



MEADVILLE LOMBARD
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

Congregational Lay Committee Handbook

Academically Rigorous | Spiritually Grounded | Unapologetically Progressive

Revised August 2016

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Letter from the Director of Contextual Ministry

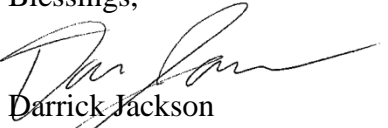
Dear Lay Committee,

Thank you so much for your willingness to work with our students. Your involvement is central to the success of our program. Together, we are changing lives and shaping the future of Unitarian Universalist Ministry.

This handbook is meant to be a resource for you as you work with our students. I hope that it will provide the tools that you need, and answer many of the questions that you may have. And I hope that it serves as a bridge for further connection and conversation as we work together to support our students. Please contact me if you have any questions or need support.

Thank you for your service.

Blessings,



Darrick Jackson
Director of Contextual Ministry

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Meadville Lombard Master of Divinity Degree Program

Meadville Lombard offers a unique model for theological education, designed to prepare ministers for our theologically diverse, multicultural, multiracial world. Built into this model is a web of support where students learn the theory and practice of religious leadership and border crossing with and from academics, clergy, community leaders, and each other. Our educational model is based on insights from Engaged Buddhism, Native American traditions, and feminist theory is encapsulated in a maxim by Paul Fitzgerald, “We are more likely to **act** ourselves into new ways of thinking than **think** ourselves into new ways of acting.” This model and this maxim help us to inspire leaders who will have the skills to cross borders and change lives in order to change the world.

The M.Div Program is anchored by three Signature Courses: Community Studies, Congregational Studies, and Leadership Studies. These faculty team led seminars are rooted in field-based experiences-- a community based internship their Community Studies year, and a two year, half time congregational internship for their Congregational and Leadership Studies years. You will be working with your student during enrollment in their two year, half-time internship. The first year of the internship is called the “Congregational Studies” year and the second year, “Leadership studies.” This approach allows students to learn first-hand – and in a variety of contexts – the multiple aspects of ministry as can be experienced in community settings and congregations of all sizes and diversity.

Each student is assigned to a Teaching Pastor who is sometimes a mentor or coach, sometimes a confidant, and most frequently a translator of Unitarian Universalist values-in-action. Teaching Pastors carve out supportive spaces wherein seminarians can grapple with issues in the intersection of theology, pastoral care, social justice and congregational ministry. In addition, each student engages with a congregation-based Lay Committee to add a valuable range of perspectives to the congregational experience.

Establishing a Congregational Lay Committee

This handbook is developed to help you understand how Meadville Lombard Theological School engages with the student and their internship site. The UUA Internship Manual 2016-2017 is a very important resource that we recommend all Lay Committee members read along with this handbook before beginning their work with the student.

In the Meadville model of ministerial formation, the primary “text” for learning about how congregations work, is the congregation itself. Our hope is that by experiencing how congregations work in real-time, students can be better prepared to meet the expectations expected of them.

The **Congregational** Lay Committee plays a critical role in the formation of the student minister during their development as a minister. It is the role of the Committee to provide support, feedback and guidance about the lay perspective of the congregation: what it is, what it does, and how it relates to the clergy (role, functions, expectations, personal and professional identity) while helping to oversee the learning experience of the student in the congregation.

Who Should Be On the Congregational Lay Committee?

The Lay Committee is made up of 5-7 individuals that are lay persons, including the possibility of a seasoned minister from another congregation. **The Lay Committee must be up and running by early October** and listed on the Ministerial Fellowship Learning and Service Agreement Form. *While the Teaching Pastor is not a member of the Lay Committee and does not attend the Committee’s monthly meetings, the Teaching Pastor should check in with the student and Chair to ensure things are going*

well. The Teaching Pastor and the student minister collaborate to constitute the Lay Committee. Care should be taken to consider the specific learning needs of the student as the Committee is formed (Career Assessment and evaluation letters from Meadville faculty are great places for insights). The Committee is comprised of members that represent a broad cross-section of the congregation (e.g., age, theology, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, types of leadership, etc.)

