and how that affects their daily lives. Beautiful, enriching music paired with thoughtful, biblical texts has a unique power to touch the heart."

Apart from worship directing with Stacy, Bryan continues to follow his musical passion by performing as a chorister and professional soloist in local productions. The Widstrands' three children—Joryn, Allora and Cyrus—are also thriving in their tightly knit community that integrates family, music, church fellowship, hard work amid the open-air splendors of one of California's top winegrowing regions. Bryan says, "When Scripture is heard or read, God is present. When Scripture is sung in worship back to God, we are fully present as well, and in His presence, we have fullness of joy." ▲

*Bryan shared his inspiring stories with recent graduates at CUC's 2023 Spring Commencement Ceremony. Hear from him in his own words at [CUChicago.edu/widstrand-remarks](https://CUChicago.edu/widstrand-remarks).*



# STANDING TALL ALL OVER THE WORLD

*Concordia University Chicago alumni from near and far tell their unique stories and share what they stand tall for in their vocations.*



# STAND TALL

# FOR THE WORD

As the Asia regional director for the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, **Rev. Charles Ferry MBA '22** oversees all the mission work throughout the LCMS Asia region. "It's a huge swath of the world that encompasses three of the four most populous nations in the world—India, China and Indonesia. It's a major opportunity for a parish pastor from Michigan, who never expected to do anything like this!" Ferry is responsible for the roughly 20 missionaries the LCMS has deployed to live and serve in Asia, and for the partner churches established there.

Ferry has been based in Chiayi, Taiwan for the last six years, where he lives with his wife Cheryl and seven children. The Ferry family has happily adjusted to life in Taiwan, where they have all been learning to speak the local language. "My girls are soaking it up like sponges. They'll sit around our dinner table and make little comments to each other in Chinese," he laughs.

Being the regional director, Ferry's position is heavily administrative. It was an area he had little experience in, which led him to pursue his MBA at Concordia-Chicago. "I was actually a police officer before I was a parish pastor. So my background in law enforcement and theology didn't really equip me to be responsible for human resources, marketing and accounting."

As the pandemic began in 2020, the LCMS Office of International Mission instated a travel ban for all missionaries abroad. For a person who travels almost 180 days a year, Ferry had to think hard about how he was going to use that time in lockdown. "Having a completely online MBA option was just perfect at that time," he says. "I enjoyed that I got to interact with people outside my immediate circle—people from different industries, backgrounds and age groups who were pursuing an MBA for different reasons. That gave me opportunities to speak to why I'm doing this and the work I do for the Church."

Ultimately, what led Ferry to choose CUC's program was the University's unwavering commitment to its Lutheran identity. "It's a joy to be able to say that I'm an alum of an institution that is strong and confident in who it is," he says.

He appreciates that he can now look at a packet of financial documents, understand board governance and review a balance sheet with confidence. "I'm able to take these new tools and use them for the betterment of the work my team and I have been



*The Ferry family lives in Chiayi, Taiwan as they serve the LCMS Asia region.*

asked to do," Ferry says. "It's an incredible assembly of skills, talents and vocations that the Lord brings together, which we continue to need on the mission field."

Managing all the servants of the Church in Asia is a weighty responsibility, but Ferry is always motivated by the work. He says, "I could get into the language of mission theologies, but what mission work is really about is getting the Word of God faithfully into people's ears who need to hear it so badly."

—Anna Seifert



# STAND TALL FOR PERSEVERANCE

Patrick Hill BA '10, MA '11 had a clear vision for his future. In 2006, the Concordia-Chicago freshman told all his friends that one day he'd be a football coach for Louisiana State University (LSU), the team he grew up watching as a kid in Shreveport, LA. Not only did he achieve that goal—helping to coach LSU's 2023 Citrus Bowl-winning team—he has now moved on to the NFL, where he is an assistant defensive line coach for the Minnesota Vikings.

His path to the pros took more than a decade of hard work. It takes Hill several minutes to list all the positions he's held since graduating, sometimes gaining coaching experience and working his way up, while at other times just taking a job to pay the bills. His first coaching job was at Concordia-Chicago, working under Lonnie Pries, who had been his coach when he was a student-athlete. Hill later joined Pries at Concordia-Ann Arbor for a year and a half.

