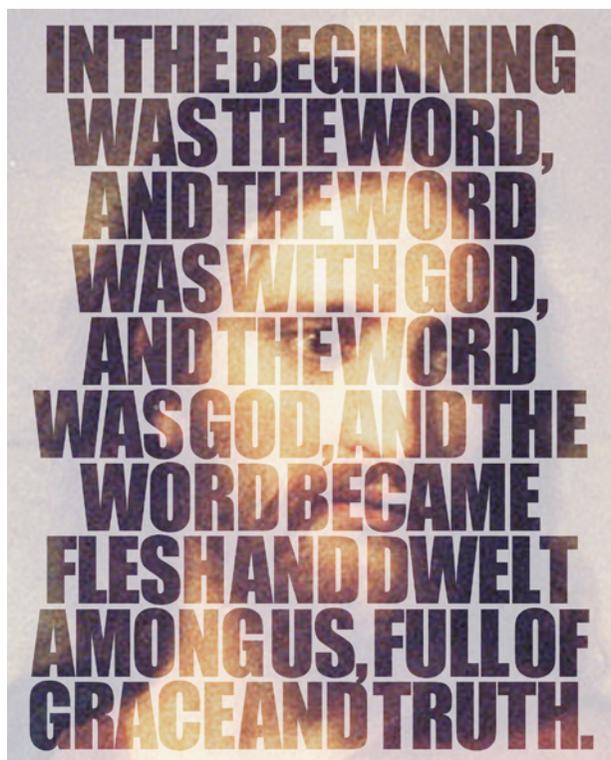


NEW CHURCH *Life*

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2015



Seeing the Lord in the Word

The Rev. John L. Odhner describes in a sermon how the Lord has given us a new way to see and know Him in the internal sense of the Word. There each of those truths becomes "a mirror in which we see the Lord." (Page 447)

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New Church Life

A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they relate to life.

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In This Issue

How do we ever really see the Lord? The Rev. John L. Odhner says we can see Him every time we open and read the Word, especially as He reveals Himself in the internal sense. Jesus had told His disciples that He had many things to say to them that they could not yet understand, but that when the Spirit of Truth comes it “will lead you into all truth.” That Spirit of Truth, in His Second Coming, turns the Word into a mirror in which we behold the face of the Lord. (Page 447)

We have the promise of conjugal love, but how can genuine love in marriage grow? In a sermon the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith says the secret is friendship, which has a threefold role in marriage: as a bridge, as a stabilizing factor, and as a means of resolving issues. “As we work at becoming a better friend to our spouse,” he writes, “a conjugal friendship will become a genuine face and garment of that intense and eternal love which the Lord is giving us.” (Page 454)

How should we respond, as New Church men and women, to the United States Supreme Court ruling legalizing same-sex marriages? The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. offers the prism of the Lord’s love and wisdom, which give us all the doctrinal teachings, as well as a charitable approach. The Church has a responsibility to present the vision of marriage that the Lord describes in the Word, but also to be a welcoming place and a beacon of hope for all. (Page 460)

A comprehensive report by the Rev. Kenneth J. Alden on the June 2015 Council of the Clergy meetings in Bryn Athyn includes: discussion of several pre-circulated papers; reports on the non-North American Church; progress in General Church Outreach; a joint meeting with the General Church Board of Directors; and plenty of useful social interaction, some including ministers’ wives. (Page 469)

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith reports on a recent episcopal visit to Ivory Coast and a first-ever visit by a bishop to neighboring Burkina Faso in West Africa. He says, “It is amazing to see the strides they are making in both countries. The energy they devote to spreading the New Church and how conscientious they are about teaching the Heavenly Doctrines is inspiring.” (Page 485)

In a term paper for the Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MARS)

Program, Caira Bevan Bongers writes about *The Love Languages of the Lord*. Caira, who received her degree in May, says we have to know the Lord to really love Him. Borrowing from Dr. Gary Chapman's best-seller, *The 5 Love Languages*, she says: "The Lord's favorite love language is clearly useful service. Through this we are living according to His commandments, which is true acknowledgment of Him." (Page 491)

In *Introducing Our Ministers*, the Rev. Calvin A. Odhner says he always knew in the back on his mind that he would be a minister; it just took him a very roundabout way to get there. Now he looks back on a wide variety of career experiences as preparation for becoming pastor of the Morning Star Chapel in Atlanta, Georgia – the great love of his life. (Page 500) In a sermon, *We Are All Blind*, Calvin talks about how our "blind eyes" are always being opened by the Lord to see the power and light of His divinity. (Page 506)

In a sermon on *True Freedom*, the Rev. Ryan M. Sandstrom says that freedom is ultimately deliverance from the lifelong struggle against evil and falsity. But it is a struggle where the Lord is always with us. "Let us keep in mind," he says, "that only the Lord can tell us how to get to heaven and He lays the steps for us to take in the Word. Everything happens according to order; there is a process to everything." (Page 510)

A new way of worship is a Sunroom Spiritual Growth Group, open to anyone with a computer and a desire to connect with a small group. Kendell Hyatt says, "Sunroom is for busy people who don't have time for content preparation but do have interest in making time for meaningful conversation with others." She explains how it works and how to participate. (Page 515)

Church News includes: the outlook for the new school year in both Bryn Athyn College and the Academy Secondary Schools; a workshop sponsored by the College on *The Unintelligible Afterlife: What Deathbed Conversations Tell Us About a World Beyond*; a report on this year's British Academy Summer Camp by the Rev. Howard Thompson and student Brent van der Merwe; expanded leadership in General Church Education; a new Principal in the Washington New Church School – the Rev. Brian D. Smith – with a strong focus not just on teaching, but learning; a preview of the Boynton Beach Retreat 2016; and the current membership of the General Church Board of Directors and the Academy Board of Trustees. (Page 519)

Editorials

WHAT ARE WE LOOKING FOR?

Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord. (Psalm 33:12)

Many nations and people still look to the Lord and are guided in varying degrees by spiritual values. The official motto of the United States always has been, “In God we trust,” although people often incline to trust themselves instead – and pay the price. Freedom of religion, and a “wall of separation” between faith and government, are healthy principles. But democratic governments throughout the world are increasingly secular. Many of the positive influences of religion are in decline among leaders and citizens. This is not a good thing.

Much evil has been done throughout history in the misguided name of religion. We witness evil every day – the deliberate choice of people who have turned their backs on God. Calls to “stand against evil” and Godlessness are heard but ring hollow in a culture of political correctness that resists labeling anything “evil”. Even God-fearing leaders dare not sound “too religious” these days.

This is quite a change. In the United States, for instance, presidents once were proudly and openly religious:

- George Washington forthrightly set the tone for a new nation: “It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible.” He cast the vision: “Let us raise a standard to which the wise and honest can repair; the rest is in the hands of God.”
- As Abraham Lincoln was about to assume the presidency, in a land headed for Civil War, he openly acknowledged: “Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended (George Washington), I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well.”
- In the 20th century, Woodrow Wilson felt free to state: “When you have read the Bible, you know it is the Word of God, because it is the key to your heart, your own happiness, and your own duty.”

Rare is the national leader anywhere in the world who would proclaim such unabashed faith today. But when a nation and a people's God is not the Lord, their "God" is something else, and the nation is less blessed.

We know the story – repeated in *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke* – of the Pharisees trying to trap Jesus by asking if tribute should be given to Caesar. When Jesus asked for a coin and showed them the image of Caesar, He said: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's." Later, when Pilate found no fault in Jesus and tried to spare Him from crucifixion, he implored the roiling crowd: "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests left no doubt where they stood, saying scornfully: "We have no king but Caesar." (*John* 19:15) That is what happens when people honor Caesar but turn against – or away from – God and the Word. This was also an echo of an Old Testament warning:

In those days there was no king in Israel and every man did that which was right in his own eyes. (*Judges* 17:6)

We witness the fallout of people and governments turning their backs on the Lord and doing what is right in their own eyes. But we are not helpless, nor are we blameless.

Consider Josiah in the *Book of Kings*, one of the few good rulers in a long succession of evil kings, who "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left." (*II Kings* 22:2)

When Josiah ordered the cleaning and repairing of the temple the high priest discovered "the book of the law" which had been long forgotten. When Josiah is told of this he rents his clothes in anguish, afraid that the wrath of the Lord will be kindled against them for "not hearkening unto the words of this book." But he restores the book to its holy place in the temple and makes a covenant with the Lord for his people to keep His commandments.

As we know from our own experience of repenting from evils, then finding ourselves weakening, Josiah's covenant did not last. "And like unto him there was no king before him, that turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to the law of Moses; neither after him are there any like him." No sooner was Josiah slain in battle than Jehoahaz became king and quickly reverted to doing "evil in the sight of the Lord."

The Old Testament is full of stories about the Children of Israel being admonished, vowing to do better and follow the Lord, then backsliding. Remember how they vowed to do all that the Lord commanded but all too quickly were imploring Aaron to make them a golden calf to worship while Moses was up on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments.

As with everything in the Word all of this speaks to our own lives and

regeneration: learning the truth, succumbing to temptation, but always being lifted up with new opportunities and never abandoned by the Lord.

When we are blessed to live in freedom, without kings or tyrants ruling over us, we have more options – and more responsibilities. When America was declaring its independence in 1776, for instance, an anxious woman asked Benjamin Franklin, “What do we have?” And he told her bluntly: “A republic – if you can keep it.”

“*If you can keep it.*” There was sown the citizens' responsibility to a government of “we the people.” As citizens throughout the world who have the privilege of choosing our own leaders, we also have the responsibility for establishing the kinds of nations we will uphold. That starts with modeling the beliefs we wish to be upheld, then looking for leaders who are guided by the Lord and the spiritual values that flow from Him.

As we evaluate our would-be leaders, it is good to remember that *who* leads us is never as important as *what* leads us, and ever to be guided by the ideal:

“Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord.”

(BMH)

THE GIFT OF SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

It is worth reflecting on the priceless gift of spiritual knowledge that has been revealed for the New Church lest we begin to take it for granted or lose our sense of responsibility to preserve it, use it wisely, and pass it along to the next generation. And there is delight in such reflection for the more we realize what a treasure we have, the more we can be thankful for it and rejoice in it.

“I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now” the Lord told His disciples when He was in the world in person. (*John 16:12*) They weren't ready. People – at least some people – must now be ready because, in His providence, the Lord has seen fit to reveal many new and deeper truths that He left hidden in His first advent.

Some people. Why we, out of all the people on earth, should be the ones to receive this blessing, we don't know. To imagine that it is because of some special merit of our own would be extremely foolish. And yet, deserving or not, for some reason we have been entrusted with the treasure of angelic wisdom contained in the books of the Writings. “You did not choose Me, but I chose you.” (*John 15:16*)

Yes, we are blessed because we have seen something wonderful – but we should remember that others also are blessed “who have not seen and yet have believed.” (*John 20:29*)

Knowledge is dangerous, and the greater the knowledge the greater the

danger. It must be handled carefully. And if, as intended, knowledge leads to actually *seeing* the truth – that is more dangerous still. Remember what the Lord said to the Pharisees: “If you were blind, you would have no sin; but now you say, ‘We see.’ Therefore your sin remains.” (*John 9:41*) It’s a solemn warning for all who presume to see the truth.

What we have in the Heavenly Doctrines are countless *particulars* of spiritual knowledge on subjects which would otherwise be matters of only general awareness and vague speculation. We have a responsibility to think about such matters because, thanks to the new revelation, we *can* think about them. “Now it is permitted to enter with understanding into the mysteries of faith.” (*True Christian Religion 508*) When the Lord opens a door, we should walk through it.

The promise the Lord made in His first advent has now been fulfilled: “But when it shall come, the Spirit of truth, it will guide you into all truth. It will glorify Me . . .” (*John 16:13-14* – see also the note on translation in *Life Lines*). The Lord, the Spirit of truth, speaks through the spiritual truths revealed in the Word He has given for His New Church, which glorify Him in our minds by showing how the Divine and the Human are One in Him.

(WEO)

THE USE OF KNOWING

As with all kinds of wealth, knowledge carries with it an obligation to put it to use. Knowledge is a vessel through which truth is communicated, and thus also the good of truth, or the good that truth inspires, defines and makes possible.

Knowledge of the law, for example, is for the sake of establishing justice. Knowledge of history is for the sake of understanding what was good and worked well in the past so that it can be preserved and built upon in the present, and also that we might learn from the mistakes people made in the past and avoid repeating them. The kind of knowledge needed to design and construct buildings is for the sake of the uses that will be carried out in the buildings.

Truth should be loved for its own sake, but we need always to bear in mind what it is that truth loves as its own, namely, the particular good that forms the soul of each truth.

“All instruction is simply an opening of the way.” (*Arcana Coelestia 1495.2*) We begin by storing up factual knowledge in the memory, and then progress into ever higher orders of truth: from knowledge, to understanding, to seeing the truth. When the knowledge of truth we have is filled in and guided by good it becomes wisdom.

The *Nunc Licet* number in *True Christian Religion* concludes with an angel from the third heaven handing Swedenborg a piece of paper on which was written (“in rounded letters, such as they have in that heaven”) this invitation: “Enter hereafter into the mysteries of the Word, which has been heretofore shut up, for the particular truths therein are so many mirrors of the Lord.” (# 508)

When the Lord is seen there, in those Divinely polished mirrors of revelation, He will also appear more and more in the various facts of nature disclosed in such abundance by modern science – for nature also, like the Divine Word that gave it form, reflects the beauty of the Lord.

Then . . . “the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (*Isaiah 11:9*)

Truly, our cup runneth over!

(WEO)

Letters to the Editors

The Model of the Grand Man

To The Editors:

I would like to thank the Rev. Alan Cowley for his excellent sermon, “Church and the Human Form,” that was published in the July/August issue of *New Church Life*.

My interest in anatomy and physiology began many years ago when I was a senior at the Academy Boys School. The Rev. Dr. Hugo Odhner’s college course, *The Human Organic*, further stimulated my interest in the study of the Grand Man, which has continued throughout my life.

I was pleased to see how Mr. Cowley’s sermon so deftly applied this foundational teaching. My take is that this teaching/revelation from the Lord is seen primarily as philosophical, but in reality it is very practical. For instance, I believe the General Church should make every effort to restructure itself in the form of the Grand Man. The New Church then would look very different than the former Christian Church and would be more able to operate in better correspondence with the Lord’s will since influx is according to the receiving vessel.

