For many reasons, I feel confident that Academic Year 2020/2021 will be remembered as a watershed in our school’s history. It certainly was a year of great change for us at Meadville Lombard Theological School.

As I look back, what strikes me as extraordinary is not only that we accomplished more than we have thought possible in these times, but also the way MLTS staff and faculty jumped into creating new ways of doing our work in a swift, meticulous manner. Even when anxiety ran high in the world around us, we supported each other and worked together to achieve more than we could imagine. It was as if I was witnessing a group of artisans working collaboratively to weave a beautiful fabric. It fills me with such joy to be able to work among them and to be able to share their accomplishments.

At the end of the previous academic year, we responded with open-minded nimbleness and grounded thoughtfulness to switch our programs and events into virtual formats. Then Academic Year 2020/2021 propelled us even further into our future as we discovered many opportunities to push forward our mission of embodying the collaborative work of liberation.

We applied for and received grants that will enable us to continue innovating and creating new programs; our faculty’s scholarship continued to be as robust as ever; our curriculum was revised for our post-pandemic multi-platform learning environment; our Library and Archives exponentially expanded into online spaces; our Fahs Collaborative’s signature program, Beloved Conversations, was reimagined into a virtual format and more than 2,000 people participated in learning about the impact of racism on our lives to unlearn the old ways and learn new ways of being.

At the same time, we also began to envision our future in bolder colors and shapes. As new opportunities to expand our service to ministerial education started to take shape, and after faithful deliberation with stakeholders, we adopted a new Mission and Values Statement to ground our work. We took bold steps toward realizing our longtime dream of building an institute for lifelong learning within our school that will enrich our learning community. We grabbed the chance to find a new space for our campus, one that meets our students’ needs better and expands our horizons.

Ahead lie opportunities to write a new chapter in our storied history that will renew our commitment to be active agents in the creation of a world shaped by equity, inclusion, justice, liberation, and healing.

We could not have done any of these things without your steadfast support. You are our warp, the vertical threads that support the weaving, that allow us to weave well thread through to create patterns. Thank you for being a vital part of this fabric of ministry. I am proud to share with you this year’s Annual Report.

In service

Dr. Elias Ortega
President

Q: If you were to think about the legacy you will leave at the end of your presidency, what would you like it to be?

A: If I think about my legacy, I would love for Meadville Lombard to have been a school that is committed to our UU movement and preparing faith leaders to serve in the Living Tradition and also other faith traditions.

We need to be able to articulate an answer to the question: how are we agents of growth and change in the movement? Not only for our institutional health, but more because it matters to the world for our values to impact and shape it. That is something that gets me really, really excited to think about. It changes the question that I ask myself continually about leadership and where we are going. If I think about who’s going to be in our next class of students, I get a particular answer versus thinking about who will be the faith leaders who will one day occupy our current roles as faculty members, teachers, staff, UUA leadership.

The folks who will occupy our spots in the future are in middle school right now, possibly elementary school. How do we start shaping conversations based not only on today, or next year, but around the long-term question: what do we need to be investing in now? If our investment in our current students is really an investment in the students who are coming 10 or more years down the road, what does that mean?

The questions shift dramatically when I start thinking about what that legacy looks like. It will take not thinking about just next year but thinking about 15-20 years down the road when folks in middle school are considering whether or not ministry is an option for their lives. How do we start capturing their imagination about engaging with a theological school and how do we, as a faith movement, engage with that younger generation not in the future but in the present day? I think if I can move that conversation forward, that will be my legacy. That will be something that I will be proud of. I would be honored to be part of that work.
We made many decisions that will move us deeper into our mission and forward into our future.

NEW MISSION & VALUES STATEMENTS by Dr. Ortega

This Spring, the Board of Trustees voted to adopt new Mission and Values Statements. The Board’s vote brought to a conclusion work that spanned over a year and included discernment, study, outreach, consultation, writing, and refining. We are thankful to those of you who participated in this effort — students, faculty, staff, alumni, former board members, supporters, friends, and religious professionals. Your participation in this process was vital because it is these statements that will guide this beloved and resilient institution in the coming years as we plan for new programs, co-curricular offerings, and move to a new facility.

As this process unfolded, it became clear to me that we needed to commence again. When I arrived at MLTS, I was made aware that securing a new office lease was a first-order priority. A number of options surfaced during this process: remaining in our current facilities, moving to a new location in Chicago, and considering the possibilities of partnering with another school. Each of these possibilities presented unique opportunities to imagine our institutional future. Whether decision we would arrive at, it needed to support our institution’s mission of preparing and inspiring religious professionals and lay leaders to live into the values of compassion, justice, and equity that are central to liberal religious traditions including Unitarian Universalism.

