

Interview with Dr. Joseph L. Knutson

Interviewed by J. L. Rendahl for the Heritage Education Commission

April 18, 1985

Joseph Knutson - JK

J. L. Rendahl - JLR

JLR: This is an interview with Dr. Joseph L. Knutson, President Emeritus of Concordia College, Moorhead, Minnesota. As a member of the Education Subcommittee of the MSU Oral History Project, I am doing the interviewing. My name is J. L. Rendahl. The time is 10 a.m., Thursday, April 18, 1985. The place--Lee Nordrum's audio studio in the Moorhead State University Livingston Lord Library. The Oral History agreement form has been signed, giving ownership of this interview tape to the Northwest Minnesota Historical Center at MSU.

Now, Dr. Knutson, for the record, will you give your name and address, the date and place of your birth, and your parents, and so on.

JK: My name is Joseph Leonard Knutson. I live at 416 South Seventh Street in Moorhead. I was born February 14, 1906 in Grafton, North Dakota. My father was a Lutheran pastor, and when I was two years old, he moved the family to a parish in Radcliffe, Iowa, where we lived for ten years. Then we moved to Jackson, Minnesota, and we spent ten years there; and it is really in Jackson where I grew up during the teen years, finished high school there, and from there went to St. Olaf College, from which I was graduated in the year 1927. And from St. Olaf College, I went to Luther Theological Seminary in St. Paul and was graduated from that institution in 1930.

My first parish was in what we called a home mission congregation in De Kalb, Illinois, a manufacturing town 60 miles west of Chicago. I didn't know much about economics when I went to De Kalb because life on the whole had been pretty good, even though existence in the parsonage could sometimes be rather meager, especially so far as cash was concerned. But I never expected to see anything along the line that confronted me in De Kalb, Illinois. The Depression was already full blown, and big companies like Wurlitzer and Creamery Package Company, Cyclone Fence, Standard Foundry, all closed down. So there were thousands of people out of work, and at that time there was no organized relief. The work there went fairly well, but I was soon advised the general church body which I served was running out of funds and so there would be no more checks from the mission department of the church.

But fortunately after two years, I received a call to serve a congregation in Fillmore County, Minnesota. It was a rural area, and while people didn't have much money, it was good dairy country and everybody had something to eat and people got along very well. We spent five very happy, profitable years in that parish.

And from there we moved to Lake Mills, Iowa, a much larger parish; in fact, at the time it was the chief congregation of the Norwegian Lutheran Church in the state of Iowa. No other congregation had facilities as good or had such a strong membership. I was also close, 17 miles, from Forest City, Iowa, where the church had an academy and junior college called Waldorf; and it was there that I got acquainted with J. L. Rendahl, who was President, and when I came to Concordia in 1951, he was in charge of several departments and he continued with me all the years which I served Concordia College.

JLR: Just a couple of items there on the biographical data and for the record.

JK: Shall I continue where I served parishes?

JLR: Yes, fine, fine.

JK: Okay. All right. I spent five years in Lake Mills, and I accepted a call to the congregation at Ames, Iowa, which in itself was a large congregation and on top of that served the Lutheran students at Iowa State College--that was the name it used then; it is now Iowa State University. I can honestly say that I didn't want to go there. If anyone ever accepted a call by divine compulsion, I did when I left the luxurious, easy-going, happy place in Lake Mills and went down to Ames and that parish which served Iowa State College. But it was here that I came in contact with a large university and also had the privilege of serving thousands of Lutheran students. The war was on when we went there in 1943 and Iowa State taught electrical engineering which was used on all the ships that were being built to over 4,000 Navy men. At that time there was much interest in church. We ran buses to the college and the church would be filled to capacity twice on every Sunday morning. And then on top of that, I was head of what we called the Lutheran student work at the institution, and we would meet every Sunday night and also sometimes have mid-week meetings. There was a marvelous group of Christian students who were interested in the work, and I felt that it was a wonderful opportunity for me to learn and to grow and to experience a ministry that I would not have experienced had I not gone there.