Robert L. Heinrichs
Rochester, Michigan

The Significance of 17

To The Editors:

Your readers may already be aware of the prominence of the number 17 in events around the time of the Second Coming of the Lord. I came across this phenomenon a few years ago but my interest peaked a few weeks ago when I discovered that June 19 is the 170th day of the year. Here is a collection of the

number 17 items that I am aware of:

- About 17 centuries after His First Advent the Lord made His Second Advent in the form of a revelation from the Lord through his servant Emanuel Swedenborg.
- In 1770 the last book of this revelation, *True Christian Religion*, was completed.
- In the 170th day of 1770 – that is, June 19, 1770 – after the completion of this book, the Lord called together His twelve disciples who had followed Him in the world and later He sent them forth throughout the spiritual world to preach the Gospel: that the Lord Jesus Christ is king and His kingdom shall be forever and ever.
- 17 years after the completion of *True Christian Religion*, and after Swedenborg had passed on, the first New Church worship service occurred in London on July 31, 1787.

The number 17 is prominent in these four bullet points. This is in line with the teaching in *Arcana Coelestia* 853 that the number 17 denotes a new beginning. This interweaving of the number 17 in the dates of events clustered around the time of the Second Coming Advent of the Lord appears to be in perfect harmony with its enormous importance to the whole human race. It also reflects the fact that every last detail of the Lord's Second Advent was under the care of Divine Providence, as are all things in the created universe.

Philip Richards
Canberra, Australia

Comfortable in My Role

To The Editors:

Thank you for your words of wisdom, Peter Boericke: (*A Wake-Up Call: Will the General Church Survive and Thrive? New Church Life*, May/June 2015, page 262)

I have not resigned from the General Church, but do serve elsewhere. Having banged my head on the General Church door long enough I decided perhaps the best way things might change were if people were to see a woman minister in action. I know that has definitely changed some people's minds.

We preach and lead differently than men, and hopefully complement them. I do not believe I am in any danger of preaching like a man or attempting to deceive people. I am grateful I can serve people and help them in their spiritual

lives, wherever they are on that journey. I also serve all faiths in my role as a hospice chaplain.

I do not believe I am in any danger of compromising my marriage since my David is in the spiritual world and I do believe he is my strong spiritual supporter. I in no way support these arguments, by the way, but I am at least reassuring those who might feel that way.

We have been told that the New Church is not a representative church, but one whose people can truly be touched celestially by the Lord. So the argument that women cannot represent the Lord has no basis. Our role as ministers of either sex is to support people spiritually, whatever that looks like, and to constantly turn to the Divine for love and inspiration.

Rev. Julie Conaron
Interfaith Minister and Minister in the
Swedenborgian Church of North America
(General Convention)
Willow Grove, Pennsylvania

Seeing the Lord in the Word

A Sermon by the Rev. John L. Odhner

Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things from Your Law. (*Psalms* 119:18)

We gather this morning to connect with God. Some of us may have come here with a feeling of coming home, being in a familiar place where our minds easily embrace the Lord's great love for us and the blessings that He gives us every day. Others may have come with questions or doubts. Perhaps we feel distant from God. Perhaps we have suffered painful experiences of loss, conflict and grief, and have trouble believing that a loving God could allow such things. Yet the majority of human suffering is the result of greed, selfishness, prejudice and hatred. These things separate us from one another and separate us from God.

God as He truly is, is pure love and compassion, never condemning, never angry, always forgiving, always wanting a loving partnership with every person. To let Him into our lives is to let in love and compassion. This is the power that can end human conflict, bring joy out of suffering and healing of the injury we do to one another. But can we connect with God as He truly is?

A New Way to See God

God has provided the world a new way to see Him. In ancient Israel God was revealed as the powerful and yet mysterious Creator who led His people to victory, peace and prosperity, yet who was sometimes – actually, frequently – angry and punishing. Then God took on His own human form, and in Jesus Christ we came to see more clearly God's love for all people.

Yet Jesus said to His disciples that He had many things to tell them that they could not yet bear. (*John* 16:12) He said that He was going away, but that He would return as the Spirit of Truth that leads to all truth. (*Ibid.* 14) Many have looked for His return over the past 20 centuries, yet few have opened their eyes wide enough to see Him in the way that He now reveals Himself.

John wrote in his story of the life of Jesus Christ: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." (*Ibid.* 1:1, 14)

To fully reveal the Divine Truth about Himself, God took on a Human

form and became a Person who could walk among us. We could hear His words and see His miraculous works, and know that He is the One who has the power to change our hearts. Yet He spoke in parables and symbols, and many who have longed for miraculous healings have wondered why such miracles no longer seem to take place.

Jesus said to His disciples: “These things I have spoken to you in figurative language; but the time is coming when I will no longer speak to you in figurative language, but I will tell you plainly about the Father.” (*Ibid.* 16:25)

That time is now. The second coming of Jesus Christ is not by Him taking on yet another human form. Through His first coming the Lord took on a human form and made it Divine, uniting it to the Father or the Divinity that was in Himself from birth. He is still present with us in the world in that Divine Human form.

If we understand that the Lord is present everywhere – in all space yet not limited by space – then we know that His coming is not a matter of arriving in a place where He has not been present. He is already here! The only “place” where the Lord is not already present is in human awareness. If we do not think about Him and do not understand Him, then He is not present in our thoughts, and has not “come” into our consciousness.

This is why the Lord’s second coming is not a physical but a spiritual event. His coming is a revelation that allows us to see Him in a way that we have not seen Him before – more clearly, more powerfully and more intimately.

The Writings are what we often call the books that the Lord has provided to the world so that all could see Him in this new way. Yet these Writings do not transcend or supersede the Bible. Rather they open up the Bible and show us what has always been there, yet was hidden from our view.

The Bible was written in ancient times, in ancient languages, to ancient cultures, yet it was written for all times, and perhaps especially for today, when the deeper meaning can be plainly revealed. Now we can see not only what the Lord did and said, but what He felt and thought.

The Road to Emmaus

On the day when Jesus rose from the grave, He walked with two of His disciples on the road to Emmaus, though they did not recognize Him. On the two-hour walk Jesus “expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself;” beginning with Moses and all the Prophets. Later, after Jesus had vanished, the disciples said to each other: “Didn’t our heart burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (*Luke* 24:27, 32)

We don’t know exactly what parts of the Law and Prophets the Lord opened to them that day, but it is clear that He helped them see things about Himself

that they had not seen before. He showed them that He was present not only in scattered prophecies of the Messiah, but also in “all” the Scriptures. In this the Lord foreshadowed His second coming, which was not to be another coming in Person, but a coming in the Scriptures, in the Word. (*True Christianity* 777)

The Word is Divine Truth from the Lord, which deals in its highest sense with the Lord alone. As a result, those who receive enlightenment when they read the Word see the Lord. This is the result of their faith and love. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9411)

Abraham Looking at the Stars

I want to share some examples of how we can now see the Lord in the Word. The Lord had promised Abram that he would have many descendants, yet as an 85-year-old man he had no children. Abram complained that he had only household servants to inherit what he had. The Lord then brought Abram outside and said: “Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them.” And the Lord said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” (*Genesis* 15:5)

On the literal level this is a story about Abram looking at the stars. When the story is opened up more deeply, however, we see that it is about Jesus Christ. He also looked up to heaven when He was praying for all the people in the world who might become His own – who might believe in Him and love Him.

Abram was distressed with the thought that those who inherited his estate would be servants or slaves, not his own children. Likewise Jesus struggled with the thought that the people in His kingdom, in His church, were acting as servants, not as His own children. They followed external rules to gain worldly rewards rather than truly loving one another as He loved them.

In His times of trial and inner turmoil, Jesus never fought from selfish desire, or for Himself, but for everyone in the universe. His effort was not to become the greatest in heaven, for this is contrary to the Divine Love, and scarcely even that He might be the least; but only that all others might become something, and be saved. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1812)

In everything the Lord does His goal is a heaven from the human race (*Divine Providence* 27), so when He looked up to heaven in His prayer He did not think of the stars, but of all those who would be with Him in heaven and inherit His kingdom as His own children. (See *Secrets of Heaven* 1807-8) In a similar way, when we look at the story of Abram from an understanding of the love the Lord has for all people, Abram disappears and we see the Lord Jesus Christ instead.

Joseph Feeding the World

Another story from the Old Testament in which we can see the Lord is the one about Joseph and his brothers. There are obvious parallels between Joseph and Jesus. They were both beloved sons. They were both sold for 20 or 30 pieces of silver by Judah/Judas. Both were falsely accused of crime, and both became rulers in their kingdoms.

Joseph was able to save countless people from starvation by providing food for them during the seven years of famine. Jesus miraculously fed thousands of hungry people with just a few loaves and fishes, not only because He had compassion on them but also to show that He is the One who gives us love and life.

Though we do not sense it, all our thoughts and feelings flow into us through heaven from the Lord. He is the source of all the mental and emotional energy that drives our actions. When we let His love and compassion come into us so that we begin to love others as He loves us, it actually keeps us alive spiritually, just as food does naturally.

So on a literal level the story of Joseph is about feeding many Egyptians, but on a deeper level it is about our Lord Jesus Christ and the love that He shares with all people. We can look at Joseph, yet see the Lord.

Moses Crossing the Sea

Another story in which we can see the Lord is Moses crossing the Red Sea. His power over the wind and waves enabled him to bring the people safely through the Red Sea. This may remind us of Jesus' similar power over the wind and waves, allowing Him to bring His disciples safely across the Sea of Galilee during a storm. Yet on the inside this story is about the Lord's power against the hells.

In the Writings, the teachings for the New Church, we learn that "to those who are above [in the spiritual world], the hells appear like seas, and the people in them seem to be in the depths of the seas." (*Apocalypse Explained* 537)

This is the kind of flood that David spoke of in a *Psalms*: "When the waves of death surrounded me, the floods of ungodliness made me afraid. The sorrows of hell surrounded me." (2 *Samuel* 22:5-6)

When the hells' influence on us increases, we may feel overwhelmed – flooded with anger, grief, hurt, lust and despair. If we are struggling against our own hells and demons, we can have a small idea of what the Lord was going through in fighting all the hells.

The Lord came into the world to gain power over the hells and to lead us through hell and out of hell into heaven. The hells at the time were increasingly raging out of control and threatening the destruction of the human race. Those who followed Jesus during His life on earth had no idea of the spiritual struggles

He was going through and the battles He was fighting against all the hells. For us today we can learn the teaching about the Lord's trials and struggles, and then we can look at Moses at the Red Sea, yet see the Lord gaining power over the hells and bringing us to safety.

David as a Shepherd

David was a gentle shepherd who cared for and protected his father's sheep, killing a lion and a bear that attacked them. He also became a brave warrior who fought Goliath and many other oppressors of Israel. Many people have seen that David's life as a shepherd was symbolic of Jesus, yet when Jesus described Himself as the Good Shepherd He clearly was not speaking literally.

Jesus was a carpenter (*Mark 6:3*), not a shepherd. Yet on a symbolic level we are all sheep and the Lord watches over us, provides for us and protects us every day, just as a shepherd does. And as David fought, the Lord fights on our behalf against our demons to bring us inner peace and victory over resentment.

Elisha Raising the Dead

A final example of a story in which we can see the Lord is Elisha raising to life a boy who had died. Clearly Elisha's power to give life foreshadows Jesus bringing to life the dead son of the widow of Nain, as well as Lazarus, Jairus' daughter, and many more.

Bringing to life those who have died is an incredibly powerful miracle, yet after Jesus brought these people back to life they all died again some years later. We are not created to live forever in this world, but in heaven. That is where the Lord wants all of us to be.

The fact that Jairus' daughter could grow to adulthood before finally leaving this world is not nearly as significant as the fact those few more years of earthly life showed that Jesus has power to give eternal life to all who seek it from Him.

Seeing Ourselves

When we look beyond the literal to the spiritual meaning in the Word, we can see the Lord there, and we can also see ourselves. Abraham wanted children of his own, and the Lord wants us as His own children. Joseph gave his brothers food to feed their families, and the Lord sends us to serve and satisfy the needs of others around us. Moses brought Israel through the Red Sea, and the Lord brings us through times of being overwhelmed.

As David cared for his sheep and his people, the Lord cares tenderly for each of us, providing for all our needs. And as Elisha raised a boy to life the Lord raises us from apathy into a life of compassion.

By looking beyond the literal meaning to find the Lord in the spiritual level of the Word, we can come to know Him, to love Him and to be changed by Him. In the Writings for the New Church an angel gives this advice: "From now on enter into the mysteries of the Word which have so far been hidden: for each one of its truths is a mirror in which we see the Lord." (*True Christianity* 508)

Amen.

Some Passages from the Writings

The Lord is now to appear in the Word. (*True Christian Religion* 777)

A person who leads a life in accordance with the commandments is joined to the Lord. For the commandments teach about life and also impart life, thereby opening the way to heaven and opening one's eyes to see the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 8767)

The Lord is indeed One who sees a person and establishes His presence with him, enabling the person to see Him; thus no one sees the Lord from himself but from the Lord present with him. (*Ibid.* 9297)

The Word is Divine Truth from the Lord, which deals in its highest sense with the Lord alone. All this being so, those who receive enlightenment when they read the Word see the Lord; they do so because of the faith and the love they have. (*Ibid.* 9411)

From now on enter into the mysteries of the Word which have so far been hidden: for each one of its truths is a mirror in which we see the Lord. (*True Christian Religion* 508)

"And they saw the God of Israel" means the Lord's coming and presence in the Word. . . . Those who read the Word and at the same time look to the Lord, acknowledging that all truth and all good come from Him, and none whatever from themselves, receive enlightenment; they see truth and perceive good from the Word. (*Secrets of Heaven* 9405)

Who does not see God before him when he prays, in whatever direction his face is turned? (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 129)

As the Lord is constantly before the faces of the angels, so it is said in the world of those who believe in the Lord and love Him that they have God before their eyes and their face, and that they look to God, and see God. (*Heaven and Hell* 143)

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (*Matthew* 5:8)

No one can see God's face except by virtue of having innocence. (*Arcana Coelestia* 5608)

Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear, and they will see the Son of Man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and glory. (*Matthew 24:30*)

God is present everywhere, and yet does not exist in space. Thus He is both within and around an angel, and therefore an angel can see God, that is to say, the Lord, both within and around him – within him when he thinks in accord with love and wisdom, and around him when he thinks about love and wisdom. (*Divine Love and Wisdom 130*)



The Rev. John L. Odhner has served as a pastor in Florida and California, and was a key person in revising the General Church *Liturgy*. He is assistant to the pastor of the Bryn Athyn Church, teaches in the Bryn Athyn Church School, works on the Office of Outreach Internet Project, and is one of the directors of the Stephen Ministry Program. He lives in Bryn Athyn with his wife, Lori (Soneson), and their family.

Contact: John.Odhner@newchurch.org.

