

MEADVILLE LOMBARD

theological school

NEWS

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An Update on the Conversation between Meadville Lombard and Starr King

We write you with the latest news 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 March 6, 2006. 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 (held in November), we determined that it was necessary to acquire an accurate understanding of the economic vitality of both Meadville Lombard and Starr King so that each institution could better know its ability to independently generate new economic energy and resources over the next few years. We also established the need to more accurately understand the potential economic vitality of a consolidated school. We accomplished these steps and agreed with the following assessment:

- That the size of each School is too small and does not have the necessary critical mass of enrollment, faculty, and staff to achieve long term financial sustainability.
- That each school has been managing an overall reduction in the strength of their endowments, the number of faculty and number of staff—even with increased enrollment.
- That in coming together in a consolidated school, both Meadville Lombard and Starr King have the opportunity to more vigorously fulfill our missions by increasing the number of students, faculty, programs and locations devoted to Unitarian Universalist theological education.
- That including the UUA as a "partner" (even while keeping the new school fully autonomous), could allow for increased vitality and greater fulfillment of the mission.

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Out of these understandings, the Leadership Group voted unanimously to recommend to each of our Boards that we take the next step of moving into a negotiation phase to form a consolidation

between our two institutions. To be more specific, the next step would be the coming together of our two Boards to design and implement a consolidation plan that would unite our administrations, faculty, and educational programs. It is understood that a new consolidated school would allow for locations in Berkeley, Chicago and a third on the east coast. The Starr King and Meadville Lombard campuses would allow for expanded M.Div, M.A. and distance learning programs, as well as advanced D.Min and Ph.D. studies. An East Coast Center, to be created in a future phase of development, would allow for the much needed program of continuing education for ministers and lay leadership education.

As previously stated, specific resolutions are currently being finalized. These resolutions will come to a vote by the Starr King Board in April and by the Meadville Lombard vote in June. The UUA will entertain a discussion around its participation at its April meeting.

Should these resolutions be passed by the two Boards there will be much work to do, including putting into place a comprehensive plan for receiving further input from alumni and other stakeholders of our two schools. Thank you all who have already contacted us. Please do not hesitate to continue 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 to educate progressive religious leadership who will bring Unitarian Universalist values to bear on issues in our larger society and world. And we thank you for your support and encouragement.

Sincerely,

Rev. Dr. Lee Barker
Meadville Lombard Theological School

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker
Starr King School for the Ministry

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