Well, after five years at Iowa State, I was called to the University Lutheran Church of Hope on the north side of the Minnesota University campus. This was by far the largest congregation serving University students; and because of the huge Lutheran population in Minnesota, the Lutheran student group at the University was also larger than any other denomination. And, again, there was much interest in the church. We talk about foxhole religion, which was supposed to be characteristic of much religion during World War II; well, it had carried over into the period in which I served this University church in Minneapolis. And it was a thrill to meet the large congregation of students Sunday after Sunday. I suppose it was my work with these university congregations that caused someone to think of me in connection with the presidency of Concordia College. I can truthfully say that never in my dreams or wildest imagination had I ever thought of being a college president or had I ever desired to be a college president.

They didn't have anything like affirmative action in those days, and in February in 1951 I was called by a pastor whom I knew to come and have dinner with him at the Curtis Hotel.

And when I got down there, I found that it was a committee from the Board of Trustees of Concordia College. And this Board offered me the position as President of Concordia. Well, I was completely stunned, and I came home and told my wife, "You can't imagine what they wanted with me," and she couldn't believe it either. Well, after much thoughtful prayer and squelching many fears, we did come to Concordia College in Moorhead in the summer of 1951.

JLR: To go back on a couple of items of the biographical data--you mentioned that your father is a pastor. Would you give the name of your father and the maiden name of your mother, for example.

JK: My father's name was Thomas John Knutson, and my mother's name was Linda and her family name was Knudson, too, but they weren't related; but they spelled their name "K n u d s o n" instead of with a "t."

JLR: Then, with regard to your present family situation--your wife, your children--what are they doing at present?

JK: Fortunately, my wife is still living and she's been a great help to me in my work. We've been in parishes and situations that demanded a lot and she's always been willing to help and contribute her part. I have one son, the oldest boy, who is a pastor at Waseca, Minnesota. He was ordained in 1960. We lost a younger boy, ten years ago, by the name of Frederick. The one girl we have was between the two boys, and she's married to the assistant to the superintendent of schools in Alexandria, Minnesota, whose name is Wayne Elton.

JLR: Interesting about how you were called and how you were surprised by it. Describe the college as you first saw it in 1951, and tell us about your experiences, let's say, the first day you were here, and especially the first year you were here.

JK: Well, after we were called, we came up to see the place on one Sunday in April. Before we came up, the fieldhouse, which was in the process of being built, suffered a setback in a windstorm. The huge girders had been placed, and there were seven of them--it's a huge building--and they all fell down, so that building was in shambles. It wasn't very encouraging to look at. Well, it's pretty hard for us who live in Moorhead today to realize that the sidewalk in the city of Moorhead actually stopped on Seventh Avenue at the corner of the President's house. It wasn't the President's house at that time. The college had bought it, but it had been used by the Home Economics Department; and beyond the college to the south, there was hardly a house and streets were just being put in and it had been a wet season and we hadn't confronted so much mud in many years. In fact, it was almost impossible to walk around and see the college. For example, Seventh Street went right through the campus, as did several other streets that are now closed, so it wasn't a very beautiful place. And the first night after we got into our hotel room, my wife said to me, "This is a wild goose chase, isn't it?" And I said, "Yeah, I think we'll have to leave in the morning," but, I said "I promised to meet that committee at noon and I don't know whether I'm obliged to do that or not; it might be a waste of time." Well, we thought it

over, and she said, "Well, they are paying you're expenses to come up here; I don't see how you can refuse to meet with them." Well, we did meet with the committee from the Board at noon and then that afternoon, some of the college family had a reception for us and by the time the day was done, we had pretty well made up our mind to come to Concordia College and give it a try.

We did realize that Concordia had a natural constituency, and it was marvelous that Concordia had as large an enrollment as it had. Concordia's enrollment was at least one-third larger than that of Moorhead State College and it was that for several years after I came here. Sometimes people ask me, "How have you gotten along at Concordia?" and I would humorously say, "Well, I really got along very well. Moorhead State now has over twice the students of Concordia College and when I came to town there wasn't even a Roman Catholic Church." The Roman Catholics worshipped in a room in their parochial school building, and now we've got two nice Roman Catholic churches in town.

