

Interviewee: Kermit Moldenhauer	Division: Music
Years of service to MLC: 22	Years of service to the church at large: 46

Bode: Good afternoon, Professor Moldenhauer.

Moldenhauer: Good afternoon.

Bode: Thank you for agreeing to this interview. You're concluding 46 years of service to the church at large, of which 22 were served in the music department at Dr. Martin Luther College and Martin Luther College, right?

Moldenhauer: Actually, it was Martin Luther College in 1995. (Bode: OK) It was at the time of the amalgamation, so that the name was Martin Luther College at that time.

Bode: Thank you. How many of those years did you serve as their chair?

Moldenhauer: Nine and a half.

Bode: That's fantastic.

Moldenhauer: Yes, I served part of a term finishing up for Wayne Wagner, and then I served two full terms after that. So that was nine and a half.

Bode: Alright. What was your greatest concern when you began your teaching career?

Moldenhauer: Can I do this? (Bode: Sounds right.) Will I be able to do this? We joked when we graduated, my classmates and I, when the administration met with us for the last time on the campus, we said as we went into the meeting, "I wonder if they're going to tell us the secret of teaching today?" (Bode: OK) And they did not. So we went out searching for it.

Bode: So, your concern was justified?

Moldenhauer: Well, yes, I think a typical first year. But we found—we were called to St. Stephen's, Beaver Dam [Wisconsin]—and we found some wonderful friends and mentors, and I think because of them we survived the first year.

Bode: Christian community is wonderful!

Moldenhauer: It is wonderful. We made some very close friends and some dear colleagues.

Bode: Was it different for you when you started at DMLC?

Moldenhauer: You mean as a student?

Bode: As to your concerns?

Moldenhauer: Oh, my concerns. I think we were too young to realize what we were getting into. I think we knew what we wanted to teach, but we had no idea what we were really getting into. So, I think we were typical high school seniors coming in, saying, "Oh, this'll be fun."

Bode: Ok. What in your time in the ministry makes you want to recommend ministry to others?

Moldenhauer: I think probably those times when the Lord gave you a little, little window into His work—the work of the Holy Spirit—and you would see or hear someone speak about the Gospel and their appreciation for having found it. And sometimes that was a student, and sometimes it was somebody listening to your choir. Those are really the special moments. Just a little window into what is going on in the spiritual realm that we can't see.

Bode: I think especially when people have the courage to tell you.

Moldenhauer: Yeah, when they do—and that doesn't happen all that often, but those are really special moments.

Bode: So, what was your favorite, or not favorite, course to teach, and why?

Moldenhauer: Oh, the favorites are very easy: College Choir, directing the College Choir, became a huge part of my life. (Bode: College Choir is both men and women?) It's both men and women, yep. That ministry of taking the Gospel out in song—that became just a huge part of my life and something I would look forward to doing every single day. It was just wonderful. The other one is Lutheran Worship, teaching Lutheran Worship. I think I accepted the call mainly because of Lutheran Worship, teaching Lutheran Worship. My call here was to start a men's choir on campus and to teach Lutheran Worship, and then, as all calls are, to do whatever else needs to be done. (Bode: Yes.) But I think I accepted the call mainly because of Lutheran Worship, to be able to teach that.

Bode: Tell me a little bit about Lutheran Worship, just a little bit.

Moldenhauer: Sure. Lutheran Worship is a course that teaches the theology that stands behind our worship practice, and it's for all the education majors on the campus and the staff ministry majors on the campus. So, it would touch a lot of students, and it was fun to see some light bulbs go on as we talked about that. A combination of theology and practice in worship. It was something very, very unique to the campus and a privilege to teach that.

Bode: Excellent. What major changes have you seen at MLC during your time here? (Moldenhauer: Changes at MLC? And how do you evaluate them?) Yes, or see them, yes?

Moldenhauer: I suppose the biggest change, the very biggest, was the introduction of licensure on the campus and the impact that that had on the whole curriculum and the whole school. I mean, it is such a dramatic shift from 1995 until now. I suppose my evaluation is mixed on that. I understand that out in the field, parents are looking for teachers with qualifications, and they look to licensure as part of that qualification. But on the downside, I think the faculty spends more time talking about licensure than about ministry. And I know no one really thinks this, but if you listen to the amount of talk, it seems like ministry takes a back seat to licensure—just about the amount of words that are spent in a meeting or so forth. So, I am a little worried about that shift as far as the school, I mean I don't think it's in any danger, but it just seems like a definite shift to me. I guess one of those concerns I have. So, that was a huge change.

Bode: It sounds like it, yes.

Moldenhauer: I suppose the other big change was the way the institution handles administration; the introduction of the structure of vice-presidents and academic deans. That all changed between 1995 and now, and that whole—the whole governance thing—changed on campus. So, and again, there are pluses and minuses. I think it's much more efficient than it was. On the other end of it, I don't know that the faculty has as much say about what goes on on the campus as we used to. So, it's pluses and minuses.