Hill went on to pursue every opportunity he could, accepting coaching positions—sometimes on a volunteer basis—at colleges and universities large and small, all over the country. "I think I've lived in about 12 states and had about 14 jobs," he figures. Several times during those years he had to move back in with his mom. At one point, he got a part-time job as a janitor at a Planet Fitness. At another point, he had to apply for government housing and food stamps.

"I often asked, 'God, what am I doing wrong? Why am I always moving?' But I held onto my faith," Hill says. "It felt like God had shown me the movie trailer highlights of my life—the exciting parts. In



*Hill works on the sidelines as assistant defensive line coach for the Minnesota Vikings.*

between were the lonely times or the hard times. But I wouldn't trade it for anything."

In 2022, while he was coaching for Nicholls State University, he got the call from LSU—his dream job from all those years before. And then, a year later, he was offered the position with the Vikings. Hill says he gained his persistence because of what he learned the hard way as a student at Concordia-Chicago. In his sophomore year, he was nearly suspended for poor grades. "I struggled with retaining information over the whole semester. I didn't know how to study," he says.

Having time to discover his interests helped him turn his situation around. "I

came in as an accounting major, and I just didn't like it. So I felt like I had no reason to be at CUC. And then I found this class called Intro to Sociology, and I fell in love with it. Then, because I loved sports, sports management came to me naturally as well." He graduated with majors in both subjects, and then earned his master's in sports leadership.

Hill's favorite Bible verse is, "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men," (Col. 3:23). He says, "It reminds me that when I'm doing a project, or a film breakdown, or a study, I'm doing it for God, not for man."

*—Anna Seifert*



# STAND TALL FOR INTEGRITY

There is one key value, above all else, that serves as **Phil Grimpo's** BA '98 driving force—integrity. "You must live by your own word, and never compromise," he says definitively. "It is imperative to live up to your promises, in business and in life. That, in turn, has allowed me to build lifelong trust and respect with others." His dedication to integrity has led him to build a hugely successful media production company.

In high school, Grimpo showed interest in becoming a marine biologist for the exact reasons you might expect from a teenager: "I wanted to scuba dive and fly helicopters." His work today as founder and executive director of Inspirmedia, however, is a far cry from exploring the depths of the sea.

Participation in a computer programming competition for high schoolers provided his initial introduction to Concordia-Chicago. He recalls being wowed by a tour of the University's computer center, which was state-of-art at that time, not only for Concordia but also among colleges nationwide.

While studying computer science, Grimpo decided that becoming a programmer wasn't the right direction. Having dabbled in both video production work and high school theater, he was able to transition to a major in communications/theater. "As a member of a Lutheran family, I focused my senior independent study on researching how churches were utilizing media—at the time it wasn't very much, but I had uncovered what I thought was a good future opportunity," he recalls.

A few years into working for local churches to build websites and support video needs, Grimpo realized that he needed to own his own equipment to provide the highest level of service and stay relevant in a rapidly evolving technical environment.

At the urging of a trusted member of his church, Grimpo started Inspirmedia in 2000 and hasn't looked back. "I'm grateful of the lifelong relationships that I built with fellow students and colleagues while at Concordia-Chicago, because they were my first clients," he says.

Grimpo's exceptionally high-quality work and professionalism spoke for itself, and he quickly became a household name across the LCMS. He was soon tapped to provide what he refers to as "media intense" work both in his home church, and for various national conferences and conventions. To this day, Inspirmedia



*Grimpo at work at the University of Nebraska's Memorial Stadium.*

remains the go-to media production company supporting major events like the national LCMS Youth Gathering and Synodical Conventions.

As business continued to grow, so did the need to hire additional staff and purchase more equipment. Grimpo was able to accomplish that by expanding his business to include secular clients like the University of Nebraska. But his passion remains focused on supporting organizations that spread the Gospel.

"If you're not sharing the Word in a way people can understand it, then you're not really sharing it at all," Grimpo believes. Harkening back to his theater experience, Grimpo says that the use of lights, sound and visuals are important tools in connecting parishioners with the Word. He says that setting a particular mood creates an emotional tie with the message that is being shared. "Stained glass, vestments, pipe organs and choirs in the balcony are traditional ways that services have been enhanced. We're simply building upon that tradition using today's technology."

