

Obituary: The Reverend Arabella Thomas Meadows-Rogers July 15, 1949 - December 17, 2009

The Rev. Arabella Meadows-Rogers, a pioneering clergywoman in the Presbyterian Church, USA, died at 60 on December 17th, after a two-year battle with pancreatic cancer. She most recently served as Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of New York City from the summer of 2003 until July of 2009, overseeing the mission and ministry of ninety-eight congregations. Ordained in 1975, Ms. Meadows-Rogers served churches in New York City, West Delhi, New York, Durham, North Carolina, and Grandin and Hunter, North Dakota, as well as serving as Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of the Northern Plains from 1997 until 2003. In the Presbyteries of New York City and Northern Plains, Ms. Meadows-Rogers was the first woman to serve as Executive Presbyter.

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, on July 15, 1949, the daughter of a U.S. State Department diplomat, the Rev. Meadows-Rogers grew up in Hungary, Argentina, Ecuador, and Pakistan, as well as Bethesda, Maryland. She was a graduate of Duke University (1971) and Union Theological Seminary in New York City (1974).

As Executive Presbyter in New York, the Rev. Meadows-Rogers' leadership led to the expansion of the Commissioned Lay Pastors program, the doubling of installed Latino and Latina pastors, and the firm designation of monies for mission work from the sale of church property.

According to the Rev. Susan Andrews, former Moderator of the Presbyterian Church, USA and General Presbyter in Hudson River Presbytery, Ms. Meadows-Rogers "was a leader among her peers, building effective networks, encouraging marginalized people to grow into leadership, and

challenging the status quo with prophetic visions of who the church is called to be.. By celebrating the image of God in each diverse person, she empowered others to transform both the church and society.”

Ms. Meadows-Rogers began her career of service in her senior year of college as Vice-President of the National Student YWCA. At the beginning of her thirty-five-year ministerial career, she worked with the Association of Theological Schools on issues of women and theological education. Subsequently, she undertook many leadership roles in Synods, Presbyteries, and the General Assembly of the PCUSA. She also believed deeply in ecumenical cooperation and took an active role in Councils of Churches and interdenominational organizations in every venue of her ministry. She served as Dean of the Presbyterian Young Pastors’ Seminar, as a trainer for new executive leadership in the PCUSA, as a member of the Steering Committee of the Association of PCUSA Executive Presbyters, and as Vice-President of the Council of Churches of the City of New York (2008-2009). She also served as a Lecturer at Duke University Divinity School (1986-1992), as founding President of the Genesis Home Family Shelter in Durham, North Carolina (1988-92), and on the Board of Directors of Jamestown College in Jamestown, North Dakota (1998-2003). In 2008, she received the Leadership Achievement Award of the Holmes Presbyterian Camp and Conference Center, and in 2009 she received the Extraordinary Executive Leadership Award of the Council of Churches of the City of New York. She has had essays, sermons, and articles published in *Horizon* magazine, *The Journal of Preachers*, *Theological Education*, *Pulpit Digest*, and *The Clergy Journal*.

During her extensive illness, Ms. Meadows-Rogers bore witness to the fullness of life even in the midst of a deadly disease. In her preaching she spoke honestly about the paradox of life and death: “Vulnerability and strength. It’s a lesson I’m learning daily. It’s a lesson I can’t help from learning, because living with a terminal disease makes me different, weaker sometimes, more vulnerable. It’s a lesson that says vulnerability and strength are just two sides of the same coin, and each gains integrity and power by embracing the other side.”

Many across the country were strengthened by’s Meadows-Rogers’ faith. According to the Rev. Jill Hudson, Associate Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church, USA: “None of us will ever forget Arabella’s courage and continued wit as she fought against this horrible disease. Her wildly colorful head scarves were an outward statement of her inward joy of life and her determination to live fully until the last minute.” The Rev. Jon Walton, Pastor of First Presbyterian Church of New York City, echoed this sentiment: “Arabella resolved to live, to live today, and live into tomorrow, knowing that no tomorrow could rob her of life or of the hand that has always been in her hand, which is God’s hand.”

Arabella is survived by her husband of thirty-seven years, Dr. Robert Meadows-Rogers, an adjunct faculty member in art history at Fordham University (Rose Hill); by her son, Matthew Meadows-Rogers of Fargo, North Dakota; by her daughter Sarah Emma Diaz and her son-in-law Roberto Diaz and her grandchildren, Estella and Juan Diego, also all of Fargo, North Dakota; by her father, Jordan Thomas Rogers of Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania; by her three sisters: Elinor Rogers of Madison, Wisconsin; Louisa Rogers of Eureka, California, and Guanajuato, Mexico; and Jane McIver of Hillsborough, North Carolina; and by several nieces and nephews. She was

preceded in death by her mother, Dr. Sarah Flinn Rogers, and a brother, Jordan Thomas Rogers, Jr.

A Memorial Service of Witness to the Resurrection will be held on Saturday, January 9, 2010, at 1:00 p.m., at the Madison Avenue Presbyterian Church, Madison Avenue and East 73rd Street in Manhattan. The Rev. Dr. Fred Anderson will preside, with the Rev. Dr. Susan Andrews preaching; the Rev. Dr. Oscar McCloud, Acting Executive Presbyter of the Presbytery of New York City, and Father Raymond Rafferty, pastor of Corpus Christi Roman Catholic Church in Manhattan, will also participate. A memorial service will also be held on Saturday, January 23, 2010, at 2:00 p.m. at the First Presbyterian Church of Durham, North Carolina, the Rev. Joseph Harvard presiding.

In lieu of flowers, contributions may be sent in Arabella's name to Presbyterian Disaster Assistance, 100 Witherspoon Street, Louisville, Kentucky 40202-1396.