Characteristics of a Good Lay Committee member:

- Have the ability to meet monthly for committee meetings with the student;
- Bring an informed lens of analysis to discussions about student performance and integration into congregational life;
- Help student identify and address specific learning needs (disposition for service/advocacy, leadership, management, pastoral care, teaching, cross-cultural encounters, etc.);
- Demonstrate involvement across the ministry and life of the congregation;
- Demonstrate knowledge about the church and its mission;
- Be committed to work with the student to develop their potential as a minister;
- Provide support, care, encouragement and honest dialogue with the student;
- Handle sensitive information in a confidential manner, including how to negotiate professional boundaries with the Teaching Pastor;
- Help prepare the congregation for the student's arrival, entry and departure (e.g., formal introductions and farewells to the congregation, staff, leadership, etc.)
- Enable the student to reflect upon his or her experiences.

General Guidelines for Lay Committee Member

- Provide constructive feedback that helps the student to grow and speak the truth in love!
- Take time to see the student as a person.
- Be realistic and remember that becoming a minister is a process.
- Respect confidentiality.
- Contribute fully to the experience. When present give your undivided attention. Help to establish appropriate structure: place, agenda, and participation.
- Value one another's time: arrive and depart meetings on time, and prepared for the meeting's agenda.

Role of the Committee Chair

The Committee Chair has two primary responsibilities on the Lay Committee:

1. to work with the student to coordinate the convening of meetings, their facilitation and to expedite evaluations
2. to foster support and enthusiasm for the Lay Committee and the student minister in the congregation.

Potential Problems with Lay Committees

Several challenges that are typically associated with lay committees tend to be centered around the following themes:

- Time - The committee meets too infrequently, so that trust and continuity never have a chance to develop;

- Leadership - The committee chair is ineffective as a group leader and/or is unclear about how to proceed;
- Goals - The committee is unclear about its work and tends to micro manage the student e.g. They focus on a sermon evaluation or a single task;
- Commitment - The committee senses a lack of support of its work from the student or the minister;
- Coordination - The student and the committee chair do not seem to be on the same page e.g. they do not prepare the agenda in advance.

Academic Support for Learning

During both the Congregational and Leadership Studies year, students will be given specific academic assignments about various topics within congregational life (e.g., preaching, religious education, governance, pastoral care, etc.). Some assignments are designed to pull upon the wisdom and experience of Lay Committee members. On such occasions, students are asked to confer with the Lay Committee as a whole group or with individuals on the Committee who can represent a point of view. Students are aware of the deadlines for these assignments at the beginning of the semester, and should work with the Lay Committee Chair in advance to schedule time on the Committee's agenda.

Lay Committee Concerns about a Student's Ministerial Formation

In the event a Lay Committee becomes concerned about a student's dispositions or performance during their internship in either Congregational or Leadership studies, they should contact the Lead Faculty member in Congregational or Leadership Studies. As student performance (or non-performance) is directly linked to an academic credit, the Lay Committee should directly share their concern with the Teaching Pastor, who will in turn speak with the appropriate Meadville Faculty. During the 2016-2017 Congregational Studies year, contact the Lead Faculty Member for Congregational Studies, Dr. Nicole Kirk (nkirk@meadville.edu)

As Director of Contextual Ministry, Rev. Darrick Jackson (djackson@meadville.edu) is also available to provide support as an *ex officio* member of the teaching team

Possible Activities for Lay Committees and Students

While the student and the Chair should use the student's learning goals as a guide some of the following activity suggestions can occur during a lay committee meeting:

Beginning tasks – Get Acquainted

- Share one another's spiritual odysseys, that is, the story of becoming Unitarian Universalist, what attracted you and what has kept you; what brought you to the church?
- Review the goals/ objectives of the student and discuss how to review them.
- Review the evaluation instrument and when and how evaluations will be completed and submitted.

Pastoral Ministry

- Members recall a time when they were the recipients of good pastoral care (or bad pastoral care) and share their thoughts with the student;
- Everyone reads an article on death and loss that will be discussed at the next meeting;
- Members attend a training on pastoral care that the student gives for the Pastoral Care Committee. They come to the next meeting prepared to discuss the experience and give their feedback.

Preaching

- Members attend worship where the student is preaching and come prepared to share their feedback at the next meeting.
- View a video of the student's sermon and then discuss at the next meeting.

Faith Formation (Religious Education)

- Two or more members attend a class for children, youth or adults led by the student and provide constructive feedback at the next meeting.

