

Interviewee: Chip Rupnow	Division: Mathematics / Science
Years of service to MLC: 17	Years of service to the church at large: 33

Bode: This is an interview with retired Professor Kenneth Rupnow, recorded on July 10, 2017, by Interim Archivist Lois Bode. Good afternoon, Professor Rupnow.

Rupnow: Hi Lois, how are you?

Bode: I'm fine. Thanks for joining me today. The Martin Luther College Archives also thanks you for agreeing to share your thoughts on an impressive 33 years (have I got that right?) of teaching ministry. I want to ask to begin—because I'd like to know and I'm certainly sure others do—other than Dr. Rupnow, why are you called Chip rather than, say, Kenneth or perhaps Ken?

Rupnow: My dad was also Kenneth. He was Kenneth Arnold and I'm Kenneth Clay, so I wasn't a junior, but we thought it would be less confusing in the household, with two Kenneths running around, to have a nickname, and so . . . I looked just like my dad, and from birth I was a "chip off the ol block" and so I always grew up being called Chip, rather than Ken. In fact, I usually don't even respond to Ken, because that's my dad.

Bode: Perfect. As a database manager I really like that, that you're called something different from your dad. So, Chip, you have just completed a teaching career that includes not only (now I've got that wrong) 17 years teaching mathematics in the math/science division of Martin Luther College, but an additional 14 years at Bethany and Wisconsin Lutheran Colleges. You are unique in beginning your career by teaching high school mathematics to Martin Luther Academy students, on the same campus from which you are now recently retired. Tell us about your years of service.

Rupnow: I was actually sick in my senior year at Dr. Martin Luther College, and so I had to come back for one more quarter. And as soon as I finished that one quarter, there was a need at Martin Luther Academy, because the teacher who was there at the time, Al Just, took a call to Arizona—but stipulated that he would only go after football season. And so they needed somebody for the last three quarters of the year, and I look back and say that the Lord's hand was in this—that I was sick for that quarter of my senior year, so that when the time came for them needing a math teacher for three quarters of a year, I was ready to step in and teach. And I enjoyed that, but I do have to say that there were some unique challenges in stepping into a set of courses that somebody has taught the first quarter, and now you are picking up. We had actually one week of turnaround, where the first couple of days I watched him teach, the last day he watched me teach, and in between we kind of did the hand-off. (Bode: Wow!) But it made for one week we had of layover between the two of us. So, that was a real unique experience in trying to figure out what he was doing in his class and what things I could continue, and then what things I had to do differently, because I would be more comfortable.

Bode: What class was it?

Rupnow: I was teaching the sophomore level Geometry course to—I think there were a couple sections of that, and then I also had a senior level Algebra 2 course that I was teaching. And in that sophomore level course, by the way, I had Paul Koelpin, I had Ross Stelljes, and I had Cathy Schubkegel then—Cathy Biedenbender now. So, three people with a connection to this campus, all from that first class that I taught of Geometry. (Bode: Wow, Okay.) Then, after I got through with that situation, and by the way, I was just too young and naïve to know any better, that this isn't the way it works. This was my first call. So I thought this was just the way it works, you walk in a quarter into the school year and just start teaching. But I look at that now and think how crazy that was, to take somebody's classroom at that point, yet it can be done with the Lord's blessing and it worked fine. (Bode: Indeed.) Then after that I went back to grad school for a while, and my next call was at Manitowoc Lutheran High School. That was probably my most challenging year of ministry. In the first place, I'm a math person, and I had some kind of math courses that were not particularly challenging to teach, but I had some very challenging science courses, which isn't really my thing. So it was more science than math. I felt a little bit out of my element that year, but we did it for a year, and again the Lord blessed the work that I did. I was thankful that the Lord did bless my efforts there. At the same time, I felt this really was not me. I didn't see myself continuing there. It was a one-year call, which had possibility of renewal, and I did not ask for it to be renewed.

Bode: But you still were fairly certain you wanted to be a teacher of some sort?

