

Interviewee: Earl Heidtke	Division: Social Studies / Science
Years of service to MLC: 25	Years of service to the church at large: 44

Bode: This is an interview with retiring Professor Earl Heidtke, done by Interim Archivist Lois Bode for the Martin Luther College Archives on May 30, 2017.

Bode: Good morning, Professor Heidtke.

Heidtke: Good morning, Lois.

Bode: Thank you for agreeing to this interview for the Martin Luther College Archives. You are concluding 44 years of service to the church at large, right?

Heidtke: Correct.

Bode: During your first three years at [Dr.] Martin Luther College, you taught in three divisions: education, math/science, and history/social studies, and then continued to do so at Martin Luther College. You also ended as the academic dean of education and staff ministry. What was your greatest concern when you began your teaching career?

Heidtke: Call Day 1973 was a different type of thing. It was just kind of an announcement at an evening meeting in the auditorium. I can still remember sitting with my engaged, Pam—we weren't married yet for another year—wondering about, wow . . . grades 5-8, 28 kids, principal, adult choir, and organ if possible . . . and well, organ's not possible. But "Oh Lord, give me patience," was my prayer at that particular time. Because of the demands of that, it just—it scared me.

Bode: And was it different when you began at DMLC?

Heidtke: DMLC was different because of those three different divisions that you mentioned. How will I be able to prep for such a broad range of college level courses? In education. In math/science. In history/social sciences. How in the world can I have that background?

Bode: And now, 25 years later on this campus, did that concern turn out to be justified, or just the typical nerves?

Heidtke: Serious concern that needed to be addressed, and I think that was the key thing, is: "Lord, I realize my shortcomings, help me overcome those." So I think they were serious enough to be on my mind, and that's good, because then I addressed those things.

Bode: You were new as a professor to the campus then. What advice would you give to a new student at Martin Luther College?

Heidtke: The campus of ministry at Martin Luther College is an amazing thing. When we call ourselves the College of Ministry for the synod, that's a fascinating thing. And how we develop that servant's heart in our graduates is still an amazing thing, because you don't put that in any course, but you pick it up from those that are around you—from the classrooms, from the pastors and teachers that serve to instruct you. That's just a fascinating thing to be part of and I would encourage new students, as they are coming in, to just jump right in and get fully involved, because you're on for a fantastic ride. We'll get you ready to become a beginning teacher or a beginning pastor, and that growth pattern needs to continue throughout your ministry.

Bode: Wonderful advice. Ok, let's have you reveal what was your favorite or/and your least favorite course to teach, and then tell us why.

Heidtke: I have many that I really loved teaching. Intro to Ed was a fun one, because I'd take freshmen into exploring what the teaching career could be like for them, and I can still remember being very excited about that. Using John Isch's book, "Train Up a Child"—we could use that as a course; it was a 2-credit freshman course, Intro to Ed—and just to talk about philosophy of education. To give them case studies from my own personal history and say, "Okay, what would you do/what should you do in a case like that?" That was a fascinating one. As I continued to get my master's degree in geography, it was always the courses that I loved—to help college students see that current events have meaning. To see what's going on in issues around the world, to help them explain even weather phenomenon. It just was a fascinating time for me. The social studies courses, too, were fascinating ones to teach. American Government—can you imagine, in an election year, what fun that would be? It was just all exciting, exciting times.

Bode: Those are a lot of courses. What do you think students will remember most about you or the courses?

Heidtke: I hope they caught my love of teaching. I hope that they were inspired to continue on their road to become teachers, to become good teachers, and to be involved fully in all of those different aspects. That's one thing I hoped that every student walked out from my classroom with, is a goal of continuing on to serve the Lord, because of how invigorating it is and how exciting it can be.

Bode: Let's get a little more specific. Could you describe an activity which invariably produced enthusiastic student involvement?

Heidtke: Probably that every student who has taken one of my courses say it's just a whirlwind. It's so fast and what's going on is there. I don't lecture. I try to get student involvement in activities, in short video clips, in clicker systems (which I'll probably be going down for as they remember, "Oh, yeah, that's that one that we used the clickers for") The PRS, the Personal Response System. Trying to get everybody involved: small group discussion, large group discussion. And, of course, no class with Heidtke is ever official unless it has a PowerPoint, because I want to have visual images there. How can you study geography without the images of pictures and video to help them with understanding this?

Bode: If you were to pick three words that describe you, what would they be?

Heidtke: That was an interesting question when you gave me these to review ahead of time. Just what is it to do it in just three words? I came up with servant, because I want every graduate from here to have a servant's heart, and I'm hoping that they could see Earl will do whatever he can to help this college. I hope they see me as a teacher, as an educator . . . and then I hope they recognize that I was a caring individual that they could come to with any problem. If that's a social problem, if that's an emotional problem, if that's an academic problem, I hope that I could be seen as somebody that they could approach.