—Eric Matanyi



# STAND TALL

# FOR AGILITY

**Holly Powell BS '12, MBA '16** is an IT product manager for the Americas for the cosmetics company L'Oreal USA, known globally for its extensive line of personal care products. In her role, she oversees the systems that send content to the company's e-retailers, which include Ulta.com, Walmart.com and Macys.com.

"I love trying to figure out why people think the way they do and how to help them connect with the best products to meet their needs," Powell notes. "As a Concordia-Chicago undergraduate, I majored in marketing with a minor in psychology, which gave me insights into both aspects."

In her current role at L'Oreal, no two days are ever the same, Powell reports—a situation which she finds to be both a blessing and a curse. The CUC alumna leans into the challenge: "I love trying to find solutions that make people more productive with less effort on their part."

Powell has modeled agility in navigating her own career and sees it as a requirement for success in the contemporary workplace. "Times have and continue to change and evolve," says Powell, "and a straight ladder career path is rarely the best move in the corporate world nowadays. As long as I'm able to continue learning new things and enjoy what I do while maintaining my personal time—that is my goal."

After originally choosing CUC for her undergraduate studies because of its small, personalized approach, Powell then "went back to CUC to get my master's degree in business and was able to do it all online while working full time." Beyond her degrees, there was an even more important career-building asset she gained from the University.

"Never underestimate the power of personal connections," Powell recommends. "My Concordia-Chicago network got me an interview for my first full-time job. Since then, I've built an amazing network and that has helped me get to where I am today, along with skills and knowledge."

—Martina Reese



Powell at the Maybelline popup outside her New York office.



# STAND TALL FOR THE CHALLENGE

**Sammy Valdez BA '23** loves to challenge himself. The recent CUC grad is now a second lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps after completing Officer Candidate School last November. "I want to serve my country, and it's also a great way to keep pushing myself on a daily basis," he says. But 2nd Lt. Valdez excelled at many things before he chose the Marines as his first move post-graduation.

Growing up in Plainfield, IL, his parents encouraged him to pursue whatever interests he wanted, as long as he kept his grades up. Valdez tried lots of sports, and eventually zeroed in on baseball—until his junior year of high school when he was cut from the varsity team. "That was a wake-up call. I thought, if I want to keep playing the game that I love, I have to take it seriously," he recalls. "From that point forward, you couldn't stop me from working hard and busting my tail to get to where I want to be."

He did make it back on his high school team as a pitcher, and started to be recruited by colleges. "I talked with (CUC baseball) Coach Kolin Conner a lot. I really liked the people I met on my campus visit. Everyone was so friendly and helpful, and it just felt like home, you know?"

Valdez put his best foot forward in both baseball and academics at Concordia-Chicago, graduating summa cum laude with a BA in business management.

He is currently in The Basic School at Marine Corps Base Quantico, a six-month program where newly commissioned officers are trained in the ethos of the Marines. "For example, one week might be spent in the classroom, learning about different squad size tactics, and then the next week we put it to application. We'll



**2nd. Lt. Valdez graduated summa cum laude from CUC before joining the U.S. Marine Corps.**

hike out to the field and spend two or three days outside, sleeping among the trees," he says.

With the high academic honors he received, his college baseball background and now his military service, Valdez has set himself apart from the pack. His plan is to see how his first four years go in the Marine Corps, and, at some point, return to the civilian life. "I'll just take it day by day," he says. "Eight years from now, 20 years from now, we'll see where life takes me."

Valdez feels reassured that he has chosen a challenging path: "I think God's message to me was, 'I know this is scary and you're unsure if you want to do it, but it's going to work out for you.' I feel that I'm on the path that I need to be on. I always commit to anything I do—no matter if I stink at it at first, I'm going to see it through, no matter what."

—Anna Seifert



## STANDING TALL FOR 160 YEARS



One-hundred sixty years of preparing students to grow in the faith, pursue their vocations and live out the Word of God. Of forming students for lives of influence and service to the common good, fulfilled by purpose and meaning. An anniversary provides an opportune time to reflect on the past as we prepare ourselves for a thriving future. Each decade gives a new generation of alumni life-forming experiences. New buildings are erected, while others are torn down. Programs are launched, while others are phased out. Students arrive for their first day, and in the blink of an eye are walking across the stage at commencement. At Concordia University Chicago, Christ remains at the center through it all. Enjoy these photos from just a handful of moments that have shaped our institution. ▲



The faculty of the Addison Seminary, c. 1880s. Dr. Eugen Krauss, the seminary's second president, is seated at the far left, with Dr. Theodore Brohm, the seminary's third president, seated in the middle.