Friendship in Marriage

The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

Lessons: Genesis 2:18-24; Matthew 19:1-12; Conjugal Love 214

Friendship is, so to speak, the face of [conjugal] love and also its garment; for friendship both attaches itself to love like a garment and combines itself with it like a face. *Conjugal Love 214:2*

John Dunne, the famous English poet, once said, “No man is an island.” We can think of ourselves as rugged individuals, and we do need to follow the Lord and shun evils on our own initiative. Yet our relationships with others are absolutely essential for a human existence.

This is seen with our family and friends, but most importantly in marriage. This is the bedrock of our lives. The marriage of one man and one woman is the full embodiment of love to the Lord and the neighbor. Even if never married, people can prepare and look toward marriage in the spiritual world. And even if a marriage ends in the tragedy of divorce, the will to join with someone else in this relationship endures.

This is because marriage is different than any other human relationship that we can have. It draws two very different people together, each contributing complementary traits that create a larger whole than any individual could achieve alone. Also, we did not choose our parents, siblings, children or coworkers. But marriage is freely chosen with two people saying: “I want to become one with you, and make your life into mine.” It has a fullness and completeness, satisfying one of our deepest needs which cannot be found anywhere else.

Considering this, it is amazing how little is said in revelation about marriage. The Old Testament speaks of two becoming one in *Genesis*, but no further explanation is given. A few laws are given governing marriage – who could marry whom and who owned property – but polygamy was rampant, as seen with Abraham and Sarah, and Jacob with Leah and Rachel.

In the New Testament we might expect more, but how much is taught? The Lord quotes the Old Testament about two becoming one, but again, there is minimal, if any, explanation. Although the Lord did speak politely to women

and treat them far better than did most of the men of the time, He did not seem to promote marriage or families in any way.

And then the teachings of Paul in the non-canonical books of the New Testament; they are downright frightening! Marriage is a choice if one cannot remain celibate. Marriage is only for those who cannot contain their animal lust. And women are clearly presented as subservient to men.

It is no wonder then that when the Lord was asked whether there was marriage in heaven, He said they are neither given in marriage nor received there, for the conception they had of marriage in those times simply does not exist in heaven. The Lord did not teach more because they were not ready to hear anything more.

Unfortunately, many people still have but a natural concept of marriage. Some view it simply as a legalized living together, providing for tax and inheritance purposes. Others identify it with romance or passion. Love is blind: Samson let down his guard for Delilah. Love is passionate: David jeopardized his throne for the beautiful Bathsheba. And love is instantaneous: a first-sight experience as seen in *Romeo and Juliet*.

However, the danger in equating such romantic ideas with a genuine love in marriage is that we tend to assume that if we are not at that peak of passion we really don't love the other person. The reality is that such passion has a very limited life span. No one can sustain the "falling in love" state for too long; it is absolutely exhausting!

So if marriage isn't simply the romantic passion nor a mere legal contract, what is it?

In the New Church we are given a vision of what marriage can be. It is primarily a gift from the Lord. It is not something that we create but rather something that we receive from the Lord to the extent that we open ourselves to it. While couples feel that love welling up from within, He is always the source of that love.

Moreover, it is a spiritual joining of two lives into one. From the wedding ceremony there is a uniting of the very souls. Then as they interact in marriage their minds become more and more intertwined. They become one in all things

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of affection, thought and life. Couples who have been married for many years seem to think and feel as a one, and cannot imagine being separate from the other. It is not simply that they live together, but that something special is taking place deep within their very lives, transforming them.

This is not done in a way that can be measured. There is no yardstick to see how much people love each other.

Because the love is deep within, joining their lives, we only catch glimpses of it in this natural world. So there are times when the love is not felt on a conscious plane as much as at other times. This does not mean that it is gone, simply that natural challenges, such as financial worries or selfish impulses, are preventing it from being felt as before.

And how can a genuine love in marriage grow, or how are we to deal with difficult times? The secret is friendship. Friendship is described as “the face of [conjugal] love and also its garment; for friendship both attaches itself to love like a garment and combines itself with it like a face.” (*Conjugal Love* 214:2) As the face and clothing are what we see of others, so it is how conjugal love presents itself.

Thus everything we know about friendship in general applies to marriage. And all of our efforts to become better friends to people, whether we are married or not, prepares us to become better married partners. For friendship is based on similar loves and affections, it carries with it a responsibility to care for the other, it has a tolerance for the other’s foibles, and it sees and promotes what is good in the other person. (See *Spiritual Experiences* 1137, 2011; *Arcana Coelestia* 4804; *Apocalypse Explained* 204:2)

Such friendship, the doctrines of the New Church tell us, have a holy fear within – “a fear of injuring and also respect.” (*Ibid.* 696:4) Wishing well for one’s spouse, thinking about his or her well-being, and doing what we can to make it happen, is a wonderful trait of friendship.

So much of this is seen in this teaching of the Lord: “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down his life for his friends.” (*John* 15:13) While this verse is frequently cited to express thanks to those who have defended their country in times of war, even to the point of dying for it, which is true, it also has application in friendships. For if we are to be genuine friends with others, we are to set our selfish life down, giving up some of ourselves, that our friends may be supported. To be a good spouse is to be a good friend.

So friendship in marriage has a three-fold role: friendship is a bridge,

a stabilizing factor, and then a means of resolving problems. (*Conjugal Love* 214)

As a bridge, friendship creates a transition from the initial stages of love to a more normal genuine love between a couple. The Writings note:

When friendship and mutual trust join together with the first love in marriage, conjugal love results, which opens the partners' hearts and inspires in them the sweet enjoyments of love, and this more and more deeply as friendship and trust are added to the original love, and as that original love enters into this friendship and trust and they into it. (*Conjugal Love* 162)

Friendship in marriage has a three-fold role: friendship is a bridge, a stabilizing factor, and then a means of resolving problems.

Everyone knows that the initial romance of love fades with time. Those early phases of marriage are absolutely wonderful and exist as a prelude and a foretaste of what heaven will be like. It is an incredibly selfless time, as we would do anything for the happiness of our new spouse. But because no one is regenerate, especially in the early phases of marriage on this earth, that honeymoon state tends to have a short duration. We return to whatever spiritual developmental stage we were at previously. It is in friendship with our spouse that those initial feelings of love can deepen and grow.

Friendship also adds stability to marriage because of trust. If we are secure in our friendship with our spouse, we have the freedom to see problems and to work on them rather than avoid them and let them fester. If we know that even if we're not perfect our spouse will still love us and stand by us, it's far easier to recognize problems and to deal with them openly and honestly. This can "still the troubles" in marriage. (*Conjugal Love* 271) It is how we tolerate each other on our "off" days.

Then the final way in which friendship plays a critical role in marriage is when there are significant problems. In states of cold, when there is little if any warmth felt toward the other person, the hells are ever present, trying to convince us that there is no love left. In fact, they suggest to us that because that other person is irritating us or making our life miserable, we have the right to ignore, abuse, or treat our spouse worse than we would anyone else we know. No wonder divorce so often follows from this; it is the siren call of the hells.

At these times when warmth is not felt, the challenge is to force ourselves to treat the other person with decency and respect. This is how we would treat a friend, even if that friend is in a state that we don't like. When we compel

As we work at becoming a better friend to our spouse, a conjugal friendship will become a genuine face and garment of that intense and eternal love which the Lord is giving us.

ourselves to act in a friendly way, even if we don't especially feel like it, it sets the stage for the Lord to work within to restore the love. We cannot change our feelings, but we can take actions that allow the Lord to stem the flood of the hells, so that the genuine love within can re-emerge. (*Conjugal Love* 271) And even if efforts to be a friend do not save the marriage, they still prepare the individual for an eventual conjugal relationship.

Ideally, friendship – as the face and garment of love truly conjugal – enriches and brings an inmost joy to people. Or, as the Heavenly Doctrines

state: “If friendship, love of the married partner, love of children, reigns in common in any society, then every single thing they think, speak and do is joyful.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 2415)

As we strive to become better and more selfless friends, sometimes forcing ourselves to act against our baser feelings, something precious grows inside. An opening to the Lord creates a union of souls and a joining of minds – and that can take place and be felt more and more in our lives.

This is the promise of an inmost friendship (*Conjugal Love* 180), said in the Heavenly Doctrines to be the “friendship of friendships,” (*Ibid.* 334) or “conjugal friendship, which surpasses all friendship.” (*Spiritual Experiences* 6110:49)

As we work at becoming a better friend to our spouse, a conjugal friendship will become a genuine face and garment of that intense and eternal love which the Lord is giving us. It will promote that deeply formative and satisfying genuine love in marriage, allowing a couple to grow closer forever. For they “who so dwell together on earth dwell together as angels after death.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2732)

Indeed, then the joy of dwelling together increases in this world and will in the next forever. So our marriages will become the source of the deepest and the most intense happiness that we can ever experience.

This is the promise of love truly conjugal – a precious gift from the Lord that He is ever offering to us. Amen.



The Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith is Executive Bishop of the General Church, General Pastor of the General Church, Chancellor of the Academy of the New Church, and President of the General Church in Canada, the General Church in South Africa and of the General Church International, Incorporated. He lives with his wife, Gretchen (Umberger), in Bryn Athyn. Contact: Brian.Keith@newchurch.org

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

DEGREES

The doctrine of degrees is peculiar to the Writings and fundamental to an understanding of their philosophy. The gradations from light to shade, fine to gross, rare to dense, loud to quiet, etc., are continuous degrees, which are degrees of one thing – measurable by various types of instrumentation. Discrete degrees are the degrees of the formation or composition of one thing from another. They exist in all things, but each distinctly, although they make a one when taken together. They are related as end, cause and effect, and the only ratio between them is that of correspondence; that is, the higher degrees can flow into the lower ones, but not the lower into the higher.

Lower degrees have qualities not found in higher ones, but these are qualities of limitation. Love, thought and speech are a series of discrete degrees. Thought cannot formulate all that love perceives, and speech cannot express all that man thinks. However, discrete degrees are homogeneous, and it is in the ultimate degree that all the power of a series is exerted. The three heavens and the three degrees of the mind are discrete series.

Yet it should be noted that there are discrete degrees in natural as well as in spiritual things; that the term does not express only a relation between the spiritual and the natural or the infinite and the finite. The natural atmospheres, for example, are discrete from one another. The designations “degrees of height” and “degrees of length” should not be taken too literally. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 10,181; *Heaven and Hell* 38; *The Infinite* 16; *Divine Love and Wisdom* 184, 256; *Divine Providence* 32.)

The Marriage of Love and Wisdom: A Response to the Same-Sex Marriage Ruling in the United States

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

Many people are still responding to the United States Supreme Court decision of June 26, 2015, in which the United States joined several other nations in legalizing same-sex marriage nationwide. While a number of people regard the Court's decision with favor, others see it as a challenge to their fundamental beliefs – to things they have long held to be true about marriage and the Lord's will for us all. I am one of those people.

This article is my attempt to share some New Church teachings that bear on the subject in a respectful manner. My hope is that readers in the United States may be aided in their own informed responses to this dramatic shift in attitudes and practices around marriage in their country. I also hope that those in other countries may feel invited to consider their views on this important topic.

Love and wisdom.

I'd like to gather my remarks around the theme of *love and wisdom*. We might all agree that the best response to many of life's challenges comes from love and wisdom – not love divorced from wisdom, which can sometimes appear soft and rudderless; not truth alone, which can be cold and harsh; but that useful interplay of love informed by wisdom.

This is not, therefore, a condemnation of people who, for whatever reason, identify as gay, or an attempt to speak against those who support them. Rather my hope is that we can consider some of the reasons the Lord created marriage

in the first place, and from that solid ground, wisely and lovingly respond to what is happening in today's world – as individuals and as a Church.

Marriage at its core.

There is a further reason for choosing a theme of love and wisdom in that it helps us get to the heart of what marriage is. Love and wisdom constitute a fundamental duality that originates in the Lord our Creator and extends into all things created, including ourselves. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 28)

But when we get to the unique and complementary way in which men and women are created, we start to see something foundational about marriage. Our God formed two sexes for the sake of marriage – so that each sex could not only reflect God Himself in a unique way, but could come together like interlocking puzzle pieces, with each offering something that the other doesn't have. In the chapter of *Heaven and Hell* on “Marriages in Heaven,” we read:

Everyone, whether man or woman, possesses intellect (or the capacity for wisdom) and will (or the capacity to love); but with the man the intellect predominates, and with the woman the will predominates, and the character is determined by what predominates. (n. 369)

Then in the work devoted to marriage, *Conjugal Love*, we learn:

Married love in its origin is the interplay of wisdom and love, for man was born to be a form of wisdom, and woman to be a form of love. (n. 75:7; cf. n. 457)

The theme of love and wisdom, then, which is consistent throughout creation, extends in a beautiful way into the relationship of marriage. This is why the Lord strives to implant in each one of us a love for one of the opposite sex, a particular person who is complementary in nature to us, with whom we can grow spiritually, raise a family, be useful, become a better person, and share the ups and downs of life, potentially to eternity. (See *Conjugal Love* 37, 46)

While we can acknowledge that it's tough going at times, and that not everyone experiences in this life the joys that the Lord intends, what is important to recognize is that this is what the Lord calls “marriage.” It has everything to do with “the interplay of love and wisdom” in feminine and masculine human beings.

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A loving and wise response: two ropes.

So how are we to respond to the U.S. Supreme Court ruling that has finalized a change in the definition of marriage on a civil level, to include people of the same sex? How are we to regard people we love who may be attracted to people of the same sex? How do we interact with those who believe strongly in their conscience that homosexuality is to be embraced?

While I can't pretend to answer that for all readers in all contexts, I go back to something suggested earlier, that the best responses come from

a careful interweaving of love and wisdom. I liken it to holding on to two ropes – the “love” rope, calling us to look for the good in others, to view the whole person, to humbly acknowledge our own limitations, and to build up rather than tear down; and the “wisdom” rope, strongly attached to the Word as the source of wisdom, describing the truth about marriage and important principles to consider about homosexuality. The bottom line is: we don't get to let go of either rope, because the same Lord, who is love and wisdom, has given us two hands to hold both.

Holding onto love.

The “love” rope is relatively easy to talk about, yet often takes a lifetime to work on. It's essential for us to see the Lord as a God of infinite love who cherishes every human being. We can also count on the fact that His love is always and completely married to His wisdom, leading Him to provide for each of us from an intimate and full knowledge of all that is going on. Therefore it can be useful, whenever we are considering another human being, to reflect: “The Lord loves that person, and is caring for him or her.”

