

Texas Conference

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ProjectCURATE Director Co-Lectures with Arch Bishop Rowan Williams of Cambridge

11/12/2015

Collaboration, culture and curriculum were among the topics discussed publicly and privately when ProjectCURATE Director Matthew Russell traveled to England to share ideas at October conference.

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Being a leader has its rewards.

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Dr. Matthew Russell, of **St. Paul's UMC, Houston**, who heads the new Center for Urban Reconciliation and Theological Education, is still buzzing about crossing something big off his personal bucket list: spending time – and actually co-lecturing with Archbishop Rowan Williams. Notes Matt, “It was an amazing experience, to say the least. I was invited to the Center for Research In Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities Conference sponsored by Cambridge University to speak on the theme of subversive good, alongside Rowan Williams – a legendary theologian and leader who speaks or reads some 11 languages and it was intimidating and incredible at the same time.”

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Against a backdrop of spontaneous riots and cultural uproar in America and beyond, this meeting of the minds was quite timely. With a brilliant understanding of culture and relationships, Rowan Williams is an ideal mentor for discussions about the urban reconciliation work of the Texas Conference-sponsored ProjectCURATE pilot group. “It’s been said that a mind like his comes along every 200 years,” shares Matt. “I was able to dialogue with him and interview him on video for several hours and found him to be a deeply settled and spiritual man who is at deep peace, much like I would expect Jesus to be.”

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While in this region, Matt and video partner Travis Reed (www.theworkofthepeople.com) also met with Chris Baker, Director of the Temple Foundation studying religion and public life. Other interviews included David Ford, a theologian at Cambridge, Sarah Hills, cannon of reconciliation at Coventry Cathedral (known as the



**Dr. Matthew Russell and
Arch Bishop Rowan Williams**

largest reconciliation center in the world). †Matt will incorporate content from these high-level interviews into curriculum for the 2016 Multicultural leadership class of ProjectCURATE in Houston, which is currently being assembled and will be capped at 60 participants, citywide.

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“The mutual passion among those we videotaped,” he explains, “is to foster collaboration in city spaces that would otherwise remain divided.” The content of the videos will be used to nurture ideas among the next class of multi-racial leaders, and some of it will be translated into Spanish.

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“In Houston, for example, the people in the fifth ward do not typically have friends in Spring Branch, or Asian/Hispanic communities. So, ProjectCURATE participants to date have been exploring new ways and improbable friendships. It’s been amazing to see how these can be the basis for a new fabric that holds a city -- with diverse communities – together, and see the ideas that these friendships generate to

create more of the same.” Matt believes the average churchgoer has a hunger to move from the enclave of incubated church experience to have a wider impact. “Creating kinship across cultural divides is to see Jesus tearing down the dividing walls and the church pushed out into the world in more dynamic ways,” Matt adds. This reconciliation becomes the “hope” of the city.

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Incubator Success Story

Buzz about the Iconoclast student arts program that has emerged from the incubator within CURATE has caught the attention of 170 students across the seven participating sites in the pilot group. Additionally, **St. Paul’s UMC, Houston** member †Marlon Lizama has been named the community recipient of the John P. McGovern Award for the Promotion of Public Health. A poet, writer, artist, author, and dancer who focuses on the cultural aspect of writing and the arts, is Artist-in-Residence in the Iconoclast program.

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He will present "The Art of Storytelling: Working with At-Risk Youth to Find Their Voice through Writing and Performance Poetry." He is currently developing and implementing a writing program for youth from all over Houston, including youth in inner-city schools and at-risk youth in the Harris County Juvenile Justice System. With the help of fellow educators, he developed a "How to Teach High-Level Creative Writing to At-Risk Youth" curriculum, which aims to create creative writers†and young authors. He is publishing an anthology of poetry created by the youth who have participated in this program.



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His McGovern Award presentation, open to the public, will be Wednesday, November 11, from 11:15 a.m. to 1:15 p.m. at The University of Texas School of Public Health's RAS auditorium, on the first floor of 1200 Pressler.

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Next Steps

Adds Matt, "What I love about these interviews, conversations and leadership development opportunities is that they are about looking at the city and world as a parish, which is a very Wesleyan dynamic. This constitutes a different way to be the church and to nurture new relationships."

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Building on the vision of Bishop Janice Huie and Missional Excellence Center Director Rev. Diane McGehee, as well as **St. Paul's UMC** pastor Tommy Williams,†ProjectCURATE will continue to focus on under-resourced schools and other creative ways to change the fabric of the community. "We have churches and organizations as different as art studios and prison ministries working under the ProjectCURATE umbrella to generate new ways to be the church together," he explains. "It's wonderful to watch this unfold and create new ways to foster friendships."

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December 1 is the deadline to apply to be in the 2016 leadership class. Anyone interested in participating or supporting the work of ProjectCURATE can contact Matt at matthew.russell@projectcurate.org.

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