



Meadville Lombard
Theological School

Frequently Asked Questions: Meadville Lombard and Potential Partners

November 23, 2009

The Board of Trustees of Meadville Lombard Theological School this month opened a new direction for the school. The board voted to authorize partnership talks with Andover Newton Theological School as a first step in what could be a union of several theological schools and seminaries. At the same time, the Board authorized steps to market the school's Hyde Park campus in Chicago for sale. Here are some answers to questions we are already receiving:

Is the partnership with Andover Newton a "done deal?"

Far from it. The Meadville Lombard Board has only authorized the beginning of a dialogue and, and of this writing, a first conversation has not even begun. There are numerous issues that need to be identified and addressed before any outcomes can be imagined or foreseen. Both parties have the option to "walk away" at any time.

Will the School stay in Chicago?

Both ANTS and Meadville Lombard are committed to exploring the financial feasibility of staying in Chicago. Although there can be no guarantees, Meadville Lombard will make every effort to maintain a Chicago location. It is likely that every student now enrolled in the school will graduate from the current campus.

What would Meadville Lombard gain by selling its campus now?

We would gain three things. First, Meadville Lombard would be relieved of spending funds to address deferred maintenance of the campus; this would free funds for our educational mission. Second, Meadville Lombard would gain increased endowment funds which, as a part of our investment policy, could be used to fund our educational mission. Third, Meadville Lombard would gain flexibility to provide the best educational program without requirement to conform to restrictions of the current outdated facility.

When is Meadville Lombard likely to move out of its buildings?

Without having yet sold the campus, we can only say that it will be a long while before Meadville Lombard moves out of its buildings. Before any move can take place, we need to have a better idea about our future. This includes knowing how our students will be provided access to our valuable library materials. It could take several years for these issues to be resolved.

What about the Meadville Lombard Library?

The Wiggin Library is a tremendous resource for Unitarian Universalism. The core materials will be maintained and will have a home accessible to all of Unitarian Universalism and our students. We

cannot just jettison the library; it is a unique and valuable resource for Unitarian Universalism and for our future.

What about students who are currently enrolled in Meadville Lombard?

All students will be able to complete their current program.

What about prospective students?

This action provides an even better reason to apply for and enter Meadville Lombard with the incoming class in 2010. Meadville Lombard is making these bold moves in order to create a future for those students. The prospect of a financially sound institution within the context of an exciting theological education partnership is a better reason than ever for prospective students to come to Meadville Lombard in the fall of 2010. As Meadville Lombard enters this period of creative innovation, we will be especially attractive to students who are similarly entrepreneurial.

What will happen to the Meadville Lombard faculty?

Although it is too soon to answer this question specifically, it is true that Meadville Lombard's faculty provides the core of Unitarian Universalist education to our students and is valued for what it brings to the partnership talks.

What will happen to the Meadville Lombard staff?

It is also too early to answer this question specifically, except to say that if there are any changes to be made as a result of the Board's action, we will demonstrate our compassion and regard for our staff by giving plenty of notice and proper compensation.

What will happen to endowed funds?

All will be maintained for the purposes they there were given. Meadville Lombard has a legal obligation to do so, as well as moral obligations and specific agreements.

Why not enter into a conversation with Starr King School for the Ministry, the other seminary affiliated with Unitarian Universalism?

Meadville Lombard has Starr King's permission to state that Starr King was a school approached by us during the summer. In making decisions about the future direction for the school, Meadville Lombard took into account the successful record of ministers at Starr King and the high regard Meadville Lombard holds for the educational model of Starr King. At the same time, Meadville Lombard believes it is advantageous for Unitarian Universalists to have two identity-based ministerial formation experiences and academic centers. The direction the Meadville Lombard trustees have chosen will allow for these two valued formation experiences and centers to continue.

Are there any certainties in these partnership talks?

Yes. We will not go forward if we cannot guarantee maintaining Unitarian Universalist-identity education for seminarians, maintaining the new Meadville Lombard Educational Model, and being financially feasible.

What will happen next?

We expect a joint release from Meadville Lombard and ANTS within the next two weeks. We expect Meadville Lombard and ANTS to establish core teams of trustees from each school. We hope to announce by year-end that the two schools have given a green light to further exploration. This puts Meadville Lombard ahead of schedule; it had not counted on making the decisions made this month until the end of the year.

After that?

We need a decision in 2010. The “do nothing” option is not sustainable for Meadville Lombard.

What is the context for these actions?

Meadville Lombard is responding to demographic trends that include students coming to theological education later and later in their lives as well as increasing costs. The Meadville Lombard Educational Model responds to demands for new forms of education. The notion of a theological university with multiple identity-based colleges could be appealing to financially fragile seminaries and to people who want to either study or teach. It mirrors the realities of pluralism in religious life in North America today. The future of Meadville Lombard in this sort of new collaborative arrangement could be quite creative.

What is not changing at Meadville Lombard?

- Meadville Lombard will continue to fulfill its mission of educating Unitarian Universalist ministers for Unitarian Universalism.
- Meadville Lombard will continue to provide its relatively high levels of scholarship assistance for ministerial students.
- Meadville Lombard will maintain its commitment to be in the vanguard of theological education with our Meadville Lombard Educational Model.

Who should I contact with my comments and suggestions?

Any member of the Executive Team of the Meadville Lombard Board of Trustees would be delighted to hear from you. They are:

- David Frost: defrosty1@aol.com
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