Most of us also know that our greatest calling from the Lord is to love – love Him, and love our neighbors as ourselves. (*Matthew* 22:38-39) He leads us to put ourselves in the context of other people to the best of our ability, saying, “Whatever you want others to do to you, do also to them.” (*Ibid.* 7:12)

Of the things we might see in others that seem off-track, we are encouraged toward humility: “Why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye?” (*Ibid.* 7:3). And if we do have to make a judgment call about what's going on in the life of another person,

He says: “Do not judge according to the appearance but judge with righteous judgment.” (*John* 7:24) In other words, come from love, and consider the factors that might contribute to the behavior in question.

In the Heavenly Doctrines, too, there are powerful teachings that urge us to respond with love. We learn, for example:

Those who have charity hardly notice the evil in other people, but instead notice all the goods and truths that are theirs, and on their evils and falsities they place a good interpretation. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1079:2)

Along similar lines, we are called in several places to love the good that is in a person and attach ourselves to that good. (*True Christian Religion* 417, *Doctrine of Faith* 21) We are reminded time and again that we do not know all that goes on in the life of a person. For example, we encounter the principle that “what is interior possesses thousands of things which are seen in the exterior only as a simple whole.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 5707)

Beneath the surface is a world of hopes and dreams, memories, traumas, insecurities, strengths, weaknesses and the like – much of which we do not see. (See also *Conjugal Love* 531) For all these reasons, we are called to embrace a charitable attitude toward others, which consists of “wanting what is best for them and being of benefit to them.” (*True Christian Religion* 413)

What does all this imply with regard to our response to individuals within the same-sex context? In these relationships, as with all others, these teachings call us to interact with kindness, compassion and understanding. They remind us that we all struggle with our own issues, all wish for people to give us the benefit of the doubt, and all want to be thought of as decent human beings who have much to offer.

But we can also acknowledge that it is not always easy. Consider the phrase, “wanting what is best for them.” That often involves judgment calls. Would it not, in this context of marriage as it is intended by the Lord, include wanting people we love to experience a marriage relationship at some point in their lives, in this world or the next, with one of the opposite sex?

Wouldn't love seek for appropriate opportunities to share the Lord's

These teachings call us to interact with kindness, compassion and understanding. They remind us that we all struggle with our own issues, all wish for people to give us the benefit of the doubt, and all want to be thought of as decent human beings who have much to offer.

teachings about marriage with those we love, even the harder ones? And if there are harmful effects for people we love from engaging in same-sex behaviors that the Lord says we shouldn't engage in, what would love lead us to do?

These are tough questions, no doubt. Each of us can determine for ourselves the best thing to do in the individual situations before us, and with the people with whom we interact. Sometimes that may lead us to focus on connecting with people instead of forcing disagreements around the truth. Other times we may strive to create the space for gentle appeals and offers of help. And sometimes we may feel it necessary to create some boundaries for the sake of our own well-being. Each of us can humbly pray for the wisdom to interact in helpful ways.

That's some of the love rope – beautiful attitudes and teachings which are not always easy to apply.

Seeking wisdom from the Word.

Then there is the wisdom rope. We note that these two ropes are intended to work together. As marriage itself is an interplay of love and wisdom, so our compassion for our fellow human beings can be informed by the many truths that the Lord has now revealed. In that vein, let me share four categories of teaching that bear on the issue at hand.

The first is relatively easy to absorb. The Lord describes three forms of connection that we can experience with other human beings, depending on their, or our, gender. We read:

There is a love between men, also a love between women, and there is the love of a man for a woman and the love of a woman for a man. And these three pairs of loves are completely different from each other. (*Conjugal Love* 55:6)

What this teaching says to me is that each of us will have a range of relationships with other human beings: some of them will be with people of the opposite sex, and some of them with people of the same sex. Common experience bears this out, and nothing here suggests that there's anything inherently wrong with these relationships.

Yet they are said to be “completely different from each other.” Again this teaching uses the theme of love and wisdom to describe these differences. “Love between two men is like the love between one intellect and another,” and “love between two women is like the love between one affection and another.” (*Ibid*) As a result there just isn't the “capacity for conjunction in every detail” as exists with people of the opposite sex. (See *Ibid.* 37)

A conclusion we can reach is that the Lord encourages relationships among people of the same sex, some of which could be life-long and close in

nature. But these relationships have an orderly limit. Nowhere in the Word do we find support for calling them anything more than friendships.

Instead (and this is the second category), we find a number of hard-to-hear teachings about the ultimate expressions of same-sex attraction. Again the intent is to place a clear limit. We read of “forbidden classes (or relationships) of people enumerated in Leviticus 18” (*Conjugal Love* 519; cf. *Genesis* 19:5-7, *1 Kings* 14:24), of conjunctions that “ought not to be named” (*Spiritual Experiences* 4763, *Conjugal Love* 450), of “behavior that is contrary to the order of nature” (*Arcana Coelestia* 2322); and the like. In general, homosexual attraction that extends into the physical realm is identified with adultery. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2220, 6348)

I acknowledge that these teachings are talking about the sexual acts related to homosexuality, and that some have argued that they don’t apply to the more laudable and inner connection of love that a man can feel for a man or a woman for a woman. I would note that many things that extend into the sexual realm are forbidden for us, for they can have lasting consequences for ourselves and others.

For example, the Word speaks in many places against the innate temptation to connect sexually with many people of the opposite sex (or arguably of the same sex), calling it “lust for variety” (*Conjugal Love* 507ff), and, in the case of married people, adultery. (*Ibid.* 453) It is certainly true that all of us have things to work on in order to shun wandering lusts and to strive for chasteness around the things of marriage.

What I hear in the context of same-sex relationships is again a clear boundary: they are not to go beyond a certain point, not into sexual expression, and not into a relationship that resembles marriage.

A third category of teachings relates to gender. This is a tricky and sensitive thing to talk about, as scientific exploration provides us with a great deal of information to process, some of which conflicts. I would be out of my professional depth to comment on specifics in the scientific realm, but I mention it because it is part of the thought process for many people around the subject of homosexuality.

My personal approach is to go first to the teachings of the Word around gender, and to consider scientific findings in light of those teachings. A particularly relevant teaching is:

Masculinity in the male is masculine in the whole and every part of him, likewise femininity in the female, and there is a capacity for conjunction in every detail. (*Conjugal Love* 37)

I view it as speaking to the soul of any created human being, which is either masculine or feminine, being covered over with a mind and body that

A chapter in *Conjugal Love* on “Marriages in Heaven” says that its purpose is not only to teach that marriages exist in heaven, but also that they are central to the happiness that the Lord offers to people there.

is equally masculine or feminine. It says to me that the Lord’s intention for each of us is to be born and develop as a fully functional man or woman, who has the “capacity for conjunction in every detail” with a person of the opposite sex.

Are there interruptions in that process from time to time with some people, as science seems to suggest? I do not know. I do find it helpful, personally, to allow for the possibility that there are things going on for some people that may incline them more toward homosexuality, as it keeps me more open to what others may be experiencing.

Finally it is useful to consider eternal trajectories. On the negative side, there is no indication that same-sex unions exist in heaven, and there are additional hard-to-hear teachings indicating the sad lot in hell of those for whom same-sex attraction becomes pervasively domineering, self-serving and lustful. (See *Apocalypse Explained* 1006:2, *Spiritual Experiences* 2675) The same thing could be said of disorders of a sexual nature in the heterosexual realm.

But these teachings should be viewed in the context of what truly defines us, namely what we come to love the most. The Heavenly Doctrines refer to these loves as our ruling or life’s love. (See *Heaven and Hell* 479; *Divine Providence* 106)

While each person’s ruling love will be unique, all in heaven share the common elements of love of God and love of other people. They have also been willing to be led by the Lord away from what is hurtful and self-serving.

I think it important to note, in the context of one’s ruling love, that homosexual attraction by itself need not define a person eternally. While it matters for all of us the level to which we indulge in things that the Lord forbids, we should never underestimate His ability to lead people through their many states of life toward heaven.

There is, however, an important component of our preparation for heaven that revolves around marriage. A chapter in *Conjugal Love* on “Marriages in Heaven” says that its purpose is not only to teach that marriages exist in heaven, but also that they are central to the happiness that the Lord offers to people there. In fact there are many teachings that lead to the conclusion that

marriage with one of the opposite sex is the intended state for all in heaven. (See *Conjugal Love* 229, 316:3, 531)

One teaching in that chapter describes something important about our preparation for heaven while on earth. In addressing our ruling loves which remain with us after death it says: “Especially does a love for the opposite sex remain, and in the case of people coming into heaven, namely, people who become spiritual on earth, married love.” (*Ibid.* 37)

This teaching has some important implications:

- First, our regard for marriage and our willingness to embrace the Lord’s definition of it matters.
- Second, it is wise for us to do everything we can to ready ourselves for our part of a healthy marriage in heaven, by becoming increasingly “spiritual on earth.”
- Third, it appears clear that those who have experienced homosexual attraction, assuming again good central or ruling loves, would need to be led away from it prior to entering heaven.

So that’s some of the “wisdom” rope that connects us with the truths we need to know from the Word in order to be led by our Lord toward eternal happiness.

Closing thoughts.

I’d like to close with a comment or two about the Church’s role in all of this, and an appeal to talk with me or others if any of what I have written is troubling to you.

Regarding the Church, we read, “A church is a church by virtue of its reception of the Lord’s Divine goodness in the Divine truths that it has from Him.” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 797) There’s the theme of love and wisdom again. The Lord’s Divine goodness is His love, which looks upon us all with mercy and compassion – an attitude we can continue to strive for.

This church happens to have an incredible reservoir of truth from the Lord about marriage, which teaches, among other things, that He is the one

Many would agree that the Church as a whole has the responsibility to present the vision of marriage that the Lord describes in His Word – a vision that the world desperately needs. Most would also agree that the Church is to be a beacon of hope and a welcoming place for all seeking the Lord and the life He lays before us.

who created this relationship, and that it is vitally important – the “precious jewel of human life and the repository of the Christian religion.” (*Conjugal Love* 457)

Many would agree that the Church as a whole has the responsibility to present the vision of marriage that the Lord describes in His Word – a vision that the world desperately needs. Most would also agree that the Church is to be a beacon of hope and a welcoming place for all seeking the Lord and the life He lays before us.

That life includes the relationship with one of the opposite sex that can grow in richness and meaning to eternity. It also includes the loving and wise ways we are called to respond to others, even as we hope for that response to our own states of life, good and bad.

The subject of homosexuality and marriage is intricate and sensitive. I hope that you have heard a call by means of the teachings referenced to kindness and love, and have also felt informed about what the Word has to say about same-sex relationships.

I welcome dialogue and response to what I have written. I am keenly aware of the limitations of the written word when dealing with sensitive topics. Therefore I would encourage readers to talk to their local pastor, or to others in their lives, and to contact me directly if that would be helpful. I can be reached at 267.502.4918 or at peter.buss.jr@newchurch.org.



The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. is Assistant to the Bishop of the General Church, Vice President of General Church International, Incorporated, and Head of General Church Education. Prior to his ordination into the third degree he was pastor of the Glenview (Illinois) New Church. He and his wife, Teresa (Farrington), live in Bryn Athyn with their four children.

Council of the Clergy Meetings 2015

The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden

More than 90 priests from around the world attended the General Church International clergy meetings June 23 - 27 in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. Most ministers, some with their wives, exchanged warm greetings at the open house and supper hosted by the Executive Bishop, the Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith, and his wife, Gretchen, in their home on Monday evening. Those on the Bishop's Consistory and Advisory had met earlier in the afternoon.

The meetings officially opened with a worship service led by the Bishop in the Dining Hall on the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools campus, which was also home to our plenary sessions for the week. Bishop Keith read from *Psalms* 37, in which David, from the midst of his many troubles, remarkably urged "trust in the Lord and do good." Together with a reading from *Spiritual Experiences* 4692:2 on the way the Lord's leading can seem random, and another from *Arcana Coelestia* 2572:3 on the way those in the good of doctrine see as from a tower, Bishop Keith reflected on how the Lord leads those who strive to live by what He teaches.

The first order of business was to act on the report of the Membership Committee, presented by the Rev. Grant H. Odhner, chairman. The following were welcomed as full members in the Council of the Clergy: from Côte d'Ivoire – Aime Dayoro and Gedeon G. Gnagne; from Kenya – Fred Onsiro Ang'asa, Emanuel Wanjala Juma and George Omosu Magero; from Norway – Thomas Floyd; and from the United States – Brett Buick, Jared Buss, Joel Glenn and Michael Cowley. Additionally, Eduardo Berith, from Brazil, was recognized as a general member; and Martie Johnson, from the United States, was removed from membership.

The Gift of Free Will

The first speaker was the Rev. Daniel W. Goodenough. His paper, "Love's Highest Goal, Divine and Human," focused on the Lord's gift of free will and the feeling that life is our own, which is so essential that He never takes it away.

Before highlighting the pre-circulated paper he reflected on some of the feedback he had received on the General Church Clergy Googlegroup. Some had objected to his suggestion that the Lord may value our feeling of life as our own more than our going to heaven, on the grounds that the latter is what the Writings describe as the end of creation. Mr. Goodenough suggested that calling the sensation of self-life a “universal” goal may be a better way to describe it than the “highest” goal.

As he highlighted the paper, Mr. Goodenough noted that heaven is God’s highest wish for all people, but freedom is first in time. Even for those who go to hell, the Lord still loves their faculties of freedom and rationality, and the goodness of the uses they perform. He is happy that they have life as their own and some limited joys. His will is for people to be in the highest heaven, but many lower things are of His consent, leave, or permission.

Mr. Goodenough encouraged us to image the Lord’s love. Priests are not just to seek people’s good behavior, but should focus on promoting free will within the mind, helping people to decide wisely by using truths rationally. Love of control is an issue for all to deal with – by New Church families as well as priests. Encouraging free decisions is a distinguishing feature of New Church teaching and aspiration. Among the points made in discussion were that priests guide people’s freedom through their teaching but need to give space to make choices, and that the way a church functions will influence the congregation’s ability to respond freely to the Lord.

Following a break, a second session was devoted to reports. Bishop Keith drew attention to several points in his pre-circulated report, including his travel in the past year, his intention to revive a Bishop’s Council of lay people, and his progress toward setting up a communications committee to facilitate understanding between the General Church Board and the Council of the Clergy. He also spoke of how painful it was for him to cease recognition of Jacob Maseko as a priest of the General Church due to recent actions against his congregation, and how tragic it was for his long service to end this way.

The Academy and New Church Education

Bishop Keith then spoke from his report as Chancellor of the Academy. After noting wonderful successes of the various schools in athletics, arts and academics, his appreciation for Dr. Kristin King’s service as College President, and for Brian Blair’s preparation to step into that office, he dwelt at some length on the progress being made in reining in deficit spending. He concluded with a quote from Bishop Benade about the great work we have to do, and doing it “as in the very presence of God.”

