

**Facilitating Lifelong Christian Family Disciples
In the Amount of \$5,000
Resolution**

WHEREAS, Jesus said, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,"
Matthew 28:19a ESV; and

WHEREAS, As followers of Christ, the mission of Concordia Center for the Family is "Uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus;" and

WHEREAS, Research shows only twenty percent (20%) of children baptized in the LCMS remain in the church through young adulthood; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Center for the Family is a Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the LCMS and is uniquely positioned to support parents by partnering with congregations to provide Family Discipleship Facilitators trained to implement the Family Discipleship program and work within congregations in the LWML South Dakota District and across the United State to change this alarming trend; and

WHEREAS, Concordia Center for the Family acts as a unifying force between church leaders, congregations, and families to spread the Light of Jesus through family discipleship within LCMS congregations making lifelong disciples of Jesus: let it be

RESOLVED, That the Lutheran Women's Missionary League South Dakota District in convention vote the sum of \$5,000 for Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) to fund recruiting and training of at least ten (10) new Family Discipleship Facilitators within the LWML South Dakota District and across the United States over the next two years, positively impacting at least 1,000 people.

**Approved By
LCMS Michigan District President:**

DAVID A. DAVIS
Printed Name

[Signature]
Signature

8-28-25
Date

[Signature]
Signature

Rev. Dr. Todd A. Biermann
Executive Director
Concordia Center for the Family
toddbiermann@concordiafamily.org
810.771.8837

8-12-25
Date

Facilitating Lifelong Christian Family Disciples

Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations,” Matthew 28:19a
ESV

Not long ago, high school students in the United States distributed or received cards with a QR code printed on them. Students used these QR codes to direct them to a website where they asked Biblical questions. Initial responses to their questions were by artificial intelligence (AI). If the responses triggered additional questions from the students, the AI would then redirect the individuals to a ‘human’ contact. Many of the students acted on these QR codes late at night without their parent’s knowledge.¹

This scenario raises questions for parents and grandparents considering confidence in the accuracy of the responses and sources providing biblical information our youth receive. It also highlights whether or not parents feel prepared to discuss this information with their children using reliable solid Christian Lutheran guidance and resources.

As followers of Christ, the mission of Concordia Center for the Family (CCF) is “Uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus!” CCF is a nonprofit Recognized Service Organization (RSO) of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod (LCMS), founded by Ben Freudenburg. Professor Freudenburg developed the first version of a training method that begins with a unique shift to lead church workers to equip parents for home-centered faith formation with the support of their congregation. His method, promoting what is now known as family discipleship, came about through years of research, including personal experience working with children, youth, congregations, other church professionals, and volunteers. His work showed the great need to establish an organization to implement a family discipleship program. Thus, CCF was organized in 2012 as an institute of Concordia University, Ann Arbor, MI, and then became an independent nonprofit in 2018 and an RSO in 2023.

Concordia Center for the Family acts as a unifying force between church leaders, congregations, homes, and families to spread the Light of Jesus through family discipleship within LCMS congregations, LCMS districts, the United States, and around the world.

Statement of Need:

Since 1993, research has shown that families have the greatest influence on how children engage in religious activities, but most families are not engaged in activities that guide youth to become active adults within the church.

“Young adults are about twice as likely as senior adults to say they never say grace or pray at mealtime, while young adults are also significantly more likely to say they never

¹ www.digitalministryconference.com, Digital Ministry Conference, “Saturate,” February 24, 2025, Grapevine, TX, “Using Ai Chat for Ministry,” Chase Cappo, speaker, Gloop AI

read the Bible or pray with their families. These young people are more likely than senior adults to say they never participated in religious holidays in their homes growing up. Generational differences in religious upbringing come down to parenting decisions and priorities.”² These generational differences underscore the influence of parenting choices and priorities upon the family’s values. Evolving family structures now often require grandparents to assume key roles in the spiritual development of grandchildren, highlighting the need for Christian resources that serve a wide range of family configurations.