Rupnow: Yes, well, I actually at that point applied for a position at—I was in my master's program at Oshkosh at that time—and I applied for a position at St. Norbert College in De Pere [Wisconsin] and taught there for one year, and had really excellent support from the people in the department. It was a department that was well known for excellence in math, and drawing lots of people from their student body into the math major, and doing all kinds of unique activities with students. It gave me all kinds of wonderful ideas to use later in my ministry.

Bode: So that sounds like a great transition school, considering you just went from high school into a college level. Would you agree?

Rupnow: Yes, it was my first chance to teach Calculus, for instance, and again with people there who I could ask questions of, that I thought a lot of, that were very excellent mathematicians, and could really learn on the job while I was there. So it was a good experience. I actually taught Calculus 1 there before I had had a course in Calculus 3 elsewhere, which is not the ideal way to do things, but it worked. And that kind of whetted my appetite for teaching college. At that point I said, "This is really where I think the Lord would have me serve." So then I went and got further—did further—degree work, got a degree in mathematics from Marquette and wanted to teach in college at that point. Sent my resume out to a bunch of places, actually had a couple of job offers that I could have accepted. One of them I actually had in hand and was considering when there was an ad in the old Northwestern Lutheran for a teacher in math at Bethany Lutheran College. And so I said "no" to the other opportunity and applied at Bethany instead, and ended up getting that position. That was—I was back in our circles again and really had, as far I was concerned, I had reached my goal at that point, to be able to teach math in one of our colleges.

Bode: You're teaching mathematics at this point?

Rupnow: Yes, that was all math, yes, and a variety of courses I had. I think that's the only time in my life I've taught differential equations, but that was fun.

Bode: The reason I ask that, it's not "teaching mathematics"—how to do that—it's teaching mathematics. Have I said that correctly?

Rupnow: Yes, yes. I was teaching mathematics. Not math ed, it was mathematics.

Bode: Ok, that's right, math education. Right, that would be the phrase I was looking for. Okay.

Rupnow: I was teaching math. And the uniqueness of Bethany was, at that point it was a 2-year school. It isn't anymore, but it was at that point a 2-year school. So you'd have people that would transfer into all kinds of other programs—engineering, you know, things like that—at other institutions, and I thought they were really an excellent 2-year college. I really enjoyed the experience there. And again, being in our fellowship again was nice. Unique to that time was the fact that not everybody was of our fellowship who was teaching there. I think they have since tried to point more in a direction of getting all of their faculty members to be in our fellowship, but at that time that wasn't true. But still some wonderful people to work with and it was a good experience. I taught there four years (Bode: Okay.) and enjoyed that very much. And then the opportunity came, and I'm trying to remember exactly how this happened, but I think they just called me to come down for an interview, if I remember right—WLC, Wisconsin Lutheran College. And I went down and this was kind of out of the blue, it happened during the summer. In fact, the call came while we were on a vacation and I never realized they had called until we were back in town, back in Mankato, and then once I got the information I went down and I did do an interview with them, and they offered me a call to teach at WLC.

Bode: When you say we, you're talking about you and your wife, Judy?

Rupnow: Yes, right. At that point Rachel was just born, too, our daughter. (Bode: Oh, Okay.) She was just born in May—or I'm sorry, March—of that year, so it was that summer that I got the call. And so we ended up going down to, we lived in West Allis, and we taught—I taught—at WLC then for 10 years. And I told you we were in our fellowship before at Bethany, which was true; we were back in the WELS again once I got to WLC, and that was a really nice experience too. I enjoyed my years there. While I was there, they also required that I get a doctorate, so I had the opportunity to do that while I was teaching there and polish that off in a setting where it was handy (Bode: Wonderful!) with Marquette right up the road. That was really kind of nice, to be able to be that close. (Bode: Yes, especially with a new baby.) Right, yeah. And that was when I got the call to . . . I was going to mention to you, too, some of the things that I really appreciated about these institutions. Bethany, I thought, had incredible closeness of faculty at the time. Even after basketball games, we had parties together where the faculty would show up and—it—they had a very, very close-knit campus, both with students and faculty. I thought that was really one of the strengths of that institution. WLC had some incredible talent in terms of academic ability that they had attracted from all kinds of different places. People who came out of, in some cases,

non-academic settings, but really some good ability. And I also enjoyed living in Milwaukee. Being the sports fan I am, there were chances to go see lots of Brewers games and things like that. A bunch of the faculty members even had season tickets and I'd go with them sometimes. So there was, those were . . . (Bode: So baseball, more that football?) Yeah, there it was. (Bode: Okay. Just had to clear that up.) That was a good opportunity to teach there and I enjoyed those years. When I got the—sorry, what were you going to say?