Problem Solving

- The student prepares verbatims for the lay committee and they serve as the focus for discussion.

Learning and Service Agreement

The Learning and Service Agreement is a learning tool wherein the student, Congregational Lay Committee, Teaching Pastor, and faculty establish basic learning objectives for professional ministry. While there are set expectations for ministerial competency, there is room for negotiation, adjustment and change as is deemed appropriate and necessary by the partners involved.

There are several steps the student takes in preparing the Learning and Service Agreement (LSA). First, review the [UUA Internship Manual 2016-17](#) material on the LSA including the seven competencies students are expected to focus on during their internship. The UUA manual provides an overview of the agreement, the parts of the agreement, and the process. For Meadville Lombard students, the process is as follows:

1. Students create their LSA by reviewing all the evaluative materials they have gathered at this stage of their ministerial formation, including classroom feedback, career assessment, Clinical Pastoral Education evaluations, a faculty letter from their first year community internship. Due Date: Forms to Meadville Lombard Faculty by October 7, 2016.
2. Students consult with the Teaching Pastor to create and negotiate the content and shape of their learning goals, which includes a list of Lay Committee members.
3. **Students submit a DRAFT of the LSA to the Congregational Studies Faculty by October 7, 2016**, at which point the faculty will give students feedback within one week. If changes are suggested, the student works with their Teaching Pastor to consider changes. Before the student sends the forms to the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC), the intern should share the form with the Lay Committee. Students are expected to submit forms to the UUA/MFC by the end of October.

Goals of the Agreement

- The relationship shall primarily be one of learning for the student in order to facilitate the student's development and professional identity.
- Both the Teaching Congregation and student are expected to learn and grow as a result of their relationship.

Elements of the Agreement

The Learning/Service Agreement includes, but is not limited to, several essential elements:

- learning goals of the student;
- process (objectives) by which those goals will be achieved;
- basis for assessment and evaluation of the student's progress.

A **goal** is a quantitative statement of an end result to be accomplished. It is meaningful, understandable, actionable, measurable, and attainable. For example, in the area of site discernment a goal might be: "to gain an understanding of how budgets are created."

The Learning/Service Agreement contains clear statements of goals for learning and ministerial formation, for the acquisition and appropriation of knowledge and skills, for personal growth and spiritual development, and for reflection and integration.

An **objective** is often defined as a strategy that is developed to accomplish a goal. Well-written objectives are observable and measurable and give direction to the "how to" of achieving a goal.

For example, objectives for the above goal in the area of discernment might be:

- To observe the fall committee workshop that develops programming priorities
- To attend Board of Directors meetings on programming
- Read minutes of Board meetings and know how the mission is reflected in the budget.

A plan for implementation of the goals is then developed. It is possible that more than one goal will be identified in each area.

General Guidelines for Writing the Learning/Service Agreement

- The process of developing a Learning and Service Agreement moves from the general to the specific. That is, goals are developed from the areas identified in the covenant in which the student will work, objectives formulated, and then a plan created.
- Goals and objectives should be consistent with the level of leadership which is also identified through the Learning and Service Agreement.
- Evaluate the usefulness of an objective for a goal by asking questions such as: is it meaningful? Understandable? Actionable? Measurable? Attainable? If answers to these questions are not forthcoming, either the objective needs more work or the goal needs to be redefined.
- The Learning and Service Agreement should attend to challenges raised by faculty evaluations, Career Assessment, and/or Clinical Pastoral Education evaluations.
- The Learning and Service Agreement is a resource for interaction between the student, Teaching Pastor and faculty. It is the role of these partners to discuss, negotiate, and give approval.
- The Learning and Service Agreement should be signed and dated by the student, the Teaching Pastor and posted by the student to Populi.

- The Learning and Service Agreement is an organic document that can be revised in consultation with the Teaching Pastor.
- Learning/Service Agreement Forms are included in the *UUA Internship Manual*, and can be found in the Appendix.

**Note that Learning and Service Agreement Forms are included in the UUA Internship Manual.

The Focused Initiative

The Focused Initiative project requires the student intern, in conjunction with the Teaching Pastor, to identify an area of congregational growth and change (with a focus on those underserved in the congregation). Beginning formally in January 2017, the student, in dialogue with the Teaching Pastor, will name an issue or issues that would move the congregation closer toward the inclusive ideals inherent in progressive liberal religion in general, or specifically within Unitarian Universalism. Once the project is defined, articulated, and confirmed to be of value, the student minister will present their project in a formal 20-minute presentation to the Congregational Lay Committee, Teaching Pastor and the Congregational Studies faculty by late April 2017.

