

MEADVILLE LOMBARD

theological school

NEWS

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John Howland Lathrop Fund fully endowed

Endowment will ensure English instruction for seminary students in Transylvania

Meadville Lombard Theological School is pleased to announce that a recent pledge by the Rev. Dr. Leonora Montgomery has completed the funding for the John Howland Lathrop Endowed Fund for Transylvania English Instruction.

Patricia K. Bailey, Vice President for Institutional Advancement at Meadville Lombard, notes that once all the pledges to the fund are received, they will total over \$280,000, generating an annual income for the program of approximately \$14,000 and “securing its place in perpetuity.”

“Learning English is key to the future of the movement there,” said Montgomery, who has traveled to Transylvania twice, in 1992 and again in 1994. Montgomery enjoyed having the opportunity to meet with the seminary students there, but found that she was “terribly dependent” on those students who could speak English. She feels strongly that the Unitarian students there desperately need to be able to speak English in order to get the support they need from the Unitarian Universalist communities in the United States.

This is exactly the reason Douglas K. Eads requested that the endowment be set up in the first place. Eads, a lifetime member of the First Unitarian Congregational Society in Brooklyn, New York, asked that the endowment be named as a tribute to Rev. John Howland Lathrop (1880-1967), a 1903 graduate of Meadville Lombard and minister of Eads’ congregation for 46 years. Although Eads was only a boy when Lathrop retired from the ministry, Lathrop’s interest in and commitment to international UU ministry was legendary in his church. “I remember him vaguely as a youngster in Sunday School and as a person of history,” said Eads. Intrigued by Lathrop’s interest in Transylvania (and India), Eads decided to make the pilgrimage to Transylvania in 1998 and returned again in 2000.

The English teaching program was in progress when Eads visited and he had been aware of it through his own involvement with the UUA’s Partner Church Council. Eads says he “really felt this program was worthwhile and exactly the kind of program I wanted to give a substantial amount of money to—because it was educational and would open doors to the world for people who needed the language.”

It was with the intention of opening that door wide to seminary students that Eads began the funding earlier this year with a pledge of \$250,000. It was important for Eads to begin giving to this fund while he was still living, so that he could see the work continue.

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Other donors came forward as well. The Rev. Dr. Leon Hopper, who has served as president of the Partner Church Council, also found the program to be key to supporting the movement abroad. “I saw it as establishing a broader context” for the Unitarian seminary students in Kolozsvár, Hopper said, “giving them access to information that would fuel their own ministries.” Hopper has been involved with the program, having met all of the English teachers in Transylvania with the exception of Ben Legg, the current teacher. He has watched as each new group of students has gone through the program and notes that three of those students are now teaching at the seminary.

Larry Coburn also made a donation specific to the Lathrop Endowment. Coburn has been involved with the Partner Church Council since 1993, and continues today, serving on the Partner Church Council executive committee. Coburn decided that having common language with the ministers in Transylvania was so important, he sought lessons in Hungarian and became conversant in the language. And then he married his tutor, Gabriella, a Hungarian-born Roman Catholic who is as involved in the English Instruction program as Coburn.

Coburn describes the program as “the single most important and effective program” and makes all the difference in communicating with the Unitarian ministers in Transylvania. He and Gabriella have hosted many of the students and ministers in their home and he often has phone conversations with them. “There is nothing like being able to talk with these ministers first-hand,” said Coburn.

For more information on the roots of Unitarianism in Transylvania, see [Unitarian Universalist Origins: Our Historic Faith](#), by Mark W. Harris.

For information on the Partner Church Council, go to www.uupcc.org.

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