The Board of Trustees, faculty, and staff entered a period of discerning about the future direction of the school and what facilities may be needed for us to thrive in our next chapter. Through such conversations, we received feedback from students, alumni, supporters, and friends that encouraged us to lean into our spirit of innovation as we considered our space needs.

As this process unfolded, it became clear to me that we must be bold now in our pursuit of facilities that meet our current and emerging needs, while we stay accountable to our institutional mission and good stewardship. Such considerations meant that our space needed to be flexible for our current educational and gathering needs, include a dedicated worship space, and be ADA compliant and welcoming to the multiple identities of our stakeholders. Furthermore, it needed to be a space that we could use to the maximum capacity in our future work as we create new programs and initiatives.

By adopting this mission statement, we reaffirm our commitment to be a learning community of excellence grounded in the values and perspectives of Unitarian Universalism for religious professionals and those who are inspired by liberal religious values. This grounding compels us to work for justice, to compassionately guide our relations, and to hold to the promise of transformative love to enable us to live into Beloved Community.

Meadville Lombard’s new Mission Statement reads:

Carrying the Living Tradition of Unitarian Universalism, Meadville Lombard Theological School nurtures learners from diverse faith traditions to embody the collaborative work of liberation through congregational and community leadership.
MILESTONES: FACULTY

CORE FACULTY

Dr. Mark Hicks (Angus MacLean Professor of Religious Education, and Director of the Fahs Collaborative) sponsored a reunion in commemoration of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre for 105 MLTS alums. He also oversaw the launch of Beloved Conversations Virtual, including the launch of Gathering Our Selves, a new curriculum to support the faith formation of UU Black, Indigenous and People of Color communities.

Dr. Mike Hogue (Professor of Theology, Ethics, and Philosophy of Religion) was honored to have the issues raised in his book, American Immanence: Democracy for an Uncertain World (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), serve as subjects of a full day of discussion panels at the 2021 annual conference for the Institute for American Religious and Philosophical Thought. He participated in a year-long Wabash Symposium on Anti-racism in Theological Education.

Dr. Nicole Kirk (Associate Professor, Rev. Dr. J. Frank and Alice Schulman Chair in Unitarian Universalist History) was awarded one of the highly competitive American Academy of Religion Individual Research Grants as well as elected as the American Academy of Religion’s Contingent Faculty Director.

Dr. Pamela Lightsey (Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Associate Professor of Constructive Theology) was selected to be a member of Chicago Mayor Lori Lightfoot’s LGTBQ Advisory Council.

Dr. Elías Ortega (President, Professor of Religion, Ethics, and Leadership) presented “What Is Democracy?” at the American Academy of Religion 2020; did an interview with the author of Cuban Literature in the Age of Black Insurrection, Matthew Pettway for HTI (Hispanic Theological Initiative) Open Plaza; and was the speaker for the Closing Plenary at the Atla Annual 2020.

VISITING FACULTY

Dr. Elyse Ambrose (Visiting Assistant Professor of Ethical Leadership and Society and Louisville Institute Postdoctoral Fellow) received Columbia University’s Center on African American Religion, Sexual Politics, and Social Justice ‘The Art, Politics and Publics of Black Faith’ project grant, funded by the Luce Foundation, and co-chaired Queer Studies in Religion Unit and committee member of African Diaspora Religions Unit (American Academy of Religion).

AFFILIATED FACULTY

Rev. Tandi Rogers (Affiliated Faculty) moved from Adjunct to Affiliate Faculty to take up more responsibilities with the Signature Courses framework, curriculum development and teaching. She has been working for the Unitarian Universalist Association for almost 20 years and is currently designing a nationwide initiative which includes a team of coaches supporting faithful conflict engagement in congregations.

Rev. Julie Taylor (Affiliated Faculty, and Senior Director of Contextual Ministry) was selected to do work with the Chaplaincy Innovation Lab, a partnership between Boston University School of Theology and the Wabash Center, funded by the Henry Luce Foundation.

