

# THE SWORD

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## Concordia Divided

By Katrina Bell

According to its Promise Statement, Concordia University is a place where “Christ is honored and all are welcome.” A recent event on campus has sparked a debate amongst students as to what this truly means, specifically in regards to student sexuality.

Concordia student Nikki Hagan, former message coordinator of 908 (a student-led chapel service), recently came out as bisexual in October 2015. After Nikki’s announcement of a relationship with another woman in November 2015, the President of 908 decided to consult University Pastor Tom Gundermann and Shelly Schwalm, Concordia’s Director of Church relations and Ministry Associate, regarding his feelings and concerns with a homosexual woman holding a leadership position on a worship-focused organization. As a future pastor, this student turned to Pastor Tom and Shelly Schwalm seeking guidance on whether or not he could support Hagan to continue in her role.

Gundermann stated that during the meeting they came to an agreement on the Biblical understanding and parameters of sexuality. And while there was an agreement that Hagan should step down from her position, he also divulged, “Were we on the same page as far as a process or timeline, or end result? No.”

Gundermann agreed with The president of 908’s actions, but he regrets not making it, “more of a process and involving more people.” According to Gundermann, “A proper process could have taken a few months.” The president of 908 has no comments about how the meeting ended. But following the meeting, he spoke to Hagan alone, specifically asking her to resign her position.

Hagan stated, “I really had no choice. Even if I had said no, I would have had to resign.” Gundermann has since apologized publicly and privately to Hagan and others about how the situation was handled.

Many Concordia students are speaking out about the situation, asking for change on campus through a movement entitled the #IStandwithNikki Project. The movement has been gaining increased

publicity, beginning with an online petition that calls to “stop institutionalized discrimination against people’s innate human traits. This needs to be carefully considered at Concordia–Saint Paul, through open communication and changes in the [student–handbook].” Information about the #IStandwithNikki Project can be found at [cspstudent.wix.com/istandwithnikki](http://cspstudent.wix.com/istandwithnikki).

Stickers and T-shirts with the collective trending hashtags have gone around the university and beyond, a gofundme account has raised more than \$600 in support of the movement, and conversations and panels have been hosted to talk about the issue with some of the student body. A rally/march was held on Friday December 4th on the outskirts of campus where around 50 students marched and protested. The movement has also gained local attention, landing stories in the Pioneer Press and the Star Tribune.

Other students disagree with this movement’s requests, encouraging the university to retain the traditional Lutheran Church--Missouri Synod (LCMS) teachings and values that the university was built upon. These students have been holding on campus prayer sessions at various days and times in an effort to talk, pray, and support one another in their beliefs.

President Tom Ries addressed the issue in a campus-wide message stating that, “First, [Concordia] love[s] all of our students...Second, [Concordia] affirm[s] the biblical teaching that God’s creative intent is for sexuality to be expressed between one man and one woman in a marriage relationship...I see opportunities for us to review student handbook policies and craft a student support group that is respectful of the needs of all our students.”

Concordia is governed by a board of regents. The LCMS is the parent organization of Concordia that owns the University. The Lutheran Church Missouri-Synod, the second largest Lutheran church body in North America, holds onto traditional values all within the context of the Christian Gospel.

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