



Meadville Lombard
Theological School

For Immediate Release

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'Meadville Lombard Has an Exciting Future,' Says School's President

**Meadville Lombard to Join Andover Newton in Seminary
Partner Talks that may include Colgate Rochester Crozer, others**

CHICAGO -- Meadville Lombard Theological School, a 165-year-old Unitarian Universalist seminary, will explore an innovative partnership with Andover Newton Theological School in talks that could later include Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School and other seminaries.

The talks were authorized this weekend by Meadville Lombard's Board of Trustees. The partnership discussion is designed to preserve Meadville Lombard's mission of providing UU-identified ministerial formation, continue the school's new educational model and address financial challenges the recession exposed for Meadville Lombard and the other seminaries.

The trustees also voted to authorize the sale of the school's campus in Chicago, which includes a main educational building, three converted large houses and the land associated with the buildings. (See separate release.)

Andover Newton, based in Newton Centre, Mass., is covenanted with both the United Church of Christ and the American Baptist Churches USA. Colgate Rochester Crozer, based in Rochester, N.Y., is covenanted with both the American Baptists and the United Methodist Church. Andover Newton has a large Unitarian Universalist presence, including trustees, faculty and students.

Meadville Lombard's talks with Andover Newton are at an early stage, said Lawrence R. Ladd, chair of the Meadville Lombard trustees. Identification of Andover Newton as a potential partner is based on research by a committee of the board. It consulted with The Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary,

which charted Andover Newton's growing commitment to Unitarian Universalist ministerial formation.

In May, Andover Newton began partnership talks with Colgate Rochester Crozer. If Meadville Lombard and Andover Newton achieve an early agreement on negotiation positions, it is expected that Andover Newton will bring Meadville Lombard into its separate talks with Colgate Rochester Crozer and possibly other seminaries, Ladd said.

Meadville Lombard can withdraw from the talks at any time, Ladd noted. In particular, the school will withdraw if negotiations cannot preserve Meadville Lombard's UU identification, its new community-based pedagogy embedded in the Meadville Lombard Educational Model or create an economically sustainable vision for the future.

The Rev. Dr. Lee C. Barker, president and professor of ministry at Meadville Lombard, said the talks with Andover Newton are expected to be preceded by a preliminary joint announcement within the next two weeks. All subsequent announcements about the possibility of partnership will be made simultaneously by both institutions. The same joint protocol will apply if Meadville Lombard becomes part of Andover Newton's talks with Colgate Rochester Crozer or with other institutions.

"Meadville Lombard has an exciting future," Barker said. "There is an opportunity here to create an economically viable future, an opportunity to educate our current students, an opportunity to continue to implement our new theological educational model, an opportunity to sustain our Unitarian Universalist identity for ministerial formation and an opportunity to attract many more students in the future.

"This partnership can be a true collaboration, the coming together of institutions that preserves the identity and mission of each," Barker said. "Each component school, including Meadville Lombard, would come to the partnership in its own way. We'd each have our own docking mechanism into the whole.

"An eventual agreement with Andover Newton and possibly other schools could produce a university of theological schools, similar to the ancient universities of Europe, including Oxford University, which has a Unitarian college as a component."

Barker pointed out that the Colgate Rochester Crozer talks are currently predicated on retaining a presence in Rochester for that school. A similar possibility exists for retaining a Meadville Lombard presence in Chicago.

Meadville Lombard was founded in 1844 as Meadville Theological School, a Unitarian seminary in Meadville, Pa. It has been located in Chicago's Hyde Park neighborhood since 1926, where it became both a neighbor and an affiliate of the University of Chicago. During the Depression of the 1930s, Meadville combined with the Chicago-

based Ryder Divinity School operations of Lombard College, a Universalist institution established in 1851 in Galesburg, Ill. The two denominations served by the combined Meadville Lombard Theological School themselves merged 30 years later in 1961 to form today's Unitarian Universalist Association. Meadville Lombard is also a member of the Association of Chicago Theological Schools.

The Rev. Peter Morales, president of the UUA, welcomed the new talks between Meadville Lombard and Andover Newton as well as the possibility to expand talks to Colgate Rochester Crozer and other schools.

"This is an opportunity to strengthen financially fragile schools that are important centers for forming UU ministers, one of them explicitly dedicated to doing so," Morales said. "It could produce a platform to present Meadville Lombard's innovative and UU-inspired curriculum in a larger and more diverse setting. It's also a possibility to bring Unitarian Universalism into an interfaith link with the school that produced the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Rev. Howard Thurman."

Barker said that while Meadville Lombard's finances are challenged -- a circumstance common among the 250 members of the Association of Theological Schools -- many other parts of Meadville Lombard are strong.

"All the things going right at the school are still going right," he said. "The most important human elements are in great shape: students, faculty, alumni, donors, friends, and prospective students. We have a great new curriculum. But like most seminaries in North America, we need a new model for handling finances and administration.

"The place to start thinking about Meadville Lombard's future of service to Unitarian Universalism and to students of ministry and religion is from the place of looking at possibilities," he said. "This school is loaded with intelligence and commitment to survive, and the same is true of other seminaries. Meadville Lombard has faced many challenges in its two centuries. It has survived by looking squarely and honestly at itself and making decisions that lead to the strongest contemporary education setting for ministers, which in turn produces leadership that transforms congregations, individual lives and the world."

Links:

Meadville Lombard Theological School: www.meadville.edu

MLTS Board Resolution on Partnership: www.mlflash.org/2009/11/partnership-resolution

Separate news release on campus real estate: www.mlflash.org/2009/11/campus-release

Andover Newton Theological School: www.ants.edu

Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School: www.crcds.edu

Unitarian Universalist Association: www.uua.org

Association of Theological Schools in United States and Canada: www.ats.edu

Center for the Study of Theological Education at Auburn Theological Seminary:
www.auburnsem.org/study/about.asp?nsectionid=2&pageid=1

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