Well, we all know the stories about what happened to private education. In 1951 there were more students in private institutions than in public institutions; but the various states, through legislative action, could come up with money much faster than private institutions could raise money and also they could endow tuition rates through taxation. So pretty soon there was too much of a differential between what a private college and a state college had to spend; but nevertheless because of Concordia's natural constituency and the reputation of the college, the college was able to draw a sizable student body. In fact, it was quite common year after year for Concordia to receive more freshmen than any other private institution in the state. There are some good people that can take credit for that. We had a good Admissions Department, and the territory was intelligently worked so students were brought into the college. Personally, I marveled that students would come to Concordia because our facilities were very meager. We had Fjelstad Hall, which was a very nice dormitory, and Brown Hall, which had been recently built, was a nice dormitory for men; but our Science Department was in some government World War II barracks and we had some houses for our Home Economics Department. The Old Main, which had been built and dedicated in 1904, was in a bad state of repair; but still the students came. Most of them had had much better facilities in the high schools that they had attended, and I often said that if any college ever had a natural vitality, it was Concordia College. And I think this was due, in fact, to the large Lutheran constituency in this area.

JLR: Now that first year you were faced with quite a few problems. I'm thinking, for example, of the girders that were lying on the ground there for the auditorium/gymnasium that was to be built. Can you fill us in a little more on the various problems that you met during your first year?

JK: Well, I was amazed to find out after I came here that nothing had been done with efforts to get the gymnasium or the fieldhouse built again. The insurance company didn't even try to make a settlement, and I went to the agent who had sold the insurance and I think I lost a friend, but I told him, "I don't know much about insurance, but I know this much: That insurance isn't any better than the man that services it." Unfortunately, Concordia had an architectural firm, the head of which didn't even have a license to

practice architecture. He was a broker. He was a handsome man, and he had a salesman's personality and he not only succeeded in having Concordia College under his wing, but he had the University of Minnesota, many of the state colleges, and many of the private colleges. He really knew how to collect contracts. Well, he didn't lift a finger. The real culprit in the collapse of the fieldhouse was the steel erector. There had been some nice days, and it takes money to get these girders up and use a lot of guy wires to hold them in place and so he just went ahead and got them up on the nice, still days and forgot about the fact that the wind can blow in the Red River Valley. The man that really got the project going again was Joe Powers of the Powers Construction Company that had the contract on the gymnasium. I'm grateful to him to this day. He still lives but he isn't in very good health now. He's a Roman Catholic, but he called me and he said, "We got to get the four parties involved together--the college, the steel erector, the architect, and the contractor." And so we did, and we met in the office of G. L. Dosland, the college attorney; and we signed an agreement in which all of us would accept equal liability for the damage done. Well, we still brought suit against the insurance company but were awarded only \$25,000. But when the firm of attorneys which handled the case took its fee, we only had \$15,000 left. But anyway, that fieldhouse was one of the greatest things that ever happened to Concordia College. Just think of it! Before we got that fieldhouse, there wasn't even a place on the campus where we could gather a large number of people. At Homecoming and Commencement, the college was using the public school auditoriums and the basketball team, for example, was using the gymnasiums in the public schools for many of its games. The contract for the big fieldhouse was a little over \$500,000 and even furnishing it with good seats and a lot of other equipment, the building didn't even cost \$600,000 and it would cost many, many times that much today.

JLR: You had a financial campaign on your hands the first year, too, I suppose.

JK: Well, that was one of the hardest things I ever faced. Before Concordia had started on this fieldhouse, President Brown, my predecessor, had called together various groups in the Fargo-Moorhead community. Frankly, there wasn't a decent fieldhouse or gymnasium in Fargo-Moorhead at that time, and there wasn't a place where, you know, you could gather thousands of people. Well, the various groups assured Dr. Brown that they would back this campaign. Well, the college had entered a contract with a fundraising company in Chicago by the name of Beaver Associates. Well, when the fieldhouse blew down, they said that was no time to put on a campaign; it had to be postponed until construction had started again. Well, when we got legal matters settled and started construction, then the Beaver Company sent the man up here to take charge of the campaign; but maybe I shouldn't say this, but all the good friends who had promised so much went into hiding and we couldn't even get anyone to be chairman of this general campaign. And so it ended with my being chairman of the campaign, and at the most we raised \$40,000 instead of the half million that we were supposed to raise. And the general community--individuals and organizations--didn't give as much as \$20,000. The other \$20,000 came from alumni and different church groups. It was a very discouraging thing, and more than once I felt as though I should walk away from it.

