

Summer 2010

Midpoint
midpoint@presbynyc.org

A NEW SEASON

A NEW EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER ...

A NEW MODERATOR ...

A MINIMAL STAFF...



Outgoing Moderator Elder **YVONNE ARMSTRONG** (l) and new Moderator the Rev. **PERRY WOOTTEN** (r) Photo by **ANDY JAMES**



Newly elected Interim Executive Presbyter Elder **TONY DE LA ROSA**

F Y I

NEXT MEETING OF PRESBYTERY

September 25, 2010 at 9:30 AM

UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

2167 University Avenue.

Bronx 718-295-1224

MEETINGS OF PRESBYTERY

November 16

MEETINGS OF GENERAL COUNCIL

October 19
November 9
December 14

COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY

COM MEETINGS

September 7, 2010
October 12, 2010
November 2, 2010
December 7, 2010

COM MATERIALS DEADLINE

August 24, 2010
September 28, 2010
October 19, 2010
November 23, 2010

- A session's primary point of contact is its COM-appointed liaison.
- Please allow 1 - 2 weeks to receive action letters following the meeting of COM.
- COM doesn't normally acknowledge receipt of correspondence until COM can act on it.
- Official correspondence should be mailed to the Presbytery office or, preferably, e-mailed to com@presbynyc.org.

MEMBERS of COM's LEADERSHIP

Chair	Rev. Carmen Rosario	crosario_reyes@msn.com	212-923-3215
Pulpit -Ord'd & Installed	Rev. Grace Bowen	reverendbowen@yahoo.com	617-308-0634
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ELECTION OF NEW INTERIM EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER

Elder **TONY DE LA ROSA**'s background is a picture of the diversity, faithfulness and hope that shape the history and future of the Presbyterian Church (USA). He is the oldest of three sons born to his immigrant parents, his Mexican father and Puerto Rican mother (whose first mainland church was **FIRST SPANISH** in Brooklyn). Tony grew up in Los Angeles, but was schooled in the East, graduating from Phillips Academy (Andover) and Yale College. He earned an M.Div. from Yale Divinity School and a J.D. from Yale Law School.

Tony is Clerk of Session at Immanuel Presbyterian Church of Los Angeles, a multi-cultural inner-city congregation where he is known as a gifted mentor to church members of all backgrounds seeking to fulfill their callings. As an elder commissioner to the Presbytery of the Pacific, he recently served on a high-profile administrative commission, where his ability to build bridges and negotiate competing goals – as well as eloquently interpret the Book of Order – earned enormous respect from all sides. Tony has lent his skill in managing organizational change to all levels of the church. He has worked for 20 years with General Assembly-level entities, most recently as a member of its Special Committee on Civil Union and Christian Marriage. His leadership style is collegial and seeks to empower others to lead; he is intent on addressing hurts and enabling dialogue that honors all perspectives. He is humbly aware of God's grace moving through all he is and does; it is in response to God's grace, and in response to the gospel of justice and reconciliation, that Tony continues to offer his God-given gifts to the church.



A FEW QUESTIONS FROM MIDPOINT:

Have you found a place to live?

Not yet, but I'm pursuing a few leads. I hope to be near the office. I'll be bi-coastal too, since my partner will stay in L.A.

Will you be ordained to this position?

I am ordained. I'm an elder. I feel strongly about the role of elders in the church.

What was your role at Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles?

Immanuel is a wonderful and diverse congregation. The median age there is mid-thirties so as Clerk of Session there I was involved with education; I mentored new elders, many of whom were new Presbyterians. I did some pulpit coverage, was a commissioner to Presbytery, lots of things.

What were your impressions of the June 30th meeting of Presbytery, the meeting at which you were elected?

I felt proud of the Presbytery. Some presbyteries are not able or willing to raise difficult issues and struggle openly about them and debate and decide. There is clearly passion; the Spirit is in this Presbytery, and it's a Presbytery that likes to get things off its chest!



