

Scott Black Johnston and Patrick O'Connor, PCUSA pastors, meet with Trump
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Scott Black Johnston (left) and Patrick O'Connor. Photo by Vasheena Doughty.

Scott Black Johnston and Patrick O'Connor, two Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) pastors whose congregations have ties to the Trump family, met with the president for 20 minutes days before his inauguration.

O'Connor is the senior pastor of First Presbyterian Church in Jamaica, Queens, where Donald Trump was baptized and confirmed. At his inauguration, Trump took the oath of office “on the Lincoln Bible and on the Bible his mother gave him when he graduated from the First Jamaica Sunday Church School in 1955,” [Johnston wrote in a public letter](#). Johnston’s family was part of the same congregation in Queens, and he now serves Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church in Manhattan—“whose steeple the Trump family can see from their windows,” Johnston noted.

“We believe we had a responsibility, as Christians, to offer prayer and honest counsel,” Johnston wrote of the two pastors’ offer to meet with Trump, which he accepted.

Johnston and O'Connor wrote in a commentary for CNN: "Some will criticize our visit. Some worry that we will be 'used.' But our worry, and the reason we wrote to Mr. Trump in the first place, is that the people who will interpret the American religious landscape to the new administration will not represent the breadth and depth of our country's faith communities."

Johnston noted in his letter on his congregation's website, "We know that evangelical Christians and proponents of the prosperity gospel have had Mr. Trump's ear."

They called the congregations they serve—and that millions of Americans attend—"purple churches," moderate and progressive congregations, with economic and ethnic diversity as well, that are addressing national issues. "We vote in different ways, and yet, by the grace of God, we worship as one people. We believe that our unity depends not on lockstep agreement, but on the Christ who claims us and calls us to care for the poor, the sick, and the imprisoned."

Johnston and O'Connor offered to share the perspective of congregations such as theirs with Trump again at any time.

"We spent most of our brief time with Mr. Trump in prayer," Johnston wrote. "We asked for God's help in healing deep societal rifts and in stepping forward to create a nation that serves all of its people."

Johnston shared the full text of the prayer he and O'Connor gave on Fifth Avenue Presbyterian's website. It included these words: "Almighty God, all the people of the earth are yours. . . . Your will is done when governments are rightly administered, liberty is preserved, justice is decreed, dignity is assured, and care is extended to the most vulnerable of your children."

A version of this article appears in the February 15 print edition under the title "People: Scott Black Johnston and Patrick O'Connor."