



Meadville Lombard
Theological School

Report to the Meadville Lombard Alumni/ae Association

November 21, 2008

Dear fellow alumni/ae,

In my capacity as Meadville Lombard Alumni/ae Association President, I attended the recent meeting of the Meadville Lombard Board of Trustees on November 14 and 15, 2008. It was a pivotal meeting in the history of our institution and one that will have far reaching consequences for the future.

Two key decisions were made by the Board of Trustees:

1. to move ahead with the plan to build a new campus south of the Midway at 62nd Street and Ellis Avenue.
2. to authorize the school's administration to implement a new educational design.

The plan to development a new campus for Meadville Lombard has been widely discussed and should not come as a surprise to you. There have been some new developments regarding the plan and I want to share those with you. The Alderman of the 20th Ward (the neighborhood in which the new campus will be located) had pushed to have the City donate the land for the new campus to Meadville Lombard. After much discussion, the City attorneys determined that this would violate the separation between church and state. Consequently, the school will now be buying the lot at the corner of 62nd and Ellis.

The need to generate additional income to cover the cost of the land purchase has led to an architectural design change that will expand the size of the new campus. The planned programming space (classrooms, library, chapel, and offices) in the design has not changed, but more than 1/3 more residential space is to be built. Instead of providing housing for only Meadville Lombard students, the new campus will have graduate housing for ML students and units available for rent to non-ML students. To this end, the number of residential housing units is being increased from 65 beds to 132.

To facilitate the purchase of the land at 62nd and Ellis, through loans and New Market Tax Credits, while providing the school with maximum legal protection, a separate not-for-profit (501c3) entity, 62nd and Ellis Development (62ED) has been created to assume much of the legal exposure on this real estate transaction and building project. 62Ed will also be responsible for managing the housing portion of the new campus. The formation of a new 501c3 to assist in the development project struck me as odd and confusing at first, however the consultants advising the Meadville Lombard Board, Institutional Project Management (www.ipm-amicus.com), have successfully employed this approach in helping DePaul University develop a new campus. Both their proposal and answers to Board member questions were clear and compelling.

The campus development plan will now move forward on parallel tracks, with 62ED negotiating the purchase of land from the City, and applying for loans and New Market Tax Credits, and the school's administration negotiating the sale of the existing campus.

As I reported to you last year, I believe that the construction of a new campus is critical to the long-term success of Meadville Lombard. Our Saturday Board session was held in the Curtis Room and breakfast was provided in the Wiggins Library. The main building, with its stone staircase and rich woodwork, has lost none of its ambience and charm. Then I went downstairs to the restroom and into the kitchen, and walked through the limited classroom space upstairs. The Meadville Lombard of the 21st century needs a

campus designed for the future with the school's mission in mind and I believe that the new campus is just that. I voted in favor of moving ahead with the new campus development project.

The Board agenda item that has drawn the most interest in recent months was the vote on whether to implement the proposed new Educational Design. Many of you have strong opinions on this matter. Some of you were kind enough to email me your thoughts in advance of the meeting, while others spoke with me on the phone. I tried to gather a range of viewpoints from Alumni/ae Association members before the start of the Board meeting.

The proposal that came before the Board has a few key elements:

1. 3-year degree program (M.Div.) or 4-year dual degree program (M.Div. & M.A.)
2. *praxis* education model throughout the three year program
3. cohort learning teams
4. on-going student/minister mentoring relationship throughout the 3 years

The most controversial aspect of the new Educational Design is the M.Div. program that includes a "non-traditional internship" experience over a three year period and does not require a year-long residential internship. Some of the concerns voiced to me by colleagues were:

1. the depth of experience that a year-long residential internship provides cannot be replicated through a series of brief, site-specific experiences.
2. the relationship between an intern and a supervising minister develops over time and a longer, residential internship allows for that.
3. year-long residential interns are ambassadors for Meadville Lombard in our UU congregations and both heighten awareness of the school and cultivate support for the institution.
4. the non-traditional internship may satisfy the Ministerial Fellowship Committee's (MFC) requirement on paper, but will not adequately prepare students to succeed in front of the MFC.
5. a shorter, *praxis*-focused degree program may not provide the same academic grounding that a more traditional educational design will.

These are some, but by no means all, of the concerns that I heard from Meadville Lombard Alumni/ae. Each one is founded on a thoughtful critique of the proposed Educational Design.

When I was first introduced to the proposed new Educational Design last spring, I was excited about some aspects and concerned about others. I was, and am still, very excited about the full integration of theory and practice that is at the heart of this teaching model. I saw too many of my peers at Meadville Lombard spend two years in classrooms, without ever darkening the door of a church, and then go off to internships for which they were ill-prepared. The new Educational Design guarantees that students will be learning the practical arts of ministry through experience in community and church settings, and reflecting on that experience in peer groups ("cohort learning") under the guidance of a professor.

I was gravely concerned about the adequacy of the "non-traditional internship" alone to prepare graduates for success before the MFC and in ministry over the course of their careers. I was very pleased to see that the school's administration took seriously the input from alumni/ae and developed a dual degree program that allows a student to complete the three-year M.Div. program and also elect to complete a fourth-year, full-time residential internship that will earn the student an additional M.A. in Ministerial Leadership. The M.A. award will ensure that students will be eligible for student loans during their fourth year and will not be required to start paying on existing loans until after graduating from the dual degree program.

The following motion was passed by the Meadville Lombard Board of Trustees: “The Board endorses the Integrated Education Design as presented to the Board and authorizes its implementation.”

With only one member dissenting, the Board voted in favor of the motion. Three of the four Meadville Lombard graduates who are voting member of the Board voted in favor of the new Educational Design, and I was one of them.

It is very clear to me that, while it is bold and daring, this new Educational Design has been thoughtfully conceived. I am persuaded that the *praxis*-learning model that is at the heart of this new design will be very appealing to a new generation of ministers, some of whom may not be Unitarian Universalists. I can easily conceive of the day when our new campus at 62nd and Ellis is the hub of both Unitarian Universalist theological education and inter-religious, and inter-cultural, learning on the South Side of Chicago and beyond. It is an exciting time at Meadville Lombard and I am honored to have the privilege of serving as your representative on the school’s Board of Trustees.

Please feel free to contact me with any comments, questions, or concerns that you may have about any aspect of this report. I will gladly make time for a conversation.

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