“Tradition and innovation are often in tension, unless an institution’s self-understanding is marked by innovation, risk-taking, and imagining new ways of living out its mission. Meadville Lombard Theological School lives up to the challenges it faces inspired by our tradition that points the way towards innovation.”

—Dr. Elias Ortega, President

“What a year to begin a new leadership role!” This is a phrase I heard many times over the last few months. I heard it from students, alums, faculty, staff, supporters, and friends. More often than not as an exclamation. Facing the challenge of leading this institution through our current moment, as we faced the impact of a global health crisis and then the tumult of nation-wide protests against police brutality and white supremacy culture, required us to take a deep look into what makes us who we are. Meadville Lombard Theological School’s DNA is one of being willing to re-imagine and reinvent ourselves anew to face the moment with an eye towards the future.

During this year, there have been moments where the newness of it all has required us to imagine solutions for unexpected problems. Undoubtedly, this year brought us things that we were not expecting. How do we move as an institution through a pandemic? How do we continue our work during these times? How do we foster community when we are supposed to be social distancing?

In my first year as President of Meadville Lombard, I have experienced first-hand what makes this school a forward-thinking institution. Through the caring and mindful work of our faculty and staff, the generous support of donors, and the wisdom of our community of alums, students, and friends, we were able to lean heavily into our mission and thrive.

and richer that fuels this creative spirit. As an institution, we are willing to work creatively and passionately into futures that forward our mission: equipping religious professionals grounded in the rich tradition of Unitarian Universalism. It is this commitment to our mission and the future of Unitarian Universalism that energizes our work and helps us see possibilities through the cracks of current realities.

This year was a year of many “firsts” for us. We...

• learned how to work remotely and continued the digitalization of our work that had started in the Fall, including migration of our courses to a fully online environment.
• hosted a Virtual Commencement to honor and celebrate the achievements of 23 graduates and 3 honorary degree recipients.
• re-envisioned our Partners in Ministry annual fundraising event at GA into our first crowdfunding event.
• committed to strengthening pedagogical practices and completed an online teaching certification process for our Core and Affiliated Faculty members.
• opened a space for connecting our students, alums, faculty, and staff by hosting monthly vespers.
• began hosting regular virtual gatherings with alums and other supporters.

What a year it has been, indeed! I am very grateful for the warm welcome, support, and encouragement I’ve received from our community, faculty, staff, Board members, and supporters. As President of this institution, I look forward to imagining with you new possibilities for our work ahead.

Elias Ortega, President
Dr. Elías Ortega’s anti-oppression work in the larger Unitarian Universalist community

Dr. Ortega, President, was an integral part of the UUA’s Commission on Institutional Change as a theological scholar and lay-leader. The Commission delivered its final report at GA 2020 and published the full report, Widening the Circle of Concern, which will guide all UUs in creating systemic change to dismantle white supremacy culture within Unitarian Universalism.

Dr. Pamela Lightsey’s induction into one of the most prestigious collegia

Dr. Lightsey, VP for Academic and Student Affairs, was inducted into the 35th Martin Luther King Jr. College of Ministers and Laity Collegium of Scholars at Morehouse College. Dr. Lightsey was among the distinguished honorees, some of the most prominent scholars and academics who are committed to research, mentoring, and teaching in a wide variety of disciplines and contexts that promote the work of peace through moral cosmopolitan social responsibility and engagement.

Dr. Mike Hogue’s interfaith work

Dr. Hogue, Professor of Theology, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion, teamed up with Dr. Dean Bell, President of Spertus Institute, to explore vulnerability and resilience as leadership tools in inter-religious dialogue. They have received grant funding from the Arthur Vining Davis Foundation for their Religion, Vulnerability, and Resilience Project, which explores—via case studies, research, and public programs—how these principles can be applied to improving outcomes in inter-religious work. They are writing a book together.

Rev. Julie Taylor’s service to the community

Senior Director of Contextual Ministry and Affiliated Faculty, Rev. Julie Taylor also serves as an Air National Guard chaplain, and was deployed during the COVID-19 pandemic in support of the NYC Office of the Chief Medical Examiner. This experience informed and deepened Rev. Taylor’s work at Meadville Lombard.