The West Annex Cafeteria c. 1929. This space now serves as the Kreft Student Success Center.



Aerial photo of the campus in 1921, when River Forest was little more than a farming community.



Addison Teachers Seminary band, c. 1890s.



Original campus of Addison Teachers Seminary in Addison, IL, c. 1900.



The subfloor construction begins on what is now Addison Hall on the River Forest campus, c. 1912.



Students in the 1940s arrive for move-in day.



Students line up to use the campus payphone in 1957.



The Concordia Teachers College Choir performed at the White House Christmas Tree Lighting ceremony in 1966. Pictured with President Lyndon Johnson and Lady Bird Johnson.

Students helped fill more than 250,000 sandbags to prevent Des Plaines River floodwaters from destroying the neighborhood around campus in 1986.



CUC was an early adopter of computer systems and was recognized as a national technology leader within the Concordia University System and higher ed in general, c. 1981.



The University experienced significant growth of its facilities between 1999 and 2001, including construction of a new track/stadium (pictured), CATS building, parking structure and the Christopher Center.



Radio legend Paul Harvey (left) served as MC for the 2002 dedication of the Christopher Center. Also pictured: Jay and Doris Christopher.



In 2017, “The Reformation at 500: An Interdenominational Conversation” featured LCMS President Matthew Harrison, Cardinal Blase Cupich and Wheaton College President Philip Ryken.



The campus community showed its resilience navigating the COVID-19 pandemic.



Former Presidents Gard (left) and Johnson (right) attend the installation of President Dawn in 2019.

# Emeriti—Where Are They Now?

## Dr. Marv Bartell BA '61

By: *Anna Seifert, Communications Associate*

Since leaving Concordia University Chicago, Dr. Marv Bartell's retirement hasn't fit the standard definition. Instead, the distinguished professor emeritus of biology continued to dedicate his post-CUC years to educating others, particularly in the sciences.

Before Concordia-Chicago established its own on-campus Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN), the University offered classes to nursing students at area hospitals. Starting in the late 1960s, Bartell taught anatomy and physiology courses to nursing students. Sometimes the classes were taught on Concordia's campus, while other times, he and his colleagues would pack up their materials to teach at Lutheran General, St. Anne's or West Suburban hospitals.

Over the course of his career, Bartell continued learning as advances were being made in the sciences worldwide. In the 1980s, he spent his sabbatical studying microbiology at Loyola University Medical Center, conducting research and taking courses. "That was when some of the breakthroughs were happening with recombinant DNA. I appreciated that I was able to be on the forefront," he says. Later in his career, he took a research sabbatical at the University of Washington in Seattle, which enabled him to apply for and receive a substantial NSF grant to purchase microbiological research equipment for Concordia students.

When Concordia College became Concordia University in 1990, Bartell was the founding dean of the former College of Arts and Sciences. He says, "I insisted that I continue to teach when I was dean, because I felt my place was in the classroom, to lead by example."

Bartell officially retired from CUC in 2003, but remained engaged in a number of ways over the next 20 years. When the University was going through a difficult time financially in 2004, he returned for a year and a half as acting dean. However, the bulk of his retirement was spent serving as executive director of Associated Colleges of the Chicago Area (ACCA), an organization he had already been involved with for many years.

The consortium of 15 small colleges was formed in the 1960s in connection with Argonne National Laboratory. "In those days, every Tuesday I would take several students to Argonne for a special seminar on a scientific topic. They also had a laboratory where students from ACCA colleges could use their high-powered specialized equipment," he recalls. "All the ACCA biology faculty got to know each other and that was a great support system."



*Dr. Bartell (center) at a recent emeriti faculty luncheon.*

In the 1990s, Argonne lost their funding for educational programs, so ACCA went independent. "We continued to offer many of the same things we offered before, such as the student symposium and divisional courses," Bartell says. "ACCA also formed relationships with Morton Arboretum, Shedd Aquarium and Hooke College of Microscopy. It was really an important alternative, that students had access to courses that weren't offered on campus."