Now I want to reverse myself. After this building got up, it really gave the college an entirely new image. For four or five years we had this grand place, and we had all kinds of conventions and exhibits. We really let the community use it, and it did help get people interested in the college and it didn't take long until we started getting some very, very good help from the community. We're sitting at Moorhead State College for this interview and I want to say this in connection with the remark I made about those who had promised to help in the campaign running away. There was one fellow that didn't run away, and he'd been a long-time faculty member and football coach and athletic head at Moorhead State College, and that was Slim Nemzek. He would come over constantly wondering what he could do, and one reason for his interest was, he said, "Here I was a good Roman Catholic, and when J. A. Aasgaard was President of Concordia College, he offered me the job of being athletic director and football coach at Concordia College," and that day on the ecumenical stage, it was rather an unusual thing for a Lutheran college like Concordia to offer a good Roman Catholic the job, and Slim Nemzek never forgot it.

JLR: You're known as the administrator of the school during its greatest growth period up to the present time; and just by way of getting something on the record there and open the discussion of what all was going on during your, what was it?, 24 years. Well, for example, there are 16 new buildings--gymnasium/auditorium in '52, education building in '54, Ylvisaker Library in '56, Park Region Hall in '56, student union/Cobber Commons in '60, Livedalen Hall, Normandy and the bookstore in 1962, Hvidsten Hall in '63, the administration building in '64, Hoyum Hall in '65, Jake Christiansen Stadium in '66, science center in '67, East Complex dormitories and food service (really three buildings) in '68, humanities center in '69, Ylvisaker Library addition in '71, Norwegian Language Village buildings in '71, the Knutson Life Center in 1974, in '76 the Centrum and the pool building. And in addition, rather complete refurbishing and remodeling of Berg Art Center in '53, Academy Hall in '53, Bishop-Whipple Hall in '54, heating plant in '67, biology building in '72, Old Main in '74. Sixteen new major buildings and six major remodelings, 22 projects in 24 years. Well, let's start on that. What are the problems of being administrator of an institution that's building like that?

JK: After I came to Concordia, about the first thing that struck me was that this institution has to have a library building. The library was housed in a few rooms in the basement of Fjelstad Hall, and it was anything but satisfactory. Well, during my second year at Concordia, William Smaby, who had been in a bank at Rushford, Minnesota, came as the business manager and controller of the college. Here I'd like to mention the difference between those days and what takes place now in this age of affirmative action. When I came to Concordia, the Board actually told me that I had the power to select my administrative staff and also the faculty, and I pretty much did this for a few years. If I thought the department head was strong and doing a good job, I would confer with him; but in some cases where I thought the department was weak and the head wasn't doing his job, I didn't pay any attention to him at all. Then I would seek counsel elsewhere as to what I should do. But Mr. Smaby was a real find for the college. One day my older boy, who finished the last year of high school in Moorhead and then started Concordia, said to me, "Dad, you can't be afraid of losing your job." He said, "If you have to quit, okay," but he said, "You've got to get a couple buildings up." He said, "Even if you have to borrow

money to get them up." And he said, "These people in the church here aren't going to let Concordia College die," but he said, "I don't see how this college can go on with the kind of facilities it has." Well, a peculiar thing happened. A few days after that, Arthur Hanson, who was the bishop of our church in northern Minnesota, came to me and said the same thing only he put it this way: He said, "Joe, we're going to borrow money and get a couple of buildings up," and he said, "They'll be paid for." Then he said, "These Norwegians are so stupid that they aren't going to give money to a building unless they see it [laughter], and when they see the building they'll pay for it." Well, really, that's about the way it worked out. There was a man employed in the church office who was really supposed to have our colleges under his wings; his name was Orville Dahl, and when he heard Smaby and me talking about borrowing money to build the library, he just hit the ceiling. And he said, "You'll close the doors of that college so quick." He said, "Whoever heard of borrowing money to build an academic building." Well, Smaby went down to the Cities and talked to the big bankers to see if we could get \$500,000 on a loan and sure enough there were a couple of banks who were willing to go along. One banker told us, "The only reason we're doing this, we have confidence in the church that's backing the institution." Well, we had to clear everything with the Board of Trustees of the church and when we had the meeting in Minneapolis to get approval for this library loan, Orville Dahl fought it tooth and nail. And J. A. Aasgaard, who had been president of the church for years and now sat on the Board as an ex officio member, spoke up and said, "Let Concordia have the money." He said, "I know those people up in the Red River Valley." He said, "They won't let Concordia die for \$500,000." So, the Board of Trustees approved the loan and we went ahead with the library.