Tony served in the 1990s as Executive Director of the Los Angeles Center for Law and Justice, devoted to advocating for the poor within the justice system. For the last eight years he has worked as an in-house attorney with the nation's largest public health plan. "Discerning jurisdictional boundaries, understanding behavioral limitations, and fashioning consensus" have

been crucial in his professional life as in his service to the church. Tony is a certified Professional Registered parliamentarian. He currently lives with his partner in L.A.

Tony is exceptionally aware of NYC Presbytery's historic and prophetic mission, its "unflagging courage and witness in calling our denomination to address pressing theological and social issues ..." and is committed to the kind of leadership that

Photos by JOHN HARRIS

will renew the Presbytery's vision and enable it to fulfill its mission.

The IEP Search Committee believes that God is calling Tony to be our Interim Executive Presbyter; we affirm that he has the spiritual gifts and administrative skills, the “energy, intelligence, imagination and love” to guide us through this hour, so that we together can claim the future that God is holding out to us.

from Presbytery's **INTERIM EXECUTIVE PRESBYTER SEARCH COMMITTEE** Report.

A few words with new Moderator, the Rev. **PERRY WOOTTEN**, Senior Pastor at **EASTCHESTER**

What do you hope will be the features of your moderatorial year?

I hope that the entire leadership of the Presbytery will foster a greater sense of unity and purpose among our churches and communicants. We are a family – a collection of individuals for sure. But we should all be conscious of our calling and determined to live out our vision for the Church of Jesus Christ in New York City.



What challenges do you see?

Wherever there is a challenge there is an opportunity. The most obvious challenge which faces the Presbytery in the short term is that of functioning with a reduced staff. While we all regret the stress this situation has placed on a number of people, not the least of whom being those who have had to identify other job opportunities, we are confident that we will use this challenge to develop an efficient organization. Another challenge, of course, is to implement the suggestions which come out of the Lombard Mediation process as well as the Synod group.

You're going to be busy. How are you going to cope?

Eastchester PC has a plethora of fine leaders and dedicated Christians. And, our Associate Pastor, Carlton Knight, is an excellent leader as well. They easily will take up whatever slack my occasional absence will require.

I had a hard time getting this time to talk with you – kept running into your babysitting chores. What gives?

We have ten grandchildren, eight of whom live in the NYC area and all of whom are under 12. This situation occasionally means that I am ‘out of pocket.’ However, I do not expect that my responsibilities as Moderator will be overlooked because of these little ones.

Have you ever been a moderator of presbytery before?

No. However, I sometimes am allowed to moderate family gatherings!

A few words with outgoing Moderator, Elder **YVONNE ARMSTRONG**

You’ve had a unique perspective on Presbytery life this last year. Any comments?



I’m so glad I did it. I felt God’s presence through all of it, he was faithful even when it seemed most difficult ... even when a meeting was threatening to careen out of control, I felt guided. On the whole, it was a very good experience.

It’s been quite a year.

Yes, this year we saw the beginning of the Lombard Mediation process, and we started work on a resolution of issues around parity. And then, there was the sad-good news of a congregation conscientiously and thoughtfully voting to close, and its building immediately being put to wonderful new use as a new church home to Bethel.

What would you like to be remembered about you as Moderator?

When I was a new elder commissioner it took me quite a while to understand what was going on in Presbytery meetings – I felt I hadn’t a clue. Business was sometimes decided quickly and I knew there was often more to know and consider that somehow didn’t get expressed. So I felt called to aim for clarity and transparency on the floor of Presbytery. I think I am criticized for this but I believe in transparency, fairness, and hearing a divergence of opinion.

I hope I had some influence on discouraging the practice of Presbytery's acting on reports and paperwork that wasn't mailed out ahead of the meeting in the regular packet.

Any lasting impressions you take away?

I am amazed by the consistent and deep caring for issues in the Presbytery. There are so many times when I think other people would have thrown their hands up in the air, and walked away, and quit. By and large, that doesn't happen here. I think that can be a good thing, something positive to be observed about us.