Alarming, these statistics are no different for LCMS congregations and their families. In our LCMS, the nurturing of faith in homes with congregational support has not been happening for the vast majority of our children. A 2019 study by the LCMS Office of National Mission showed “only 1 in 5 children baptized in the LCMS remained through young adulthood.”³ This highlights a critical gap in faith development within homes, even where congregational support exists.

The growing use of technology among young people is further influencing how youth seek and obtain answers to questions about faith and scripture. At a recent Digital Ministry conference, Chase Cappo, Director of the AI Enterprise Division at Gloop AI, stated, “youth are using artificial intelligence to ask questions that they would never ask an adult.”⁴ Children and young adults need to know and believe they can trust their parents and church leaders for strong biblical faith-based answers or have access to good Christian resources.

Although there are numerous causes for the demise of parents and youth growing together in Christ, one major cause is a misunderstanding of the role of the congregation and home working together. Unfortunately, some people believe the church has the exclusive job of raising children into Christian adults. However, this approach is not effective. The way forward is “uniting homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus.” CCF supports this new model and is a ready partner helping congregations provide families with biblical understanding, skills, and attitudes needed for discipleship within the family. This daily Christian support, communication, and teaching of children strengthens home and family which in turn combats Satan and the evil influences which exist in the world today.

CCF is uniquely positioned to support parents by partnering with congregations at this critical time. CCF provides training to develop Family Discipleship Facilitators to work

² www.aei.org/research-products/report/the-decline-of-religion-in-american-family-life/The Decline of Religion in American Family Life, Daniel A. Cox | Jacqueline Clemence | Eleanor O’Nei, American Enterprise Institute, December 11, 2019

³ “Seven Practices of Healthy Youth Ministry,” Julianna Shults and Mark Kiessling, Concordia Publishing House, 2023, page 20.

⁴ www.digitalministryconference.com, Digital Ministry Conference, “Saturate,” February 24, 2025, Grapevine, TX, “Using Ai Chat for Ministry,” Chase Cappo, speaker, Gloop AI

within congregations across the United States to support strong Christian homes in which faith is being nurtured among children and adults.

Project Goals:

- The primary goal of this project is to unite homes and congregations in making lifelong disciples of Jesus Christ.
- Congregations will be encouraged to assist households and family circles by faithfully and consistently providing the Means of Grace along with the resources and guidance of their trained Family Discipleship Facilitators. This approach aims to address the gaps which might exist in understanding and applying religious teachings in daily life.
- Parents, grandparents, and caregivers will be supported in daily nurturing faith within future generations, promoting an all-encompassing approach to involve all members of the church family.
- Christian families trained in family discipleship will be prepared to share their experiences and knowledge within their congregations and communities.

This project aims to strengthen families in LCMS congregations and schools by training Family Discipleship Facilitators, enabling parents, grandparents, and caregivers to pass on faith in Jesus Christ to future generations. We estimate that at least 1,000 people will be served and positively impacted by these grant funds. Facilitators are equipped to evangelize and promote faith development and may even inspire those served to pursue further church worker and ministry opportunities within the LCMS.

Project Budget:

Concordia Center for the Family is requesting a mission grant in the amount of \$5,000 from the LWML South Dakota District for the 2026-2028 biennium to achieve the following goals:

- CCF will invest in our trained Facilitators in the South Dakota District to enable them to educate and recruit more South Dakota church leaders to become trained as CCF Family Discipleship Facilitators. - \$1,000
- Through the recruitment of church leaders, CCF will ensure at least ten (10) new Family Discipleship Facilitators within the LWML South Dakota District will be trained and ready to implement the program in their respective congregations and communities during the 2026-2028 biennium (If candidates are unavailable within the LWML South Dakota District, facilitators may, as a final measure, be recruited from across the United States). - \$4,000

These particular items are not currently funded by other sources. The grant will help lower training expenses, enabling more Facilitator trainees to attend training events without being overwhelmed with prohibitive costs that might limit the effectiveness and positive impact of implementing this program in their congregations.

This project will continue to be updated, operated, and sustained throughout and beyond the 2026-2028 biennium through ongoing support from congregations, donors, and other foundation grants.