And then one day out of the clear blue came Luther Jacobson and Mr. Gene Paulson, Fargo businessmen, and they were on Concordia's Board. They said they had an idea to pay for the library; they wanted to go around and ask for thousand dollar gifts, and we needed \$400,000 to clear the debt on the library. And they said, we'll find 400 people that will give a thousand dollars each. Well, we told them to go ahead; and they succeeded. And when that money came in, C-400 didn't stop. It's going to this day and really having more success than ever, building one academic facility after another. We are indebted to the federal government for help with some of our buildings; for example, in 1955 and this was under a Republican administration too, a bill was passed supplying the biggest aid to education that the federal government had ever given up until that time and we could borrow money on the authorization of this bill to build dormitories at a very low rate of interest and that's what we did in getting our dormitories up.

And then in 1957, in October, something happened that shook the educational world in America much more than John Dewey ever did. And that's when Sputnik went into orbit, and the cry went up from all over the country, "What's wrong with our educational institutions? How did the Russians ever get ahead of us?" Then the government made provisions so we could get a grant of one-third the cost of an academic facility and we did this in connection with Science Hall and the humanities building, which is now called the Comstock Building, and the addition to the library. Of course, that was a tremendous help.

JLR: You've been mentioning finances, and that must have been quite a terrific problem--the new buildings, \$16 million, and the remodeling, \$2 million, a total of \$18 million invested during your administration in buildings. And then the endowment funds were increased by a million and a half and the deferred gifts by \$2 million. It probably took a good deal of thought and time to cover all that. Still on the subject of finances, the budget for the first year you were here, I understand, was \$800,000 and for the last year that you were here, it was \$9 million. Now, have you covered the finances; or is there anything more that you want to say about the extent of that kind of a load?

JK: You know, a fellow can't take too much credit for anything because we have to face up to this: That from 1951 until 1974, when I quit, maybe we enjoyed the greatest economic activity, growth, and stability that America had ever had. It really wasn't as difficult as it seems because Concordia is an example of what could take place in those years, but there are thousands upon thousands of other examples, too. Just look at the growth of Fargo and Moorhead during those years and of the other institutions here.

JLR: Now, going over to another side of it--the faculty and the students. The enrollment when you came, I think, was 890. I don't have the exact figures when you left, but from a brochure I have here, they mention 2400. I think it was a little over 2400. So that's three times, and that means the faculty was trebled, maybe quadrupled. What were the problems seen from your office in the expansion of the classrooms, faculty, students during that period? There must have been periods of maladjustment and shortage of space and other things.

JK: Yeah, that's right. It was very difficult to find teachers for several years. Some fields were especially short. Take, for example, in physics and chemistry and mathematics; and this was especially true after Sputnik in 1957 because so much emphasis was being placed on the sciences. One year we couldn't find a chemist who was qualified in what we called physical chemistry, and so we made arrangements for our chemistry majors to go over to North Dakota State. Well, according to the Tri-College, this should have been a wonderful thing; but it backfired on us because I'd hear around the country, "That chemistry department at Concordia College is really sick; just think, they have to send some of their students over to North Dakota State."

And really, as wonderful as Tri-College is and it's worked out especially well with the libraries--these three libraries together, you know, are the equal of most big university libraries and that part of it has been grand--but this jealousy to hold on to certain disciplines; for example, when this Tri-College was being formed, Dean Russell of North Dakota State said, "North Dakota State is a land-grant college, and our money should be used principally for agricultural research in this area, and North Dakota State should not be teaching history and sociology, and languages." Well, then to implement this, one year NDSU quit teaching languages, and Concordia, which has always had a strong language department, took care of the North Dakota State language courses. This was really the main reason for the Tri-College, and it was George Sinner, the present governor of North Dakota, who came up with the idea and who really is the founder of it. But those things have always held up the real implementation of the Tri-College program. And another

thing that's held it up, and we aren't to blame for that, because Concordia has to charge tuition compared with the state institutions and there's been a discrepancy there that just hasn't been solved, so it hasn't been implemented to the extent that it should be.

[Begin Tape 1, Side 2]

JLR: The students in the early days came from the adjoining counties here in the Red River Valley and not too many from the Twin Cities and not too many from western North Dakota. The boundaries of Concordia's public have been pushed out. How has that been done, and how does that look to you?

