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Seminaries to create new model for theological education Multifaith leadership training is central focus

NEWTON CENTRE, Mass. -- Two leading seminaries have agreed in principle to form a new interreligious university-style theological institution that seeks to become an innovative center for educating religious leaders for service in a pluralistic world.

The as-yet unnamed institution will be established during the next year by Andover Newton Theological School of Newton Centre, Mass., and Meadville Lombard Theological School of Chicago. Other seminaries will be sought as partners in a design that allows participating schools to keep their historic names and sustain distinct faith traditions while gaining significant financial and administrative advantage through a single corporate infrastructure.

In separate meetings late last week the Trustees of the two schools agreed in principle to undertake a program of actions to bring the new “theological university” into existence by June 15, 2011.

“Across the country seminaries are searching to capture the opportunities of this new era in the life of the church, respond to the growing complexities of a multi-faith society, and yet meet the ever-present challenges of financial sustainability. This vision has the potential to offer innovative answers to these questions, and do so not only in the curriculum but in the design of the corporation as well,” said the Rev. Dr. Nick Carter, president of Andover Newton and incoming president of the new institution.

The Rev. Dr. Lee C. Barker, president of Meadville Lombard, who will become a senior executive in the new entity, said, “This new interreligious ‘theological university’ is designed to serve seminarians of all religions, and seeks to strengthen their faiths and identities – not water them down. It is in valuing each other’s distinctions that we find the ground for the greatest learning. We hope other like-minded seminaries will join us because they share our mission to train leaders who are prepared to serve in a religiously diverse world and want to do so in a model that can offer a financially sound footing.”

The two founding schools, one Christian and the other Unitarian Universalist, will retain their historic names under the corporate umbrella of the new entity. Andover Newton, America’s oldest graduate seminary and the nation’s first graduate institution of any kind, traces its establishment to 1807. It is affiliated with the United Church of Christ and the American Baptist Churches USA. Meadville Lombard, also among the nation’s



oldest seminaries, was founded in 1844 and identifies with the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

The new institution will be based on the Andover Newton campus in Newton Centre, MA., although the Meadville Lombard academic operations will remain largely based in Chicago, primarily engaged in “TouchPoint,” its innovative distance-learning program.

Meadville Lombard is in the process of selling its four-building campus in the Hyde Park neighborhood of Chicago. The sale will liquidate the school’s real estate assets and terminate needs for ongoing maintenance, freeing up assets for better use in the educational mission of the new school.

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