Comment, please, on the meetings.

I love the worship in our meetings, and prefer them at the beginning to set the tone and remind us of our purpose. We remember, in action, Jesus sharing a meal, offering the Bread of Life, and this seems the right way to set our minds as we meet.

I prepared by studying the docket, reading all the paperwork, having conversations with the Stated Clerk, the Executive and Moderator of General Council. I found it helpful to script the meeting beforehand to help me keep on track, and tried as much as possible to anticipate motions and other potential actions.

Any parting wisdom?

I believe in hope. I'm always hopeful. Oscar McCloud once called me a "radical optimist," a description of me I really like, and accept.

Wisdom? Well, I have always liked the prayer attributed to Theresa of Avila. In part, it "Christ has no body but ours, no hands, no feet on earth but ours; Ours are the eyes with which he looks compassion on this world ..."

AS I HAVE LOVED YOU

Scripture: John 13:31-35

On this auspicious day as we install new leadership to office in our presbytery, we gather to worship, and to celebrate the Lord's Supper, and to offer up our prayers of thanksgiving for those who have served us as leaders, and prayers of dedication and commitment and intercession for those who will now lead us as officers, committee chairs, and council members in New York City Presbytery. Lord knows they will need our prayers. The Lord, indeed, knows that, and the Lord will no doubt be their strength and their salvation in this coming year even if at times we in our contention and irascibility are not.

Sermon preached by Jon M. Walton
Presbytery Installation Service
May 18, 2010
at Eastchester Presbyterian Church

It's not an easy presbytery, the Lord knows that too, and these are not easy times for us as a community of faith. So it's important to pause and offer prayer and give thanks and rededicate ourselves to playing our part in expressing the reign of God in New York City. So much is at stake.

It's Pentecost this Sunday, and we might well have focused on a Pentecost story today, the folks all gathered in one place, speaking many languages, and the wind of the Spirit falls on the church. We need that. Cliff Kirkpatrick once described New York City Presbytery as the Church at Pentecost *before* the Spirit came. But even so, we are a presbytery like all others, in need of the Spirit to guide and direct and inspire our work

But I'm going to save my Pentecost sermon for Sunday. Today, there's another text that comes to mind and it's one that rewinds the tape and takes us back past Ascension. Going in reverse. Past Easter. Back to the night of Jesus' arrest and his dinner speech at the table with his disciples in that upper room.

It's a long speech in John's gospel, chapters 13 through 17 in fact, known as the Farewell Discourse. Nobody else besides John among the gospel writers remembers so much of what was said in such detail.

It is a new teaching, Jesus says, but by now it has a familiar ring to it. "Little children," Jesus says to his grown up disciples, "I am with you only a little longer, so love one another as I have loved you. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

It's a touching farewell appeal. Something that opens the heart and touches the spirit of us all. *Love one another*, he said, *as I have loved you*. And certainly this is one of those passages of scripture that is so familiar that it becomes apt wording for a sampler on grandma's dining room wall, or as a greeting message in a Hallmark card on friendship. Familiar words exhorting us to love.

Of course, the familiarity of these words also has a numbing quality to it, we've heard them so often. We *ought to* love one another. So we teach the kids that lovely campfire song at Holmes,

*We are one in the spirit,
we are one in the Lord,
we are one in the spirit
we are one in the Lord,
and we pray that all unity
may one day be restored,
and they'll know we are Christians
by our love, by our love,
yes they'll know we are Christians
by our love.*

Now what's interesting about this commandment that Jesus gives his disciples to love one another, a commandment that is a parting attempt to instill and review with them the essentials of what he wants them to remember, is its placement in the gospel. It immediately follows Judas' betrayal of Jesus.

In fact, the words come out of Jesus' mouth immediately following Judas' departure from the upper room. "Do quickly what you have to do," Jesus tells Judas, and Judas took the bread from Jesus' hand, and ran out into the darkness of the night to find his way to the council where they awaited his arrival.