Dr. Nicole Kirk was on sabbatical for the 2019/2020 Academic Year. We look forward to reporting her superb scholarship in next year’s report.

Dr. Elyse Ambrose, our new Visiting Professor

Dr. Ambrose joined us as Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethical Leadership and Society and Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow at Meadville Lombard. Dr. Ambrose will be with us for two academic years, through Commencement 2022. The fellowship is a prestigious award that supports cutting-edge work done by scholars and understood as “advancing North American religious and theological scholarship.”

During the course of our 176 years of history, thanks to the steady stream of people who continue to be in our corner, we have been able to fully embrace our ability to stay nimble and continue to evolve to better serve our students and the world, especially in these drastically changing times. Spring of 2020 demanded that we show that quality in earnest. The school planned and executed two first-time virtual events on very short timelines.

Commencement Ceremony

The ceremony was viewed live by over 3,000 individuals, many of whom interacted with one another by way of virtual chat during the live event. The graduates were happy with the outcome and the event was appreciated by their loved ones who likely would not have been able to attend a physical event. To date, the ceremony recording has been viewed over 2,700 times. The Honorary Degree recipients were Dr. Barbara Ransby (L.H.D.), Dr. Janet Wolf (D.D.), and Rev. Danielle Di Bona (D.D.).

Partners in Ministry Fundraiser

Meadville Lombard counts on the Partners in Ministry breakfast at the UUA General Assembly as its largest source of gifts every year. With GA going virtual, we hosted a two-part virtual fundraiser in place of our physical event and turned it into a crowdfunding opportunity, which generated $26,716 and created increased visibility for the school. The live-stream event on June 18, featuring Rev. Leslie Takahashi, MDiv ’04 as the keynote, was recorded and replayed over 340 times.
We received $2,043,342 from 296 donors, including 53 first-time donors.

$1,512,314 (74%) from 27 non-individual donors

$531,029 (26%) from 269 individual donors

Who were our donors:

- 10 Congregations
- 9 Foundations, Trusts, or Estates
- 8 Other Organizations
- 27 non-individual
- 184 friends and supporters
- 269 individual
- 85 Alums (including honorary degree recipients) and current students

How we received the gifts:

- 6% $125,870 Partners in Ministry (2020 crowdfunding one-time gifts, and pledge payments received in 2019/2020)
- 16% $319,910 Other Appeals (End-of-Year, Spring, Denny Davidoff Memorial, Barker Professorship, Pointing the Way)
- 40% $826,349 Requests and Trusts (See “In Memoriam” on the facing page)
- 34% $685,965 Organizational Gifts (congregations, foundations, organizations, including the UUA)
- 4% $85,249 Other Individual Gifts

Allocation of Gifts

- 38% Operational Support
- 26% Library & Archives
- 11% Special Instructional Support
- 20% Scholarships and Aid
- 4% Fahs Collaborative Programs

IN MEMORIAM

We celebrate the generosity of the Doris A. and Lowell L. Blaisdell Estate. In May, we received $500,000 to support our Archives and $300,000 in support of the Daniel G. Higgins Jr. Scholarship. This scholarship helps prepare students for Unitarian Universalist Ministry. Lowell, an educator, historian, and author of multiple books, and Doris, an archivist, had distinguished careers spanning over three decades at Texas Tech University. They were pillars of their community and their UU church, where they left an indelible mark.
WE ARE SO GRATEFUL for our Fiscal Year 2019/2020 donors who made gifts to Meadville Lombard between July 1, 2019 and June 30, 2020, as well as our major donors, whose generosity continues to sustain our work. Thank you for supporting the education and training of the progressive faith leaders our world needs.

Donors with Lifetime Gifts of $500,000 +

- Martha Atherton
- Doris A. and Lowell L. Blaisdell
- Arnold Bradburd, LHD ‘00 and Julia Bradburd
- Martha Christianson
- Spencer Lavan, LHD ‘97 and Susan Lavan
- David Osborn, BD ‘82, DD ‘77 and Janet Osborn
- Diana Strassmann
- Lyssa Jenkens, MDiv ‘14 and Patricia Houck
- Charles L. Hutchinson Fund
- Lawrence R. Ladd, LHD ‘13
- Laurel Hallman, DMin ‘81, DD ‘97 and Lawrence R. Ladd, LHD ‘13
- Charles L. Hutchinson Fund
- Lyssa Jenkins, MDiv ‘14 and Patricia Hauck
- Bruce and Barbara Schultz Mickey
- St. Lawrence Foundation for Theological Education, Inc.
- Diana Strassmann
- Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington, NY
- U.S. Treasury
- Ken and Jensha Vogel

The following list is based on gift amounts received during 2019/2020 Fiscal Year.