In the half hour discussion of the two reports, information was sought on such topics as the Board’s request that the College be asked to consider opening

the Master of Divinity program to women; the difference between the roles of the Bishop's Council and the Communication Committee; and the possible use or sale of Academy property to meet financial needs, and the potential for compromising our stance on moral and doctrinal issues in so doing.

The Rev. Dr. Andrew M. T. Dibb, Dean of the Theological School, spoke of the three graduates this year, the two students enrolled for next year, and how the balance between the needs of the General Church for pastors and the supply of graduates is about right at present. He was happy to report that generous contributions to the Theological School have made it the only Academy school to be operating with a small surplus. In response to a question, he also spoke of involvement with the non-accredited worldwide theological schools operating in several countries where classes are taught in languages other than English.

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. then highlighted his pre-circulated report which was devoted to the uses of both the Episcopal Office and General Church Education. He gave his perspective, based on his travels and work, concerning the many good and useful things happening in the General Church, despite existing challenges. He pointed out that the truth is being shared and lives are being touched. He said a large part of his job is to support the clergy and called on those who need help to contact him.

On the education side, he spoke of exciting progress in curriculum and teacher development, and support for New Church families. In the discussion, questions were raised about the limitations of the Master of Arts in Religious Studies, training for teachers overseas, and our pool of translators.

The Non-North American Church

After lunch the Rev. Grant Odhner, as Secretary of the Council of the Clergy, introduced a series of reports on the "Non-North American Church."

The Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs began with a report on the church groups in Cuba, and the support of translation and publishing efforts there. In addition to revising century-old translations by Dr. Leopoldo E. Calleja which were never published, Douglas Calvo and Josué Vasconcelos have been translating from Latin. So far, *Divine Providence* and *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* have been completed and *Conjugal Love* and *Heaven and Hell* are almost complete, with more on the way. Publishing is lagging but progressing and a new more useable Spanish website is projected to become a vehicle for distributing the texts.

The Rev. Todd Beiswenger compared the challenges of the Church in Australia to similar challenges faced in America. His work involves a fair amount of travel. He spoke of the prominent use the annual church camp serves in bonding the Church.

The Rev. Richard Keyworth spoke of the New Church in New Zealand.

He and another Conference minister, both retired, are keeping the doors open and urging the society to look outward.

The Rev. Ekow Eshun spoke of the Church in Ghana. Ten ministers serve seven congregations, totaling about 1,500 members and two schools with more than 500 students between them. He described efforts to invest a modest endowment, the proceeds of which are being used to buy land, purchase audio equipment and contribute toward stipends for retired ministers.

The Rev. Martin Gyamfi, Regional Pastor for West Africa, pointed out that the Church is in six countries there: Ghana, Togo, Ivory Coast, Benin, Burkina Faso and Nigeria. He said the Church in Nigeria started about five years ago and consists of two groups in the southeast led by laymen who are brothers. Their commitment to growing the Church includes land they bought with their own money.

The Rev. Sylvain Agnes said that the Church in Côte d'Ivoire consists of eight congregations, five of which are in the capital, Abidjan. Ten ministers serve a total of 300-500 members, with an eleventh serving in Mauritius. The Theological School there has 25 students, five of whom are being trained to serve within the General Church and the rest as independent New Church ministers. They are training one student from Togo and another for Burkina Faso. They have a pressing need for books of the Writings in French and are working on building their endowment fund.

The Rev. Segno-Kodjo Ayi said Togo has the second oldest New Church congregation in West Africa, after Ghana. The first service was held in 2001, and now there are four ministers and two congregations, with a third planned. They also need French translations of the Writings, or translations into their local language.

The Rev. Guillaume Anato described the Church in Benin as the smallest or youngest brother of the West African churches. When he finished school in 2010 he returned home to start a church. Now they have about 35 people in the congregation and are looking for a larger place to worship in the capital. He also serves a small group about an hour away, is trying to train some men to assist him, and also to start a three-room school on land they own.

The Rev. John Jin praised the ministers working in Asia for their enthusiasm and the dedication to work in ministry as their second job. After the sudden death of the Rev. Jiro Kumazawa last year the Church in Japan has suffered. They have just two ministers. There are nine ministers and three missionaries in Korea serving seven churches and three groups. The Korean New Church Corporation is two-thirds of the way to raising \$3 million with the help of the Healthy Church Match program for a new church in Seoul and a center for development. While Japan has all volumes of the Writings translated and published, Korea has three, with three others in process. China is also in sore

need of more translations. It is not politically feasible to open a church in that country. Mr. Jin praised the Rev. Timothy as a very brave man.

Pastoral Renewal and Outreach

The fourth session had three concurrent offerings:

- The Rev. Brian Smith led an informal discussion aimed at Pastoral Renewal. The objective was to help pastors thrive in their work through sharing and discussing relevant passages from the Word, getting to know one another, and brainstorming ways to succeed in a demanding job.
- The Rev. Nathan Cole helped colleagues install the Kempton Project onto their computers and learn how to use it.
- The Rev. David Lindrooth hosted a session on video webcasting, “Live Streaming.”

Mr. Lindrooth spoke of his goal of getting New Church doctrine out into the public domain, and about the success enjoyed so far by Curtis Childs in webcasting for the Swedenborg Foundation. (Monthly viewers see a total of a million minutes of New Church content.)

Stewart Farmer, who webcasts for NewChurch LIVE, outlined what viewers are looking for (immediacy, interaction and involvement); the components of webcasting (capture, encode, host and storage); the equipment and manpower needed (hardwired Internet connection, camera, tripod, mic, mixer, computer and a technician who is not the pastor); and the costs (about \$4,000 in the first year and \$1,550 annually thereafter).

In the evening, two electives were offered concurrently. The Rev. Michael Gladish led a discussion on “What the Doctrines actually say about church growth.” Favorite passages were shared and the discussion touched on such things as the need to teach from good will and reach out to the good in others; the applicability today of what was said about the spiritual state of the world when the Writings were written; the kind of growth we are looking for (publishing the doctrines, signing up members, individual regeneration); and how we know the Lord is blessing our efforts.

The second elective was led by a layman and repeated the next day. Richard Daum shared both experience and study on the subject of “Male Sexual Abuse.” His hope was to help males who have suffered such abuse to overcome the harmful results, as well as to bring light on this topic so that the perpetration of such abuse can be addressed and reduced to the best of our ability.

He spoke both about things that make a boy or young man especially vulnerable to being abused; the stages of coming to terms with having been abused, and growing toward mental and spiritual healing in its wake; resources available to those who have been abused; and what a pastor can offer if someone discloses that he has been abused.

Externals and Internals

Wednesday began with two small-group electives. The Rev. Glenn “Mac” Frazier led a half hour discussion of a short Scripture reading. Concurrently, the Rev. Clark Echols offered teachings from the Word about meditation and reflection. The objective was to introduce a regular practice to enhance one’s well-being and further one’s enlightenment by giving attention to the effect reading the Word has on one’s mind and body.

For most, however, the day began with worship led by the Rev. Jay Barry. He read from *Genesis* 15 on the horror of darkness Abram experienced even as the Lord promised to bless him; and from *Divine Providence* 234 on the laws of permission being laws of Divine providence. He spoke of how we, as pastors, are faced with difficulties, and the Lord assures us of His will to bless us, for He endured the temptations of the faithful.

Mr. Frazier led a session with lots of audience interaction as he talked about his pre-circulated paper, “The Externals of the Church.” He began by observing that the issues we tend to fight about in the Church are those in which we take something internal and bring it into expression in externals. There, we tend to re-categorize the issue as internal and essential, leading to unnecessary tensions in the Church.

He said he is concerned when he sees sharp disputes arise over what is really an external matter. Externals are indeed important, for the purpose of the Church is to learn the truth and lead a good life, which means acting in externals on that truth. Every church has externals and internals, represented by Japheth and Shem. It seems that we do not remain in one or the other state, but transition back and forth between them.

As important as externals are, there needs to be flexibility. The Church dies when it values externals apart from internals. When people lament the change of externals in the Church, it is helpful to focus on the internal that was sought, in the past, through that external thing, and see if the current generation is seeking that same internal in new externals.

To underscore how variety in externals can serve a single internal thing, he also noted that the literal sense of the Old Testament would have been different – with the internal sense remaining unchanged – if had it been written among a different people than the Jews. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 10453:3) The active discussion supported his points while seeking to keep externals and internals in their proper order.

Blueprint for Success

After the break, the Rev. Jeremy Simons brought out the main points in his paper, “Blueprint for Salvation,” which was an outgrowth of the lectures he gave at the Boynton Beach Retreat. (See “Blueprint for Success” *New Church*

Life, March/April 2015, pp. 147-152) He said that although they are seldom mentioned in formal General Church strategic plans, the principles of our founders form the underlying strategy of the General Church, or its “DNA.” He described these approaches as “brilliant,” distinguishing the General Church from every other New Church organization worldwide.

After reviewing the *de facto* strategies that prevailed in the General Convention as it evolved in the 1800s, he pointed out that the Academy movement was a reaction against those strategies. They wanted to reform the organization according to principles taken directly from the Writings, beginning from two principles: first, that the Writings are the Word of God, and secondly, that the Christian Church has come to an end.

They sought an educated clergy that would take a scholarly and scientific approach to the Writings. They also valued New Church Education as a means to growth, and government by a priesthood that was both accountable to the Word and answerable to superiors. As a measure of the success of these strategies, Mr. Simons pointed out that from the year the General Church separated from the General Convention, the latter declined steadily to the present, while the General Church has had slow but steady growth decade after decade – most recently especially in Africa and Asia, as the founders expected that it would.

Today, however, strategies critical of today’s North American culture are increasingly viewed as unacceptable, while Convention’s strategies are increasingly touted in the General Church.

He concluded with the conviction that the original strategies of the General Church have been a powerful force in creating a strong and loving church, and that we should resist efforts to return to Convention’s strategies.

In the discussion, it was evident that Mr. Simons’ broad generalizations had provoked thought both about things the General Church has done well, and about what improvements and adaptations are needed for the present and future.

The New Christian Bible Study Project

After lunch, both sessions were set aside for electives. In the first, Rich Daum’s topic was repeated; the Rev. Pearse Frazier led a discussion on New Church education and learning, including a sharing of favorite related passages; and Steve David introduced people to the New Christian Bible Study Project (www.newchristianbiblestudy.org).

There are billions of Christians in the world. This project’s aim is to serve the hundreds of millions of people going to Bible study websites and offer them the real meaning of the Word as revealed by the Lord. The project team has gathered 82 Bible translations, to which they have added and cross-linked

Swedenborg's theological works in Latin, English and other languages – French, Spanish, Korean, Portuguese and others, with more coming. Supporting these are plain-language explanations of the internal sense of Biblical words and stories; and links to videos, artwork and photos. The site is getting 36,000 visitors per month.

One ambition is to make this a global, crowd-sourced project. Volunteers are needed to keep improving the website and content. Mr. David invited ministers to send in sermons and to encourage church members to use the website often, since popularity breeds popularity on the Internet. He also spoke to the need for donations to this non-profit corporation to keep this rapidly growing work going, and the link to do so on the website. Further information about the project and how to get involved can be found on the website, at the bottom of the home page.

The second afternoon session had two electives: a repeat of the one offered earlier by Nathan Cole, and a workshop led by the Rev. Chuck Blair, "Difficulties Growing a Church." He suggested some areas of challenge, such as attendance, buildings, funding and discipleship. After sharing *Arcana Coelestia* 1419 which says that the essence of heavenly love is to be a blessing, he divided participants into groups to list barriers to growth and then grouping them by affinity. Then they were invited to report to the whole group. Mr. Blair concluded that in growing a church, what you do as a leader is what you can control.

Following the afternoon sessions, ministers and their wives were offered an opportunity to take Holy Supper together in a service at the Cathedral led by the Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr. In the evening Cairnwood Estate was opened to ministers and their wives for hors d'oeuvres and dinner. Grant Odhner provided welcoming remarks and introduced our first and only minister in India, the Rev. Peter Devassy, who sang a hymn in his native tongue, Malayalam. His lovely rendition was a first for this body.

Life and Doctrine on the Mountain

Thursday's morning worship was led by the Rev. Derek Elphick with readings from *Genesis* 41 and *Arcana Coelestia* 5352 and 2493. He encouraged us to enjoy the present moment in our ministry and not allow the evil spirits to turn our thoughts too much to the past or future. During the announcements that followed, our oldest member of the council, the Rev. Douglas Taylor, was heartily welcomed.

Our first speaker was the Rev. Göran Appelgren. He introduced his pre-circulated paper, "Life and Doctrine or Stay on the Mountain," which used the imagery of a mountain to recognize love to the Lord and the neighbor at the top of a pyramid of doctrines. Like the Lord's life, the life we have from

the Lord is also “the life of love toward the universal human race.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6467e)

He said his paper was all about reminding his colleagues that we have a tremendous responsibility: we have the doctrines and we are supposed to use them to lead *people*. He compared people to a chrysalis, which may look like a mess inside but which, if given time and patience, develops into a beautiful butterfly. From a sight of doctrine we may be inclined to insist that what is done in heaven must be immediately done on earth – what he termed “imitation theology.” But people begin life with great imperfection, and the Lord allows for this “mess” to persist as regeneration unfolds. His concern is that in teaching the ideals – as we must – we should not add a burden that inadvertently makes them seem unattainable.

While essential truths (the Two Great Commandments, the Ten Commandments, etc.) are at the top of the “mountain,” at the bottom are many non-essential doctrines like trees in a forest. He urged that priests not make belief in these to be compulsory or so central that people lose sight of the essential things that are at the core of spiritual life.

Following discussion, Mr. Appelgren further clarified his main point by saying that if you have an ideal, and you put people off, you haven’t reached them. We can improve at how well we use doctrine so that more than “being right” we are doing right.

A Doctrinal Duel

The next session led by two ministers was more philosophical. The Rev. Stephen D. Cole led off with levity by literally throwing down a gauntlet in challenging the Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom to a doctrinal duel. At issue was the way the Lord presented Himself to people before vs. after His advent.

The Lord’s presenting Himself to humankind by passing *through the heavens* is termed “transflux” in the Writings. The “duel” was over whether transflux *changed* or whether it *ceased* with the Lord’s advent, that is, whether or not the Lord still presents Himself *by means of the heavens*.