When he stepped down from ACCA in the spring of 2023, it was really like his second retirement. (He acknowledges that he failed on the first try!) "Now I'm looking forward to doing things that I ought to have been doing around the house!" Bartell says. He and his wife, Judy BA '63, established the Dr. Marv and Judy Bartell Endowment to Enhance the Natural Sciences at CUC. They also spend a lot of time at their cottage in Wisconsin. "I still jog, especially when we're up at the lake. I take a few laps around each day," he says. "Having that nice location in the woods is a real blessing." He always enjoys hearing from former students—you can reach him at [Marv.Bartell@CUChicago.edu](mailto:Marv.Bartell@CUChicago.edu). ▲



Spring 2024

## Class Notes



### 1950s

On Feb. 27, **Marvin Brandt BA '52** and Alice Brandt celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary. Marvin's Lutheran school administrative career took him to Honey Creek, MO, where he met Alice, and then to Luzerne, IA; Waterloo, IA; and Peoria, IL where he retired from Concordia Lutheran School. The Brandts now live in Columbus, IN where they attend St. Peter Lutheran Church and School. Today, the Marvin and Alice Brandt Scholarship Fund supports future Lutheran school educators attending CUC. They are pictured with their children and spouses including seven other CUC graduates (right to left): **Paul and Susan '79**, **Janice '83**, **John and Sue '77**, and **Daniel and Lani '86**.

### 1960s

**Dave Ebeling BS '63** and **Carol (Fredericks) Ebeling BS '63** celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary on June 22, 2023. Their celebration included attending the Patriotic Pops Concert by the University Band in front of the Pillars. After teaching at congregations in Ohio and Indiana, they settled in Bloomington, IN. Dave retired as the Indiana District-LCMS Education Executive, and Carol retired from the position of executive director of Hospice of Bloomington (IN). Dave and Carol have two children, five grandchildren and two great grandchildren. Three of the five grandchildren are also CUC graduates and all played in the Wind Symphony.



### 1970s

**Don Gillingham BA '76** received the Lutheran Education Association's Distinguished Retired Lutheran Educator "EncourAGING" Award. Don officially retired in 2022, having served in



Lutheran high schools in Illinois. He has immersed himself in a variety of projects and initiatives related to the improvement of Lutheran schools, later taking on a principal role at Trinity Lutheran in Roselle, IL.

## 1980s

### Karen (Oswald) Brueggemann BA '82



is retiring after 41 years of teaching, 40 years of which she served at St. Paul Lutheran, Grafton, WI, teaching at the pre-kindergarten level for 36 of those years. She earned

her master's in early childhood education in 2002. In 2012, she was awarded the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation Fellowship Award. She also was awarded the Concordia University Wisconsin Educator of the Year. She looks forward to years of reflection and relaxation, ready to respond to what comes next in God's plan.

**Rev. Mark Loest BA '84** was recently appointed to the Board of Directors of the Lutheran Heritage Foundation, which gives books of the Lutheran faith to people around the world in their own languages. He is in his 20th year as senior pastor of Immanuel Lutheran Church of Frankentrost in Saginaw, MI.

## 1990s

**Holly Sawyer BA '97** celebrated the graduation of her daughter, Molly, from the United States Military Academy West Point on May 27, 2023. Molly follows in the footsteps of her dad who was in the class of '95. Holly and her husband have five children.



**Kevin Rudzinski BA '96** was selected to receive Lutheran Education Association's 2024 Distinguished Lutheran Middle School Teacher Award. Kevin is the middle school science, math



and STEM teacher at St. Paul's Lutheran School in Des Peres, MO.

## 2000s

**Courtney DeArmond BA '06** became principal of Marcy Elementary School in Sussex, WI. Her husband, **Rev. Zachary DeArmond BA '06**, is also a CUC alum and is the senior pastor at Blessed Savior Lutheran Church in New Berlin, WI.

The Hinsdale High School District 86 board appointed **Jason Markey MA '07** as the new assistant superintendent for academics. Before this role, Jason was principal for three years at Glenbrook North High School in Northbrook, IL.

