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## Clarkstown church embraces new pastor with worldwide experience

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WEST NYACK - One of the oldest churches in the county is embracing the new pastor with worldwide experience.

The Rev. Elias Dantas, a Brazilian-native minister and scholar, has recently become the pastor for Clarkstown Reformed Church on Strawtown Road.

Dantas has been in Rockland since June 2007 when he arrived at the Alliance Theological Seminary in Nyack as director of the doctor of ministry program.

When the West Nyack church asked him if he would be interested in becoming the church's pastor, he was thrilled for the opportunity.

"I'm very happy to serve this very historical church," Dantas said, noting that the church would be celebrating its 260th anniversary next year. "It is a community-oriented church. ... A church like this serves as an island of stability and tranquility for those who in search of God and in search of a community."

Ray Castel, vice president and senior elder of the congregation, said parishioners were happy to end its decade-long pastor search with Dantas' arrival in October.

"He's a very religious man," Castel said. "And he also has such a happy personality. He just has such faith in God, such a love of life and a love for this religion. He's just wonderful."

Dantas was trained as a geologist when he was a teenager, but he found his calling in theology when he was 18, he said.

He's got a degree in theology in Sao Paulo and began his work at a Presbyterian church there.

In 1987, Dantas came to the United States to get a master's degree at Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, Calif.

After teaching at a seminary for a couple of years in Brazil, he decided to pursue a doctoral degree in Toronto.

Dantas has two doctorates - one in theology and the other in missiology - and has written theological books.

Dantas and his wife of 30 years, Amelia, have three adult sons, two daughters-in-law and a granddaughter.

Immediately before he took position at the Alliance Theological Seminary, Dantas served as pastor at

Bel Air Presbyterian Church in Los Angeles.

In addition to his roles at the Nyack seminary and the West Nyack church, Dantas continues to serve as an international coordinator for Global Kingdom Partnerships, a network of 11 million Christians around the world.

He has traveled to more than 50 countries.

Dantas said as communities in Rockland have become more diverse, so has his congregation.

"I'm not an American-born person. I have an accent. But I love God and I love people," Dantas said. "As they hired me, it shows that they are really trying to bless the environment, community around the church."

## Additional Facts

### On the Web

For more information about Clarkstown Reformed Church, visit the Web site, <http://churches.rca.org/clarkstown/>

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