

MEADVILLE LOMBARD

theological school

NEWS

December 5, 2005

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An Update on the Conversation Between Meadville Lombard and Starr King

by *Rev. Dr. Lee Barker, Meadville Lombard Theological School, and
Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, Starr King School for the Ministry*

We write you with this latest update on the conversations that are taking place between our two schools, Meadville Lombard Theological School and Starr King School for the Ministry. As we have written in the past, these conversations are intended to explore the possibility of our two Schools working in closer collaboration in order to enhance theological education for Unitarian Universalism.

The most recent meeting of the Leadership Group took place in Dallas, TX November 28, 2005. The Leadership Group's membership, along with us, includes Donna Dutton (ML board chair), Daniel Kanter (SKSM board chair), Bill Sinkford (UUA president), Patti Lawrence (SKSM acting academic dean while Ibrahim Farajaje' is on sabbatical), Susan Pangerl (ML academic dean) and Robert Cooley (consultant to the two schools).

At our previous meeting, we had narrowed several potential models for collaboration into two that looked the most promising. At this meeting, we began a preliminary exploration of the strongest one—the “consolidation model”—in greater depth. This model would consolidate our two schools into one Center of UU Theological Education with two or more campuses, allowing us to carry forward the identities of Meadville and Starr King within a new, unified institution.

During the course of the meeting we considered the various practical and visionary reasons for a consolidation, we deliberated over the mission under which a consolidated institution might be formed, we considered an appropriate role for the UUA to hold in relation to a consolidated school and we planned for a next stage in the continuing conversation.

At the meeting's end, we determined that it is immediately necessary to take two next steps.

First, we need to more accurately understand the economic vitality of both Meadville Lombard and Starr King. By this we mean it is important that each institution gain a better understanding of its ability to generate new economic energy and resources over the next few years. To this end, we will engage an outside consultant (an economist) who will provide an analysis of each School's current plan to generate more income and achieve financial stability. The same consultant will provide an independent audit of each School so that we may have a basis of comparison.

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Second, we need to more accurately understand the potential economic vitality of a consolidated school. We understand that this economic analysis must include several strategic elements: we must name the broad educational and programmatic assumptions of a consolidated school, we must identify the way in which a consolidated school might serve the UUA and be served by the UUA, and we must be able to see more clearly how greatly UU theological education would be enhanced by a consolidated effort. These intertwining issues will be explored by ourselves and UUA President, Bill Sinkford, in advance of the next Leadership Group meeting. We will be assisted by our consultant, Robert Cooley.

The next meeting of the Leadership Group will take place on March 6, 2006 in Dallas, TX. It is expected at that time a recommendation will be issued to our respective Boards of Trustees as to whether or not to move forward. If the recommendation is to continue the exploration we will, among other things, design a process that will formally solicit the wisdom of all our stakeholders and partners.

However, in the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact either one of us with your thoughts and ideas.

It cannot be said often enough that these conversations are motivated by an intention to provide our students with the finest preparation for ministry and religious leadership within the tradition of our cherished Unitarian Universalism. And we thank you for your support and encouragement.

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