MILESTONES: VIRTUAL EVENTS

176th Commencement

For the safety of our community, we made a hard decision to hold our Commencement virtually once again. We built on our learning from the previous year’s online ceremony and offered a more streamlined, spiritually rich experience. The Honorary Degree recipients were Dr. Anthea D. Butler (LHD), Rev. Roger Berndtshausen (DD), and Pastor Ivanka Fizerová (DD). Music by several exceptional UU artists added multicultural energy and spiritual reflection. Although we wished we could have gathered in person, it was a joy nonetheless to celebrate the achievement of the graduates with them, their friends and families, and the wider MLTS community of friends, alums, and supporters.

Meadville Lombard Week

In June, before the UUA’s General Assembly opened, we hosted multiple virtual events during Meadville Lombard Week. These events — an Opening Concert by Dr. Glen Thomas Rideout, Alum Annual Meeting, Mini-Lectures, Knitting Circle, Library & Archives Tour, and a Rituals of Remembrance workshop — gave us opportunities and spaces to connect and reconnect with community members near and far.

ML in the Pulpit, the worship service we offered on the last day of ML Week, has been viewed nearly 500 times on our Facebook and YouTube pages. Thirty-seven congregations nationwide shared the official recording of the service on their own channel on different Sundays at their regular worship time. We received wonderful feedback and support from those who attended the virtual service and other ML Week events.
We received $1,198,184 from 556 donors, including 267 first-time donors.

- $834,733 from 37 non-individual donors
- $363,451 from 519 individual donors

Who were our donors:
- 13 Congregations
- 16 Foundations, Trusts, or Estates
- 8 Other Organizations
- 37 non-individual donors
- 519 individual donors
- 400 friends and supporters

How we received the gifts:
- Partners in Ministry: $65,371
- Other Appeals: $117,388
- Bequests from Estates and Trusts: $387,872
- Organizational Gifts: $437,123
- Other Individual Gifts: $170,430

Revenues: $3,944,666
- Payroll Protection Program Grant: $349,470
- Other Tuition: $925,064
- Net Tuition: $1,229,819
- Other Program Revenue: $356,680

Expenses: $3,419,431
- Payroll & Benefits: $257,297
- Unrestricted Gifts & Grants: $910,446
- Instructional Expenses: $361,668
- General Operations: $286,337
- General Student Aid: $14,528

Financial Report (Unaudited)
Marty’s generosity was a faith commitment to champions of Meadville Lombard who transitioned from this life on October 11, 2020, and her husband Bob (d 2009) were committed to supporting the Unitarian Universalist ministry. They were also champions of Meadville Lombard Theological School and its role in preparing liberal religious leaders.

Marty’s generosity was a faith commitment to nurturing excellence in UU theological education. Through the establishment of the Atherton Scholarship, she helped recipients pursue their calling in ministry. Her reach was also one that promoted ministers’ education to expand into an interculturality, her support made it possible for select international students from diverse religious traditions to attend a summer program at Meadville Lombard.

Her passion for the school motivated her to be an active agent in pursuing its sustainability. She issued a challenge grant to other Unitarian Universalists that brought over $100,000 in new donations to Meadville Lombard. Marty’s commitment to the school was evident in her transformative gifts, including her planned gift, that have assisted Meadville Lombard’s facility needs from 2011-2021.

More than a generous philanthropist, Marty was a friend of Meadville Lombard. She was very much a part of our learning community, present in our classroom, events, and activities. We celebrate Marty Atherton’s life of faith and generosity that transformed the school, and that, through our students and alumni whom she supported, brightened the future of the Unitarian Universalist ministry.

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL for our Fiscal Year 2020/2021 donors who made gifts to Meadville Lombard between July 1, 2020 and June 30, 2021, 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, DHL ‘11
Doris A. and Lowell L. Blaisdell
Arnold Bradburd, LHD ‘00 and Julia Bradburd
Stanley Christiansen
Spencer Lavan, LHD ‘97 and Susan Lavan
David Osborn, BD ‘52, DD ‘77 and Janet Osborn

The following list is based on gift amount received during 2020/2021 Fiscal Year.

