

Lee Barker asked me to speak to you about why I am an enthusiastic supporter of Meadville Lombard. The short, easy answer? I support Meadville Lombard because it produces outstanding ministers.

I was introduced to ML by a fellow member of my congregation, Gus Douoguih, who was on the ML Board a few years ago. When Denny Davidoff, the Meadville Senior Associate for Development, would come to DC, Gus would arrange a dinner and invite friends from ours and other local UU congregations. So much like you, my interest came about over food. In a slightly smaller group. And with wine. But ML is not a hard sell. Gus was chair of our search committee nine years ago when we called Rev. Anya Sammler-Michael to be our minister. She is a living testament to the success of Meadville Lombard in developing great ministers.

I could talk about how she leads and fosters growth in Social Justice work (which includes our annual poetry slam – "Straight Outta" symbolizing a bridge to respect and understanding across diversity was this year's theme), spiritual growth, the variety of classes and discussion groups we have. All of which Rev. Anya has nurtured until some parts have become self-sustaining. But I want to make it more personal and share with you my passion, Pastoral Care. Rev. Anya has helped me grow into my current role as Coordinator of our Pastoral Care team by helping me turn my personal trials and tribulations into (in her words) a strong impassioned ministry in pastoral care, and guiding me and our team as we build our congregation into a caring community.

Our Pastoral Care team supports people who have had minor surgery and need one or two meals to those with chronic illnesses who need on-going transportation, meals, and, mostly, our presence.

Her best advice to me came in her first month as our brand new minister. It was a home visit, probably her first; my husband's brother had just come into our life. His schizophrenia was not under control, my mother-in-law was not able to care for him, and I was in a mild panic as I evaluated our options. Her advice was not practical; she had just moved to our area and was not familiar with the social service networks. Rather, her advice was a re-framing of our situation. Widen your circle, she said; you cannot do this by yourself. I have used that advice many times since. Personally, when I feel my options are narrow; in our team, when we begin to feel over-whelmed; and when helping others who feel their own world closing in on them.

Widen your circle.

And that's what ML does for our new ministers. Helps them to widen their circles, expand their vision of what's possible, think and act outside the box. And this in turn helps congregations to expand their visions and think outside their walls.

Not all of you are looking for a minister right now, but there will come a time when you are. When that time comes, you want to be able to choose from an amazing group of ministers who not only articulate but live out what is best about this beloved faith of ours; I urge you to support Meadville Lombard now so it can continue to be the wellspring of religious leaders our congregations need to be the best we can be.