

April 7, 2020



Dear Prospective Students,

As the coronavirus pandemic continues to occupy the news media, we are beginning to experience the full impact of the crisis—the economic, political, and social uncertainties that are reshaping our present and will blur the future. We will grieve our losses and labor to make meaning of our shared world. In a moment such as this, you may be asking yourself: is this the right time to pursue a theological degree?

I want to share with you three thoughts that I hope will inspire you to consider this as the right time to engage in theological studies and join our learning community this coming Fall 2020.

Theological education matters most in moments of crisis.

Times like these are epoch-defining and call forth epochal thinkers. James Luther Adams, a Unitarian theologian and one-time faculty member of Meadville Lombard, wrote that epochal thinkers “have seen the crisis as the crisis of an age, they have felt called to foresee the coming of a new epoch.”

This moment calls forth leaders that are rooted, inspired, and ready to serve their communities with the best tools available to them. We have an opportunity now to become epochal thinkers, who are rooted in sound theological thinking and practice, who are inspired by Unitarian Universalist values of compassion and justice, and willing to serve in a rapidly changing world.

Meadville Lombard alums and current students have responded to this moment in ways that put in full display the best of our theological education.

I share these stories with you as examples of how our theological education model has prepared leaders to respond and serve during these times.

“In this strange time, I’m so grateful for my Meadville Lombard Theological School education,” posted **Rev. Monica Jacobson-Tenessen, MDiv ’18**, with a video of the worship service she led this month. “Preaching to a camera in a mostly empty room *IS* something I learned in seminary!”

“Tomorrow, and for the next 11 days, I will be going on Active Duty orders to support soldiers who are mobilizing to deploy in response to the COVID 19 pandemic,” **Rev. David Pyle, MDiv ’10**, posted on his Facebook on April 2. He serves as the Regional Lead of the MidAmerica Region of the Unitarian Universalist Association, as well as an Army hospital chaplain. “At this time, I am not slated to deploy with my soldiers, only to be with them as they prepare to deploy, and to be in contact with their families during this very difficult time.

“It is possible that my orders may change, and I may deploy with my soldiers. If that occurs, I will be going on Military Leave from the UUA.

“I am deeply grateful for my soldiers who are deploying. They are doctors, nurses, medics and other clinicians from across the country. They are coming from less impacted areas to go into some of the most impacted. Whether or not I go with them, I am glad I get to be with them in

this time. And that the UUA has always been fully supportive of my military ministry as an Army hospital chaplain.”

Another alum, **Rev. Erin Walter, MDiv '17**, serves the largest YMCA in the nation in Austin, TX, as the Community Engagement Director. She is creating opportunities for her community to stay connected and healthy: “Good morning, everyone! Today the YMCA of Austin launches its slate of daily #VirtualY programs, including the MWF 8am Coffee Club for starting your day with peaceful, positive connection AND Monday and Wednesday Cardio Funk classes. I'm teaching Mondays at 10am on Zoom. These classes aren't recorded so you need to come dance live with us, just like our classes in the Y branches. Come dance with us!! I am hopeful and determined this is the week an excellent routine sets in.”

And another alum, **Rev. Kristina Spaude, MDiv '16**, a hospital chaplain, reminded fellow religious professionals that not all ministries come in the shape of parish ministry. “I know everyone is in crisis-response mode and of course you are because you're amazing,” she commented on the Facebook group for Covid-19 responses of the UU religious professionals.

“Just a reminder, when you think of it, to love on your community ministers. We won't be able to work from home or actually self-quarantine. Those, like me, who work in hospitals and other public environments, have to keep going in to risk everyday—not just for ourselves but for everyone we come into contact with.

“Nursing homes and memory care and other such facilities are closing to families and volunteers. This is good and reasonable... and makes our work as community ministers likely even more necessary and meaningful. AND they were undoubtedly understaffed before this happened.”

We are committed to innovation, creativity, and imagination in our work.

Our low-residency curricular model prepares our students to be adaptive in the face of challenges, intentional in their connections, and committed to living out their vocation in the larger world.

Whether in parish settings, nonprofits, chaplaincy sites, or in their communities, Meadville Lombard alums and students are answering the call to be epochal thinkers and inspired leaders. I hope you will join them in this epochal moment.

In faith and service,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'EO' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Elías Ortega, Ph.D.
President
Meadville Lombard Theological School