$100,000 +
Martha Atherton, DHL ‘11, Estate
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

$50,000 – $99,999
Jay Atkinson, DMin ‘79
Lilly Endowment Inc.
Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock

$10,000 – $49,999
Arnold Bradburd, LHD ‘00 and Julia Bradburd
William E. Churchill
John and Jacki Davidoff
Douglass Eads
Dan H. Fair, Jr., Estate
Lois Hayward, Estate
Charles L. Hutchinson Fund
In Trust Center for Theological Schools
Lyssa Jenkens, MDIV ‘14 and Patricia Houck
Bruce and Barbara Mickey
St. Lawrence Foundation for Theological Education, Inc.
U.S. Treasury
Ken and Jerusha Vogel
Susan Weaver and Eric Alan Isaacson

$5,000 – $9,999
Annie Eaton Society
Stephen Charles
Andrea Korrigan and Marjorie Brooks Korrigan
Charitable Remainder Trust
Brook Leach, MDIV ‘11 and Julie Leach
Nick Lewis and Judith Rinearson
Midwest Unitarian Universalist Conference
Makanah Morris, LSP ‘82 and Robert Morris
Pennsylvania Universalist Convention
Anthony Pinn
Janet L. Randolph
Risho Kosei-Kai
William Pitt Robinson Fund
Diana Straassmann

$1,000 – $4,999
Virginia Almoza
Anonymous Donors
Wayne B. Arnison and Kathleen Rolenz
J. Randolph Burnham and Linda Hudson
Carol B. Conger
Diana Davies, MDIV ‘17
Holly Dempsey, MA’s ‘20
Nancy Felix
Lucia and Bruce Field
First Parish Church of Groton, MA
First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, NY
Peter and Karin Fontneau
Claudia Frost, MDIV ‘08 and David Frost
John Gibbons
Marjorie L. Girth
Johanna Godfrey, Estate
Clyde Griffin, Fund
John Gubbings and Cathy Knapper
Laurel Hallman, DMin ‘81, DD ‘97
and Lawrence R. Sudd, LHD ‘93
John B. Hooper
Hills Hovie, Jr. and Margaret Shackle
Dave Hunter and Kenny Mueller
Kimberly Quinn Johnson, MDIV ‘15
Paul Stanley Johnson, DMin ‘75, DD ‘02
and Carol Rowan
Holly Kerr
Carla Kindt
Nicolle Kirk
David and Marjorie Kroft
David H. Leonard
Bonne Leaphoff
Pamela Lightsey
Charles Liffin, MDIV ‘21
William F. Lyon
Douglas Edward McCusker, MDIV ‘14
Carrie McEvoy
Morristown Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
Janet Newman, DMin ‘83
Carolyn Owen-Towle, DD ‘88
Kathleen Owens
Richard and Cindy Pardo
Patricia Parsa

$1,000+ IN MEMORIAM: Marty Atherton

Marty Atherton, DHL ‘11, understood the power of generosity that affirms the good labor of liberal religious ministry, empowers an institution to live boldly into its mission, and sustains the living tradition of Unitarian Universalism into the future. Marty, who transitioned from this life on October 11, 2020, and her husband Bob (d 2009) were committed to supporting the Unitarian Universalist ministry. They were also champions of Meadville Lombard Theological School and its role in preparing liberal religious leaders.

Marty’s generosity was a faith commitment to nurturing excellence in UU theological education. Through the establishment of the Atherton Scholarship, she helped recipients pursue their calling in ministry. Her reach was also one that promoted ministers’ education to expand into an interculturality, her support made it possible for select international students from diverse religious traditions to attend a summer program at Meadville Lombard.

Her passion for the school motivated her to be an active agent in pursuing its sustainability. She issued a challenge grant to other Unitarian Universalists that brought over $100,000 in new donations to Meadville Lombard. Marty’s commitment to the school was evident in her transformative gifts, including her planned gift, that have assisted Meadville Lombard’s facility needs from 2011-2021.

More than a generous philanthropist, Marty was a friend of Meadville Lombard. She was very much a part of our learning community, present in our classroom, events, and activities. We celebrate Marty Atherton’s life of faith and generosity that transformed the school, and that, through our students and alumni whom she supported, brightened the future of the Unitarian Universalist ministry.

DONOR SPOTLIGHTS: Part I

Dr. Mike Hogue Faculty/Annual Donor: As a faculty member for the past 16 years (a third of my life!), I’ve been a part of several major transformations at Meadville—curricular, staffing and faculty, educational model, location, and leadership shifts. Through these many changes, several things stand out to me. Meadville Lombard (staff, faculty, leadership, Board, students) is always learning how to do our work better and serve our mission more fully. Our learning is collaborative—we know that we need many perspectives to learn what we need to learn to continue to change lives in a changing world. In short, to be a part of Meadville Lombard means to me that I get to be part of a cutting-edge theological community committed to active hope, continual collaborative learning, and collective liberation.

