

MEADVILLE LOMBARD THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL  
CHARGE TO THE GRADUATES  
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In 1935, the Universalist General Convention held its biennial assembly in Washington, D. C. The Universalists were meeting in the midst of a world still shattered by the memory of the Great War--that vast conflict in which Western Civilization nearly committed cultural suicide in the trenches of Northern France. The Universalist were meeting in a world struggling with the implications of the Great Depression--that apocalypse that revealed, for all to see, the brutality and inequality and fundamental injustice of a market-driven, capitalist system run amok. The Universalists were meeting in a world shadowed by the rise of totalitarian governments and the unshakeable forebodings of an even greater war to come.

In 1935, in Washington, D. C. the Universalists met to declare to a frightened and discouraged and fearful world the faith that they sought to embody. In 1935, the Universalists declared for all to hear:

We avow our faith

In God as eternal and all conquering love;

In the spiritual leadership of Jesus;

In the supreme worth of every human personality;

In the authority of truth, known or to be known,

And in the power of men of good will and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil, and progressively to establish the kingdom of God.

It was a radical statement in 1935, flying in the face of the pessimism and despair of the times. Indeed, to some it must have seemed naive and hopelessly out of touch with the real world. But in those troubled times this was the faith from which Universalists sought to address their world.

The world in which you will practice your ministry is no less challenging than the world the Universalists inhabited in 1935. We live in an era in which even self-proclaimed democracies assert the right to preemptive war, and in response even small nations feel impelled to force their way through the door into the club of nuclear-armed states. We live in an era in which the rich grow steadily richer while the righteous are daily sold for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes. We live in a world in which the planet is ruthlessly plundered and exploited, its riches transferred from the periphery to the center of empire. We live in a world in which greed and

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lack of foresight threaten our very existence as the ice caps melt, the sea levels rise, and a brutalized planet responds with storm, drought, fire and flood.

In such a world the temptation to blindness or to despair sometimes seems overwhelming. But despair and blindness offer no basis for ministry to this broken and bleeding world. I charge you, as you enter upon your vocations, to see the world for what it is--to see clearly, and without flinching, all its pain, all its injustices, its short-sighted embrace of the values of the main chance. I charge you to cry out against conventional practices that devalue humanity and debase the moral currency and destroy the planet in the name of profit and expediency and efficiency. I charge you to be bold prophets of a larger vision in which the nations live at peace, in which the resources on which life depends are shared equitably, in which the protection of the planet, our home, becomes the central focus of our common existence.

But I charge you, in all of this, to act and minister from a deeply grounded faith, from a deep rootedness in what our Universalist forebears called the greater gospel and the larger hope. In all you do, speak faith to a distraught and despairing world.

Speak to the world of the power of eternal and all encompassing love,

Speak to the world of the importance of embracing the leadership of those whose lives are led by love;

Speak to the world of the supreme worth of every human personality,

Speak to the world of the authority of truth, known or to be known,

And speak to the world of the power of women and men of good will and sacrificial spirit to transform evil and progressively to establish the human commonwealth.

It well may be that no faith will prove adequate to divert humanity from the dangerous path it is now following so blindly. It well may be that the storms gathering on the horizon will yet sweep over us, inflicting untold suffering, pain and death. But in a world grown fearsome and threatening, to minister is to cry out the danger, to speak, out of a deep and abiding faith, of an alternative vision, a vision that has the power to entrain a different future. I charge you to live and act and to minister out of that center of faith, no matter how naive it may seem, to live and to act out of that vision of possibility, out of that hope that must not be overwhelmed no matter how grim the prospects may appear; for in truth, the future we shall build together will never be more than the vision, the hope, the faith that captures us and animates us and lives through us.

You who are our legacy, our hope, go now into a world that is awaiting your ministry; be bold to proclaim the world as it might be; be bold to serve the world we fain would inhabit.