

## ‘Rocking with Rada - Words of Hope’

### A Keynote Conversation with RE Heath Rada

By RE Janet Rainey, Postlude Reporter

In a departure from the usual form of keynote address, and in a setting reminiscent of the front porch at his home in Montreat, Heath sat in a rocking chair on the chancel and invited attendees to join him and ask questions. His insightful, grace-filled, and inspiring responses to the issues and concerns expressed were laced with humor, hope and humility.

When asked to comment on the denomination-wide response to his “Call to the Church” (issued in September 2015, after a year-long period of listening), Heath shared that he has felt called to step beyond the general ambassadorial role of the Moderator and help the denomination step out in faith and move in a direction where trust could be regained and new ways found to be church. He reminded everyone that they have been invited to take part in a



RE Heath Rada

denomination-wide conversation by participating in an online survey regarding the identity, mission, and focus of the denomination. Qualitative results (on the

identified issues and areas where our energy should be focused) will be summarized and shared with the 2016 General Assembly.

In response to a request for examples of exciting things happening in other congregations, that might give encouragement to sessions dealing with declining membership, giving, and

leadership participation, Heath told of churches stepping back to spend time in discernment and learning to rephrase the questions they were asking. Some churches with predominantly older memberships had chosen to focus on assisting with quality of life, rather than traditional ministry in their sanctuaries.

When asked if he felt encouraged by the youth and young adults that he had met during the past 18 months, Heath affirmed three reasons he felt young people are being drawn to the PC (USA): firstly, they feel safe to ask theological questions; secondly, they believe we are a church without walls, doing meaningful mission and social



witness in the community (“They may not be in church on Sunday morning, but they help at the soup kitchen on a weekday evening.”); thirdly, they are open to diversity (“The table is open to all, and we will learn to love and respect each other in spite of our differences.”).

“What can we do to help you?” Heath’s reply: “Pray, intentionally!” He

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## Day of inspiration, learning, warm fellowship!

Dodging raindrops and at times even sporadic downpours, more than 209 voting commissioners and 40 visitors from all parts of Southeast Texas made their way to St. John’s PC in Houston for the final presbytery meeting of 2015. After heartfelt greetings with old and new friends, the assembly was called to worship with the words “Take heart. Christ hears our cries and invites us into God’s presence.”

TE Jon Burnham, pastor of St. John’s PC, introduced the Moderator of the 221<sup>st</sup> General Assembly of the PC (USA) Heath Rada, who was Jon’s teacher years ago at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. “I was excited when I learned that Heath was

standing for Moderator. He was one of my teachers when I attend PSCE,” said Jon. “He is an unpretentious man of



integrity and an encourager to all.” Heath delivered the morning sermon as well as the keynote presentation. The morning offering (\$4,029) will be given to Presbyterian Children’s Homes and Services.



encouraged churches to hold congregation-wide conversations on how to manifest Christ's love in ways that are whole, loving, and helpful. "We are not called to be fighting with one another; we must address how to become peace-makers after choosing sides; we are called to be followers of Christ and doers of his ministry."

When asked about the "1001 New Worshipping Communities" initiative, Heath affirmed that it was still going strong: 300 have been established in three years; they are diverse, and often brought together by a common interest. Heath predicted that such groups would be an enormous part of our future, and that we would learn and grow from one another. He also noted that during a visit to the White House he had heard appreciation and thanks expressed for the extraordinary relationships built between the PC (USA) and many social justice organizations.

Many attendees will never forget the closing segment of the keynote discussions, when Heath shared a story from his visit to Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq. Amidst the horror of the Islamic State territorial expansion, shone the strength of a loving, respectful, and trusting interfaith friendship between next-door neighbor families, one Presbyterian Christian, one Muslim. The Presbyterian family had been forced by ISIS to walk away from everything they had. The Muslim family had devised a plan to retrieve the Presbyterian family's money and important documents (hidden in a pre-arranged location) and had, three weeks later, taken the items to the other family, in Erbil. The families had enjoyed a happy reunion, and then the Muslim family returned home.

They were then murdered; the family's activities had been observed and reported!

## Welcome to New Covenant!

*Extending the right hand of fellowship to new colleagues, commissioners welcomed three pastors to New Covenant.*



Mirjam Haas-Melchior

**TE Mirjam Haas-Melchior** has been called by St. Paul's PC, Needville, to serve as Designated Pastor for a 2-year term, effective 10/7/15 full time. Mirjam is originally from Germany where she was ordained in 2008 by the Evangelical Church in the Rhineland, Germany. She received a BA degree in Theological Studies from the Universitat Heidelberg and received her MDiv equivalent from the Barmen Theological School in Wuppertal, Germany. Mirjam and her husband Daniel have 3 children, age, 7, 6, and 4.



