

**Celebrating 40 Years of God's Abundant Grace; The Ministry
of Pastor David Bode**

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Interview with David Bode on December 8, 2004.

Celebrating 40 Years of God's Abundant Grace; The ministry of Pastor David Bode

What year were you born?

What memory sticks out in your mind the most about growing up in a pastor's home?

When did you decide to go into the ministry?

Who were some of the leading role models in your life that made you consider ministry?

How beneficial was the Prep system for your ministry, and how important is it today in your estimation?

What was Call Day like for you? Any differences between then and now?

What was it like being called into the mission setting right out of the Seminary?

From your experiences, what do you see as the major differences between the Northwest and Midwest Congregations?

What were some of the your biggest challenges in the ministry?

What were some of the joys you experienced in the ministry?

What advice would you give to any Seminary Student graduating in 2005, and the future graduates of the Seminary?



Submitted

The Rev. David Bode and his wife Carol will celebrate the 40th year of his ordination with family and friends at St. Stephen Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam on Sunday.

Ordained for 40 years

St Stephen's Lutheran Church of Beaver Dam will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Rev. David Bode's ordination into the public ministry on Sunday, Aug. 1, at 3:30 p.m.

The worship service will be conducted by a son and two sons-in-law. Two other sons will serve as organists. A potluck supper will be enjoyed after the worship service, in the school gym.

Bode was born in Terry, Mont., and spent his boyhood years in Estelline, S.D. and Cleveland, Wis., where his dad served as a pastor at WELS churches. He graduated from Dr. Martin Luther High School, New Ulm, Minn., in 1956. He graduated from Northwestern College, Watertown, in 1960. He studied for three years at Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary, Mequon, and served a vicar year at Trinity Lutheran Church, Neenah. After graduating from the seminary in 1964, he was assigned to a mission congregation in South Seattle, Wash., where he

was ordained into the public ministry. He has also served as pastor at WELS churches in Tacoma, Wash., and Delano, Minn. He has served at St. Stephen's Lutheran Church in Beaver Dam since August, 1999.

In 1962, David Bode married his high school sweetheart, Carol Weyer of Manitowoc. They have five children who also are involved in WELS ministry. Randy is a professor at Luther Prep School, Watertown. Debra is married to the Rev. David Wenzel, Appleton. Gary serves as a pastor in Sioux City, Iowa. Bethel is married to the Rev. Mark Luetzow of Kaukauna. Kevin will be a senior this year at Martin Luther College, New Ulm, Minn. David and Carol Bode are also blessed with seven grandchildren.

St. Stephen's Lutheran Church is located at 300 West St., Beaver Dam, and is a member of the Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod.

An Interview with Pastor David Bode

Pastor David Bode has been serving souls for 40 + years. He has served in 4 different churches throughout his ministry. The first two congregations he served are located in Washington State. A mission congregation in South Seattle, Washington, and another parish in Tacoma, Washington. The third congregation was in Delano, MN. The 4th congregation that he is currently serving is in Beaver Dam, WI. This interview has a personal tone to it considering the fact that Pastor Bode was my pastor while growing up in Delano, MN. He was a role model to me, and very influential in my wanting to become a pastor. The interview is biographical in nature. I have supplied a list of questions if anyone watching the video would like to follow along. I have also supplied a biographical article written for the Beaver Dam local newspaper that was written in commemoration of the 40th anniversary of Pastor Bodes ministry. My main focus for this interview is to gain a richer understanding of the public ministry, and to have some biographical information on the life of Pastor David Bode.

Pastor Bode was born in Terry, MT in 1938. The town is very small. If you sneeze while driving past you might miss it. Pastor Bode describes how this was his father's first call into the ministry. His dad had to wait a year before getting his first call, because there was a shortage of calls back then. A piece of information Pastor Bode shared with me after the video was that on his father and mother's wedding day his dad received his first call. What a wonderful day that would have been. Pastor doesn't remember anything from Terry, MT, because his dad took a call to Estelline, South Dakota when he was three years old. He remembers his dad telling him that the house was 12 feet wide, 26 feet long, and not at all air tight. As Pastor describes it could get very cold in those "dust bowl days" in Montana. Of course the economics were bad in Montana

in the 30's. Pastor describes Terry, MT as a drab place, and not well known. I have driven through Terry, MT, and it is very tiny. I don't think the population is much over a few hundred people.

In Estelline, South Dakota Pastor describes as being the area in which he has most of his childhood. He lived there until 6th grade. He remembers that the people were very kind to his parents. They gave them meat and other farm produce on a regular basis. He remembers his dad telling him that they didn't have to buy one pound of butter for 10 years. He also remembers his dad bringing home a few bags of chickens and going in the back of the barn to watch his dad chop the heads off.

