



Office for
Transition
Ministry

Ministry Portfolio

Full Portfolio (last updated Aug 27, 2015)

Rev. James Francis Perra, Maryland

Priest, Since Sep 9, 2014

Preferred Contact Information

1106 Woodheights Ave
Baltimore, Maryland 21211
United States

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(443) 296-5060
(443) 799-6723

Exuberant pastoral presence, creativity, passion for justice, and ability to discern and build with the unique gifts of parishioners: traits I offer to lead communities, empowering members to take healthy risks and grow into the stature of Christ.

Current Compensation	Required for New Position	Negotiable	Healthcare Needed
\$60282		Yes	Negotiable
Housing/Rectory	Housing/Rectory Detail	Housing Required for	
Housing Allowance	\$22896	3	

Education

2004-2007 MDiv, Divinity, Trinity College, Toronto
1999-2003 Bachelor of Arts, Psychology, Michigan State University
2007-2008 Paramedic, Emergency Medicine, Kellogg Community College

Position Preferences

Assistant / Associate / Curate
Chaplain
School
Education field
Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-Charge

Open to Consider New Position

Full time
Interim - not certified
Pilot Project:New Dreams-New Visions

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Work History and Skills

Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-Charge (Part-time)	Mar 2014	Church of the Redemption	Baltimore, Maryland
<p>Transition ministry, alternative worship, web / social-media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased average weekly attendance by 24% 2014 over 2013. • Leveraged church resources to increase projected 2015 revenue by 27% over 2014. • Built a newcomer focused weeknight alternative Eucharist w/ fellowship and study. • Provided pastoral care and redevelopment guidance to a family-size congregation in a rapidly changing urban community. • Developed web, social media, and direct-mail marketing campaigns. 			
Medical field	Jan 2009 to Apr 2014	Baltimore County Fire Department	Baltimore County, Maryland
<p>Teaching, Emergency Management, leadership, crisis intervention</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supervised and performed medical care responding to residential and industrial emergencies. • Lectured for undergraduate-level paramedic training courses in pathology, physiology, pharmacology, emergency management, and self-care. • Trained students in the field, engaging a variety of learning styles with mentorship that emphasized character and professionalism. 			
Youth Minister	Aug 2008 to Jun 2011	St. Paul's	Baltimore, Maryland
<p>Youth Groups, young adults, leadership development, teaching</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developed a comprehensive formation program for grades 6-12. • Planned and supervised special events and outreach opportunities for youth group. • Recruited, trained, and maintained a corps of adult volunteers. • Created a unique confirmation program for ages 14 and up. • Designed and maintained the parish website. • Assisted in development of newcomer and young adult (20s and 30s) community. 			
Seminarian	Jan 2008 to Jun 2008	St. Barnabas	Portage, Michigan
Chaplain, Hospital	Sep 2006 to Apr 2007	University Health Network	Toronto, Ontario
Education field	Aug 2000 to May 2003	Michigan State University	East Lansing, Michigan

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Other Contact Information

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United States

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> www.jamesperra.com

Date of Last Background Check
Tue, 2013-08-06

Company performing check
Praesidium

Diocese requesting
Maryland

Sermons Preached:

> <http://progressivepilgrim.com/?p=427>
> <http://jamesperra.podbean.com/>

Resources Created:

> <http://www.redemptionbaltimore.org/>

Online References:

> <http://jamesperra.com>
> <https://www.linkedin.com/pub/jim-perra/19/5aa/249>

What Others Have Written:

> <http://goo.gl/kztxgB>
> <http://www.kazoocivic.com/perra-james-biography>

Groups and Associations:

> <http://www.the6thbranch.org/>
> <http://www.buildiaf.org/>

Languages Written
English

Languages Spoken
English

Languages in which you are able to Lead Worship
English

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Describe a moment in your recent ministry that you recognize as one of success and fulfillment.

When I arrived in March of 2014, the Church of the Redemption was at a critical junction. Economic and cultural changes to the neighborhood in the past few decades had precipitated a decline in membership. The parish responded by turning inward, focusing on maintaining the past and managing the decay. This led to faster decline and hindered the congregation's ability to live its mission. Ideas suggested in response to this decline, if they sacrificed the familiar, were rejected angrily. After seventeen months of building relationships, preaching, teaching, sharing demographic research, and recruiting newcomers into the community, the leadership of the parish has reshaped itself. In August of 2015 the vestry voted unanimously to participate in an intensive, year-long redevelopment program. They made a priority of adding previously unheard voices to the committee that will guide rapid and radical changes in the congregation. Hearing people who had previously been angry and exhausted speak with hope and a conviction to change has been a high-point of my time at Redemption.