Bode: Did you play baseball at DMLC?

Rupnow: No, I didn't. (Bode: No, you didn't. Alright.) I was actually a football manager. (Bode: Oh, okay.) Coach Gorsline, back then, said when I was a freshman, "I think you could make a good football manager." It came out of the blue. I never had thought of anything like that, but he approached me and I enjoyed that a lot in my years here. Years later, I was doing PA for football in the years at MLC before I left. So that's really kind of where my bulk of the football years started. (Bode: Alright.) Lots of years involved with MLC football, for sure. At WLC I did basketball regularly, PA. In fact . . . (Bode: PA is?) Public address announcer. (Bode: Oh, okay.) Announcing the starting lineups. (Bode: You didn't do statistics for them either?) I did stats when I was a football manager on this campus. (Bode: Okay.) No, I did the PA work. (Bode: Okay.) In fact, I had done that at Manitowoc when I taught there too, and at—did I do it a little bit at MLA? I'm trying to remember—Martin Luther Academy. I think I did there, too. I think I've done that pretty much everywhere I've been.

Bode: The Lord uses our gifts in many ways, I see.

Rupnow: Yes, yeah. Well, one of the things I dreamed of as a kid was getting into radio, and I didn't go there, but this gave me a chance to do those kinds of things that I wanted to do, even though I didn't pursue that path. So the Lord uses those things, like you say, and I appreciated that. When I was ready to—I had a call to MLC in 2010—and one of the memories I wanted to mention with doing PA at WLC is that as I had the call and was considering it, I have a really warm memory of—at a basketball game—doing PA, and during the game the student body on the other side of the stands broke into a chant of, "Stay, Chip, stay. Stay, Chip, stay," which really touched me at the time. (Bode: This was at WLC?) At WLC. (Bode: Okay. Now, you said—I thought you said—2010. Did you mean the call was at 2000?) I meant 2000—2000, yes—sorry, 2000. (Bode: Okay. Don't want to confuse our people here. Okay.) 2000 is correct. (Bode: Alright.) And as I was considering this, that just really touched me. (Bode: Wow, yes.) In the end result, the Holy Spirit had other ideas and I came up here, but it took some getting to—for that to happen too. As I was considering the call here, the original call had in it teaching a math, doing a teaching math course, and I . . . (Bode: So back to math education?) Right, and that just, honestly, I looked into it as much as I could—talked with people who were in math ed, and the more I looked at this, I said "this isn't me." If this is the call, I can't reasonably consider this. And I talked to the department head here at that time and said, "I'm not trying to put pressure on this at all. I do have respect for the call and I will consider it whatever way you want to do this, but I can't reasonably consider the call under those circumstances." And they did clarify then, that this would be just for math courses, not math ed. (Bode: Okay.) Then it made it possible to look at this in a whole different way and the Holy Spirit did lead me to come here then.

Bode: And it is important when you have a call that you look at the gifts that the Lord has given you and then select the call where you're going to be strongest.

Rupnow: Right, yeah. And like I said, I would not have felt that could have been the case here, if that was in it. But the Lord led all that the way it was supposed to be. On this campus I have appreciated the one direction that everybody has. You do have that oneness of purpose here that is unique to this campus, as opposed to any of them that I've served on, because everybody here is contending to get into church work in the future. (Bode: I see.) That's exciting, working with people who are heading in that direction. Now, having the opportunity to look back and see that some of the people that were my students—good example would be Tyson Zarnstorff, who was one of my students, and now he's called to teach at Martin Luther College, starting this fall. (Bode: Wow!) Or Sarah Sherod at the time, now Sarah Gierach, who's teaching up in the Twin Cities in one of our high schools—you know there are people that you've had opportunity to work with that are now math teachers themselves. That's very rewarding, to look back and see that.