**Jeremy Christian MA '08** became principal of Niles West High School in May 2023. His previous roles included principal in Oak Park School District 97, assistant principal in Naperville Community School District 203, dean of students at Proviso East High School in Maywood, and teacher and team leader at Bolingbrook High School. Jeremy and his wife, Latoiya, have two children, Joi, 13 and Javari, 20.

After two seasons as an assistant baseball coach, **Andrew Massey BS '18** has been named head coach of the Evergreen Park Community High School baseball program. Andrew played collegiately at CUC, where he made the All-Northern Athletics Collegiate College first team, won the conference batting title his junior year in 2016, and was named to the All-Region team that year.

Adjunct professor and graduate **Antwan Babakhani MA '07, EdD '14** was selected as the new principal for Maine South High School in Park Ridge on Feb. 5, 2024. Antwan will begin his new role on July 1, 2024.

**Rev. Anthony Dodgers BA '07** and **Deaconess Betsy Dodgers BA '08, MA '18** welcomed their second son Arthur David into their family on Jan. 9, 2024. Arthur was baptized on Jan. 21.



The Lutheran Education Association selected **Meghan Vogel BA '04** to receive the 2024 Distinguished Lutheran Early Childhood Administrator Award. Meghan is the preschool director at Bethany Lutheran School in Parma, OH.





**Rev. Ben Vogel BA '04** was selected by the Lutheran Education Association's Board of Directors to receive LEA's new honor, the LEA Distinguished Lutheran School Team Pastor Award. This award



is presented to a Lutheran pastor who is committed to excellence in Christian education and supports the faculty and staff of his school, partnering with them in teaching of the faith. Rev. Vogel is senior pastor at Bethany Lutheran Church and School, Parma, OH.

## 2010s

**Traci Reiner MA '19** became assistant principal of Forest Elementary School in Des Plaines, IL. Traci has taught 1st, 4th and 5th grades, and has also been a reading and math interventionist.

**Natalie Hudson MA '19** was named assistant principal and director of special programs of Prairie Trails School in Mount Prospect, IL. Hudson has worked in the district's student services department since 2015, most recently as a kindergarten special education teacher at Prairie Trails.

**Cheryl Sullivan MA '13**, principal at William Beye Elementary School in Oak Park, IL, has recovered from brain surgery and resumes her responsibilities serving District 97. Cheryl was given a keepsake book when she returned to school, as well as a surprise all-school assembly to celebrate. She thanks her family, doctors and the community for supporting her throughout surgery and recovery.

This past August, **Annmarie Dufelmeier MA '22** became principal of St. Edward Central Catholic High School in Elgin, IL. She came to St. Edward in 2011 and served as a secondary English language arts teacher. She then went on to chair the English department before being named principal.

**Antonio Bondi MA '10** was awarded The Dominic DiFrisco Humanitarian Award by the Italian American Human Relations Foundation of Chicago in recognition of his outstanding dedication to the promotion of the Italian language and culture and La Settimana Italiana. Antonio is a teacher at Rolling Meadows High School in Rolling Meadows, IL.

**Olivia Villarreal-Garza MBA '11** was married to Daniel Garza on July 15, 2023 in Millington, MI. Olivia serves as the manager of student services in the Office of Graduate Admission and Student Services at Concordia-Chicago.

Downers Grove South High School selected **Brandon Murphy MA '11** as the next associate principal for athletics. Prior to this role, Brandon served as the director of athletics at Willowbrook High School. Brandon and his family reside in Woodridge, IL.

**Mark Lowrie MA '16** was named Ohio Teacher of the Year for 2024. Leaders from Ohio's Department of Education and district leadership honored Mark at a school assembly on Sept. 7, 2023. Mark teaches broadcast journalism at Gahanna Lincoln High School.

**Mic Brunner BSBA '14** and Marissa Brunner welcomed Silas Forrest Brunner on April 12, 2023. Silas joins brothers Asher and Jericho (JP) and proud Cougar grandparents of Doug ('82) and Sheri (Corporon) Brunner. The family resides in Sauk Rapids, MN.

**Michele Flanagan MA '19** has been hired as the new principal of Morris Community High School for the 2024-2025 school year. Michele will begin her new role in July.

**Rebekah (Thoelke) Pauls BA '17** and her husband, Nathan, welcomed their second child, Eden Pauls. She was born on May 15, 2023.