TE Holly Smith

Also transferring to New Covenant is **TE Holly Smith** – Member-at-Large. She is transferring from Des Moines Presbytery. Holly graduated from Stephen F. Austin State University and received her MDiv from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary in 2008. She was ordained in 2009. Before ordination, Holly was a candidate under care of New Covenant Presbytery and a member of Westminster PC in Nacogdoches. She is currently teaching in a middle school and is the mother of 4 children under 9!



TE Alf Halvorson

**TE Alf Halvorson** was not able to attend the presbytery meeting as planned because of an injuries incurred in a bicycle accident. Alf was installed as Pastor at Memorial Drive PC, Houston, on Aug. 30, 2015. Alf (rhymes with golf) graduated from Luther College with a BA, received both his MDiv (1990) and a Master of Theology degree (1991) from Princeton Theological Seminary, and his DMin from Austin Presbyterian Theological Seminary (2011). He was ordained in 1991. Since then, Alf has served 3 churches, most recently First Presbyterian Church, Bethlehem, PA. He and his wife, Shari, have two children, Matt and Kristen.

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## Motion to form an Administrative Commission

The Committee on Ministry (COM) recommended that the presbytery appoint an Administrative Commission to engage in the process of reviewing, responding, and assisting in the reconciliation within Korean Young Nak Presbyterian Church, Houston. This process would assume original jurisdiction over the Session.

COM believes the congregation needs to be heard and thinks at this time that the congregation is not able to unite and collaborate on a common mission and vision. The primary task of an Administrative Commission is to settle difficulties.

Much floor discussion ensued from those who favored and from those who did not approve of the motion, providing background and clarification concerning the motion. The vote of the assembly gave approval to the motion to form an Administrative Commission.

The AC shall send a letter to all members of the congregation outlining the task and process. It shall have one-on-one conversations with employees and shall communicate with COM and General Council. The Administrative Commission shall use a translator for meetings with members to ensure understanding.

# Overtures relating to climate change passed by commissioners

By RE Jim Allison, Postlude Report

The Presbytery's November 21 meeting included discussion of five overtures proposed for submission to the General Assembly for consideration at the meeting coming up the summer of 2016. Three of these proposed overtures dealt with issues related to climate change and the overture to the 2014 General Assembly calling for divestment from fossil fuel companies. All three of these overtures were passed by the presbytery, and require only a "concurrence" from at least one other presbytery to be included on the agenda for the 2016 General Assembly.

In response to that 2014 overture, which was not passed, but was instead referred to the Committee on Mission Responsibility Through Investment ("MRTI"), Mike Cole convened an ad hoc working group from within the Synod of the Sun to discuss what might be faithful alternatives to divestment and to create overtures to implement those faithful alternatives. This group met many times over the last year, and produced (i) a Consultation Document, (ii) a symposium held in Houston in early October (that was attended by several members of MRTI and the Foundation), and (iii) a template for creating overtures on the topic. The three fossil-fuel-related overtures all arose from this process.

The three overtures share many common themes, which is a reflection of their shared origin. Most significantly, all three reflect a view that blanket divestment from the fossil fuel industry is not an adequately faithful response to the issues. Among the arguments is the observation that divestment doesn't actually do anything to reduce greenhouse gas emissions -- there is no causal connection between the solution proposed by the divestment movement and the climate change problem they highlight.

There are also differences among the three, reflecting the differing points of emphasis highlighted by the three sessions that submitted the overtures. The overtures from Pines and Atascocita focus on alternative to divestment as a

response, alternatives that would be more faithful, in part because they would be more likely to actually accomplish something. The response highlighted in both overtures as most likely to have a material effect is the establishment of a mechanism to price greenhouse gas emissions. The Atascocita overture focuses on this one response, and builds out a more detailed approach to how to proceed to accomplish this.

The Pines overtures has essentially the same call for a pricing mechanism, but also notes that there are many other things that we can and should be doing individually and collectively. The Pines overture also goes beyond the Atascocita and Woodlands overtures in its description of our historical stewardship of community and creation as "self-centered and sinful" and its call for repentance.

The overture from the Woodlands Community Church shares many of the fundamental themes of the Atascocita and Pines overtures, and has the distinctive feature of providing further guidance to MRTI and investors on the circumstances in which targeted divestment might be appropriate.

