NEW FOOD AND CLOTHING CO-OP
PROVIDING FOR FUTURE PASTORS AND DEACONESSES

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you." (Matthew 6:31–33)

The Food and Clothing Co-op at Concordia Theological Seminary, Fort Wayne (CTSFW), plays a critical role in easing the anxieties of seminary students and their families, who typically leave behind friends, other family members, and a steady source of income to study at CTSFW.

The Co-op, open to all CTSFW students, provides food, clothing, and household items at no charge. Students volunteer service time for the privilege of shopping.

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"For most of our students and their families, we can meet 70–95% of their needs," says Deaconess Katherine Rittner, who has served as director of the Co-op for eight years. "When I talk to prospective and incoming students, especially the wives, you can see the fear and uncertainty lift when they hear that."

The Co-op began in 1976 as a food bank in the basement of a home owned by seminarian Paul Miller and his wife, Karen. Today, the Co-op occupies two spaces on campus, neither of which was designed for that purpose. The Food Co-op, set up like a small grocery store, is located on the lower level of the Student Commons. The Clothing Co-op is in Spiegel Hall, a former dormitory, and has fourteen shopping areas on multiple levels.

The shelves and storerooms in both places are overflowing, thanks to generous donations of perishable and non-perishable food items, clothing, household items, and monetary gifts from individuals and organizations such as the LWML (Lutheran Women's Missionary League), congregations, and VBS and school groups.

"The love and support from the greater Fort Wayne area and around the country is overwhelming," says Rittner. "I get three to four emails a week from donors about things they'd like to send us."

A New Home for the Co-op

As CTSFW moves ahead with plans to enhance the residential experience, one of its first projects will be a new Co-op, a space where everything will be under one roof on a single level.

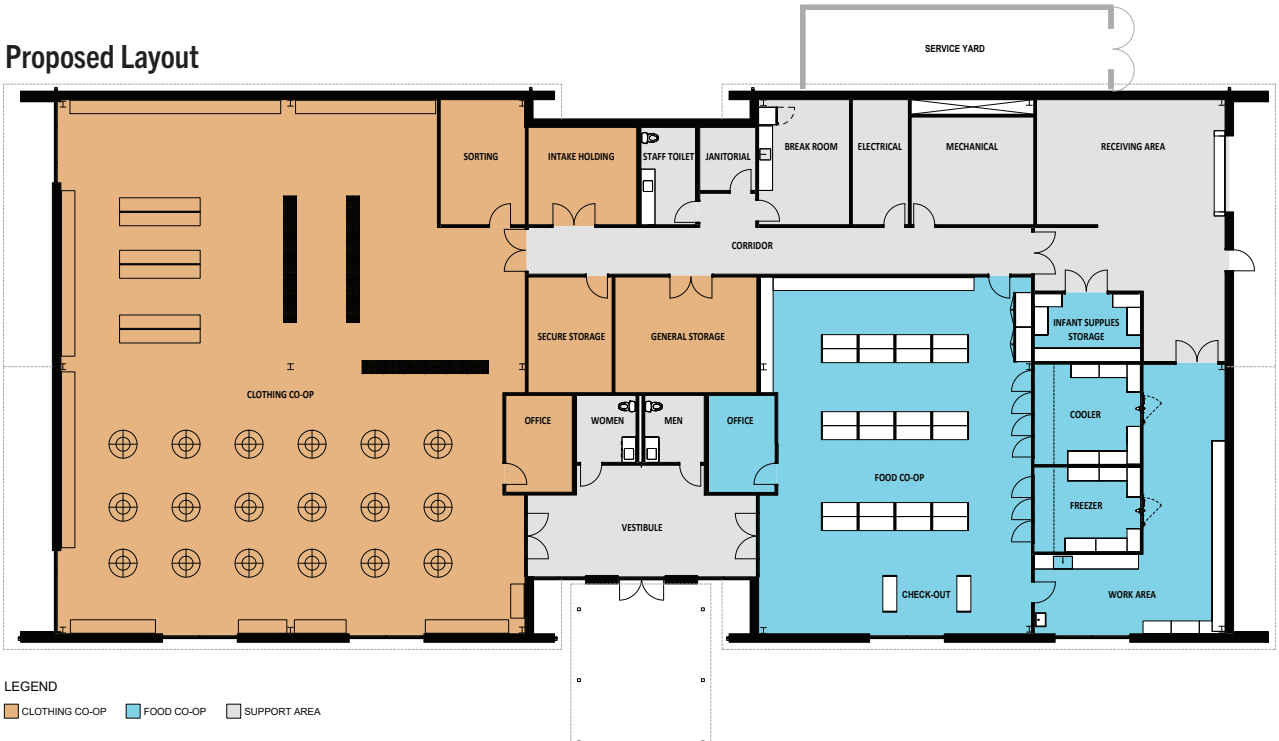
Rittner lights up when looking at the Co-op plans that hang on her office wall. "We'll have one department in one location. We'll be able to work together as a staff on receiving and processing large donations. It's hard to have the director in one place and the assistant director in another."

She's also looking forward to having no more stairs to navigate, which is currently a challenge in both Co-op

Architectural Rendering

Renderings: Design Collaborative

Proposed Layout



spaces. “Everything on one level! That will help so much with strollers, and parents won’t have to worry about little ones going up and down steps,” says Rittner.

The experience for shoppers will be much improved, with far more space for displaying and browsing the wealth of donated items, and shoppers and donors alike will benefit from plentiful parking next to the building.

If all goes well, construction of the new Co-op will begin sometime in 2026.

“This has been a dream since before I arrived on the campus almost twenty years ago,” said Rittner. “To be able to carry on the tradition of showing grace, support and love to our future pastors and deaconesses in such a functional and grand way is beyond imagination. I can't wait!”

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Co-op Provisions

Below are just a few examples of what the Food and Clothing Co-op is able to provide to students, thanks to the generosity of donors. (Data from July 2023–June 2024)

- 1,920 gallons of milk
- 1,635 dozen eggs
- 20,003 lbs. of fresh fruit and produce
- 8,857 lbs. of pork
- 438 lbs. of beef

Students say …

"When I learned about the support services offered by the seminary–especially the Food and Clothing Co-op, my fears, and those of my wife, were greatly alleviated. The blessings of the Co-op far surpassed our initial expectations! Our grocery budget, which grew tighter and tighter after we arrived in 2021, was significantly eased by the Food Co-op's consistent assortment of staples. The Clothing Co-op was a veritable treasure hunt. It kept my (constantly growing) family clothed and made our seminary rental feel like home."

Nathan Raugutt
2025 MDiv Graduate

"Being from so far away, with no family or friends nearby, I was anxious when I moved to the seminary, entering a very different culture and community. I have found support at every turn, including the Food and Clothing Co-op. I hail from the Pacific Northwest, where winters are very mild, so I was grateful for the generous donations of sweaters and winter coats, which helped me endure my first experience with temperatures below zero and wind that cuts like a knife."

Brenna McGuire
Deaconess Intern

To support the new Co-op and other master plan projects, visit ctsfw.edu/support or scan the QR code. If you'd prefer, you may mail a gift or call CTSFW Advancement at (877) 287-4338.

Donaton Day

Food Co-op

Food Co-op

Clothing Co-op