The Focused Initiative project allows student ministers to experience leading change in the congregational setting. In other words, it is developing a project that allows the student minister to lead as a change agent by developing a plan to address these gaps in collaboration with congregational leaders. The plan will be implemented as part of the student's second year of the internship through the Leadership Studies seminar.

The Focused Initiative plan should include a detailed description and assessment of a problem or issue including how this plan will serve a group historically underserved by the congregation or allow the congregation to cross a "cultural border." This document becomes the blueprint for an independent project that is implemented during the Leadership Studies year. Ultimately, this project should be co-designed in conjunction with the Teaching Pastor, Lay Committee and other significant groups in the church (e.g., if it is a social justice project, the Social Justice Council might be consulted, etc.). More details about the project will be shared in November 2016.

Evaluation and Assessment

An important part of the student's learning is the feedback they receive from others. In your role as Congregational Lay Committee, we ask that you evaluate the student. We expect that you will use your monthly meetings with the student to go over issues and concerns as they arise. We also hope that you will encourage the congregation to provide direct feedback to a student when they notice issues and concerns. The first time an issue is raised should not be in the evaluation.

Formal Evaluation: The Mid-Year Evaluation

The Meadville Faculty will ask you to participate in the Mid-Year Evaluation that is required by the Ministerial Fellowship Committee (MFC) and Meadville Lombard, for the student to receive academic credit (at the end of the Congregational Year), again, using the form provided by the UUA. Expect that work to begin in March 2017. The student will complete a self-assessment first and share that assessment with you and your Teaching Pastor. The final, end of Internship Evaluation is completed at the end of Leadership Studies. The Chair of your Lay Committee, again, should consult the *UUA Internship Manual*, which is linked to in the appendix.

UUMA Guidelines

One of the many important roles of the Lay Committee is to become familiar with the UU Guidelines for the Conduct of Ministry. These Guidelines are located at the following [link](#) and should be reviewed with the student.

Support

For questions about the role and work of the Congregational Lay Committee, student evaluation and assessment, contact:

Rev. Darrick Jackson
Director of Contextual Ministry
312-546-6482
djackson@meadville.edu

Questions about evaluation, assessment, course assignments, formation concerns:

Dr. Nicole Kirk
Lead Faculty, Congregational Studies
nkirk@meadville.edu

Glossary of Meadville Terms

Affiliated Faculty – Faculty with multi-year teaching responsibilities and renewable contracts.

August In-Gathering – a three-day gathering on Meadville Lombard’s Chicago campus wherein new and returning students covenant into a Learning Community and launch their year of study in a Signature course.

Contextual Ministry – Contextual ministry aka field education is a practical learning approach to ministry in which seminarian’s/participants are exposed to varied aspects of learning in approved/structured contexts that integrate praxis and theory – experiential learning and classroom or site environment. Contextual ministry provides an opportunity for reflection on the theology of practice of ministry during the participants’ ministerial formation.

Dialogue Triads – Three-person student groups enrolled in Signature Courses that process and synthesize weekly assignments about their learning sites.

Discernment – Listening to the sacred for clarity about a question or issue.

Focused Initiative – A participant-observer research and action project that moves the congregation closer to the inclusive ideals inherent in progressive liberal religion in general, and specifically within Unitarian Universalism.

Formation – Developing the skills and temperament for ministry.

Intensive Courses – Courses where research and writing occur throughout the semester and in-person class time is concentrated within a week or a weekend.

Jaminars – Weekly faculty-generated teaching podcast for students

Lead Faculty – a member of the core Meadville Lombard faculty who coordinates the administration of teaching and learning for a Signature course teaching team.

Learning Community – A community of people who covenant to learn with and from each other.

Learning Convocation (January) – Residential portion of the Signature Courses wherein students engage with the “big ideas” and challenges of ministry and Signature Course content.

Low Residency – Students have low residency in Chicago, but full residency in the world. Students come to Chicago four times a year, and connect with students and faculty throughout the year, to share and explore what they’re leaning in their local context

Podcasts – Digital audio or video files that can be downloaded and used on portable devices. Signature Course faculty use podcasts for the weekly Jaminars responses.