JK: Well, as I said, Mr. Rendahl and his associates in the Admissions Department did a wonderful job.

JLR: Outside of admissions. You know, the public has become more aware, the corporation has been extended, and I was thinking of the outreach, the general outreach. Also, I'd like to ask about relations with the church as it developed during your period as President.

JK: Well, Concordia is not owned by the general church. Concordia is owned by the congregations of the American Lutheran Church, as it is now called, in northern Minnesota, North Dakota, and in Montana east of the Continental Divide. To go back into some history, in 1917 there were three Lutheran bodies of Norwegian background that united to form the Norwegian Lutheran Church, and in the Articles of Union and Incorporation that formed this church it was stated that there should be two colleges in the church--St. Olaf at Northfield, a coeducational institution, and Luther College at Decorah, Iowa, a male institution, and Red Wing Seminary to be an academy and post-seminary of the church. Each one of these institutions represented one of the church bodies that went into the union. So Concordia was really not a legal part of the general church body. Well, when I came here, I found out, to my horror, that Concordia got a pittance of the money that was raised for education compared with Luther and with St. Olaf. In fact, during the Depression years, Concordia received the total amount of \$1,000 from the general church year after year; and when I came here, it was getting \$4,000. And this was the way with Augustana in Sioux Falls and with Pacific Lutheran out in Washington. Well, I was rather aggressive and I brought this up and here's where I will credit Orville Dahl with helping me because he was dreaming about uniting all these institutions in one big Lutheran university and a lot of time and money was spent on this project of his and a lot of things were written and a lot of meetings held and the different faculties didn't buy it. So it was never implemented. But I think that was his real reason for all the colleges of the church to be treated equally, so we had to fight this out with the Board of Trustees of the church, first, you know, through the Board of Education of the church; and we succeeded in doing it. The presidents of Luther and St. Olaf didn't feel very good about it, you know; they brought up the fact that this is the Articles of Union and then I happened to be of Hauge background; that is, from the old Hauge Synod that had Red Wing Seminary and that had already been closed, so I would say the Articles of Union had already been broken. "If you fellows are going to have your way, we've got to resurrect Red Wing Seminary." So that's

one thing that I could feel good about that first year that we got on equal standing with the church despite the fact that we have a different type of corporation. This is interesting. When the American Lutheran Church was formed in 1960, the German body that came in was opposed to any kind of corporate entity that wasn't a legal part of the general church. But we not only had colleges such as Concordia, we had old people's homes and children's homes and bible camps that were of separate corporate entities. Well, the amazing thing is that when the new church had been in existence a few years, Capital [spelling] University, which was our chief institution of higher learning in the former American Lutheran Church, changed its articles of incorporation to include the congregations in part of Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan to be the owners and caretakers of Capital University. I think there has been a real value in Concordia's corporate setup because it has brought the college closer to the congregations.

JLR: You were rather closely involved in the church union of 1960.

JK: Yes, I was on the Union Committee. I was elected to this committee when I was pastor at the University Lutheran Church in Minneapolis, so I served on the committee for a period of 10 years until the church was formed in 1960.

JLR: Has the church union had any beneficial or adverse effects on Concordia?

JK: I don't think it has had much effect on Concordia because the real strength of the Norwegian background of the church was pretty much in this area, you know. Percentage wise, North Dakota, for example, being the most Lutheran state in the Union--about one-third of the population are members of the Lutheran Church.

JLR: Now, going over to the corporation. You dealt with the corporation and the board. Do you have any interesting incidents of successes or problems or relationships with your board and your corporation?

JK: Well, I was very democratic when I came here. The Board of Regents, as we call them now, is elected by the meeting of the corporation--representatives from every conference of our corporate area come once a year. I thought, well, I'm not going to play any politics; but after a couple of years I learned that we were getting too many weak board members. For example, one pastor brought an elderly pastor along as a delegate from one of the conferences and on the way up to Moorhead, why, this younger pastor said to the older fellow, "You don't have much to do now; it would be wonderful if you could go to Concordia a couple of times a year and be on the board as a board member." And this young pastor actually told me that. Well, I thought that's terrible; and Dr. Aasgaard once said, "Don't ever expect any help from the Board of Regents." He said, "They'll just be a bother to you. You will have to serve them, and trying to find enough money to pay their travel expenses to come to the Board meeting." Well, frankly, we started to play some politics. Members of our administrative staff that with [unclear] people that we knew in the area, so we got regents who had some influence and were really able to help us. So the last years that I served as President at Concordia, the Board of Regents was very strong. Some

of these men, you know, were some of the biggest executives in the country and had the expertise that a big institution like Concordia needed.

