



10 Minutes with a DCO



What does a DCO do?

We spoke to Phil, a DCO at a Lutheran congregation in Colorado, about what it's like to be a Director of Christian Outreach. Here's what he shared:

1 *What are your primary tasks as a DCO?*

My main task is helping members of all ages develop the awareness and skills that will make them more effective in sharing their faith in Jesus Christ. Along with this I coordinate the new member assimilation process, teach some adult Bible study classes, and coordinate the congregation's community contact efforts.

Some DCOs work more with youth programs, inactive ministry, stewardship, small group development, or other congregational outreach ministries. Others may end up overseas or in cross-cultural ministry here in the States.

I often tell people that my main responsibility is to be an advocate in our congregation for the unchurched, and to train other advocates. I believe a major responsibility of my job is to look at every aspect of our congregation's ministry with "outreach eyes" and suggest ways that we can better communicate the Gospel to, and welcome, those who are not yet members.

2 *Describe your typical work day.*

My typical work day may include some teaching, a one-on-one discussion with someone who is seeking out a church home, sending letters to those who have visited our worship service, placing an ad in the local newspaper advertising a congregational event, or visiting the home of a person who is struggling in their relationship with Jesus and desperately wants some basic answers about the Christian faith. I may be preparing a weekend workshop on developing witness skills or a planning retreat for developing a congregational mission statement or preparing an agenda for a ministry team meeting.

The truth is I have no typical workday! However, I do have some constants. One constant is making the effort to model outreach for someone else in order to train them to do what I do. Another constant is professional growth. Reading a variety of books and journals, attending workshops, talking regularly with other people working in the areas of outreach and assimilation are absolute necessities if I am to continue to grow and encourage the people I serve to grow. And learning how to plan and think strategically is crucial too.

3 *What is the greatest challenge of your profession?*

My greatest challenge is to keep the main thing the main thing! It is so easy to become engrossed in the many and various activities that I lose sight of the main thing – outreach! Any organization follows

a natural tendency to focus on itself and the needs of its members. I have had to learn to be firm in my self-evaluation and self-motivation when it comes to keeping an outreach focus in front of the congregation as the purpose for all of our activity. It isn't natural or easy for most congregations to make decisions and carry out ministry activities with the unchurched in mind. I have to maintain that outreach focus in my personal life and ministry so that I can lovingly ask the tough questions that will help the congregation maintain a proper balance and perspective in all of their activities.

4 *What is the greatest reward of your profession?*

My greatest reward is when I see, what I call, the "light bulb" experience in another person. When someone learns for the first time what a relationship with Jesus is all about, or what unconditional love really means. Or when a member of the congregation comes away from a visit with a guest, overflowing with joy and excitement from seeing the Holy Spirit work through God's Word to change that person's life. These are all "light bulb" experiences, and there is nothing like them! Their joy becomes my joy because I see people changed as God brings us together through the sharing of His Good News. I love being a part of that process!

5 *What kind of training does it take to become a DCO?*

I attended the 5-year DCO program at Concordia University in St. Paul, Minnesota. Even though St. Paul is the only Concordia to offer the DCO program, you could transfer there after two years of study elsewhere. You formally enter the DCO program in your junior year, choosing from three majors: cross-cultural ministry, parish ministry and Bible translation. Besides classroom work there is a 9-12 month internship that usually happens after your junior year. People who already have degrees can take a shortened period of study and practice to become a DCO.

6 *What is the average starting salary for a DCO?*

Salaries for DCOs are as varied as the jobs they do! Much depends on years of experience, standard of living in the area, responsibilities, etc. Average starting salary in my area of work is approximately \$26,000, plus medical coverage and other benefits.

7 *How many hours do you work during a typical week?*

The number of hours I work may vary from week to week; however, I estimate that I spend between 50 and 60 hours a week “on the job.” Because many of my hours are in the evening, I try to keep my time flexible so I can more easily meet the needs of my family.

The challenge is choosing one full day each week to take off and really sticking to that. Because my time demands often change, so does the number of hours spent at work, and when those hours occur.

8 *How does your job affect your family life?*

This is difficult to measure because my family has never known anything else. Many close friendships have developed over the years and I wouldn’t want it any other way. The one challenge my wife and I have faced is to set reasonable standards for our children’s involvement in the life of the congregation that were not based on anybody’s expectations but our own.

The flexibility of my hours has been a blessing at times, allowing me time during the day to attend a school function or other special event that I would not have the opportunity to do with a “9-to-5” type job.

As in any ministry position there have been both positive and negative aspects to being the family of a staff member, but I think they would agree that the positives have far outweighed the negatives.

9 *In what ways are you able to help others as a DCO?*

God has blessed me over the years with the opportunity to be with people at the time when they first enter into a new, redeemed relationship with Him through Jesus Christ. I have been able to watch those people grow and mature in the faith, to the point where they discover that God has saved them for a purpose – to share what they have been given with someone else who needs it. I have been blessed to see the seeds planted in a Bible study or workshop bear fruit in changed lives – not just for the hearer but for the people that they in turn are able to reach through their everyday relationships. I have seen individuals that have studied God’s word grow in their ability to verbalize “the hope that they have within them.” My greatest joy is seeing the Good News of Jesus Christ spread from father to child, from neighbor to neighbor, from friend to friend, with the results that lives are changed and God is glorified.

10 *And now a question for you . . .*

Have you considered that God might be calling you to serve the church as a DCO? Here are some steps you might take to help you answer that question.

- Talk to your congregation’s pastor. He’s there to give you the guidance and support that you need.
- Call the DCO office at Concordia, St. Paul, Minn., for more information about the training it takes to be a DCO: 1-800-333-4705
- Contact a DCO directly with your questions or thoughts by sending an e-mail to Phil at dco@peacelutheran.net.
- Ask God to grant you guidance as you consider ways in which you can serve His church.

What are some of the characteristics of a DCO?

- A love for people
- A passion for reaching the lost with the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- A desire to serve God in an outreach ministry
- A desire to get others excited about outreach
- Knowledge of the Bible and Christian doctrine
- An ability to teach and to work in a team
- Energy, creativity, and a sense of humor

Where do I go to prepare for a church work career?

Concordia University
Ann Arbor, Michigan
800-253-0680
www.cuaa.edu

Concordia University
Portland, Oregon
800-321-9371
www.cu-portland.edu

Concordia University
Austin, Texas
800-865-4282
www.concordia.edu

Concordia University
River Forest, Illinois
800-285-2668
www.curf.edu

Concordia College
Bronxville, New York
800-937-2655
www.concordia-ny.edu

Concordia University
St. Paul, Minnesota
800-333-4705
www.csp.edu

Concordia University
Irvine, California
800-229-1200
www.cui.edu

Concordia College
Selma, Alabama
334-874-5700
www.concordiaselma.edu

Concordia University
Mequon, Wisconsin
888-628-9472
www.cuw.edu

Concordia University
Seward, Nebraska
800-535-5494
www.cune.edu

Concordia Seminary
St. Louis, Missouri
800-822-9545
www.csl.edu

Concordia Theological Seminary
Fort Wayne, Indiana
800-481-2155
www.ctsfw.edu

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The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod
1-800-248-1930, Ext. 1254
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