Mr. Cole’s paper was titled: “The Angel of the Lord – Divine Transflux Then and Now.” He set out passages from the Heavenly Doctrine that showed both 1) that before His advent the Lord had presented His Divinity in Human form by taking on the whole of heaven as He inflowed through the heavens, and 2) that at His coming the Lord took on the Human form which had been with the angels and made it Divine. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 3061:2-3; 5663:3)

He then showed that the Lord now flows into natural things directly from Himself, but still, working through heaven from Himself. (See *Divine Love and Wisdom* 233; *Apocalypse Explained* 1166:3) So although the Lord still gives to the heavens their human form and flows through that, what is different is the

directness with which He appears to the natural mind of those who receive Him: He Himself teaches them directly.

Mr. Sandstrom said he agreed with all the passages from the Writings that Mr. Cole quoted. After reading Stephen's paper he wished to change the assertion he made in his paper, "The Huge Changes Brought On By The Glorification." Rather than say, "transflux ceased," it would be more accurate to say, "the human Divine ceased." The greatest joy of the angels is to do the Lord's work, even though their work is less than perfect.

He explained that in the Advent the Lord first took on that which was with the angels and, as the Son of Man, became His own terminus for His own transflux, so that it was now within Him, between His soul and His mind – His Human. The Divine Human is now an essence by itself that fills the heavens, and is what is referred to when we pray, "Our Father who art in the heavens."

From there, Mr. Sandstrom spoke of other huge changes dealt with in his paper, including the simultaneous enlightenment of the spiritual and natural mind made possible by the Lord's Divine Human, which also made possible the modern era and the blossoming of scientific study.

In the discussion of these two papers, several men spoke to the use of these studies to help people see the Lord, see Him speaking through the Writings, see how He works, see Him in the Word rather than just the characters there, and revive a sense of wonder regarding the Lord.

Thoughts About Membership

The afternoon was again set aside for electives. Immediately after lunch there were two choices.

One was to join the Rev. Robert Cole for a discussion of his paper, "The World of Spirits: Three States Then and Now," in which he gave a thorough review of the resurrection process and the three states in the world by which a person transitions from earth to heaven. He proposed to inquire into how these states may have changed between the 18th and 21st centuries. Would people's experience of them be influenced by such things as the way spiritual cities may have modernized; current psychological therapies to discover one's internal character; or the development of New Church scholarship as an aid to education about heavenly life?

The leader of the second elective was the Rev. David Lindrooth with a workshop, "Thoughts About Membership." To start a conversation about what has been working, what has not, and the effect of the environment on membership, he invited three ministers who teach young people in our Academy schools to share their thoughts.

The Rev. Chris Barber spoke about the untapped potential for church members in the Academy Secondary Schools, and about the difficulty of

letting the truth challenge them to be their best in a world that says it is not cool to be confrontational or judgmental.

The Rev. Barry Halterman spoke of a culture among young people today that makes our church seem homophobic on the one hand, and not encouraging young people to commit to anything on the other. Young people feel that the job of the Church is to care for people.

The Rev. Thane Glenn said his job is to engage students at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church with New Church teachings about the Lord, the Word and their lives. If promoting membership in the General Church was part of their job as well the College could probably have an impact.

Mr. Lindrooth then broadened the conversation by inviting several pastors to speak, including the Revs. Ethan McCardell, Jay Barry, Mark Perry, Jerome Dube and Mike Gladish. The discussion branched into related topics about finding uses for people to do in the Church, and the Church serving non-members through our schools in ways that engage them with the doctrines.

The final session offered a repeat of Steve David's presentation on "New Christian Bible Study"; a discussion on meeting young people where they are; and a presentation organized by the Human Resources department on the transition to and services of Benefit Plan Administrator Services (BPAS) which would be managing the Church's retirement plans in place of Valic.

In the evening, the clergy had dinner in the Dining Hall while their wives were invited to dinner at the home of the Rt. Rev. Tom and Nina Kline.

Joy in Heaven

Friday morning's worship service was a series of readings by the Rev. Alan Cowley on the subject of the Lord's patient leading on the one hand, and His persistence in the fight – not against people but against the hells.

The Rev. Ethan McCardell introduced a slide presentation with a reading of the parable of the lost sheep, from which the title of his presentation came: "There is More Joy in Heaven . . ." He showed many passages from the Heavenly Doctrines about how the angels welcome people into the life of the spirit, accompanied by questions aimed at bringing angelic attitudes, affections and methods into our work of welcoming people into the Church.

His aim was to approach the work of evangelization from the spirit rather than from methodology. He thus brought forward such ideas as loving the neighbor more than oneself; helping people to know themselves in terms of their dominant love and being attuned to that; never giving up on people and ministering to them where they actually are rather than where we think they should be. He pointed out how people are part of communities naturally and spiritually, and the value of listening to how the Lord is already working in people's lives, and paying attention to their spiritual and natural communities.

Angels excel at acknowledging their profound ignorance and so should we be both humble and teachable, and confident that the Lord is leading everyone's life. Since angelic influx is into what a person knows and believes, perhaps we should be putting more emphasis on encouraging people to think for themselves, and leading them to reflect for themselves.

The angelic role of bringing comfort after temptation suggests that sermons whose truths bring a degree of torment should also bring the certainty of the Lord's love for us, no matter what. As with Mr. Frazier's presentation, this one was enriched by ongoing interaction with an affirmative audience.

Progress in Outreach

The business session following the break began with balloting for two positions on the Membership Committee. The incumbents, John Jin and Derrick Lumsden, were re-elected. With the Revs. Erik Buss, Coleman Glenn, Willard Heinrichs and Brad Heinrichs rotating off the Bishop's Consistory, suggestions were also to be written down for the Bishop to consider as replacements.

Speaking to a pre-circulated report of the Director of General Church Outreach, the Rev. David Lindrooth touched on a few highlights: the near completion of a significant refresh of *Newchurch.org*, which would go live over the summer; Sunroom teams designed to provide video-led support for small groups; the energy going into the small group systems, supported by a doctrinal rationale and their effectiveness; and the mutual benefits of having some of his Outreach staff also employed by the Bryn Athyn congregation in a collaborative effort.

He expanded on his report by sharing other exciting things in Outreach, including the support being offered for webcasting; what support for the Helping Children In Crisis initiative in Kenya has accomplished; the progress in digitizing French translations of the Writings, led by the Rev. Sylvain Agnes; the thrilling opportunities in Cuba for the Spanish-speaking world; and the fact that NewChurch LIVE has grown to a congregation of more than 600 people and has achieved financial self-sufficiency.

He expressed appreciation for the weekly small group meetings that have been started for three clergy groups: the church planting clergy, the western clergy and the European clergy.

Mr. Lindrooth also invited the Rev. Mark Pendleton to talk about the exciting work on Begin a New Life (BNL), a charitable organization which makes the doctrine of repentance accessible to many as a life-changing practice. Mr. Pendleton described his successful application to Google for a grant of \$10,000 of Google advertising per month for the life of the organization, and the exciting response so far, including weekly downloads of the worksheets, as well as interest in hosting a BNL seminar in the United States and other

countries. He challenged others who offer support for spiritual life on the Internet to incorporate as a charitable organization and apply for a Google grant.

The Church International

We next returned to reports about the non-North American churches. The Rev. Malcolm Smith reported on South Africa, since the new Executive Vice President of the South African corporation, the Rev. Mark Allais, was unable to attend the meetings. He touched on each of the three churches in the Johannesburg area, two of which are challenged without the attention of a resident pastor. He also touched on the four churches in the Kwa-Zulu Natal province (where Durban is) and the six pastors serving them.

Highlights included the two theologs in training in the Johannesburg area; the more than 200 students between the pre-primary and primary schools in Westville; the mini-assembly hosted by Alexandra with about 350 in attendance, including curious local people; and the work of Mo Zungu, a layman who has been translating and publishing some of the Writings in Zulu, and getting these up on the Internet as well.

Bishop Keith stood in to report on the Church in Kenya, since the pastors there had been unable to get visas to attend the Council meetings. He spoke of how unbelievably hard the pastor Samson Abuga and his wife work to serve the orphanage at Etoro and how gratifying it is to see the joy among the kids. He also touched on the Kiaware Circle where the Rev. George Magero is pastor, and the promising developments in two other areas where two other ministers are directing their attention.

The Rev. Göran Appelgren said he finds that in Europe the “dragon” is dead: people are not interested in the old doctrines in places like France, Scandinavia, Czech Republic, Ukraine. In Russia and Georgia there is much more of the shadow of the Orthodox Church, while England may have some of the “dragon” there.

In France, the Rev. Alain Nicolier’s focus is on meeting needs, especially through marriage counseling.

In Scandinavia there are small or struggling groups in Oslo, Copenhagen and Jönköping, while Stockholm is thriving.

The General Church in England is in a very good position with the Rev. Alan Cowley in London and the Rev. Howard Thompson in Colchester. The latter, in Mr. Thompson’s own words, is “in transition” and London is building a stronger presence in the local community. Mr. Cowley added a few comments about the unique offering of the British Academy Summer School for awakening in European students a love for the Church that they didn’t have before.

Mr. Appelgren then turned to India where he said “the dragon” is very much alive, and introduced the Rev. Peter Devassy who spoke of how Mr. Appelgren came to India in 2007 to help establish the Church there, the tribulation he himself went through since finding the Church, and how 29 people have since joined the Church. He asked us to hold the people of India in our prayers.

Mike Gladish drew attention to the fact that they had just recently published *The Four Doctrines* in Malayalam, and asked him to read a selection in his own language. This was received with warm applause. They also have *Heaven and Hell* and *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* in their language.

Joint Meeting With the Board

After a lunch in which some members of the General Church Board of Directors participated, we had two sessions of joint meetings of the Council and Board. Bishop Keith said that the main use of the meeting was communication between the clergy and board, with discussion of the strategic plan providing an opportunity for that to happen. He said the strategic plan document was imperfect and evolving. Its objective is not to dictate to the world but to look at the kind of support the central offices can give to the Church in the next three-to-five years. In order for this to be helpful, the central offices need feedback.

The board-clergy communication was to take place in small groups which would discuss questions concerning the relevance, completeness, practicality and priority of the objectives in the strategic plan. Toward the end of the second session we reconvened and a member of each group summarized a few points from their group. Secretaries from each group were to send their notes to the administration.

To close the session Jim Adams, Secondary Schools Managing Director, and Brian Blair, President Elect of Bryn Athyn College, spoke about their schools. Afterwards, hors d'oeuvres were served to clergy, Board and spouses on the Dining Hall patio, to further opportunities for informal communication.

Resisting the Golden Calf

With worship saved for closing the meetings, Saturday's session began with a presentation by the Rev. Kenneth Alden on “A Golden Calf.” Jeroboam, king of Israel, feared that if his people went up to Jerusalem to worship, they would return to serving his rival, the king of Judah. So he said it was too much to go up to Jerusalem and introduced the worship of golden calves. Golden calves stand for natural good, and Jerusalem for the doctrine of truth from the Word. It can seem as though appealing to natural good will keep people's loyalty but it can bring an end to the Church as it did to Israel.

Turning directly to a review of his paper, Mr. Alden spoke of how the people at Mt. Sinai lost faith that Moses would return and asked Aaron to make gods for them. Similarly, doctrine from the Word can seem “lost in the clouds.” The hells lead us to “make gods” out of natural good or external things, while buying into the feeling that doctrine is out of reach. But doctrine of truth from the Word makes good to be spiritual. Worshiping the golden calf means worshiping for the sake of self, rather than for the Lord’s sake.

Priests need to believe that people have affections for spiritual truth that can be awakened and enlightened, and believe that spiritual truths can be understood as easily as natural truths, as the Heavenly Doctrine teaches. They need to assure people that “Moses” will come down from the mountain, and encourage people to go up to “Jerusalem” to worship the Lord. Pre-circulated questions were provided for small group discussion.

The New Church in Togo

After the break, the Rev. Segno-Kodjo Ayi walked us through his paper, “The Lord Wills the Salvation of All.” He said he was happy for this topic to come at the end of our meetings for salvation is the end of creation. He gave a history of the five churches, showing that the Lord has provided for the salvation of people in every generation, no matter how “lost” they have become. He reaches out to them, teaching His Word. He sends out priests as “angels” to gather the elect from the east, the west, the north and the south by that teaching.

The New Jerusalem is also to bring all churches and religions to acknowledge the Lord Jesus Christ as the only God. The people of this church are to have their internal mind affected by love of the Lord and love of the neighbor as the first principles of life.

Turning from the Lord’s end to his experience of the Church in the world, Mr. Ayi spoke of how the Christian Church is dying because of rampant falsities and self-serving preachers. The Heavenly Doctrines are the leaves for healing the nations, and those who are ignorant of the truth but simple and upright in heart who are disposed to listen when taught – the “Gentiles” – may be found everywhere in the world. The Lord wills to save all and draw them to Himself.

We need a new, creative strategy to propagate the doctrines of the New Jerusalem, he said, since current strategies in the General Church have worked so slowly we wonder if they are working at all.

He then described the work being done in Togo to analyze why there has not been as much growth of the Church there in the last 10 years, as was expected. He also translated from French and paraphrased a document submitted to the government outlining their objectives. These included propagating the teaching of the New Church, worshiping the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching in a way that people can freely shun evils as sins and lead a good life, and bringing

people to the Writings so the Lord Himself can lead them.

There was also a 10-point action plan from starting churches and providing New Church education to opening a library and having a center for charitable social work. He concluded by suggesting that the General Church can better bring the healing teachings of the New Jerusalem from the few to the many if we can also be dealing with the social aspect of life through establishing New Church hospitals, charitable organizations, etc., to help with people's physical needs.

Many who spoke in response to the paper appreciated his passion and enthusiasm, and assured him that they believe the Church is growing in Togo, slowly though it may be.

'Come Lord Jesus'

The meetings formally concluded with a worship service led by the Rev. Pearse Frazier. He read from *Revelation 3* on the contrasting churches of Philadelphia and Laodicea. We may identify with the first as a picture of how we have the truth and are good, while the other may describe our tendency to think that we have no need of the truth.

To this church the Lord knocks, offering a proposal for us to open our hearts to the truth, and a heavenly marriage between good and truth within us. We can consent, or exercise *our* power to say "no." *Our* power is the power to choose hell.

For the closing he invited us to respond "Yes, come Lord Jesus" in response to the Lord's proposal, "Yes, I come quickly. Amen." These are the words which precede the familiar benediction which concludes *Revelation*: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen."

After a final lunch, a number of ministers concluded their week by attending the General Church Corporation meeting in the afternoon.



The Rev. Kenneth J. Alden is pastor of the Boynton Beach New Church in Florida and visiting pastor to Bonita Springs. He has served also in Mitchellville, Maryland; the Carmel Church in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada; and the Colchester New Church in England. He and his wife, Kim (Truax), live in Lake Worth, Florida. Contact: pastor@newchurchboyntonbeach.org.