The other bookend of this teaching on love which begins with Judas' betrayal, is Peter's denial. Jesus no sooner finishes his words to his disciples than they leave the upper room together, make their way to the garden across the Kidron Valley where he is arrested and then stands trial before the high priest. And as he does Peter denies that he even knows Jesus. "Are you not also one of this man's disciples?" the woman in the high priest's courtyard asks. "I am not," Peter said. "I am not." "I am not." "I am not."

Jesus asks his disciples to do one thing, to love one another as he has loved them. By this, people will know that they are his disciples, Jesus says, if they love one another.

Some love! Judas betrays him, Peter denies him, and all fall away that night in the garden. At the cross, only Jesus' mother and the beloved disciple are anywhere to be found. The others are in hiding.

I suppose none of this was really any great surprise to Jesus. After all he was aware that his betrayer's hand was at the table with him. He even said so. And he told Peter that in spite of his protests to the contrary, Peter would deny him three times before cockcrow.

There had been indications all along that the choice of these twelve was not without its challenges. The gospels are replete with stories of the disciples' pettiness, their lack of faith, their inability to pick up the mantle and cast out demons or perform miracles, their backbiting, their jockeying for position. Even Peter, supposedly the best of the lot, couldn't accept Jesus' repeated explanation that the Son of Man must suffer and die. And so he tried to dissuade Jesus from his course of action, which frustrated Jesus no end; enough so that he rebuked Peter, called him *Satan*, and told him to get out of his way.

The inner circle of James and John, were diminished by the fact that their mother wanted to get advance seating arrangements for them at the heavenly banquet, a move that left the other disciples jealous and bickering among themselves.

The disciples were a rag tag army of argumentative, irritable, dissimilar people. As a group they were a lot like... a lot like... this presbytery, come to think of it. Basically good, but deeply flawed.

And while the passage that we read today trips off the tongue in a kind of benign and comfortable way, "Love one another as I have loved you," it is a commandment that is easier said than done; easier heard than fulfilled.

In fact, I am convinced that it is not only not easy for us to love one another in the church and in the presbytery, it was never easy for Jesus to love his disciples. I think it was a trial at times. Thirteen men traveling around the countryside of Galilee and Judea, going from town to village to roadside weigh station to wilderness outpost. I don't know about you but I think a real test of patience if not friendship is *traveling* with people.

You know you sign up for one of those tours with your college or the AARP or the Metropolitan Museum, and you're on the bus from early morning till late evening, arriving at the hotel, getting on and off at sites all day long. And somebody in the group is always late getting back to the bus, or oversleeps in the morning. Someone is always asking idiotic questions like, "When did you say the war of 1812 was?"

Or you're on one of those sea cruises where they put you at a table with people who are impossible and with whom you have nothing in common, and with whom you will be eating every lunch and dinner for the next ten days!

The disciples were an unlikely lot, several fishermen, a tax collector, a crook who was the treasurer, a member of a subversive political party, two sets of brothers, one a skeptic who didn't believe anything he couldn't see or touch; they didn't necessarily have a lot in common these folks except for, of course, Jesus. Which is why they were like the church, even like the presbytery.

The church is a group of people who would not necessarily have chosen to be together in quite this way were it not for the one in whose name we gather, and who has called us to be the church, to be together, as his body.

I think that it was hard for Jesus to love the disciples, not easy. As hard for him as it was for them to love one another. What was hard for him was to see the potential, the possibility of what they might be, and to know that they fell so short. I think it was hard because he knew how much depended on them, and how difficult it would be for them to live up to that. And it was hard because he knew how given to pettiness and jealousy and bullheadedness and sin that they were prone to be, and how far short they fell from the mark.

But in spite of all that, Jesus loved them. He loved them because he believed that together they were a sum that was greater than its parts. That together they were better than they were alone. That maybe, just maybe, they might rise above their pettiness and bickering and limitations and achieve something that had the love of God in it. Something that had his love in it and in so doing they might just love one another.