Pastor Bode's role model going into the ministry was his father. He remembers how his dad spoke of the enjoyment he found in visiting the people of the congregation. He didn't have the privilege of attending a Lutheran grade school. So there was no particular teacher that he could follow, or look up to for guidance into the public ministry. He is the oldest in the family so didn't have any older siblings to follow after either. He came to the conclusion that that was what he was going to do. He points back to his Northwestern days around Junior year he decided to go into the ministry.

I point out in the interview that there are two different perspectives between his life and mine. I had decided I wanted to go into the ministry around 6th grade, and he didn't decide until Junior year in high school. It's interesting to see two different perspectives about when someone decided to go into public ministry.

I asked Pastor Bode about the Prep system and how beneficial it was for him. He says that his parents at the time lived North of Sheboygan, WI. His father didn't think it would be good for him to spend 8 years on the same campus in Watertown, WI, so Pastor Bode went to

Martin Luther Academy in New Ulm, MN. He saw this experience as very beneficial for him. In my question about Area Lutheran High Schools and Prep Schools he saw that I might have implied that they are in competition. He states that "it is imperative we don't pit the one against the other." He feels that the synod needs both. He states that at the Prep school everyone was in the same boat, they are there training to go into the public ministry in some type of function, whether it be pastor, teacher, or laymen in the congregation. The bottom line is that both schools have a different emphasis, but both are needed for our synod to survive. He sees the schools going in a downward spiral, and says that we can't afford to get rid of one of our prep schools. He points to the Missouri Synod when they got rid of their prep system, that was when they started going downhill. He mentions that they are scraping by to get pastor candidates, and that a lot of their men are coming from those men starting a second career, and the synod has not always been satisfied with them.

I point out after this question that I agree with his statements, even though I am from an ALHS. I do value the prep system as much as he does. He does value it a little more because he had the prep school experience. He feels that his prep experience was a good one. He enjoyed the language emphasis, and day to day studies. He was taught good study habits that helped him prepare for the public ministry, and some of those good habits transferred into his ministry as well.

I then proceeded to ask him a question concerning Wisconsin Lutheran Seminary call day, and to list the differences from today and in his day. He mentioned that there were no cameras, large crowds, or worship service before hand. He talks about the Holy Ghost room where the district presidents would meet to discuss the various calls. There were only 15 in his class. They went into classroom 11 which was a storage room at that time. Professor Lawrence read the

names with no music, no wives, just bare bones. He says that when he told his wife about the call, his wife mentions that he gave her the wrong city. His first call was to a mission in South Seattle, Washington.

He mentions that in going to his first call they had many questions. His wife was 7 months pregnant at the time, who would be the doctor? What were the people like? How many were there? They had many questions which was not unusual traveling from the Midwest to the Pacific Northwest for the first time. The congregation had 20 people in the mission. He was ordained at a community clubhouse north of the international airport. They worshipped for a short time in a rundown saloon. He says if there was a beer party the night before they could smell that, and if there was a dog show then they would smell that. Definitely a humbling experience. After 2 months they moved to a public school gymnasium. It was only 2 blocks away from where their new church would be. He remembers canvassing from house to house. He mentions how he really enjoyed doing that. He enjoyed meeting new people and sharing the gospel message with them. They didn't have brochures, but had to use the mimeograph machine. They weren't pretty, but they contained the message that the people needed. It served them well.

After three years they started an instruction class with individuals or groups of two or three. They decided to find a piece of land to purchase with the intent on building a new church. They had two men from synod come out Egger and Watchman. One was on the board of home missions and the other was on the board of trustees. Pastor Bode talks about going to the different pieces of land they had to choose from. They found a piece of land that suited everyone, and they went ahead with the building project. After three years of being in South Seattle they built their first church. 6 months later they had a parsonage. He talks about many hours of volunteer hours really bonded the members to the preacher. Everyone gave more than

they thought they had to give. He says "those were good days." He really enjoyed the combination of physical and spiritual work. The congregation today is in Des Moines, Washington. He mentions that the old building seated 200 people, and now that old church has been torn down replaced with a brand new one. He mentions how he is eager to see it today.

He served a vacancy in Tacoma, Washington which was 45 minutes away. He mentions that the seminary professors would frown upon taking a call only 45 minutes away. He mentions it was important to cut all ties, so as not to get in the way of another man's ministry. He mentions it was hard to do. He had one funeral in 8 years. They were a young congregation. He said it was good times.