$5,000 – $9,999
- Dan and Julie Brady
- Claudia Frost, MDiv ‘08 and David Frost
- Brock Leach, MDiv ‘11 and Julie Leach
- Nick Lewis and Jude Rinearson
- Virginia (Ginger) Luke, MDiv ‘01 and Don Chery
- Midwest Unitarian Universalist Conference
- NYS Convention of Universalists
- Anthony Pinn
- Jeanne Pupke, MDiv ‘04 and Regina Largent
- William Pitt Robinson Fund
- Kurt and Pat Steele

$1,000 – $4,999
- All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, OK
- Virginia Alonzo
- Wayne B. Armstrong and Kathleen Rolenz
- Jane and Lee Bannor
- Lee Barker, DMin ‘78, BD ‘01 and Kristina Barker
- Nancy Bechtol
- Michael Berger and Rosalie Chavez
- Deborah and Klaus Bieber
- J. Randolph Burnham and Linda Hudson
- Stephen Charles
- Carol B. Conger
- Diana Davie, MDiv ‘17
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- Eleanor Emmons
- First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City, OK

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- Karen Staynoff, MDiv ‘96
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- Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association
- Unity Temple Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Chicago, IL
- Dorothea I. Wallace
- Erin J. Walter, MDiv ‘17
- Melanie Walter-Mahoney

Mark Ward, MDiv ‘04 and Deborah Ward
- Marion Wertheim
- Lynnda White, MDiv ‘13
- W. Frederick Wooden, DMin ‘79 and Wendy Wooden

$500 – $999
- Roger and Suzanne Ames
- Jay Atkinson, DMin ‘79
- Emile Baggis, MDiv ‘05 and Gordon Baggis
- Marsha Borders
- Elizabeth Citrin
- Christopher and Deborah Corbett
- Steve J. Crump, DMin ‘78
- Roger Doebke, MAR ‘14 and Judy Doebke
- Augustin Dovaguah
- Richard and Cathryn DuBow
- Lauren Furst and Peter Koos
- Bunny Hodas
- Michael Hogue
- Barbara Wells ten Have, MDiv ‘85, DMin ‘07 and Jaco ten Have
- Hills Hawie Jr. and Margaret Shackle
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- Jenice I. View
- Willard and Katharine Wilcox
- Teresa C. Wilmot
- Shari Woodbury, MDiv ‘15
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Barbara Baldwin
George Beach, DD ’87 and Barbara Beach
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John Carlton
Peter K. Clark
Kathy Counsell
Carol Cramer
Lynn and Jon Dash
John Dreu Daubenspeck
Alice Diebel, MDiv ’19
Monica D. Dobbins, MDiv ’17
Vilus Rudra Dudzila, DMin ’06
Kathleen Ellis
Kathryn Ellis, MDiv ’10
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W. Bradford Gereeley, DD ’01 and Catherine Gereeley
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Carol Haag, MDiv ’96 and Carl Haag
David Hawver
Franklin Heller
Tomo Hilde
Jeni Holloway
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Doris and Howard Hunter
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Daniel and Tammy McNan
Elaine McMillan
Betty Jo Middleton, ISP ’83 and J. Howard Middleton
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Bennie Miller
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Linnea Nelson
Christopher Nelson
Barry and Maria Nobel
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Charles Ortmann, MDiv ’92 and Judy Ortmann
Adriana O’Toole
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Elaine and James Peters
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Sarah C. Richards, MDiv ’13
Kathryn T. Rickey, MDiv ’14
Gail Riley and Tom Nixon
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James C. Roach, MDiv ’05 and Becky Roush
Robert and Margie Sallie
John and Margaret Saphir
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Margaret Seip
Marilyn Sewell, DD ’04
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John B. Ludwig

Thank you for growing the roots of love, compassion, and justice!