Bode: What major changes have you seen during your career on this campus, and how would you evaluate them?

Heidtke: I'm fascinated to think of how technology has changed this campus over 25 years. (Bode: It has!) How technology has influenced education. All the online learning that's going on now would just be a small outgrowth of that. But, the computers, and how that has all transpired. I jokingly think of how I went out and bought a security camera from a garage sale here in New Ulm and made a little slide so that I could take pictures of National Geographic magazines to put up onto a 28-inch TV that I rolled in on a cart, and played with VCR 7-second loops of pictures, to say, "Okay, we're going to study the Megalopolis. You need to see pictures of the Megalopolis." And so, that technology has evolved to just immense PowerPoints shown on 82-inch high-definition TVs. And that tremendous change that technology has made in the classroom and has had just a huge impact on student learning.

Bode: Some favorite memories that you have from your teaching—or—you were a student here, were you not?

Heidtke: I was a student here for three years. When I was a student, and then coming back for continuing ed, and doing all the different parts. The student . . . I always try to express this to the college graduates: you don't realize how powerful that is, to see freshmen walk onto our campus and walk off as colleagues. To see the maturation, to see the growth in college students through their three, four, five years here on campus . . . to see that. And then to work with such a dedicated faculty. The pleasures of working with dedicated servants who all have an immense pile of gifts that the Lord has blessed them with, and they're all here to serve. It's just a fascinating, fascinating time.

Bode: As we understand that our Lord gives us gifts and he gives us blessings, and all of the things we accomplish are His accomplishments. But yet, we know they are there. So, perhaps you could tell me about some.

Heidtke: Reflecting back, it's an amazing thing to think that 44 years I've been able to teach—to keep at the profession that I once, as a high school student, thought, "Yeah, it might be fun to be a teacher." I was always motivated by mission festivals when I was a kid. To be able to see that this farm kid from Wisconsin was able to go to the missions in China, to be part of the mission work in Russia, to have traveled to many, many continents and to see all these different things, and then to have served here for 25 years. It's just an amazing opportunity to be part of this campus of ministry. The Lord has been

good. When I closed my last faculty meeting, we closed with the Doxology, because that's what I wanted everyone to reflect on, is how good God is.

Bode: Is there anything else that we have not talked about that you would like to share?

Heidtke: One thing I think we see is, we see profs in very high profile positions and we think, "Wow, this is really cool, to see this teacher, that teacher, and how they've had impact." But to me, the thing that I really want to get across—and need to get across better—is the support staff that's here on our campus. We get people that comment just about the beautiful grounds and how clean everything is, but the thing that I was thinking of is the tremendous support staff that we have: administrative assistants who are so dedicated and so knowledgeable that I think they run the school, more than anybody with a title. It's just a fantastic thing. To help others understand how big a campus this is and how many different individuals all participate in making it do what it does.

Bode: What are your plans in retirement?

Heidtke: Well, I was experienced this weekend because I was able to go see grandkids. I want to be able to help out daughters who are raising kids and be part of that whole grandpa and grandma time, where I'm not tied down to a college teaching schedule, but I'm able to be there. We haven't been to a Grandparent's Day yet, and I want to get to a Grandparent's Day. To help two granddaughters celebrate birthdays this weekend would be probably one of the things. To travel: I've got daughters spread across the United States—currently Phoenix, California, and Wisconsin—and to be able to go be with them. I jokingly say I know I have enough house projects to keep me busy for a year. By the time—at the end of that year—the list will have grown even longer. To garden, to landscape. I like woodworking. To do whatever I can. The daughters do a good job of saying, "Dad, could you build . . . ?" And I get to make one of those things, and then hopefully take it out and deliver it.

Bode: Are you going to be doing anything for Martin Luther College?

Heidtke: I will be teaching an online course this summer. I didn't think it was fair to take the new geography professor, Kari Munte (strangely, who was a student of mine)—that's kind of an interesting thing to see, someone you've taught come and take your place. I didn't think it was fair to make her teach before she even taught it face-to-face, so I'm going to be teaching online for this summer. I'm going to be also teaching for ALHSO, which is Association for Lutheran High Schools Online, taking the college course for dual credit and applying it in a high school curriculum. So, I'm going to be able to keep my online work going and to be part of that process.

Bode: Well, Professor Heidtke, MLC's Archives and, I'm certain, those who hear or read this interview years from now will appreciate what you have graciously shared with us today. We wish you and Pam—who's going to be retiring in August, I understand?

Heidtke: Correct, she gets to serve as receptionist for a couple more weeks, couple more months.

Bode: We wish both of you God's richest blessings during your retirement.

Heidtke: Thank you. I've been blessed.

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