Rev. Dr. Jay Atkinson, DMin ‘79 Scholarship Donor/Annual Donor: My student years (1975-79) at Meadville Lombard were among the happiest and most intellectually satisfying times of my life, enriched by deep friendships that still endure. While much has changed since then, my ongoing financial support for the school is grounded in faith and hope for the school’s future, as I see the quality of scholarship emerging from the faculty and the excellence and enthusiasm of recent graduates.

Rev. Ali KC Bell, MDIV ‘21 Recent Graduate/ Monthly Donor: What ML means to me is that I know there is a place that exists where I can go to be intellectually educated, spiritually nourished, academically challenged, and collegially connected. It means that I have a seminary that I can feel proud to have attended.
When our Fahs Collaborative reimagined its signature program for antiracism learning, Beloved Conversations, we offered the registrants a sliding scale pricing as reparations and interdependence action. The positive reaction was overwhelming. It raised funds for us to be able to offer registration discounts for those who need them, and for continued program development.

Part II

Gratitude for Our 2020/2021 Beloved Conversations Participants

Linda McGan
David McGowan
Kathy McLean
Nicole McNell
Mary Ellen McNulty
Barb Mercy
Barbara Meyers
Ernesto Micheliucci
Dolores Mier
Michael Morton
Amlan Mukherjee
Camena Ness
Juliana Neuman
Clara Neves-Mireles
Pennie Ann Nichols
Monica Nolan
Dena Omar
Rita L Parks
Margaret Pakerek
Linda Pepe
Shei Philabaum
Rebecca Phillips
Douglas R. Pilbury
Shantale D. Piggins
Regina Podhorin Zilinski
Helen Poppenoe
Lora Powell-Haney, MDV ‘20
Elizabeth Preslick, DMV ‘07
Virginia Preuss
Amanda Radak
Mike Radaw
Calleen Rathburn
Kathleen Razmus
Donna L. Rienho
Kathleen Robbins
Grace D. Rolls
Joseph Romeo
C. Leslie Rannels
Suzeen Russell
Cindy Hastings Sakaan
Linda Savard
Stacy Sceiford
Greta Seidahl, MDV ‘19
Steven Serikov
Barbara N. Shaw
Lisa Sherry, MDV ‘11 and Nelson Sherry
Chuck Shields
Winifred Shuttleworth
Lisa P. Sinclair

Carol Slomski
Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quessnel
Cindy Spring
Kathryn Ann Spring
Tracy Springberry, MDV ‘10
Betty and Tom Stapleford
Erika Steinhuil
Carole M. Stephens
Elizabeth Stevens, DD ‘03
and Frederick Stevens
Jennifer Stevens
Donna Stippman
Carol M. Stoehr
Daddie Stone
Barbara Storms
Catherine Strickland
Mary and Walter Stromquist
Christina Strong
Sue and Art Stukey
Margaret Z. Suto
Joe Sweet
Diana Szynasz
Lois Taih
Marguerita Taizjnapis
Diana D. Teichert and Donald Milton
Elizabeth Ann Terry
Jone Thruston, MDV ‘00
Laura Thomas
Leona Thomas
Anita B. Thompson
Horia Thompsoon
Richard T. Tolley
Denice Tomlinson
Marlo Turner Ritchie
Marian Uquillo
Colleen Vahey
Mariana Vakkenier and Paul Kohlbrenner
Todd Van Gordon
Paula van Hoogen
Ellis Vance
Jennifer VonKlue, MDV ‘17
Marlene Walker and Gloria Perez
Marlily S. Warner
Danielle Webber, MDV ‘16, MA’S ‘18
Judith Weisenfeld
Kauaiu Wharton
Joanne Whelihan, MDV ‘04
Patrick Wharton
Bruce Wiggins
WST Data Solutions
Miriam Willsa
Margie Wurzel

Joshua Berg Student Donor: Meadville Lombard provided me, at 50-years-old, a chance at a second career that is more meaningful and fulfilling than any job I’ve ever had. At MLTS, I also found a peer group I am confident will support each other for the rest of our lives. The existence and growth of Meadville Lombard, as one of only two Unitarian Universalist seminaries, is essential to the future of our faith.

Rev. Dr. Roger Jones, MDV ’97 Monthly Donor: Meadville Lombard’s excellent faculty, staff, and volunteers prepare students to have an impact around the world through their leadership for justice, faithfulness, and love. I make a monthly donation and have included MLTS as a beneficiary because I want to sustain its success in the academic, spiritual, and professional formation of ministers for years to come. It helps me keep the faith.

