



Lee Barker

President of



MEADVILLE LOMBARD  
THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

2003-2019

Lee Barker, a 1978 Meadville Lombard graduate, returned to the school as its President in 2003 to find that seminaries and theological schools across the nation — including Meadville Lombard — had been overtaken by strong

currents of social and economic change, making many financially unsustainable. Under Lee's leadership, with the help of generous donors, gifted faculty and a strong Board of Trustees, the school seized this opportunity and moved away from the traditional residential model that kept students out of congregations and created an innovative, contextual learning model that integrates practical and academic aspects of ministerial education in low-residency programs. The transformation was so groundbreaking and successful, Meadville Lombard became known as a leader for innovation among theological schools throughout North America.

In the final year of Lee's Presidency, the Board of Trustees and other friends of the school wish to create a professorship in his honor that will attempt to institutionalize his unique leadership skills and transmit them to the Meadville Lombard graduates of the future.



## WITH LEE BARKER'S LEADERSHIP, MEADVILLE LOMBARD...

- funded fully endowed, full tuition scholarships from 0 to 8
- increased the endowment from 8 million to 25 million
- balanced the operating budget for 8 consecutive years
- received gifts to fund:
  - a fully endowed professorship in the discipline of history
  - the move to downtown Chicago into an inspiring and highly functional facility that we share with Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies
- completed a special gifts campaign which raised \$9.8 million
- created a contextual model of theological education, which fully integrates experience and academics, is cohort-based, aimed at teaching leadership across change
- assured students that they are prepared to see the Ministerial Fellowship Committee before they graduate, allowing the MFC preparation and interview to occur within the supportive structure of the educational model
- committed himself and the school to:
  - addressing the white supremacy culture
  - addressing the needs of students of color
  - living faithfully in a context of racial/cultural diversity
- increased the average graduating class from 12 to 26
- reached a higher percentage of students of color studying for UU ministry than any other seminary
- developed special archival collections about Unitarian Universalist persons of color (Sankofa), women in ministry (Heresies), Humanist, Latinx (Cuentos), and international partnerships (Mulani)
- created a position devoted to international students
- earned a full ten-year accreditation from the Association of Theological Schools, demonstrating the success and sustainability of our new program and financial model
- revitalized the Sophia Fahs Center (now the Fahs Collaborative)
  - incubating new faith formation curricula for congregations
  - bringing Beloved Conversations to more than 150 congregations nationwide, furthering the goals of racial inclusion and equity
  - providing professional resources to Religious Educators
- developed a Lay Ministry degree to allow students not interested in ordination, but who wish to work in non-profit, intentional work and leadership to be more fully grounded in the history, theology, practices and values of Unitarian Universalism
- implemented an Affiliate and Guest Faculty program
  - exposing students to top practitioners
  - expanding the teaching faculty well beyond the core faculty, including Margot Adler, Mark Morrison-Reed, Tony Pinn, Leslie Takahashi, Bill Sinkford, and Bill Schulz
- recruited core and affiliated faculty including a high percentage of people of color



**Courage:** He moved into unknown territory trying on various solutions, “shaking things up” without a clear map to guide innovative decisions going forward. It took courage.

**Focus:** Lee unwaveringly focused on the school’s core mission of preparation and formation of Unitarian Universalist ministers for their chosen ministries. He also saw the school as a theological, intellectual, and cultural center and an historical repository for UUism.

**Resilience:** Lee tried one plan after another, obtaining and sustaining board support for each plan. As each potential solution was proposed, Lee received criticism from among the students, alums, faculty and even—at times—from members of the board. Some people told him that he was destroying the school. He pursued possibilities and endured failure. Through it all, Lee remained a steady and reassuring leader.

**Persistence:** He brought a level of impatience to the changes he was making. He recognized and reminded people at the school that we are all temporary and our solutions are partial. He taught us to seize the opportunities when they presented themselves. Even when he had a small

triumph he was unwilling to rest on his laurels.

**Love:** Lee brought people along with a mixture of clarity and humor. He brought a minister’s pastoral understanding of the covenantal relationships in Unitarian Universalism. He nurtured the relationships which over time have transcended the tasks at hand and built long-term strength in the DNA of the school.

**Humility:** While acknowledging that we live within a culture of white supremacy, Lee has been a humble, calm and committed change agent in the struggle. He has fostered a culture of transparency as well as forgiveness when we have failed to get it right. Both qualities have been central to the work for the school, moving forward.



## LEE BARKER PROFESSOR OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES

In gratitude and appreciation for the qualities of leadership that Lee Barker has brought to Meadville Lombard as President, we seek to establish the Lee Barker Professor of Leadership Studies. It is appropriate that as Dr. Barker retires we build on the qualities he has brought to the school by expanding the opportunity for students to focus on their formation and effectiveness as leaders wherever they will serve across the globe.

The institutional change we have experienced at Meadville Lombard during Lee Barker's tenure went hand in hand with the recognition that ministry and religious leadership were moving into a new age. A different kind of preparation was needed. It emphasized a further integration of practice and theory. It cultivated innovation and border crossing of all kinds. This kind of leadership created an in-depth response to the realities of church life and the world around us.

The Lee Barker Professor of Leadership Studies at Meadville Lombard will be filled by a widely recognized religious leader who embodies innovative, collaborative and bold leadership. The professor will have the opportunity to teach across a wide number of disciplines including: The Practical Arts of Leadership, Spiritual Authenticity in Effective Leadership, Leadership Theory; Leadership in a Global, Multi-racial, Multi-faith Context; Entrepreneurial Religious Leadership; Religious Leadership for Equity and Inclusion; Religious Leadership in Congregations and the Public Square; and Religious Leadership in a Post-denominational Age.

The professorship will enable Meadville Lombard to enlarge its capacity to provide leaders who will shape the future of religious and spiritual life in our faith communities and beyond.