Episcopal Visit to Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso

Rt. Rev. Brian W. Keith

In August Gretchen and I had the pleasure of visiting the developing New Church in the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso. In the Ivory Coast it was wonderful to see how things are advancing – now with 11 ministers and eight congregations. And it was the first trip to Burkina Faso for a bishop, visiting our founding minister in that country, the Rev. Samuel Lompo, for his ordination into the second degree.

We arrived in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, on Thursday, August 6. On Friday morning we were whisked away to meet with the Gesco congregation. I had seen this building in its early stages two years ago – very rough. But now it is a finished building, beautifully decorated. The pastor, the Rev. Evariste Dakouri, greeted us with more than 100 people of all ages. There followed music and speeches. It was a grand celebration of our visit and the progress this congregation has made.

In the afternoon we visited the Abobo Church in another part of Abidjan. The congregation had just moved from a classroom into this building, and they were eager to show us the new structure. We met with the pastor, Moise Doukourou, and members of the congregation. They are still working on the structure, with two men painting the name of the church on the outside wall while we were there.

That evening we were welcomed by the Rev. Roger Koudou and met with his congregation before enjoying a lovely dinner in his home. This congregation meets on the rooftop of Roger’s home but has plans to buy property for a church.

On Saturday morning we visited the Bobby Church, now called the Sinai Congregation, where they were holding a “Celebration of Excellence” for the children of all the New Church congregations in the country. The program included songs, dances and achievement awards for performance in their schools. One special feature was a close order drill the children put on, followed by a contest to see who could respond most quickly and accurately

We are seeing a phenomenon that we have not experienced anywhere else in the world – people without a New Church background seek training there and then start their own independent New Church congregations.

to the orders. Later that day we enjoyed a dinner for the clergy and wives – a social occasion where we could have casual conversations and also honor them all for the work they are doing.

The Bobby Church serves as the center of the church in Ivory Coast. It is the first one constructed there by the Rev. Sylvain Agnes. They gradually acquired the land and put up a building, and have recently made significant changes to the structure – moving out walls for a growing congregation and modifying the office and meeting spaces. And they did it all with local contributions and work.

This is also where the Theological School is housed. All clergy there but Sylvain have been trained in the Ivory Coast, in the four-year program he created

based on the education he received at the Academy. This local training has been startlingly effective. Sylvain and the other instructors there are adamant that the core of the training has to be a rigorous study of the Heavenly Doctrines, and an emphasis of it in all instruction and missionary work.

The school not only has been a means to train many New Church pastors but it has added legitimacy to the church there. In fact, we are seeing a phenomenon that we have not experienced anywhere else in the world – people without a New Church background seek training there and then start their own independent New Church congregations.

Interestingly, two men who were ordained two years ago expecting to start independent congregations have asked to formally join the General Church, and I ordained them into the second degree on this visit. One of them, Gedeon Gnagne, has a father who is a minister with three churches. He is talking about retiring and has approached Sylvain about merging with the General Church.

Apparently this is not uncommon there: independent ministers found congregations and then, after time, look to affiliate with a recognized church. The Methodist Church in the Ivory Coast has seen about 50% of its growth due to this. While we don't know where this might lead, Sylvain will be exploring this with him.

On Sunday we, along with several General Church congregations, gathered at our Cite Verde (Garden City) Church. When I first saw this land several years ago and participated in a land dedication ceremony with the local

chief, it seemed like remote grass land with nothing nearby. Now Abidjan has expanded and there are many homes and businesses around. The church was filled with well over 200 people.

The joyful service was the usual three-hour celebration. The choir marched us in and sang many pieces as the congregation sang and danced. I ordained three men into the second degree, preached, and recognized five candidates for the priesthood. There was also an occasion for speeches of welcome and thanks, during which it was rewarding to praise the strides they had made and assure them of our oneness in dedication to the New Church.

As the choir led us out at the end of the service, we moved to a ceremony of a stone laying. I was given a trowel and cement (while in my robes!) to set in a foundation stone for a school they are planning on building on that site. They have been moving carefully, not wanting to rush ahead without a clear plan for a self-sustaining school. They are still a couple of years away from classes beginning, but I'm sure it will happen.

On Monday morning I met with the current Theological School students at the Bobby Church and taught them various facets of being a pastor – their responsibilities to the Lord and to the people. There was a lively give and take as we covered many topics. Also Gretchen had been asked to meet with the ministers' wives. They had a very productive session, considering what is involved in being married to a minister and how to help the church grow there, with requests for much more time set aside for this in the future.

In the afternoon I met with the clergy. We went over in detail what is happening there and addressed a number of issues that would help them in their work. They face many challenges, often due to their growth. They have high aspirations and work very hard to accomplish them. But there are never enough resources. It is amazing what they accomplish with so little. They make great sacrifices and we are fortunate to be able to help them in building the Lord's New Church.

Tuesday was more casual, with some touring. The Rev. Aime Dayoro, one of the new second-degree ministers and his wife, took us into the country to visit with her parents. He was a retired minister; in fact, he had been the president of the Methodist Church in all of Ivory Coast. We compared notes on such leadership positions.

When I asked him what he enjoyed about being president, he said with emphasis, "practicalities and the truth!" We returned to Abidjan for an extended potluck dinner with all the clergy and spouses at Sylvain and Sylvie's home. Even without speaking French, it was delightful to see the camaraderie, caring and dedication these people have in the service of the Lord.

Burkina Faso

On Wednesday we, including Sylvain, flew to Burkina Faso. Sylvain, in addition to providing supervision for the developing church in the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, is fluent in English. Samuel is still learning, so having Sylvain to translate was essential.

Like the Ivory Coast, Burkina Faso is made up of numerous tribal groups who all share the French language. Being further north it is not as lush as the Ivory Coast, being somewhat drier and hotter, although they grow crops on all free land around the city. Samuel has started the church in the capital city of Ouagadougou (pronounced Wa-ge-du-gu).

Like most other West African cities it is not built *up* with skyscrapers, but *outwards*. Most of the key roads are paved, unlike the secondary dirt roads, but everyone travels at very moderate speeds due to potholes and the hundreds of motor scooters zooming in and out.

Samuel was introduced to the New Church by a woman who had joined the Bobby Church in the Ivory Coast and later returned to her native Burkina Faso. She had lived by the church, joined the congregation, and fully embraced the Heavenly Doctrines. Samuel was so taken with these ideas that he moved to the Ivory Coast for four years to be trained as a New Church minister. There, he married a wonderful Ivorian woman, Stephanie, and returned to Burkina Faso to found the New Church there. They have a lovely little daughter now.

In his two years there Samuel has accomplished much. He has gathered a core group of 20 people. Many others are interested and attending services and classes. He has regular classes established in three separate locations around the city. Because of the lack of literature on the New Church in French he has written and published a missionary book with the essential doctrines, including many quotes from the Writings.

Its impressive cover is a picture of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral with an insert of the New Church logo. Such connection to the center of the General Church is highly valued and respected there. And most impressively, Samuel, with his own funds, has recently purchased land on which to build a church. (They currently meet for worship in the paved courtyard in front of the house Samuel rents.)

Thursday was devoted to meeting various people associated with the church, and then having a class and dinner with one of his groups. The class was on charity and degrees of the neighbor, with a spirited give-and-take afterwards.

On Friday we visited the land Samuel has purchased. It is situated in a developing area on a main road on the outskirts of the city. Several acres large, it can easily hold a church and a manse with plenty of room left over for a gathering space or another building. We held a brief ceremony, which involved

building a small wall of cinder block, and writing on top in the mortar, “August 14, 2015.” This will become a marker for the church.

Later in the day we traveled to another home for a class with one of Samuel’s other groups toward the east of the city. It also was on the subject of charity and the degrees of the neighbor. It was given to about 20 people in someone’s yard, which was rather muddy due to recent rains. After a shared dinner we returned home for the night.

On Saturday I conducted baptisms of four adults. There were a few others who might have been baptized, but Samuel said they had not yet completed the course of study in the New Church doctrines to fully prepare them. Another church kindly

loaned us the use of an outdoor baptismal pool. The baptisms were performed by total immersion, which is the tradition there.

Later we joined a class with married couples and discussed conjugal love. It was exciting to see how well they have grasped the basics. It was also instructive to see that they wrestle with exactly the same issues in their relationships as everyone else – how to spend money, the balance of work and family, communication and listening, to mention but a few. It was heartening to see them seeking direction from the Heavenly Doctrines to support and strengthen their marriages.

Sunday was a grand celebration. Again, the church service lasted about three hours. It was filled with music from an electronic keyboard, soloists and a choir, some spontaneous dancing, Samuel’s ordination into the second degree, a sermon, and greetings for all the many visitors present. (A slight omission of not publicly recognizing the local chief led us to visit with him in the afternoon on his porch. He is a delightful man, a devout Catholic, and very supportive of another church coming to the area.)

On Monday, after some creative repacking necessitated by a number of unexpected gifts, we toured the city and had lunch with a local pastor, the Rev. Babou Bamouni. He has befriended Samuel and helped him get the legal authorization for the church there. He also got a local religious television station to film the Sunday service and interview Samuel. It was aired the following week.

It is amazing to see the great strides they are making in both countries. The energy they devote to spreading the New Church and how conscientious they are about teaching the Heavenly Doctrines is inspiring.

Mr. Bamouni leads several churches and has a religious school. He was exceedingly friendly, highly entertaining and filled with useful information about the culture and people of Burkina Faso. We then headed for the airport and our extended trip home.

As usual, it was a stimulating and full trip. It is amazing to see the great strides they are making in both countries. The energy they devote to spreading the New Church and how conscientious they are about teaching the Heavenly Doctrines is inspiring.

Sylvain's leadership is tremendous – building from the ground up in a conscientious way. It is hard to describe how significant it is for them to feel part of a larger whole. Much fanfare was made of the fact that the Executive Bishop was making a visit. Symbolically, this included them in the General Church and affirmed their dedication to the New Church.

While we can never predict how things might develop in the future, if the past is any indication then we can expect continued growth in all aspects of the Church there.

(See photos by Gretchen Keith on pages 532 and 533.)

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

DIVINE

By this term is meant in the Writings the Infinite and Eternal which is called in the Word “Jehovah” and “the Father”; the Divine love and wisdom itself which is the esse of good and truth. Thus it is the source from which all things are. The Divine with man is love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor.

The term Divine occurs in many compound expressions, but always with reference to the Divine in the Lord or to what is from Him, namely, the good and truth of the rational and the natural. An important compound which may be specially noted is “Divine proceeding,” which means Divine truth within which is Divine good flowing from Divine love, as light within which is heat proceeding from the fire of the sun. The Lord's Divine is distinguished into good and truth because these can be received separately by men. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5134, 2023, 4696, 3704; *Divine Providence* 48,49; *Heaven and Hell* 7.)

The Love Languages of the Lord

Caira Bevan Bongers

(Note: This was a term paper written for the Master of Arts in Religious Studies program of Bryn Athyn College. Caira received her master's degree – and a Theta Alpha Award – at the College commencement on May 30, 2015.)

The Lord commands, as is written in *Matthew*, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment.” (*Matthew 22:37-38*)

Loving the Lord with our whole being is the most vital thing we can do, and is what makes for a spiritual life. “Spiritual life consists in loving God above all things and loving one’s neighbor as oneself.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 8549) In fact, the word “love” means love to the Lord, as love when regarding the neighbor is actually called “charity.” (*Ibid.* 2023) But *how* do we love the Lord? How is that love best expressed? Does the Lord have a “love language”?

The concept of love languages was developed and popularized by Dr. Gary Chapman in his book, *The 5 Love Languages*. The premise is that people communicate love or appreciation in varied ways, which can be problematic if the person expressing love is using a different means of conveying it than the receiving person appreciates. Dr. Chapman breaks the love language into five categories:

- Words of Affirmation
- Gifts
- Quality Time
- Touch
- Acts of Service

Different people express love using a variety of these approaches. Some corporations express appreciation to their employees through bonuses; some grandparents like to cuddle their grandchildren; nonprofits might use words of appreciation for their employees when budgets are tight; friends sometime

like to spend time over coffee; and spouses might pick up extra jobs around the house for each other.¹

Issues can arise when the person expressing love or appreciation is using a different method than the one preferred by the receiver. If a husband brings his wife flowers but she's really hoping for help with the dishes, she could have a difficult time recognizing the love he is expressing to her. Being clued in to what type of expression feels most pertinent to the receiver facilitates healthy relationships.

Figuring out which of these means of expressing love to the Lord is most valued by Him will allow for a closer relationship with Him, and consequently more joy and peace for us.

1. Words of Affirmation

Words of affirmation are words of recognition, appreciation, gratitude and encouragement that we might say out loud or write to someone to express our affection. It can be as simple as a sincere "I love you," or it can be verbally commending someone on the quality of his or her work.

The Lord does not need affirmation and recognition for His own sake, nor does He require our words to be said aloud. It is crucial for our personal, spiritual well-being, to acknowledge the Lord as the one true God. In fact, the Writings say that acknowledging the Lord is the primary thing a person needs to do to further his or her spiritual life. "The very first thing a person needs to do is to acknowledge that the Lord is the Savior of the world; for unless he acknowledges this no one can receive any truth or good at all from heaven, or therefore receive faith from there." (*Arcana Coelestia* 10083)

Accepting the Lord as the one and only God is also the most essential component of worship, along with recognizing that faith and love emanate from His Divine Human. (*Ibid.* 7550) Without this recognition of the Lord, reformation and regeneration would not be possible. (*Divine Providence* 91) Likewise, no conjunction with the Lord would be possible. (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 283) Since the Lord desires conjunction with us above all else (*Divine Providence* 27), it follows that acknowledgement of Him is the very first step toward being in a state of love to the Lord.

In order to acknowledge Him in a way that leads to conjunction, we must have a correct idea of Him. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 13; *Apocalypse Revealed* 839.6) We cannot truly love what we do not know. The more we understand and know the Lord, the more closely we can love Him. We must recognize that

1 While the original book regarding The 5 Love Languages was directed at married couples, this generality applies to a variety of relationships beyond marriage, with the exception of touch being modified to be appropriate for that specific type of relationship.

He is one God (*True Christian Religion* 24), that He is human (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 11), and that all love, wisdom and use emanate from Him alone.

Those who were not raised in the Church, and are not taught anything about the Lord while on this earth, are not judged for this. When they arrive in the spiritual world they will be taught about the Lord by angels so that they can have an opportunity to know Him and acknowledge Him as well and thus love Him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10205, 3704.6)

Beyond recognizing the Lord as the one true God, we can express words of affirmation to Him through thanks and praise. Giving thanks to the Lord signifies acknowledging that everything comes from Him. (*Apocalypse Explained* 686, *Apocalypse Revealed* 522)

2. Gifts

Gifts are thought of as tangible symbols of love. While gifts are frequently physical tokens of appreciation, we can give of ourselves – our time, our talents or our resources.