**Erica Vonk PhD '22** was named Senior Woman Administrator (SWA) for athletics at Northwestern College in Iowa in June 2023. Dr. Vonk also is a member of Christian Business Faculty Association (CBFA) and serves as the director of Northwestern's Center for Innovation & Leadership.



For her doctoral dissertation, **Megan McCullough PhD '22** developed an exercise program called the PACE Method: Proactive Awareness Controlling Excess. A textbook of her work was published in March 2023. She also developed a mobile app, "Fit PACE," to help those who struggle with exercise addiction.

## 2020s

**Samuel Valdez BA '23** recently graduated from the Marine Corps Officer Candidates School (OCS) and was commissioned as a second lieutenant this past November. He gives special thanks to CUC's director of counseling services Christopher Johnston and Cougar baseball for supporting him as he enters this new vocation. Read more about Samuel's story on page 41.

**Colby Campbell BA '23** and **Joy (Greco) Campbell BA '23** were married on Dec. 29, 2023 at St. Paul's Lutheran Church in Brookfield, IL. The wedding party included Mariah Mielke BS '23, Caleb Martin BS '23, Matthew Lams BA '23, Rachel Jordan BS '23, Tessa Wiens BS '23, Jesse Schultz BS '23 and current student Kathyrn Haidl. Over 20 CUC alumni attended, including Dennis Zimmer BA '85 who was the organist for the ceremony.



**Matt Burgener BA '21** and **Abigail (Schult) Burgener BA '23** were married on Aug. 5, 2023. All pictured in the photo attended Concordia-Chicago. Matt and Abby reside in Menomonee Falls, WI where Matt serves as a DCE for youth and young adults at Grace Lutheran, and Abby teaches kindergarten at Zion Lutheran in Menomonee Falls.



Gerontologist **Amanda Young PhD '23** was named a 2023 Rising Star Honoree by McKnight's Women of Distinction Program. The program honors women working in senior living, skilled nursing, or home care who have had a significant effect on their organization or industry. Amanda works as executive director of The Wesley at Home, a long-term care program that focuses on prevention, proactive health and wellness for aging adults.

**Lance Thies MBA '22** was named as the newest member of the Lockport Township High School District 205 Board of Education. Lance currently works as a landscape architect and planner for the city of Lockport as director of community and economic development.

**Submit a Class Note!** For submission consideration, please send information and optional photo to [Alumni@CUChicago.edu](mailto:Alumni@CUChicago.edu).

## About Class Notes

Information listed reflects details received as of **April 15, 2024**. The University welcomes news in the lives of our alumni. To ensure accuracy, information should be provided by the featured individual, rather than another party. Photos are welcome, whether prints or electronic files, however we do not return prints. Submission of a Class Note or image does not guarantee publication. The University reserves the right to edit submissions for style, length and content.



# Condolences

“BUT THANKS BE TO GOD, WHO GIVES  
US THE VICTORY THROUGH OUR  
LORD JESUS CHRIST.”