Ted and Christine Yang Annual & Planned Giving Donors: Meadville Lombard is fertile ground which grows and nourishes UU leaders, and UU leadership is needed more than ever in our fractured society. We are proud to support Meadville Lombard’s mission with our time and treasure.

Bill Lyon Maching Gift Donor/ Occasional Student: I have always been inspired by the story of Alexander Papaderos (as told by Robert Fulghum in his book It Was on Fire When I Lay Down on It) using the metaphor of a mirror to describe the meaning of his life. “I am not the light or the source of light — truth, understanding, knowledge … will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it.” That’s what peace and justice seekers do. That’s what the best educators, facilitators, ministers, and lay leaders do. Meadville Lombard not only helps shine the light into the growing number of dark places in our society, but it inspires others to do likewise. And that is why I am proud to support this institution with my time, talent, treasure, and best intentions.

Dr. Nicole C. Kirk, Faculty/Annual Donor: Why do I devote my vacation, time, and money to Meadville Lombard as a Professor, board member, and donor? In our hurting world and in these uncertain times, progressive faith leaders are the first responders in times of crisis, the spiritual care providers for our communities and the larger society. Faith leaders guide and lead our efforts to create, in the words of James Baldwin, “a more just world and humane world.” Since 1844, Meadville Lombard has educated those faith leaders. We nurture, cultivate, and inspire those called to serve as they become socially engaged, interculturally and spiritually grounded ministers, chaplains, and religious leaders. I believe in our work—I have dedicated my life to Unitarian Universalism—and to me, to have the most significant impact in this world is to support Meadville Lombard’s training of future leaders.

DONOR SPOTLIGHTS: Part II

Dr. Bruce and Barbara Mickey Annual & Planned Giving Donors: Meadville Lombard trains the UU religious leaders and congregational ministers who help our faith contribute to a future in which people from all racial, ethnic, religious, and sexual orientations will live and work together in an atmosphere of mutual love and respect. Barbara and I believe in Meadville Lombard. We have supported their mission for the past 10 years, and we will continue to support them going forward. Please join us.

Rev. Dr. Roger Jones, MDV ‘97
Our students come from a variety of vocational paths—lawyers, nonprofit administrators, psychologists, educators, to list a few—and educational and religious backgrounds, bringing a diversity of experience and wisdom.

Which region are they from?

We are an Open and Affirming Institution. Our students express multiple gender identities. 62% of them identified themselves as female last year. About 79% of our student body identified as white, the age range was 24-76, and average age was 45.

Breakdown by degree programs. 63% of all students were full-time.
It is our pleasure to report that our Alum Association, which had been dormant for some time, experienced great revitalization this year. Dr. Ortega and Tomo Hillibo, Dir. of Communications, worked with the Association’s outgoing President, Rev. Lynnda White, MDiv ’13, and Secretary, Rev. Connie Simon, MDiv ’18, to create a pathway to pour energy back into the Association and increase overall engagement of our alums.

We appointed a Nominating Committee to create a leadership team for the association. The committee identified candidates:

- For President: Rev. Viola Abbott, MDiv ’19
- For Vice President: Rev. Connie Simon, MDiv ’18
- For Secretary: Rev. Kevin DeBeck, MDiv ’18
- For Covenant Officer: Rev. Kali Fyre, MDiv ’17

All four of them were officially elected to be the next leadership team of the Alum Association. The team will be working on reviewing the mission and purpose of the Alum Association and ways in which it can support and connect alums; having open discussions around establishing, restoring, and, in some cases, repairing relationships between alums and MLTS; and completing the revision of the Alum Association Bylaws.

While other denominations significantly sponsor their theological students’ education, that’s unfortunately no longer the case for Unitarian Universalist seminarians. The path to UU fellowship is an expensive one that typically results in student debt by the time the Ministerial Fellowship Committee meets with a Candidate to determine whether they will be granted Preliminary Ministerial Fellowship. With only two remaining UU theological schools, it is particularly critical that those who are able increase their generosity and invest in the up-and-coming UU Ministers.

I was deeply grateful to have the chance to thank some of the Meadville Lombard donors who have made a UU theological education an option for me. It was also fun getting to know some of the folks who believe so strongly in the value of a UU education! I hope that this is an opportunity that we’ll continue having in the future.