The presenters for all three overtures argued that it will be helpful to have a variety of overtures presented to the Committee at the 2016 General Assembly to provide alternatives to the latest divestment overture (which already has received at least one concurrence). Reflecting this desire for a diversity of possible solutions, the presbytery, on the urging of the overture proponents, chose to pass all three as submitted rather than to try to harmonize the three proposals into a single overture.



Reporter Jim Allison

## Additional Overtures to next General Assembly discussed

**Overture 1**, which was presented by the Session of First PC, Conroe, concerned making changes in the Manual of Operations for the General Assembly.

Presbyterians have a long-standing commitment to fairness and equity in discussions, that all voices have equal value in conversations. Recent events seem to have moved away from that commitment in General Assembly procedures. The Presbytery of New Covenant overtures the 222<sup>nd</sup> General Assembly (2016) to modify its manual.

Commissioners voted to approve Overture 1. Details on pp. 20-22 in the Packet.

**Overture 2**, which was presented by the Session of First Presbyterian, Bay City, asked the 2016 General Assembly to amend *the Book of Order*, Section W-4.900 by striking the current text concerning the institution of marriage.

After discussion from the floor, the overture was not approved. See pp. 23-25 in the Packet for details.

## Parity Plan for 2016 approved

Commissioners approved the 2016 Parity Plan as presented in the meeting's Packet. This plan establishes the number of voting commissioners each congregation may send to a presbytery. The calculation is based on the church's membership.

**Next Stated Meeting  
of the  
Presbytery of New  
Covenant  
Sat., March 19  
First Presbyterian,  
Conroe**

## 2016 Moderator installed

At the end of Morning Worship, Moderator, TE Laurey Murphy, installed New Covenant's RE Shelley Hernandez as the 2016 Moderator. "God has called you to this service in this particular place, Shelley, Whatever you do, do everything in the name of Jesus Christ. The spirit is with you," said Laurey. Shelley and Laurey partnered in leading the business of the day's meeting.

Shelley is a member of the Pathways Church of Houston.



RE Shelley Hernandez

## Request approved!

The assembly concurred with the request of Iglesia Latina Presbiteriana, under the leadership of stated supply pastor Isabel Rivera Velez, to be constituted and organized as a church in the Presbytery of New Covenant. This NCD will be chartered as a PC(USA) church in a service to be held Jan. 3, 2016.



TE Isabel Rivera Velez



## Opportunities at lunchtime

By splitting the lunchtime break into three opportunities, commissioners were able to move about the St. John's campus, not only stretching and visiting with one another, but also learning about the great variety of mission work New Covenant churches are doing by visiting the Mission Fair. More than a dozen mission projects representing many congregations and mission partners shared their stories. The third opportunity was touring the Single Family Homes built by PCHAS on land that had been part of the St. John's campus. In addition to housing, the program provides single mothers employment assistance, parenting and nutrition classes, assistance with obtaining food stamps and health insurance, money management and life skills training.

# CODA

*Elder and minister commissioners received the following announcements and conducted the following additional business:*

- Cindy Houlihan, Pines PC, Houston, received her Level II Certification from the Administrative Personnel Association.
- Sandra Lopez also received recognition from the Administrative Personnel Association for completing an additional 50 hours of Continuing Education work. Sandra serves the Presbytery as Assistant for Finance and Administration.
- Ray Henderson, Candidate under care of New Covenant Presbytery, will be ordained by Boston Presbytery where he will serve an interim pastor at Lynnfield Community Church (UCC).
- Melissa "Missy" Reed, First PC, Houston, has been enrolled as an Inquirer.
- The Nominating Committee has identified 98 individuals who have agreed to serve on presbytery committees in 2016.
- Peter Chung, Korean Central PC, Houston has been enrolled as an Inquirer.
- Edgardo Figueroa, Memorial Drive PC, Houston, has been enrolled as an Inquirer.
- TE Tim Marquez is serving as Designated Pastor at Pathways Church of Houston.
- TE Lauren Suba is serving as Interim Pastor at Heights PC, Houston.
- TE Robert Murphy is serving as Interim Pastor at Tiki Island Chapel, Tiki Island.
- Presbyterian Leadership Enrichment Event, formerly named Church Officer Enrichment, will be held Sat., Feb. 6, at Pines PC, Houston. TE Karl Travis will be the keynote speaker.

*Postlude is published after each Stated Meeting.*

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*Circulation: Patricia Brantley and Sandra Lopez*