DONOR SPOTLIGHT

Laurel Hallman, DMin ’81, DD ’97 and Larry Ladd, LHD ’13 each believe deeply in the importance of spiritual depth and effective leadership in our faith. “It was what drew us together when we were serving on Meadville’s Board of Trustees,” they said. Since their marriage in 2009 they have given as a couple, helping to sustain the school in campaigns for special purposes as well as giving regularly to the General Operations Fund for ongoing expenses. “We are glad to be able to support the school out of our own gratitude, and are proud of the students and graduates who are serving our congregations and communities in these extraordinary times.”
Our students come from a variety of vocational paths and educational environments, bringing a diversity of experience and wisdom.

Which region are they from?

- Pacific Western: 15%
- MidAmerica: 31%
- New England: 14%
- Central East: 22%
- Southern: 13%
- International: 6%

We are an Open and Affirming Institution. Our students express multiple gender identities. 71% of them identified themselves as female last year. About 84% of our student body identified as white, the age range was 23-73, and average age was 46.

In 2019/2020, we awarded over $536,000 in grants and scholarships to our students.

How Your Gifts Are Reducing Student Debt

2019/2020 Fiscal Year student debt statistics showed the lowest numbers in the last four years for the amount of student loans borrowed per student, the percentage of students graduating with student debt, and the collective student debt amount of the graduating class. Overall, unlike most graduate schools, our student debt statistics are trending downward. This student debt reduction is made possible by the combination of increased emphasis on financial planning and education for our students and—more importantly—grants and scholarships provided by the generous gifts from our supporters like you.

Move to a Fully Online Learning Experience

When the pandemic unfolded, we leaned into our values and made the decision to prioritize the safety of our community. Our staff and faculty moved swiftly and deliberately, mindful of the challenges to create significant online learning environment for the Spring, Summer, and Fall Intensives—the in-person portion of our curriculum. Furthermore, in our commitment to center students’ learning experiences, our faculty completed the Designing Digital Teaching and Learning Certification program through the University of Wisconsin-Madison. Intensives and Ingatherings have always been very precious times when our students come to Chicago, learn together, and cultivate relationships that will support them throughout their ministerial careers. While our students missed being able to physically gather with their colleagues, we have been providing many of the same extracurricular activities during Intensives that we have in the past, albeit virtually for now.

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Our Library and Archives provide resources not only to Meadville Lombard students and faculty, but also to religious professionals, members of the broader Unitarian Universalist community, and scholars of all (or no) faiths. Our complete library catalog is accessible to search online and most of our books can be shipped directly to users. Our digital archive is open to all users.

Beloved Conversations: Virtual will be launched in Fall 2020. This new program is built out incorporating the lessons learned from earlier work. We expect the new materials—along with new teaching and learning strategies—to spark new insight and deepen connection.

New Online Library System: After 18 months of hard work through the Fiscal Year 2019/2020, in July 2020, Meadville Lombard Library and Archives successfully migrated to Alma, a powerful, cloud-based library system used by most large academic libraries. This will change every aspect of the library, from how students access resources to how library staff catalog books and manage the collection. We have taken the migration to Alma as an opportunity to rethink and rebuild the entire digital infrastructure of the library and archives.

The Heresies UU Women’s History Project added over 10,000 pages of digitized archival material documenting UU women, including the personal papers of Rev. Marilyn Sewell, Rev. Qiyamah Rahman, and Denny Davidoff, to name a few. A unique aspect of this project was the centrality of sermons. To maximize their discoverability, we developed a robust new set of metadata terms specifically to describe UU sermons. The Heresies Project is ongoing, and more material will be added this year.

More about the Denny T. Davidoff Papers: Last year, we were able to honor the legacy of our beloved Denny by digitizing her papers and making them available online. The Denny T. Davidoff Papers is one of the largest sets of personal papers digitized by the Meadville Lombard Archives and Special Collections. The digital collection contains 236 sermons or speeches, 186 orders of service, and other materials. Denny’s impact on Meadville Lombard and Unitarian Universalism is evidenced in this collection and can be browsed chronologically or by subject.

Our archives hold invaluable resources for our students (and anyone’s) research.
Our work continues...