Bode: I would say there's truth in that as well. That's a great insight. So, let's pick a favorite memory. You can either choose, or tell me both, student or professor.

Moldenhauer: Can I give you an event? (Bode: Absolutely.) The choir tour to Mexico was by far one of the big, big highlights. (Bode: What year was that?) That was 2008, and we took the choir to Mexico and sang some concerts in Mexico, and the reaction of the people in Mexico to us being there was kind of overwhelming. Overwhelmingly positive. The students came back from that trip and the talk on the bus was all about mission work, doing mission work. So I felt like we came back with 60 missionaries in the bus. So, to see that happen with the students and to hear the reaction of the people out in the field, that was really very, very special.

Bode: Did you have any music in Spanish?

Moldenhauer: We did, we did. We had a few things in Spanish and we also had asked the pastors in Mexico what the favorite hymn of the Mexicans, of the Mexican Lutherans, what is their favorite hymn. Without blinking an eye, they said "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." Which I was not prepared for. I was thinking that it would be a Spanish hymn, but it was "What a Friend We Have in Jesus." So, we programmed "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" for that tour, and in the concerts, especially one in Torreon, Mexico, we were singing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," and we're doing this in English, but behind me, unannounced and uninvited, are people singing along in Spanish. (Bode: Fabulous!) It was marvelous, it was one of those memorable moments that will live with you.

Bode: So, speaking of the music, how do you go about picking music for your choirs?

Moldenhauer: That's a good question. So, I have a couple parameters: I suppose the first one is, the Gospel has to be there—it must have enough content. I tell students in Lutheran Worship or in conducting classes, if you pick something that you are going to put into somebody else's memory bank, it better be worthwhile of being there. So, how much Gospel content is there, or how does it fit into a program of Gospel? That's probably the highest. And then on the music end, I would always look for things that I knew they could do easily, but then also some things that would stretch them beyond what they thought they could do. To do both ends, so that there was a variety of things they could do. So that kind of breadth of music, and then styles of music within that, and then kind of over-arching all of that is the Gospel here in all of this.

Bode: Do you think your style has changed from 1995?

Moldenhauer: As far as picking music? Well, I supposed some of it reflects what's published today, compared to what was published back in 1995, and that has changed. The choral world has changed a lot, and I think programming has reflected that. I think having variety in the program, that probably hasn't changed. You know—to have some historic things, some favorites of the people that are coming to listen, and having some brand new things, some brand new sounds—I don't think that's changed. That part's stayed the same.

Bode: I understand that we are humble Christians, but I still want to ask. One or two of your proudest professional accomplishments—after all, we have to have some goals. So what are some things you think of that you're happy have occurred?

Moldenhauer: Well, one was to be involved with the chapel on the campus, building the new chapel on the MLC campus. (Bode: Oh, yes!) I was privileged to serve as chair for that and to be involved with that project that is now a permanent part of the campus. That was quite the privilege, to be able to be part of that. So, I suppose that's kind of high on my list, if I think back, of things that are memorable. I suppose the other one might be a composition, "Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands," which is an Easter hymn that's a new tune for an old hymn that has gotten some use in the church body. I suppose that's kind of fun to hear.

Bode: Oh yes, certainly. Anything else that you'd like to share with us?

Moldenhauer: Oh, I think that's enough!

Bode: Alright. So, your plans for retirement?

Moldenhauer: My plans for retirement. Well, we are moving to Waupaca, Wisconsin. (Bode: Family there?) Yeah, my wife has some relatives within the area, some siblings. But a bigger issue for us is to be within driving distance of Luther Prep School, because we have grandchildren there or will have. We have grandchildren there now, and will have grandchildren there for quite a while. And we have a son in Madison—also wanted to be within driving distance of him. And then, we like the area. So, we're

moving. And so being parents away for grandkids away from home is one of our new roles in life, I think. (Bode: It's an excellent role.) Good, that's glad to hear. And then I'm actually hoping to do some writing, some composing, that I haven't been able to do because of other duties. (Bode: Good for you!) And I'm a woodworker, so I have . . . my list has grown considerably since announcing retirement. My wife has added to it and my kids have added to it.

Bode: So you need a house where you can do woodworking, is that right?

Moldenhauer: That's right! That's right! That's right!

Bode: That sounds wonderful.

Moldenhauer: We're looking forward to it.

Bode: Sounds like retirement will be filled.

Moldenhauer: I think so, I think so.

Bode: Well, Kermit, we on the campus, and I personally, wish you God's richest blessings, both you and Laura in whatever's coming ahead and the things that you are going to do for the church. Anyone who gets you is going to be blessed.

Moldenhauer: Well, thank you! Thank you kindly.

Bode: Thank you!

Moldenhauer: You're welcome.

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