Connecting with Alums: Phone-a-Thon

Reported by Caroline Bright, a current student

This summer, a few current students and recent alums had the good fortune to work with Director of Development, Ery Platforms, on a fun project—calling donors to say thank you and connecting with alums! We diligently texted and called, reaching out to folks who are a part of the Meadville Lombard community but who might not get to interact with students regularly. Our recent graduates were able to connect with other alums and hear from them about where their journeys have led them so far. All of this was possible thanks to an anonymous patron who sponsored this inaugural phone-a-thon so that 100% of any donations that followed the calls would be available to the school’s annual fund.

I was deeply grateful to have the chance to thank some of the Meadville Lombard donors who have made a UU theological education an option for me. It was also fun getting to know some of the folks who believe so strongly in the value of a UU education! I hope that this is an opportunity that we’ll continue having in the future.

Below are some updates from the Class of 2021.

Monica Kling-Garcia  “I am extremely fortunate to have been named Executive Director for UU FaithAction NJ (uufaithaction.org) which focuses on legislative advocacy for social justice issues in the state of New Jersey. UUFANJ is a member of the Coalition of UU State Action Networks (CULUSAN.org). Overall, I do feel equipped for this ministry as a result of my studies at MLTS. In particular, the Signature courses (Community Studies and Leadership Studies) were foundational.”

Charles Loflin  “I am extremely fortunate to have been named Executive Director for UU FaithAction NJ (uufaithaction.org) which focuses on legislative advocacy for social justice issues in the state of New Jersey. UUFANJ is a member of the Coalition of UU State Action Networks (CULUSAN.org). Overall, I do feel equipped for this ministry as a result of my studies at MLTS. In particular, the Signature courses (Community Studies and Leadership Studies) were foundational.”

Jenny McCreedy  “My vocation is small parish ministry, and I’ve had the good fortune of being asked to serve as a contract minister at a small church, Columbine Unitarian Universalist Church, near my home for the next year. After many staff and ministry changes recently, the congregation and Board and I are all hopeful that this will be a long-term ministry. I am blessed to be able to serve part time and also in a church that has done a fair amount of racial awareness work in the past few years. Meadville Lombard gave me a solid grounding in doing this work, as well as a good understanding of systems, governance, and administration. Paired with my two-year part-time internship, I was able to learn by doing and then discuss and process my learning with my cohort. I was exposed to many different professors and their methodologies and I was able to develop collegial relationships, both of which I carry with me into my ministry. I’m very glad I had the opportunity to go to Meadville Lombard for seminary, and I look forward to lifetime relationships with my fellow alumni and professors and staff.”

Jen Raffensperger  “I started my first-ever ministry this summer at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of York, PA. For me, finding Unitarian Universalism felt like finding a home, and the call to ministry felt like being asked to create a home for others—for many—for all that may ask. Community building and spiritual companionship feels like work I will engage in for a lifetime. MLTS engaged my heart, mind, and body with the idea of a deeply complex community during a complex time, and I believe we are all engaged in the grace of learning about how we fail together. And then how we build back again and again. I will take those lessons with me into every ministry context.”
Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason is a retired UU minister who has had a 40-year career in Unitarian Universalism. His service includes parish ministry, Chair of Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and President of UU Ministers Association.

Nancy Felix is the Associate Dean for Advancement in the Medieval College of Science (MCS). She has extensive experience and impressive track records in higher education and non-profit advancement, with a focus on capital campaign fundraising and international development. During her time at Dartmouth College as a senior advancement officer, the college completed a $1.3 billion capital campaign.

Rev. Mr. Barb Greve is an ordained UU minister, a Credentialed Religious Educator, and a hospice chaplain. He served as Co-Moderator of the UUA with Elandria Williams from 2017-2020.

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, MDiv '98, serves as Senior Minister at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, MD. He has been actively involved in international interfaith and multicultural work for three decades, including serving as president of the International Association for Religious Freedom, an Executive Committee member of the Faith Community Advisory Council of Montgomery County, and a founding member of the Tampa Bay Interreligious Council.

Dr. Nicole Kirk serves on the Board as the Faculty Representative. She is a historian of American religious history. She joined the Meadville Lombard faculty in 2012 after earning her Ph.D. at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her research interests include religion, business, technology, and material culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Dr. Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano has been President of Rissho Kosei-Kai’s Gakurin Seminary in Tokyo since 2011. He is also Chair of the Board of Directors of the Niwano Peace Foundation.