Describe your liturgical style and practice.

Thoughtful and eclectic. In planning liturgy I am mindful of balancing between ancient ritual that ties us to our past, and providing a creative outlet through which we can evoke who we are and who the holy spirit is calling us to become. Worship should help us explore what we are trying to say, the story we are telling in our liturgy, and then thoughtfully and prayerfully apply our traditional rubrics to that end. I enjoy using a multitude of sources, with a special place in my heart for African and Celtic music and prose, to provide culturally and historically diverse experience, while being careful to produce a dignified and cohesive whole.

How do you practice incorporating others in ministry?

I'm a firm believer in "participation evangelism." Occasionally, a church may attract people who come on a Sunday morning and are moved to return by the worship experience alone. I have found that participation in the mission of a Church, whether it be in liturgy, outreach, or another ministry, provides an immediate, personal, and visceral experience, and allows a person to express their gifts in a way that folds them into a church community rather than simply inviting them to observe. It is important therefore, to have room in every ministry of a church for new blood, and to remain open and flexible so that a community can be an ongoing reflection and expression of the passions and talents of the congregation.

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How do you care for your spiritual, emotional and physical well-being?

In order to make room for the voice of God in my life, I engage in silent meditation three to five times a week. I hold morning prayer as a way to gather spiritually outside the busy Sunday morning program, and alternate between the prayer book office and centering/mindfulness prayer. I have a tendency to burn the candle at both ends and so I try to be sensitive to my own needs, taking a few days each year to engage in silent retreat at Holy Cross monastery. I spend time with friends and engage in new experiences to build my extroverted energies, and other times I withdraw (often with a hot bubble bath and a good book) when I need to take a break. I have struggled with my weight my whole life but have had physically engaging jobs and hobbies resulting in good strength and health.

Describe your involvement in either the wider Church or geographical community.

I currently sit on the Diocese of Maryland Compensation and Benefits Committee, and previously served on the suffragan bishop transition committee. I have participated in direct-action activities with BUILD (Baltimoreans United in Leadership Development) and have volunteered with The Sixth Branch, a veteran-guided service organization, and with the Veteran Artists Program in Baltimore. In the neighborhood surrounding my parish, I work with the Locust Point Civic Association, and support Hunger Challenge, a parishioner-led initiative to provide direct clothing and food support for area homeless. In the past I have led mission trips to New Mexico and Toronto, participated in diocesan trips to New Orleans and Boston, and I led a contingent to the Episcopal Youth Event in 2007.

How do you engage in pastoral care for others?

In our lives, in our relationships, in our search to find ourselves within the life of God, so much of who we are stems from the narrative that we write for ourselves. As Christians we are gifted with the story of Christ that informs our own. As a priest I enjoy an excellent position from which to remind people that each of us is a beloved child of God, and related to all within God's human family. More important than theological guidance is being present to help those in my care construct their own understanding of themselves and their relationship with God. In times of hardship, I find it is often more useful to simply to be present, to bear witness, and to affirm the experiences of people rather than try to "make it better." When the time is right for pastoral guidance or leadership of a community, the goal remains the same--a person or a people will write the story of how they live their lives as members of the body of Christ. A pastor's role can be to midwife and inform that story as it is born.

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Tell about a ministry project that exists because of your leadership. What was your role in its creation? Who can be contacted?

In the fall of 2014, I began to offer an alternative midweek Eucharist at Redemption. The mission was to provide an "easy-access" worship option for newcomers at a different time than Sunday morning, and to provide an option for a number of members who had drifted away due to conflicts between parishioners. While it has remained a small gathering, our Wednesday night "New Eucharist" has succeeded in its original mission and accomplished even more. This service has offered an opportunity for persons in discernment to get a taste of cohesive liturgy planning, and a space for musicians to experiment playfully. Initially the service was followed by a "Holy Happy Hour" at a local bar, but has evolved into a potluck in which participants take turns providing food. The "sermon" is a community discussion responding to questions about the day's lectionary reading or commemoration from "Holy Women, Holy Men." These conversations are the centerpiece of worship that attracts participants from both the neighborhood and all around Baltimore. For more information, contact Steve Tollefson (443.248.9525 / stollefson@gmail.com) about this ministry.

How are you preparing yourself for the Church of the future?