Populi– The web-based Student and classroom management software where class assignments, feedback and formational evaluations are uploaded and archived for historical purposes

Rotation – A practical field experience that is paired with a traditional classroom course for the purpose of deeper learning.

Signature Courses – The anchor of the M.Div program. These three multcredit courses (Community Studies, Congregational Studies, and Leadership Studies) provide students the opportunity to integrate their academic learning with fieldwork in community and congregational settings.

Teaching Pastor – An experienced minister assigned to students at the beginning of their matriculation who remains with the student until completion. The pastor serves as a mentor, coach and supervisor who helps the student grapple with ministerial formation through theological reflections.

Teaching Team – Group of Full-time and Affiliated faculty who bring their expertise together to co-teach our signature courses.

Appendix

Helpful Links

- [UUA Internship Manual](#)
- [Internship Evaluation Form](#)
- [UUMA Guidelines](#)

Helpful Resources

Sample Case Study for Lay Committees	12
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Sample Case Study for Lay Committees

The following case study illustrates a lay committee meeting where feedback is provided on the student's meeting facilitation. This case study may be used as a point of discussion because it contains strengths and weaknesses, both of the student and lay committees, and illustrates some appropriate and inappropriate feedback. The Committee Chair, student and Lay Committee may use this case study to discuss lay committee meetings, feedback and boundary issues.

“The Meeting”

Janelle is serving as the ministerial intern at a 250 member urban church. She is into her second month there and she has met with the Lay Committee twice prior to this particular meeting. There have been several social activities which have provided her with opportunities to get to know several of the committee members. At their first and second meeting they share their spiritual odysseys as a way to get to know one another. Janelle has contacted the chair of the committee prior to the meeting to suggest that she would like to get some feedback on her meeting and group facilitation from the congregational meeting. All of the members were present and felt it would be a good opportunity to provide feedback to Janelle.

Janelle and the committee chair model shared leadership and opened the meeting with a chalice lighting, a reading and prayer. They welcomed the committee members present. The Committee Chair had already sent out the agenda that included discussion and feedback on Janelle's facilitation of the congregational meeting.

Based on Janelle's and the Chairs evaluation instrument they invited the members to address the following areas: ability to keep agenda on track, efforts to include all participants, summarizing comments, transitions, deflecting conflict and opening and closing.

Some of the comments she received are as follows:

Mercedes: Your facilitation was good. It was obvious that you attempted very hard to include everyone by checking in with those who had not spoken.

Sarah: You utilized silences well and you asked for 30 seconds of silence when two members made inappropriate outbursts.

James: You began with a covenant and when it was necessary you reminded participants of the covenant to which we had all agreed.

Zulaika: You kept the agenda moving and you did not allow the long winded members to bog things down. You did not hesitate to ask someone that was being long winded to summarize his statement so that things could move on.

Ariana: The other night at the potluck you made a statement about the war being a crime against humanity. You really need to be more sensitive and remember that we have several military families in the congregation. As a student minister you cannot afford to alienate anyone and especially a big donor like General Catchum.

Discussion continued about Janelle's facilitation and all points were discussed openly and honestly. After Janelle's meeting had been discussed to everyone's satisfaction, Zulaika brought up an issue that

had been on her mind and of concern for a number of months. The Chair of the Pastoral Care Committee, Arnold, was a particularly gifted and skillful listener. His training as a clinical licensed social worker made him exceptional at what he did. However, of late, Zulaika felt he was visiting a particular member at inappropriate times and members were beginning to talk. The member was a young attractive widow with money. Zulaika felt that Janelle should speak to Arnold about this. Janelle feels uncomfortable about the request and after the meeting asks the Committee Chair what she would suggest.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Identify some of the positive features about Janelle's relationship to the Lay Committee.
2. What is your impression regarding the feedback Janelle received about her meeting facilitation?
3. What are some of the issues/problems that are raised in the last paragraph by Zulaika? Do you have any suggestions about how Zulaika's concerns should be handled?
4. What if any other concerns might be issues the Committee may need to address?

Feedback Process

A review of the comments the student received clearly demonstrate how helpful the feedback process can be. Your feedback will help the student eventually become an effective minister. So do not be hesitant to offer loving and compassionate feedback. Review the example above from time to time if need be.