—1 Corinthians 15:57

## FACULTY & STAFF

Natalie Jenne – November 21, 2023 Music

Mary J. Schuth – July 21, 2023 Accelerated Degree Programs

Victor B. Streufert – March 24, 2023 Sociology

## ALUMNI

Rev. Carl J. Anton BS '63 – September 9, 2023

Gloria (Graham) Balgeman BA '71 – January 11, 2024

Phyllis (Behnke) Balzer BS '61 – Jun 3 12, 2023

Rev. James G. Balzer BS '61 – February 1, 2024

Phyllis (Lilienthal) Barts BS '64 – January 25, 2024

Willard H. Bellin BA '66 – January 4, 2024

Virginia (Albers) Bergant BA '65 – February 3, 2023

Carol (Jungerman) Bierwagen BS '60 – February 22, 2023

Robert A. Brandt BA '87 – January 30, 2023

Donald R. Brown, Jr. BA '97 – November 9, 2023

Robert E. Bruening BS '52 – September 16, 2023

Vida (Ewald) Bruss BS '63 – September 26, 2023

Kay (Guhl) Burrin BS '59 – September 14, 2023

Robert E. Christian HS '45, BS '48 – March 27, 2023

Priscilla (Mensing) Cook BS '55 – January 4, 2023

Nancy (Hitz) Darnell BA '74 – August 25, 2023

Lillian (Eifert) Deterling BS '55 – May 16, 2023

Sueann (Schiefer) Doepner BA '77 – January 16, 2024

Gerald R. Dohrmann BS '58 – December 28, 2023

Karol Dujka BS '58 – January 31, 2023

Rev. Thomas E. Eggold BA '68 – August 10, 2023

Frederick L. Eichberger BS '64 – July 13, 2023

Gary G. Eller BA '73 – November 9, 2023

Dr. Wyman E. Fischer BS '53 – July 25, 2023

Edward J. Garbatz BS '66 – August 6, 2023

Virginia L. Gerharter BA '67 – August 28, 2023

Maxine (Bernhardt) Goldbeck BS '47 – June 9, 2023

Rev. Roland M. Golz BA '54, MA '65 – April 11, 2023

Janet (Ackerman) Guetzkow BS '60 – January 9, 2024

Dr. James M. Hake BS '53 – June 7, 2023

Eugene A. Halterman BS '60, MA '66 – June 12, 2023

David A. Hartman MA '76 – July 29, 2023

Orlyn A. Heimsoth BA '69 – July 15, 2023

Judith (Lang) Herbst BS '51 – March 7, 2023

H. Allen Herbst BS '59 – March 25, 2023

Rev. Wilton E. Hille BS '56 – April 29, 2023

Dorris (Timmer) Holz MA '92 – April 5, 2023

Robert A. Kaufmann BA '71 – March 28, 2023

Delmar A. Kell BS '62 – August 1, 2023

Dr. Leonard H. Kochendorfer BS '56 – June 2, 2023

Robert C. Krajewski BS '60, MA '66 – January 19, 2023

Roy E. Kramer BS '56 – August 19, 2023

Linda (Wingfield) Krohn BA '83 – December 18, 2023

Wilbur F. Kromphardt BS '54 – January 16, 2024

William H. Lubben BA '71 – October 21, 2023

Janet (Ries) Lunog BS '60 – May 30, 2023

Dale C. Mayer BS '61 – March 16, 2023

Laura (Imhoff) McLean BA '69 – January 1, 2024

Dr. Herbert C. Moldenhauer BS '45 – November 28, 2023

Paul A. Nicholson BA '85 – August 13, 2023

Alan G. Ostwald BS '61 – August 15, 2023

Eunice Clara Margarethe Otte BA '83 – April 18, 2023

Donata (Haug) Owsley BS '61 – June 24, 2023

Donald T. Petering MA '80 – April 11, 2023

Helen (Wunderlich) Piellusch BS '64 – June 12, 2023

Joseph W. Plautz BS '60 – April 18, 2023

Frances (Walton) Rasmussen EDS '23 – August 25, 2023

Debra (Duncan) Reed PhD '21 – January 4, 2024

Rev. Norman J. Rehmer BS '61 – July 1, 2023

Sharon (Kuerschner) Rietschel MA '92 – August 1, 2023

Eugene E. Roth BS '62 – April 13, 2023

Bruce D. Rudi MA '14 – December 24, 2023

Dennis W. Sampolinski BA '69 – December 28, 2023

Thomas Schilke BS '61 – April 12, 2023

Katherine (Grueber) Schkade BA '68 – September 22, 2023

Herman C. Schmidt BS '61 – May 5, 2023

Harold H. Schmidt BS '58 – September 12, 2023

Mary (Joshel) Schuth BA '93 – July 21, 2023

Christine (Bakirjy) Seiler BA '78 – July 12, 2023

Dr. Mark M. Silzer BA '69 – December 30, 2023

Janet (Nadler) Sommerfeldt BS '59 – October 25, 2023

Evelyn (Martin) Stahmer MA '90 – January 12, 2024

Teresa (Moser) Street BA '65 – November 20, 2023

Dr. Victor B. Streufert HS '44, BS '48 – March 24, 2023

Paul W. Sturn BS '62 – January 8, 2023

Lois (Granger) Tyson ND '86 – July 23, 2023

Susan (Dobberfuhr) Volk BA '74 – December 4, 2023

Sandra (Wendt) Wackenhuth BA '70 – May 16, 2023

Dr. Herman K. Wentzel BS '49 – September 28, 2023



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## CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY CHICAGO

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