JLR: You work with the faculty, with the students, with the educational program, I mean, running the college in general. I see some suggestions here--problems met and how resolved and campaigns conducted or goals set and what happened. It would be a little hard to choose, but what would you consider as your most significant effort during your administration as college president. Now this is kind of wide open, but does this suggest something that you would go into?

JK: I'd like to think that the good Lord used me to win friends for Concordia. I think my biggest contribution was building up a constituency that would stand back of the college, not only among Lutheran people but I really put myself out trying to get acquainted with the business leaders of the community and making friends with them. I did a lot of speaking. I was in some church nearly every Sunday. I tried to stay home in January and February because the weather was generally bad then and it wasn't so safe to travel, but outside of that nearly every weekend was filled. Then I also talked at Chamber of Commerce meetings from Duluth way out into Montana and talked to the service clubs not only in Fargo-Moorhead but in outlying towns. I don't think I laid it out too strong about Concordia, but I wanted them to be aware of the college and I wanted them to feel that they had a friend in me and I appreciated anything they could do for the college. I always thought this was to be of prime importance.

Now, I had some problems, of course. The so-called 60s were very difficult. I was a conservative that believed that we should keep some of the regulations that were typical of nearly every institution, but I had to see the demise of the dress code and the coming in of dancing. I was accused of saying that dancing is sin, but that wasn't the point I was trying to make. It's a rather hard thing to handle, and it hadn't been characteristic of the lifestyle of our people. I'm a firm believer in this: That customs and traditions have great value; they bring a discipline into life that is necessary. If they go, then we educate people who think they are a law unto themselves. And I think we see the effect of our type of education today in the breakdown of family, for example, the increase in the divorce rate, the increase in all kinds of venereal disease, an increase in crime. We really aren't educating the whole person. More and more, we are adopting the European system of education, where a student just goes and studies a discipline and the institution doesn't care whether he gets drunk or he commits adultery, so long as he gets his coursework done and passes the examination. You know, that's all there's to it. And I think it's tragic that the great percentage of American institutions of higher learning operate in just this way today. There are some people, very bright people, who see that we've gone in the wrong direction; and they are crying out about it. In fact, books are being written about it. I picked up one lately on the 60s pointing out the dreadful things that have happened. But the school administrators were under pressure in those days and I think they gave in far too easily. It wasn't an easy time to be an administrator, and I think we can say that at Concordia and also at Moorhead State and NDSU, we had less trouble than in other parts of the country. And I think the reason for this is the quality of people who live in this part of the country. I truly believe that they are superior to the people that live in the rest of America, and

somebody may say that is just a Lutheran preacher, you know, bragging about his own kind. But a leading doctor over in the Fargo Clinic once went out of his way to tell me how he enjoyed practicing medicine in Fargo because of the kind of people that came to the Fargo Clinic.

JLR: Compare or contrast the present college with the college as you first saw it. Well, you've done that in some respects. Would there be any new types of comments that you'd want to make in the way of comparison of students, student attitudes, or faculty and faculty attitudes toward their work, or the general educational function of the college?

JK: I don't suppose I would have lasted 24 years if the great majority of the faculty hadn't been kind to me and believed in what I was trying to do. I'm not so stupid as to think that everybody loved me because there was a time when we had a few faculty members that were trying to get rid of me and I was very well aware of the fact. We brought in teachers at a time when teachers were difficult to get that really shouldn't have been teaching in a place like Concordia because they were not sympathetic at all with the purposes of the institution. I think Concordia paid a price for that, and I think other colleges of the church have experienced the same thing. But on the whole, the faculty was wonderfully loyal as well as the administrative staff. I never felt threatened to think that I might have to resign soon and get out of here. I could feel fairly comfortable in my position. Well, I think I served in the best years that a college president could have had.