I asked him a question about the difference between the Pacific Northwest and the Midwest. He spent 22 years in Washington. He mentions that 75% of citizens in Washington are uncharted. When there was a convert they really appreciated what they learned. The converts were eager to share what they had learned, and it made for a really special mission spirit in the congregation. Many congregations were building at the time. The WELS were very late in getting to the Northwest. Missouri Synod got the jump on us in the Pacific Northwest. He mentions borrowing money from the Church Extension Fund which allowed for a lower interest rate than from a local bank which endeared people to the synod. People were really synod minded. He really enjoyed that spirit. He talks about the pastors having a healthy attitude towards the synod, and even joking about who had the largest mission offering totals.

Coming back to the Midwest the attitude was different. He said that they have had churches for awhile, and the attitudes turns towards one of indifference and apathy. He says it shows itself when they set the budget, and missions are cut out first when there are difficulties in the church. He says there is a selfish attitude in the Midwest. He says that in the Pacific

Northwest it was a blessing, and in the Midwest it is a problem. We talked about how after much time the attitude might change in the Pacific Northwest as they begin their own traditions and sort of get set in their ways. He mentioned Evergreen Lutheran High School putting a strain on the congregations as well. There weren't that many congregations to support it, and it put a financial strain on the congregation.

He said the first biggest challenge for him is putting a sermon together every week that will grab at every station in life, from young to old, from new convert to long time Christian, from someone who just stepped in the door to the one who has been there all their life. Challenge to help people understand certain doctrines. One in particular is fellowship. So many churches don't follow scriptural fellowship principles. He talks about preaching the whole council of God by following the pericopy, even when it comes to the more difficult portions of scripture when people don't want to hear it. Another challenge to help people understand that for the growth of the kingdom of God the Gospel is the most important tool we need, and all is needed for the Lord's work. He says that the Gospel also opens people's pocket books for the spreading of God's work. He says that it's easy to think that the Gospel doesn't work, and want to turn to commercialism. Using bazaars, bake sales, and auctions to bring in more money. Even though the people should be encouraged to give from their own hearts. He says it's not good stewardship. The Bible doesn't teach us to give, because you get a piece of pie, or a baked turkey. The difference is between making money and giving money. Where is the motivation? Does your church want a reputation for selling a good pie, or for good teaching and preaching of God's word?

What joys have you experienced in the ministry? He said that he appreciates families that are guided by God's word. He mentions my parents for bringing their children up in the Lord.

He enjoys seeing families take the Gospel and use it not just on Sunday mornings, but in their lives at home and in the world. It's a joy to see the Gospel work in the hearts of people. For those living with hard odds financially, spiritually, or emotionally the Gospel brings joy to them. He says that coming away from visits gaining more than the person he gave the Gospel. He enjoyed watching young men grow up following their dads to voters meetings. He enjoyed watching young confirmation old children aspiring to the ministry.

I asked Pastor Bode to give some advice for the 2005 graduates and following years. Don't forget to pray day in and day out. Ask God for strength, and at the end of the day thank God for being with you. Preach the whole council of God, don't be afraid to preach the word that may be difficult for people to hear. Use specific law and specific gospel. Clear and specific every time you serve as a pastor. Do good work in discipline. Churches that don't practice discipline he says he feels sorry for. He says that discipline shows a shepherds heart. He says that you have to develop a thick skin for those who don't listen to discipline. Stewardship is important. He says don't fall into commercialism, and points out 2 Corinthians 8-9 as good guide. He says that outreach is important. But don't say we need more people. The people usually mean we need more people to share the bills. He says to teach the people to love the way Jesus did. The love Jesus had for all people. Jesus wasn't content with just one or two people coming into the congregation, he loved all people everywhere from birth, to death, and resurrection. Teach them the Gospel. He points to setting the mission budget will show how much the congregation loves their God, and how their love reaches out to everyone in the world. Finally, trust that the Lord will provide for his church. I give a final blessing to him, and he gave me a blessing to me as well.

I really enjoyed having the wonderful opportunity to do this interview. I think it's very

important for any graduate of the seminary to sit down with a pastor who has had at least 40 years of ministry experience to gather information on what the ministry will be like. These men who have served for so many years, have experience so many joys and challenges that go along with ministry that we can all learn from. I thank Pastor David Bode for his participation and willingness to do this interview. I thank him for all the years he encouraged me to continue on in the public ministry. I hope and pray that God would bless my ministry as abundantly as he has blessed Pastor Bode in his first 40 years of preaching and teaching the wonderful message of Jesus Christ.