Purpose of Project:

This project will extend the ministry of the Word by training Family Discipleship Facilitators with a family-friendly curriculum taught by LCMS pastors and church professionals in an intensive three-day training event to encourage discipleship within families so everyone can have the confidence to let Christ's Light shine in their daily lives!

The effectiveness and success of CCF's family discipleship initiative relies on a collaborative relationship between households and congregations to nurture lifelong disciples of Jesus. Family Discipleship Facilitators, along with participating families, are directed to regularly partake in the Word and Sacraments within their respective LCMS congregations. Additionally, families receive guidance and encouragement from their congregation and trained facilitators to engage daily in the study, discussion, and practical application of Scripture at home. This ongoing formation as disciples is fostered by the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word.

Family Discipleship Facilitators are leaders in family discipleship spread throughout the LCMS who have received special training from CCF. They have a solid grasp of the theology, knowledge, skills and attitudes which foster a dynamic approach to family discipleship. All CCF Trainers are actively practicing family discipleship in their own home and in the congregation where they serve. They are eager to be an influence for family discipleship for other Christians and the congregations where they gather. Additional support, follow-up, and accountability are provided through mentors assigned to each newly trained participant. Furthermore, Family Discipleship Facilitators will participate in additional core curriculum and continuing education in subsequent years.

The Family Discipleship movement is gaining incredible momentum across the LCMS. CCF is now partnering with Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, to fulfill a Family Discipleship Initiative, is cooperating with the LCMS Board for National Mission to promote Family Discipleship and Concordia Publishing House will soon publish two new Family Discipleship resources written by CCF Leaders. There is a growing hunger for Family Discipleship within homes and congregations supported by LCMS District Presidents and Lutheran Women in Mission. The time to act is now.

These partnerships have already been proven to help strengthen families and shift the focus from an ineffective church-focused approach to a powerful approach that unites homes and congregations in family discipleship.

In the future, through these partnerships and ongoing training of church leaders, CCF will equip current church leaders and CCF Facilitators to influence family discipleship in the homes of many LCMS congregations, empower future leaders (pastors, deaconesses, lay leaders), and provide trusted resources to every pastor, church leader, parent, and family caregivers to influence discipleship within the families.

At CCF, we have successful tools to help congregations assess their current ministry environment and introduce a plan for leaders to implement a proven structure for family discipleship, one that has shown it empowers families to thrive. The 40 congregations we have worked with thus far have experienced increased parental involvement and have seen family discipleship integrated throughout the entire ministry. As one Director of Family Life Ministry describes the impact of family discipleship on her congregation as stated by a Sunday school teacher:

"The third and fourth graders knew more than the same age group from years past. Upon analysis of this, it seemed certain to me that the reason was because there was more parental involvement with children's interaction with the Bible... And, of course, the increased parental involvement is due to your repeated message in several different venues that the nurturing of children's knowledge and understanding of the Bible and doctrine is greatly enhanced when parents join their congregation in forming faith in their children every day. This Sunday school teacher saw the impact that faith formation in the home can have on students and thought of telling me about it." (Hannah K., Director of Family Life Ministry, Springfield, MO)

Fulfilling this grant to support CCF in training Family Discipleship Facilitators will follow God's direction to unite homes and congregations across the United States in making lifelong disciples of Jesus through Scripturally sound training and resources. This is an opportunity to foster a strong culture of Biblical understanding and discipleship within LWML South Dakota District families and communities. With your prayerful support and the working of the Holy Spirit, families and congregations can come together to "Shine the Light of Christ" around the world!

The person responsible for implementing and administering the grant funds is Rev. Dr. Todd Biermann, Executive Director. For questions, contact him at 810.771.8837 or toddbiermann@concordiafamily.org. The staff person responsible for submitting this grant is Rev. Dr. Scott Sommerfeld, Director of Mission Advancement. He can be contacted at 616.437.1891 or scottsommerfeld@concordiafamily.org.