Bode: That's a lot of experience in teaching math. If you could only teach—of all those years—one course, what would it be?

Rupnow: My favorite course to teach was the Calculus Based Statistics course (Bode: Oh!) because it required knowledge of the whole calculus sequence and statistics. It was a fairly . . . it would proof—good amount of proof in the course—very . . . I guess I always looked at the beauty of the mathematics as the key thing. You could probably say there are other courses that had more applicability to daily life, or whatever, but I always enjoyed that one very much, just seeing how some of these things—for example, when you're figuring out a standard deviation, why do you divide by n minus 1, instead of n ? Why not just the sample size? It seems logical that it would be the sample size. Without going into all the details, which I'd have to have you be in that course to understand, the point is (Bode: Thank you! Thank you!) when you get in that course, you can understand it. (Bode: Yes, yes.) And that's what the beauty was, to be able to finally say, "Oh, this is why we've done this all these years." (Bode: Right.) And there were a number of those times during that course, where you can say, "This is the reason we do this."

Bode: That's one of the things I like about mathematics. It is logical. I mean, really, when you study it, there is a great deal of logic to it. We Lutherans are taught to be humble about our—any—achievements. Yet you've frequently, during this conversation, talked about the blessings of the Lord and the gifts that you have that He's used in various ways, so I really need to ask, what are one or two of your proudest professional accomplishments?

Rupnow: One I just mentioned a little while ago, and that's the people who follow after you that you've hopefully had some influence on and now are carrying on teaching mathematics. (Bode: Yes.) That, to me, is something that I'm very pleased to see. I would say I have always felt that the beauty of mathematics is the thing for me. I think there are many strong people on this campus who can articulate, "How do I use this in my elementary school or in my high school classroom?" And it's a wonderful blessing that they're here and can do that. I did not feel that was my strength. I always felt

that my strength was appreciating the beauty of the mathematics, going to math conferences regularly to get new appreciations of that, and sharing those in the classroom. I think that—at least I have heard from some people that they come back and say—they could catch my enthusiasm for the mathematics. And when I hear that I'm excited, because I feel like that's what I'm trying to communicate.

Bode: That is a great thing to have, enthusiasm for what you're doing. I agree. Is there anything else you'd like to share with us?

Rupnow: Just, on the side, the fact that I did PA for football for all those years was an awful lot of fun too! It—that was something that I always enjoyed doing, and having the opportunity to be around students in a different setting like that was fun.

Bode: Is there something you can tell us about what you and your wife, Judy, are hoping to do during retirement?

Rupnow: I am not yet social security age, so we are going to have to not retire “cold turkey”—and I wouldn't want to anyway, at this age. I want to do some other things. So we're looking at an adventure in some different lines of work. (Bode: Great term—adventure!) Yes, exactly, that's our new adventure. I like to drive, and I like to visit with people. So, I'm thinking if I have opportunities to drive people around, whether it's, you know, to pick them up at the airport, or take them to appointments at a clinic, or anything of that nature—I'm starting to do a little bit of that here, until we sell our house, and I'm hoping to do that when we get to North Carolina too. We want to get warmer. We want to get into a warmer climate. So we're wanting to go to North Carolina. Exactly where we end up there will depend on housing markets and things. But we're thinking either the Raleigh/Durham area, or maybe the Winston/Salem/Greensboro area. (Bode: But you have no family there? It's just a warmer state.) No, our daughter, Rachel, is in Virginia, so she's much closer than she is now. But she's in grad school, so that's not a permanent thing. But at least for a couple of years we'll be closer to her, which will be nice.

Bode: So, thinking of driving there?

Rupnow: Driving, and I'm also thinking: they have minor league baseball teams. I can see myself maybe ushering, or selling concessions or something, at a minor league baseball park too. Just to be around the games, that would be fun, too.

Bode: Sounds great to me! Sure. Well, Professor Rupnow, the MLC Archives and, I have no doubt, those who hear or read this interview years from now, will appreciate what you have graciously shared with us today. We wish you and Judy God's richest blessings during your retirement years. Thank you!

Rupnow: Thank you very much, Lois. God's blessings to all those who are working in God's field that are listening to this, too.

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