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Rod Mulder's Memorial Service
By Arend D. Lubbers
November 8, 2010

He came as a teacher of French and he became a Professor and Dean of Social Work. I began to understand the depth of his personal and professional qualities during Grand Valley's darkest hour. Financial disruption in the State reverberated through its universities. We were in crisis and fortunately Rod was Chair of the Faculty Senate. Wrenching decisions were being made and Rod's calm demeanor and commanding leadership as Senate Chair made the decisions better and prevented internal upheaval that might have had a lasting negative effect on the Institution. He was a model for the term "unsung hero."

He never told me, or I don't remember if he did, why he turned from teaching French to a strong commitment to social work. I have allowed myself to speculate; an interesting, if not always reliable, process toward explanation. Rod came from a northwest Iowa, Dutch Calvinist culture. The culture contained the redeeming characteristics of compassion, love, forgiveness, gratitude, honesty, integrity, duty, and faith. In that culture these were not hazy concepts far from conscious daily life. They were literal and omnipresent. They were ingredients for a child's character. Among some adherents of the religious community in which he was born, as among all belief groups, there was a tendency to theological "i" dotting and "t" crossing that impaired their ability to incorporate the most

important virtues into their relationships and judgments. Through childhood, adolescence, college days, and early adulthood, these forces of good rooted in his heritage nurtured his character, and the weakness that I know he observed sharpened his consciousness of the good and his desire to have it prevail in his life, and filter out of his life into the lives of others.

Social work, teaching social work students, assisting the agencies dependent on social workers was the best venue I can imagine for Rod to express through his work what he held in his heart and mind. He lived the best of his culture and tradition. Everyone benefited, especially Grand Valley. A university is made up of the virtues and weaknesses of those who comprise it. Rod is among about a dozen early Professors who laid the bedrock for this institution. In the mix of the foundation stones are the personal and professional virtues of Rod Mulder.

One mantra for his life was inclusiveness. His long and durable contribution to the Madison Street Church illustrated that. Since the beginning of my tenure I celebrated Grand Valley's relationship and contribution to the community. I defined it as close and inclusive. I never passed by a soap box on which to stand and tout it. Rod and I shared the view, and his work gave substance to it. What he did made my claim valid.

When Rod and I met, we talked in micro and macro terms. We shared personal observations. We talked about family and colleagues. We assessed

Grand Valley's present status. For me our discussions were personal and professional. Some of them were scheduled, many were impromptu. As I reflect on many years of conversations with Rod, they were more than friendly and informational; they provided me with a sense of stability. He knew what he wanted and where he was going and so did I. We shared a dream for our university. We wanted that dream to come true. He did his part to fulfill it to the end of his life.

When Rod began his career he was yet to distinguish himself. But inevitably the characteristics that I have mentioned led to professional accomplishment of highest distinction. If he had served at an English university he would be placed on a list for Queen's Honors, at a Dutch university he might have been knighted. He served with us, and we cannot grant royal recognition. What we offer him is respect without qualification, affection deeply rooted, and gratitude unending. He stayed long amongst us, and that was a great gift to us and the university. In Cymbeline Shakespeare provides the line, "It is no act of common passage, but a strain of rareness." We recognize today our colleague who had that strain of rareness.

Celebration of Life



Rodney J. Mulder, Ph.D.

1942–2010

Monday, November 8, 2010

4:00 p.m.

Loosemore Auditorium
Richard M. DeVos Center
Robert C. Pew Campus

Professor and Dean
Friend and Mentor
Family Man
Advocate for Justice



GRAND VALLEY
STATE UNIVERSITY