There is so much potential in this presbytery for the sake of Christ's reign in this city. Just think of what God might be hoping for us. The potential. The promise. Churches with great histories, famous preachers and pastors, important ministries and congregations, great marks left upon the Presbyterian Church nationally, and key ministry to perform today. And what a city, what a group of cities within cities we are! Five boroughs, strategic outposts of ministry where a lamp may stand on a bushel and give light to all.

We struggle with aging buildings, and costly oil bills, neighborhoods that have changed, and congregations that have long ago left and gone elsewhere. Churches whose mission has become vague and more focused on survival than service. There are too few of us scattered in too many places and we have hard decisions as well as difficult work to do. But there is so much that God is counting on us to do, if we will get to work on it. If we can overcome our bickering and pettiness and bullheadedness and fear.

This is America's greatest city. The most diverse and challenging urban setting in the nation. Embattled and threatened by foreign attacks and yet the city that stands on a hill and from which God means to reign, if only we will love and work with one another.

Somehow it helps me to know that it wasn't easy for Jesus to love his disciples, that he had to work at it the way I have to work at it, because all too often I get discouraged by the frailty and brokenness and painful humanity of those whom God has called into the church.

This is, after all, not my group. I wouldn't have gotten these folks together. But God has. And that's the difference. God has. And God has hopes for us. God has dreams for us. God desires more for us than we have dared think possible for ourselves. And God will not give up on us. God even wants us to love one another.

"Love one another as I have loved you," Jesus said. And how was that? How was it that he loved them? How is it that he loves us? Enough to die for us. Enough to give his life for our sake. Enough to go to a cross so that our broken, sinful, nature might be redeemed.

Enough to put up with us, too. And if Jesus could love his disciples, in spite of all their painful humanity, then we can love one another in the same way, in spite of all our painful humanity. I heard not long ago about a pastor friend who has a member of the church that he saw recently. He was having coffee with her when he asked her how things were going.

"Well not so good," she said. "Our son's been putting us through hell."

"I'm so sorry," the pastor said. "How old is your son?"

"He's eighteen, and we have not known where he was for the last six months. We basically changed the locks on the door. I pray for him every night, but we didn't know where he was, and last week, during dinner, suddenly somebody was pounding on the door.

We open the door and there he was! And he starts this string of profanity.

I said, "We're eating, come on in, sit down and eat with us," and he refused to sit down at the table and he stormed back into his room, he slammed the door shut, and I could hear the door lock.

And my husband sat there and he got up, poured himself a drink, went out, turned on the TV. That's kind of how he handles it.

And I put my napkin down and got up and went down the hall. I went out to the garage, and I looked at my husband's tools and I got this big hammer, this large hammer. I walked back from the garage back in the hall, stood in front of my son's door. I asked him, "Open the door." And this string of profanity pours out.

So I took that hammer and I leaned back and hit with one good hit. I knocked the whole door knob, the lock, everything right off the door. Just split the door in two. And I barged through the door. And my son looked terrified. And I caught him right up under his chin like this and I slammed him up against the headboard of the bed and I said, "I went into labor because of you. And by God I am not giving you up."¹

I am not giving you up.

I think this presbytery must try God's patience. I know it tries mine. And I suspect God would have given up on us long ago, if it were not that God loved us so much. Saw so

much potential for us. Desired so much from us. Gave so much for our sake. Will not give up on us. *Love one another as I have loved you*, Jesus urged us. *As I have loved you*. With patience, forgiveness, forbearance, and with ferocious determination.