There are some things that have taken place today that make higher education very cumbersome and difficult; for example, affirmative action. Just think when there's a vacancy, you have to advertise in two periodicals pertaining to the field. You have to acknowledge every application for the job, you have to set up a search committee, which interviews a fair number of prospective applicants. The president has veto power, but you know how that works. When the search committee has spent hours and all this money and then you veto it, you got trouble on your hands right away. And then after someone is selected, then you have to send a letter to everyone that has applied. All right, what's an institution of higher learning for. We talk about \$500 hammers for the Pentagon. We've got things just as bad in a typical institution of higher learning today. We're spending money that cannot be justified. Now, this whole thing is being set up, really, and that's the way with tenure, too, to safeguard a teacher against an arbitrary and capricious administrator. Well, granted that some administrators can be that way, you know. How often are they that way? After all, they are a very small minority over against a large number of faculty members. I think that sure people can become mental cases and emotional cases. That goes for administrators and I know some that have been that way; but by and large, the chief administrator is just as zealous for the college as anybody else and maybe more so. He wants to build an institution that has real integrity and respect. We can be fair, you know, without putting ourselves into harnesses like a rigid tenure system or this affirmative action law. I think it's tragic that it's taken place.

JLR: Would you want to comment on your wife's part of the educational administration career? How has she enjoyed it and in what way has she contributed and thrived on it?

JK: I can give her a big accolade. When I came to Concordia, Concordia didn't have much money. In fact, I think we can say we were broke and maybe worse than broke. We didn't feel, for example, that when we had to entertain, we could call the food service to bring over the food. And for many years, at Commencement and at Homecoming, when we would have guests and special speakers, we entertained them in our home and I didn't even turn in a bill to the college for the food. But she would attend the Commencement exercises and Homecoming festivities and still make the big dinners for the guests. Well, we did change that when the college came into a better financial position. But after nearly every C-400 meeting, we had an open house. To begin with, she furnished the food; but then later on the food service sent over the cookies or the cake or whatever was served. But for some reason, she always got stuck with preparing the coffee in some big urns and then buying the coffee. I'm not complaining and we sometimes talk about that today. But there were others who were doing the same thing, too. I think of a woman I knew very well, a president' wife, Mrs. Grant Skul [spelling] at Augustana College. I was down there once for a whole week giving some speeches. I stayed at the president's house and there were several others, too, at this conference; and she entertained the whole gang day after day because Augustana was in the same boat as Concordia; we just didn't have the money. So she's been a tremendous help, and she's a very sensitive person. She wouldn't let me go to the college unless I had a shirt and tie and suit on [laughter]. She saw to it that I was dressed up and a few things like that she did to keep me on the straight path.

JLR: You've been given a number of honors and I can't enumerate them; but could you mention some of them? There were honorary degrees and I'm thinking of...

JK: I received a doctor of laws from St. Olaf College, my alma mater, in 1952. Then I was made a Knight of the Order of St. Olaf by King Olaf in, I think, 1960. And the year I left, the Concordia faculty was kind enough to confer on me the degree of doctor of humane letters.

JLR: Going over your retirement now. Well, first of all, you know accepting the presidency or spending this time in the presidency, would you do it again?

JK: Yeah, I think I would. I think I would. Sure. In fact, we've had reverses in life and a big tragedy; but looking back, there have been many more pleasant things and happy things and successful things than adverse things. I often tell Beatrice, my wife, that in fact, I wish I could turn the clock back and live it all over again. I don't feel bitter or disillusioned. As you know, St. Olaf College really came to stature under a man by the name of Dr. Lars Boe and he died at the age of 67. During the last years of his life he battled cancer, so he was bedridden much of the time. But I remember he said once, "There are a lot of men in the world and in the church much more gifted and more intelligent than I am, but for some reason the Lord has let me serve in interesting and exciting places and I have every reason to be thankful."

JLR: Time for just a few more comments before the tape expires, I think. What have been your projects and activities during retirement?

JK: Well, when I first retired, I kept fairly busy serving as interim pastor of congregations. I was in Valley City six months and Kindred seven months, and I was in Lisbon, North Dakota awhile and Barnesville and Audubon or I'd go out on Sundays and fill in parishes. But I haven't been doing that much lately because the church has many hundred pastors too many so there isn't a demand for that kind of service any more, so I spent most of my time reading and in the summer we have a lake place and we can keep busy outdoors there.

JLR: I thank you very much. You've been a good interviewee and I haven't had to ask you too many questions and I really appreciate that. Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]