The idea of "the Church of the Future" is an intriguing one to me; so far as I can tell, many of our churches are struggling to live in the now. A healthy "present" in the Episcopal Church will depend on churches that act in the understanding that we are groups of pilgrim disciples with a common mission, and not buildings or museums. A radical welcome, an outward focus, and a strong sense of identity that produces well articulated mission, vision, and strategy, along with the ability to make difficult choices about our resources, will mark successful ministries in the present and the future. Creative problem solving and revenue enhancement, and a willingness to partner in mission with outsiders both secular and religious will also be necessary. I have prepared myself for this church by studying the work of alternative communities of worship, such as those in the emerging church movement; by engaging communities of intentional church developers and redevelopers such as the monthly webcasts by Tom Ehrich; and by attending conferences like "Buildings for a New Tomorrow" that explore creative and innovative use of our sacred and social spaces.

What is your personal practice of stewardship and how do you utilize it to influence your ministry in your worshipping community?

As leaders in the church, ordained and lay, we ask individuals to tithe and support a community. We must joyfully articulate a mission, vision, and strategy that will inform the decisions that members make regarding their investments of time, talent, and treasure. I give five percent of my income after deducting student loans to the church, and another five percent to other causes and charities. I'm quite open about this because discerning a percent and following through on it, rather than "tossing a twenty in the plate" has helped my wife and I be more effective in managing our household finances, and having a household budget for charitable contributions is a fun reminder that we can live out of God's abundance. I am disciplined about being a "first fruits" giver, using electronic debit to ensure my pledge is current, and encourage others to do the same. As a whole church and as parishes we must also address our stewardship of community resources. Many of our parishes have assets of property, space, and even financial reserves that lie fallow and are not seriously placed on the table during discussions of how we do kingdom work in the world.

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What is your experience of conflict involving the church? And what is your experience in addressing it?

Leading a community faced with a choice between rapid, radical change or eminent closure has provided me a master class in conflict management. The clearer the mission, vision, and strategy of a community is, the more participants are able to be “hard on problems, and soft on people.” If objectives are clear and agreed upon, than disagreements can be about how to achieve success, and not a matter of personal privilege or control. Leadership must prioritize civility, transparency, and communication. Good pastoral care can help members understand that they can be loved, heard, and still not always get their way. Aside from helping to articulate healthy community norms, clergy must also continually model these behaviors, and maintain a vigilant degree of self-awareness and consistency. Displaying a willingness to apologize when we offend or act-out, and then to avoid doing it again can be just as useful as not erring to begin with. Accepting apologies and moving forward without a grudge, leaving the door open to reconciliation, and accepting when things don’t go our way are all behaviors that are eventually reflected in the community when consistently displayed by leaders.

What is your experience leading/addressing change in the church? When has it gone well? When has it gone poorly? And what did you learn?

I was on staff as a Youth Minister at St. Paul’s Baltimore during a time significant change and growth. The strategy there was to grow the congregation by starting a second, contemporary (Rite II,) Sunday service and by revamping the education program, adding childcare and adult formation. Over the past decade St. Paul’s has become a model of success, a thriving parish with many young families and children. Despite this, I witnessed angry and painful conversations as long time parishioners realized that their preferences and traditions were not valued by the new majority of people within the community. At the Church of the Redemption I was called upon to lead similarly dramatic change, but with fewer resources and a very short amount of time. I learned that few people are moved by the presentation of facts alone. No matter how clear new information might be, credibility is based first on strong relationships. Forcing big changes quickly is difficult at best. Even so, by working to build relationships while presenting data and opportunities gently and consistently, the community at Redemption has evolved at an impressive pace, and has responded creatively to daunting circumstances.

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References

Bishop:

Eugene Sutton (410) 467-1399 - esutton@ang-md.org

Diocesan Transition Minister

Stuart Wright (410) 467-1399 - swright@episcopalmaryland.org

Active Clergy:

Mark Stanley (410) 685-3404 - mark@osp1692.org
Former Supervisor, Rector of
Sponsoring Parish

Active Clergy:

Jim Hamilton (630) 306-5702 - jamesgaryhamilton@gmail.com
Colleague, Pastoral Missioner at
Church on the Square in Baltimore,
MD

Colleague in Church Governance:

John Henderson (443) 220-1446 - johnahenderson@gmail.com
Diocesan Disciplinary Committee and
Senior Warden of Old Saint Paul's

Colleague in Church Governance:

Medora Boyle (609) 709-6247 - medora925@gmail.com
Junior Warden of Old Saint Paul's

Colleague in Ministry:

Genevieve Callard (269) 381-2710 ext 13 - gcallard@edwm.org
Assistant to the Bishop for Children,
Youth and Young Adult Ministries,
Diocese of Western Michigan

Colleague in Ministry:

John Deason (323) 770-2493 - jdeason@churchonthesquarebaltimore.org
Development Missioner at Church on
the Square in Baltimore, MD