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¹ This account is quoted from William Willimon's first lecture "Jesus Saves" delivered at the Midwinter Lectures, Austin Theological Seminary, Austin, TX, February 4, 2008. I have also found the story in a sermon by Thomas G. Long preached at the Washington National Cathedral, Washington, D.C., June 1, 2008

THANK YOU, OSCAR



On June 16, 2010, the Rev. **J. OSCAR McCLOUD** completed his service as Acting Executive Presbyter at the Presbytery of New York City. Having been called out of retirement to accept this position he now leaves with our deep appreciation and gratitude for the generosity of his

wisdom and skills during his time with us. Reflecting on this time Oscar said the following in his letter to the Presbytery's Personnel Committee:

“It has been an extraordinary privilege to have been asked almost one year ago to serve as Acting Executive Presbyter. Fulfilling the responsibilities of this position has been a learning experience and a source of joy, as well as some stress and distress. During the past eleven months I have sought to bring some stability to the Presbytery, raise the morale of the staff, and provide some direction for the Presbytery's future. I am satisfied there has been a meaningful degree of success/progress in these areas. I have also sought to speak the truth in love. Now as I prepare to take leave of the responsibilities I wish the very best to the Presbytery, to and for the staff, and to those who will follow in this office.”

Thank you so much, Oscar, for all you gave us and all you leave with us.

We send you (back!) to retirement with our blessings and prayers for good health, abundant joy, and hopes that the fish you seek bite early and often.

Rev. **JOSEPHINE CAMERON**, Chair, Personnel

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PRESBYTERIAN SENIOR SERVICES (PSS)

Over the last six months, Carnegie Hall performers have held special performances at the **PSS/WSF GRANDPARENT FAMILY APARTMENTS**. On Sunday, June 6th, there was a very special concert entitled



“Stories from the GrandFamily Apartments” held at the Casita Maria Center. The concert was the world premiere of performances and musical pieces created by Carnegie Hall musicians in conjunction with the youth and grandparents of the GFA. The event consisted of songs and readings by some of the youth. It also featured a world premiere piece commissioned specifically for the GFA and performed by a 12 piece professional orchestra. It was truly a phenomenal experience, and it was clear that everyone was moved by the experience of putting it all together. As a result of this innovative collaboration with Carnegie Hall, the process of artistic creation will remain a life-changing experience for many of the children.



Spring was a productive season for PSS in terms of getting the word out about our programs and services. May’s annual Bronx Week included a special screening of our **GRANDMOTHER TO GRANDMOTHER** documentary at the Concourse Multiplex Cinemas on May 19th. The event, sponsored by EmblemHealth, was a huge success. A “sold out” crowd of over 180 were on hand to view the

film and meet the “stars” of the film. Representatives from the Borough President’s office and the Chamber of Commerce were on hand to recognize those involved. The event also led to a feature article written for the Daily News, as well as a story in the June 16th issue of the Bronx Free Press.

Spring was also a time for presentations.

On June 4th, PSS Deputy Director **KATHERINE MARTINEZ** was the moderator for The **BRONX CARES, A COMMUNITY EDUCATION SEMINAR** for informal caregivers. PSS Executive Director **RIMAS JASIN** was on a panel presentation for the 15th annual **JARVIE COLLOQUIUM** on June 11th . Rimas Jasin then helped facilitate a session at the **FIRST WHITESTONE**’s Health and Wellness



Fair on Saturday, June 12th. The month ended with a special presentation on the GFA at DYCD (Dept of Youth and Community Development).

Finally, the PSS office, located in the **RUTGERS** Church office building, recently underwent renovation and redecoration. On May 19th, the PSS Board and Staff invited the Rev. **ONDREJ (ANDREW) STEHLIK**, to say a blessing over the new space. It was a wonderful opportunity for the board to meet Rutgers’ new pastor, as well as for PSS to thank Rutgers Church for their generous support in hosting the PSS office.

RIMAS JASIN, PSS Executive Director

DIRECTORY

Meeting dates change more frequently than newsletters are published. Meeting dates are set at a Committee's latest meeting but, if a change is made, the Chair should contact members by phone, email or mail.

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Embody God's Love • Proclaim God's Word • Promote God's Peace



... separation of church and staff