



Office for
Transition
Ministry

Ministry Portfolio

Full Portfolio (last updated Jul 21, 2018)

Rev. James Francis Perra, Maryland

Priest, Since Sep 9, 2014

Preferred Contact Information

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United States

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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, encouraging healthy risks and growing together into the stature of Christ.

Current Compensation	Required for New Position	Negotiable	Healthcare Needed
\$70000	\$80000	Yes	Full family
Housing/Rectory Housing Allowance	Housing/Rectory Detail	Housing Required for 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
2018	College for Congregational Dev Congregational Development, Diocese of Olympia
2016	Boot Camp, Congregational Development an, ECF / Lilly Endowment
2015	Buildings for a New Tomorrow, Congregational Growth/Develop, Church Building Fund (ECBF)
2014	Seeing the Face of God in Each Anti Racism Training, Diocese of Maryland

Position Preferences

Canon for Congregational Development
Cathedral Staff
Chaplain
School
Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-Charge

Open to Consider New Position

Full time
Interim - not certified

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Work History and Skills

Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-Charge	Dec 2015	The Church of the Holy Apostles	Arbutus, Maryland	<p>-preaching -mission -stewardship -Cong. Dev. -administration -Youth & Y</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worked with leadership to recognize long standing sustainability problems, implemented strategies in response. • Led a process of defining and celebrating the charisms of the community, clarifying the core mission, developing communications and stewardship strategies to include and inspire the entire congregation during a period of transition. • Recruited, resourced, and counseled leaders who redeveloped what became thriving youth group, women's study and fellowship, and other programs.
Education field	Aug 2017	Wesley Theological Seminary		<p>Administration; teaching; organizational leadership, Pastoral care; Lead wo</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitated reflective colloquy for seminarian interns and student pastors in the UMC • Acted as a liaison between the seminary, seminarians/student pastors, and field placements • Provided counsel to persons in ordination process • Instructed students in the development of case studies for personal and group assessment of applied theological and skill-based instruction in real-world settings.
Rector / Vicar / Priest-in-Charge (Part-time)	Mar 2014 to Nov 2015	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	
Youth Minister	Aug 2008 to Jun 2011	St. Paul's	Baltimore, Maryland	
Seminarian	Jan 2008 to Jun 2008	St. Barnabas	Portage, Michigan	

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Other Contact Information

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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://jamesperra.podbean.com/>
> https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_R4ca9mbfEckWXwxuTN
TNQ

Resources Created:

Online References:

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

What Others Have Written:

> <http://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-county/a>

> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/acts-of-faith/wp/2018/05/>

Groups and Associations:

> <http://www.ube.org/Regions%20&%20Chapters/mid-atlantic-chapters.html>
> <http://www.the6thbranch.org/>

Languages Written
English

Languages Spoken
English

Languages in which you are able to Lead Worship
English, Spanish

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

A parishioner came to me to discuss how things might be different if we are successful in entering into a close, missional, partnership with a Lutheran (ELCA) congregation nearby. She asked excellent, practical, questions, and gave constructive input. She offered a mix of excitement, anxiety, and some mourning for how things may be changed one or two years hence. I could see clearly her resolve to grow the special gifts of her church in the body of Christ, even if it means a challenging transformation. This moment had me walking on air because it was the culmination of two years work. Falling in love as I did with Holy Apostles it was still daunting to stay on as Rector knowing that "if trends continued" the church would be gone in a few years. After two years of working to clarify and communicate both the joyful community to be preserved, and realities around sustainability, we are in the process of creating a partnered community. That this person, who historically would publicly lament change, and emphasize the negative, has come to experience hope and in fact become a leader in this process is truly the work of the Holy Spirit.

Describe your liturgical style and practice.

Thoughtful and eclectic. In planning liturgy I am mindful of balancing ancient ritual that maintains orthodoxy and ties us to our past, with providing a creative outlet through which we can freshly 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 liturgical 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 that amplifies and integrates the voice of marginalized peoples.

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. I have a tendency to burn the candle at both ends and so I am 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. Since leaving the Fire Department I have continued to serve as a paramedic through a volunteer company a few times a month. These shifts, helping people in concrete and immediate ways, have been surprisingly refreshing and an almost mindful opportunity to live in the immediate present.

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

I am the Chaplain to Diocesan Council in the Diocese of Maryland, and sit on the Youth Advisory and Comp and Benefits Committees, where I have worked to end compensation discrepancies related to race and gender. Currently working with the Maryland Episcopal Clergy Association work group on how we can address sexual discrimination and power related mistrust in the diocese. I am also a member of a newly formed Cohort for Congregational Development, offering consultation to congregations and exploring new models and partnerships within the diocese. After several years hanging around, I've finally joined the Union of Black Episcopalians. In my current call I am a member of the Greater Arbutus Business Association and a leader in the Greater Arbutus Ministerium Association, where I introduced both "Ashes-to-Go" and a Good Friday community "Crosswalk for Social Justice". 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.

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?

My call is helping people to succeed in ministry, to help communities to name what God is calling them to do and coach them in using their gifts and resources to that end. The more “ownership” I have of a ministry, the more something is “my project” rather than something I have sparked by putting the right people in the right place with the right tools, the more I question if it’s what we should be doing. At Holy Apostles there was a desire to restore formation programs that ceased between clergy. I worked with volunteers using best practices and curriculum to offer Sunday morning learning for all “Ages and Stages.” None of those programs took off. However, volunteers were inspired, teams enjoyed working together, I had developed trust and rapport to support ministers. Now there is a thriving youth group meeting Sunday nights, a weekly women’s study and fellowship that keeps outgrowing its room, and a children’s chapel during the liturgy of the word. These ministries exist because of my leadership, but things are best when my role is tangential, counseling, providing resources, nurturing the way the holy spirit brings people together and inspires them, and staying out of the way.

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

This is an interesting question because, 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 being formed between denominations; by engaging communities of intentional church developers and re-developers, by participating in programs like the College for Congregational Development, the Lilly Foundations “Boot Camp”, and 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?

My work leading two parishes 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, then 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?

At St. Paul’s Baltimore I participated in a time of incredible change and growth. The strategy 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 always 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. At Holy Apostles, I realized early that profound change was needed but instead of prescribing a solution at the outset, I began a process to recognize the challenges as a community, taking little steps first, and celebrating small wins, while preparing the community to do something more radical.

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References

Bishop:

Eugene Sutton (410) 467-1399 - esutton@episcopalmaryland.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:

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Maryland Episcopal Clergy
Association (MECA)

Colleague in Ministry:

Anne Coghill (703) 470-1790 - anne.macnabb@trinityelkridge.org
President of Regional Council

Colleague in Ministry:

Aaron Frank (703) 863-6717 - adfrank@hotmail.com
Colleague in local ministerium
association