

# MEADVILLE LOMBARD

theological school

NEWS

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## **Phone-In Seminar Gives Students Unique Look at Ministering to Large Congregation**

Meadville Lombard students were able to engage with three experienced large-congregation ministers through a unique hook-up earlier this month—through a telephone conference call.

The ministers, The Rev. Dr. Arvid Straube, The Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs, and The Rev. Dr. Michael Schuler, were gathered together for a conference on large church ministry in California. They formed a panel, moderated by Meadville Lombard President, Lee Barker, who was in a classroom on our Chicago campus with the students of The Rev. Dr. John Tolley's Introduction to Ministry class. In addition to those students, the course was also opened up to all Meadville Lombard students, including students enrolled in our Modified Residency Program (MRP) who dialed in from throughout the country.

Each of the panel members was given ten minutes to speak to the topic "What I Wish I had Learned in Seminary about Large Church Ministry." Rev. Dr. Straube said he now sees himself as the holder of the shared vision and the shared passion of the congregation. Motivating and coordinating the staff team is how he brings the goals forward. Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs from Unity Church Unitarian, St. Paul concurred regarding the senior minister's role. "I minister to ministers as my top priority." Rev. Michael Schuler of First Unitarian Society in Madison, also emphasized the minister's role as leader of staff. He mentioned the need for high quality staff, but said that specific experience and skills were perhaps not so important as a sense of mission and the ability to learn.

After the ten-minute presentations, the students had an opportunity to ask questions of the panelists. Jessica "Purple" Rodela, a second-year residential student, thought the phone-in seminar was a unique opportunity for her to hear about something she has limited personal experience: the large UU church. Eric Kaminetzky, a fourth-year MRP student, has been a member of large UU churches most of his life. The phone-in seminar provided him with the opportunity to "eavesdrop" on the thoughts of people who are now doing what he hopes to do one day: serve a large congregation.

Claudia Frost, another MRP student who phoned in to the seminar even though she was out of town at the time, said that rearranging her schedule to attend the seminar was well worth it. "Hearing the experiences of seasoned large church ministers is an important addition to the theory we read about and discuss in class," said Frost. Kaminetzky concurred that this was "the

practical nuts and bolts data we need to have.” Rodela adds that the participants “were very frank and helpful about the unique challenges of ministering to a large congregation, but they prepared us for those challenges.”

And, even though the participants in the call were flung as far as California to the Carolinas, all seemed to think the experience of meeting by phone was invaluable. “This was beyond my expectations,” said Rodela. “It was successful in having the feel of the speakers being in the room with us, and in terms of time and money management, this was just a great use of resources. We couldn’t fly all these people in to talk with us as they did,” said Rodela.

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*Jim Moir assisted with the writing of this press release.*