Rev. Dr. Wayne Arnason is a retired UU minister who has had a 40-year career in Unitarian Universalism. His service includes parish ministry, Chair of Ministerial Fellowship Committee, and President of UU Ministers Association.

Nancy Felix is the Associate Dean for Advancement in the Medieval College of Science (MCS). She has extensive experience and impressive track records in higher education and non-profit advancement, with a focus on capital campaign fundraising and international development. During her time at Dartmouth College as a senior advancement officer, the college completed a $1.3 billion capital campaign.

Rev. Mr. Barb Greve is an ordained UU minister, a Credentialed Religious Educator, and a hospice chaplain. He served as Co-Moderator of the UUA with Elandria Williams from 2017-2020.

Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, MDiv '98, serves as Senior Minister at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, MD. He has been actively involved in international interfaith and multicultural work for three decades, including serving as president of the International Association for Religious Freedom, an Executive Committee member of the Faith Community Advisory Council of Montgomery County, and a founding member of the Tampa Bay Interreligious Council.

Dr. Nicole Kirk serves on the Board as the Faculty Representative. She is a historian of American religious history. She joined the Meadville Lombard faculty in 2012 after earning her Ph.D. at Princeton Theological Seminary. Her research interests include religion, business, technology, and material culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Dr. Hiroshi Munehiro Niwano has been President of Rissho Kosei-Kai’s Gakurin Seminary in Tokyo since 2011. He is also Chair of the Board of Directors of the Niwano Peace Foundation.
FAHS COLLABORATIVE

Beloved Conversations is a program for Unitarian Universalists seeking to embody racial justice as a spiritual practice, to heal the impact of racism on our lives and get free together. In Fall 2020, the Fahs Collaborative launched Beloved Conversations Virtual (BCV). A team of visionary UU leaders reimagined the in-person program into an online learning experience. Along with increased accessibility, the new Virtual curriculum includes a focus on the spiritual needs of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC+) communities, and an ongoing emphasis on a developmental approach, meeting our learners where they are and moving forward together.

In addition to BCV, the Fahs Collaborative creates congregational curricula that develop UU identity, covenantal community, and shared theological grounding, helping prepare UUs for faithful justice work. In 2020/2021, the pandemic forced a strategic shift in how programs could safely be offered. We worked urgently to adapt our most recent curricula — Creating Theology Together and Beloved Conversations: Families — virtually. New spiritual needs emerged during lockdown; innovative approaches, rather than simple online adaptation, were required. As congregational planning for safe gathering continues to be in flux, we expect to offer these virtual options in Fall 2021. Two other projects were in early development this year: In Good Faith, a faith formation program for UUs active in social justice, and Youth Voices, the creation of a UU Coming of Age credo archive. Both were paused as we directed resources toward the virtual adaptations of Creating Theology Together and BC Families but have resumed development and will debut in the upcoming church year.

In the 2020/2021 church year, 2,189 learners — 13% BIPOC+ and 87% white — joined from 41 US states, 8 Canadian provinces, and 4 countries in the first phase of the virtual program, Within. This phase focuses on the personal learning and spiritual growth we each need to do to understand how race and racism function in our world. Within ran in two cohorts concurrently, one for BIPOC+ and one for white folks, with different learning goals and practices in each.

This year, in addition to offering Within, we are launching two new phases of BCV. Beloved Conversations: Among is a year-long program for Within alums in UU congregations who are ready to transform their congregational systems to overcome white supremacy culture and to build multicultural, radically inclusive spiritual homes. We are also launching Within: Exploration Stations, play stations for the soul where Within alums can focus in deep and creative ways on one topic as it intersects with issues of race and racism.

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.

While COVID-19 has had a significant impact upon access to print resources, the Library and Archives at Meadville Lombard has worked to expand our digital offerings for both students and the larger UU community during the past year.

We expanded our offerings early in the year to our students with a new website, an improved online catalog, and increased access to ebooks. During the year, we expanded course reserve access through course specific webpages created by library staff. Working with faculty, we incorporated video, audio, images, and interactive resources for students on these webpages to support their coursework, in addition to links to assigned readings.

To support the larger UU community, we created a customized version of the library website that contains a unique catalog, book displays, and over 400 free digital resources for alum and community patrons. This new community library website makes it easy to access print books, digital resources, and internally produced Meadville Lombard library resources. As with students, we can mail library books to any alum and community patron in the United States. We currently have 53 alumni and community patron accounts and hope to grow this number.
Our work continues...