Signature

8-12-25
Date

Rev. Dr. Todd A Biermann
Executive Director
Concordia Center for the Family
3773 Geddes Rd.
Ann Arbor, MI 48105
toddbiermann@concordiafamily.org
810.771.8837

Names and comments of persons with special knowledge of this project:

Over the past couple of generations, parents have been taught to outsource every aspect of raising their child: education to schools, skill development to coaches and instructors, and even their faith to the local congregation. But this is not how God designed His creation to function. He has entrusted that child to his dad and mom. God has given them the task of teaching him the faith, to trust in Jesus for forgiveness, life, and salvation. As a pastor, my hope in partnering with Concordia Center for the Family is to help parents to see the wonderful responsibility God has entrusted to them, and then to help encourage and equip them to be able to carry it out in daily life, all while the whole family is then strengthened as they gather together in Word and Sacrament with the local congregation.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you always,

Rev. Steve Andrews Jr., Associate Pastor, St. Matthew Lutheran Church (LCMS)

Lee's Summit, MO

Concordia Center for the Family does great ministry to help extend the ministry of the Word in LCMS churches. They are developing resources, providing training and equipping parents and grandparents with tools for home-based discipleship as an extension of church ministry. They are focused on faith development at all stages of life: infants, children, youth, adults, and older adults through bettering marriage, parenting, family discipleship, even retirement.

*Peter Kirby, Executive Director of Congregational Services, Missouri District – LCMS
St. Louis, MO*

Concordia Center for the Family's ministry through providing resources and education for church workers like myself has been invaluable. Through trainings, and the recommended resources from CCF, I have gained a better appreciation of the importance of parents raising up their children in the faith. In my ministry, I work directly with parents and families who are hungry to learn how to teach their children about God's Good News of salvation and His plan for our lives. Because of what I've learned from CCF, I feel more equipped to work with parents in this important work as I provide parent education programs, milestone celebrations and gifts, pre-baptism home-visits, and more for the families in my local congregation. *Hannah L. Knehans, Director of Family Life Ministry (DFLM) - Trinity Lutheran, Springfield, MO*

We are excited as the Nebraska District LCMS to partner with CCF in helping homes and churches shape the faith of our young people and impact adults with tools for sharing their own faith. Already in this new training period we have 6 congregations engaging family ministry and volunteering to help more congregations in this important faith endeavor.

Rev. Richard Snow, President, Nebraska District LCMS, Seward, NE

Dear Servants in LWML,

The Concordia Center for the Family provides very valuable service in support of the ministry of the Word through empowering homes to teach God's Word to their children in coordination with congregational ministry. I cannot emphasize enough how important their work is at this time in the Church's history. I believe the work they do is extremely significant for raising children in the faith today! Please let me know if you would like me to explain further my reasoning for such bold statements. In Christ,

Rev. Dr. W. Mart Thompson, Associate Professor of Practical Theology, Concordia Seminary, St. Louis, MO



Concordia Center for the Family
3773 Geddes Road
Ann Arbor, Michigan 48105

Email : office@concordiafamily.org
Phone : 1-888-553-5133

August 25, 2025

LWML South Dakota District
Cathy VandeBraak
Vice President of Gospel Outreach

Dear Ms. VandeBraak,

On behalf of Concordia Center for the Family (CCF), we are grateful to have a sponsor for the 2026-2028 LWML South Dakota District Mission Grant Proposal: "Facilitating Lifelong Christian Family Disciples" in the amount of \$5,000. Please see her information below.

Name: Julie Harnisch
Address: 40658 252nd St
City: State & Zip Code: Mitchell, South Dakota 57301
Email: jluebke@gmail.com
Phone: 605.201.5035
Home Congregation: Zion Lutheran, Mitchell, SD
Zone: Mitchell Zone

Thank you very much for your consideration of this grant proposal.

In His Service,

Rev. Dr. Scott Sommerfeld
CCF Dir. of Mission Advancement
scottsommerfeld@concordiafamily.org
616.437.1891



FAMILY MINISTRY VS. FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP: THE HEART OF **ALL** MINISTRY

REV. DR. TODD A. BIERMANN

TBIERMANN@GMAIL.COM 810-771-8837

EXECUTIVE DIR. ELECT & DIR. OF FAMILY DISCIPLESHIP
CONCORDIA CENTER FOR THE FAMILY