In a New Testament story Jesus saw affluent people placing large contributions into the offertory in the temple, and also a poor woman who put in two copper coins. Jesus explains to His disciples that this woman's gift is larger than the donations of the wealthy, because she gave all that she had. (*Mark* 12:41-44; *Luke* 21:1-4) Are we asked to give all that we have to the Lord?

Spiritual poverty, in essence, is recognizing that all goodness and truth come from the Lord alone: "To be spiritually poor, and yet to be rich, is to acknowledge in heart that one has no knowledge nor understanding nor wisdom from himself, but that he knows, understands, and is wise wholly from the Lord." (*Apocalypse Explained* 118)

Reminding ourselves that the goodness in our lives and the truth that we know are not our own, and in fact belong to the Lord, is what is being asked of us here. We should understand that we are spiritually poor because we own nothing good of our own. In understanding this we can become wiser. Choosing to recognize our spiritual poverty opens the person's mind toward heaven, allowing him or her to progress to a higher state of innocence, wisdom and love to the Lord. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10227:2)

How can we give anything to the Lord when He already *is* everything that is good and true? The Lord is not the receiver of gifts, as He actually is the creator of all gifts. He wishes for us to give Him gifts as though they were ours to give so that we can remember their true source:

Gifts and presents were said to be made to Jehovah, though Jehovah, that is, the Lord, is not the receiver of gifts or presents, but the giver of them, freely to everyone. Even so, His will is that they should come from a person as though they did so from that person himself, provided the person acknowledges that they do

not actually come from him but from the Lord. . . . The things that are called gifts and presents made to the Lord by a person are essentially gifts and presents made to a person by the Lord, and that they are called gifts and presents on account of what they appear to be. All who are wise at heart recognize this appearance. (*Arcana Coelestia* 9938)

Members of the earlier churches used sacrifice as a means of giving back to the Lord. That ritual is no longer expected of us. Choosing to give financially to a church organization (or any organization that appears to be committed to doing the Lord's work) is a good option for an external act that serves as a reminder to us to give back what is His.

3. Quality Time

Spending quality time requires that we give that person our undivided attention. Just as "words of affirmation" refer to words that we say to one another, quality time has to do with listening to each other. (*Chapman* 65) This blend of both talking and hearing is very useful in fostering healthy relationships.

Spending quality time with the Lord could be regarded as spending time in external forms of worship: formally worshiping the Lord, attending church, listening to sermons, spending time in prayer and meditation, and reading the Word. (*Canons* 174) However, worship can be much more than an external act. A true state of worship of the Lord is a constant state of conjunction with Him by means of love and charity, containing acknowledgement of Him, faith in Him, and love to Him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10205) It is highly recommended,

nonetheless, that while we are still in the natural world we participate in external worship as it calls our attention back to the Lord and can serve to instruct us about Him. (*Ibid.* 1618, 1175) In fact, # 7038 states that external forms of worship are "necessary."

Observing the Sabbath can be a means of creating quality time with the Lord. The command to observe the Sabbath as a holy day of solemn rest (*Exodus* 16:23) is no longer required as originally directed. Just as true worship is a constant state of thinking about the Lord, so is the Sabbath. "Anyone in whom the life of love, that is, in whom charity is present keeps the Sabbath holy since nothing delights him more than worshipping the Lord and declaring His glory day by day." (*Arcana Coelestia* 1798:3; see also 10356) While the

A true state of worship of the Lord is a constant state of conjunction with Him by means of love and charity, containing acknowledgement of Him, faith in Him and love to Him.

Sabbath was formerly ordered as a day free from labor, with the original penalty being to be put to death, now it is to be used as a day of instruction, rest, meditation and useful service to the neighbor. (*True Christian Religion* 301)

Prayer is communication with the Lord, and spending time in conscious prayer is another way of giving our time to the Lord. Praying is talking to the Lord with an inner perspective of what is being prayed for, so that the person's mind is focused on spiritual and heavenly things. The Lord responds to prayer with influx into the mind, opening our minds toward Him and enlightening us. (*Arcana Coelestia* 2535) Emanuel Swedenborg personally experienced this:

As often as I have recited the Lord's Prayer I have had the plain feeling of being raised toward the Lord, as though I was being hauled up. At these times my ideas were open and communication with some communities in heaven was consequently established. (*Ibid.* 6476)

Even though a person can also be in a perpetual state of prayer with the Lord, setting aside time to focus on prayer is recommended (*Ibid.* 1618), as many will have a hard time attaining that state of perpetual prayer while in this world.

4. Touch

While touch is a very powerful love language within the marriage relationship, the ability to use touch to express affection has to fall within appropriate boundaries, particularly in professional relationships.

While the Lord was alive on earth, He touched little children (*Matthew* 19:13-15), and healed through touch. (*Luke* 8:45) It is difficult to imagine literally touching the Lord today. Touch implies interaction with a physical body, which the Lord does not have (*True Christian Religion* 793), so we must consider the spiritual equivalent for touch. Touch corresponds to receiving the Divine of the Lord through communication and reception (*Arcana Coelestia* 10130), which is indeed possible today. Opening ourselves to influx from Him is possible by taking what we have learned and putting it into action. (*Ibid.* 8439).

As a representative act, we can partake of the sacrament of the Holy Supper, which, while an external practice, has as its internal reality the act of joining us to heaven (*Ibid.* 4211), and is therefore an act of conjunction in ultimates. During Holy Supper we are in the Lord and the Lord is in us if we approach Holy Supper worthily. (*True Christian Religion* 725)

To be worthy the person must be in a state of the good of love to the Lord and of faith in Him. (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 213) The bread, which represents the Lord's body, corresponds with the good of love from the Lord to the whole of the human race and with our love to the Lord, which

yields conjunction with Him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 3464, 5120:5; *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 212) Because of this, the Holy Supper is said to be “the holiest act of worship.” (*Ibid.* 210)

5. Service

While all of the above expressions of love to the Lord have their merit, the greatest of all expressions of love to Him are acts of useful service. In the memorable relation in which new spirits are allowed to experience the results of their mistaken ideas of what leads to heavenly joy, some spirits are permitted to experience their particular vision of heaven, which consisted of nothing but prayers, worship and unending Sabbath. When the spirits quickly became bored with such activities, angels talked to the priests ministering to them, saying:

From heaven we have seen you with your flock and how you feed them. You feed them to insanity! You do not know what is meant by glorifying God. It means to bring forth the fruits of love, that is, to perform the work of one's occupation faithfully, honestly and diligently. For this is the effect of love of God and love of the neighbor, and it is what binds society together and makes its goodness. It is by this that God is glorified, and afterwards by worship at prescribed times.
(*Conjugal Love* 9)

This concept is further confirmed in *Heaven and Hell* 222, which says: “The essential divine worship in the heavens does not consist of going to church regularly and listening to sermons but of a life of love, thoughtfulness and faith in keeping with doctrine. The sermons in church serve only as means of instruction in how to live.”

External worship also has its use, but expressing love to the Lord is not a Sunday-only act; it is how we choose to live every day that confirms our love for Him. *Arcana Coelestia* 7038, which proclaims external worship as “necessary,” clarifies this claim with the requirement that the person also engage in acts of useful service. Without service external worship is a mere shell.

True worship to the Lord is clearly more than a simple external activity, and worship is also neither mere belief nor mere feelings of love. Rather, worship is living a life in accord with the Lord's commandments. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10645:2) The Lord is His commandments and living according to them is following Him. (*Apocalypse Revealed* 556)

External worship also has its use but expressing love to the Lord is not a Sunday-only act; it is how we choose to live every day that confirms our love for Him.

If we love the Lord then we love His commandments and thus we would naturally work to follow His commandments. This is made abundantly clear in *John*, 14:21: “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me.”

Many of the Ten Commandments do not tell us what to do, but rather focus on what not to do. Avoiding evil, because it is against the Lord, is the act of loving Him.

Loving the Lord above all is simply not doing violence to the Word because the Lord is in the Word, not doing violence to the holy practices of the church because the Lord is in the holy practices of the church, and not doing violence to any soul whatever, because everyone’s soul is in the hand of the Lord. When we abstain from these evils as appalling sins we are loving the Lord above all; but only people who love their neighbor as themselves can do so because the two kinds of love are essentially one. (*Divine Providence* 94)

By actively abstaining from evil, and to the extent that we do so, the Lord can allow our lives to be filled with goodness. Loving the Lord is as simple as ceasing to do evil because it is against Him and learning to do good because it is from Him. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 237) Acts of service, or living our lives in accordance with His commandments, are not optional means of expressing love to the Lord. Not following His commandments constitutes not loving Him. (*Arcana Coelestia* 10578:3)

That love to the Lord is useful service is further confirmed in *Apocalypse Revealed* 353, which states: “Mutual love descends directly from love toward the Lord, since the Lord’s love is to perform useful services to the community and to each society in the community, and He does these through the agency of people who possess a love for Him.”

Actions and States

Some of the means of expressing love to the Lord are described by the Heavenly Doctrines as states rather than actions, such as being in a state of acknowledging Him as the one true God, constantly recognizing that all goodness and truth are from Him, and being in states of continual prayer and worship. These states are given to us by the Lord and are not something that can be independently attained by our own volition.

However, we are tasked with developing the appropriate mentality that invites these states. The Lord cannot provide us with these states without our invitation or our freedom would be affected. Performing acts of service by abstaining from evil, learning to do good, and actively living according to His commandments are actions that we can do as if of ourselves.

Thus we need to participate willingly in these externals of worship and useful service, so as to allow the Lord to provide us with states of

acknowledgement and worship. Without this effort all other forms of worship would be mere lip service to Him and thus not worship at all. All worship would indeed be hollow if we were not paying attention to following Him in our daily lives.

The Lord's favorite love language is clearly useful service. Through this we are living according to His commandments, which is true acknowledgement of Him.

Conclusion

The concept of love languages brings attention to the differences in how individuals perceive love that is being expressed toward another, and this concept applies to the Lord as well. While expressing words of affirmation in the form of acknowledging His divinity is a necessary part of our process of building a relationship with Him this is not His preferred love language.

The languages of gifts and quality time can represent engaging in external worship with the eventual development of a state of worship, but this external worship is hollow without use. Touch, which is opening up to His influx, also fosters our relationship to Him but again this is not His most preferred love language. The Lord's favorite love language is clearly useful service. Through this we are living according to His commandments, which is true acknowledgement of Him.

As is written in *True Christian Religion* 522, "He who lives well and believes rightly is saved by Him." Focusing on acknowledging Him and living a life according to His commandments will allow us to grow closer to the Lord, and we eventually then attain, through the Lord's doing, the constant states of worship. The development of this relationship with the Lord is beautifully and succinctly described here:

But, my friend, abstain from evil, and do what is good, and believe in the Lord with your whole heart and your whole soul; and the Lord will love you and give you love for what you do and faith in what you believe. Then you will do what is good

because of love and you will believe because you have faith, which is confidence. And if you persevere like this, a reciprocal partnership [with the Lord] will develop and become permanent. This is salvation itself and eternal life. (*True Christian Religion* 484)

If we do this, we can be in a state of love to the Lord.



Caira Bevan Bongers lives with her husband Garth and family in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: caira.bongers@brynathyn.edu

OUR NEW CHURCH VOCABULARY

Part of a continuing series developed by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, 1961-1966.

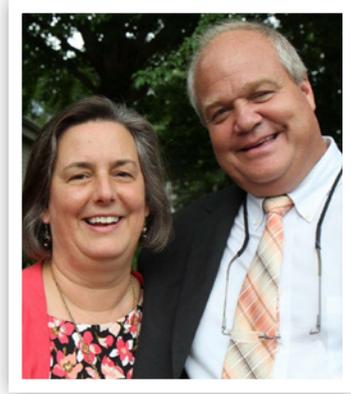
DIVINE ENDOWMENT

The terms which make up our New Church vocabulary are not taken directly from the Writings. A few have been coined, quite legitimately, to express concepts seen in the Writings, and “Divine endowment” is an example of this type. It was used by Bishop George de Charms in *The Growth of the Mind* to express a conclusion drawn from a number of teachings in the Writings: to describe an endowment received from the Lord by every human soul at its creation by virtue of which man is formed into the image and likeness of God, and by virtue of which that image and likeness is, in its particular formation, individual to him in order that it may be adapted to a specific use.

In other words, the Divine endowment is conceived as that which differentiates human souls. It is the primary cause of individuality and the third factor in determining heredity – the individual life-force derived by influx from the Divine which causes the soul to build the body in adaptation to a particular use, for which use the man was created.

The fact that the term is not found in the Writings does not detract from it in any way; but it is useful for us to know that, together with other terms of this class, it is made up and is not a term of the Writings themselves, although it expresses something found in them. (See *The Growth of the Mind*, pp 40-45, 60, 73f, 84; *Revised Edition*, pp 39-45, 60, 74f, 85.)

The Rev. Calvin A. Odhner



The Rev. Calvin and Maggie Odhner

*He Always Knew He Would Be a Minister;
It Just Took a Roundabout Way to Get There*

Connect the dots, including:

- Using a chainsaw to save for an engagement ring
- Working on farms and construction crews
- Starting his own electric company
- Selling caskets and medical equipment
- Getting a degree in Clinical and Counseling Psychology
- Teaching Psychology at Bryn Athyn College
- Starting his own therapy practice
- Marrying his high school sweetheart
- Then finally winding up in Theological School

and you come up with a portrait of the Rev. Calvin A. Odhner.

Calvin's winding course – which has led him to be pastor of the Morning Star Chapel in Atlanta, Georgia, with wife Maggie (van Zyverden) and five children – started early in life.

He was born in Monroeville, just outside of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in

1959 and his family soon moved to Bryn Athyn for his first three grades in the Bryn Athyn Elementary School. “This was a wonderful experience, having Wren Doering in second grade and Claudia Racik Gladish in third grade as my teachers. But then we moved to Connecticut and Ohio. There were years of fishing in the creeks and hiking in the fields of Ohio as I prepared to go to high school at the Academy.

“Every ‘girlfriend’ in Ohio knew not to get too close to Calvin Odhner because he’s leaving for some strange school far away in junior year – far enough away never to be seen again. And they were right. Bryn Athyn took me in and I felt it was my new home, even though my parents still lived in Ohio.

“The year before I came to school in Bryn Athyn there was a Church Assembly. It was then I laid eyes on Maggie van Zyverden at Cairncrest. I was utterly and completely overcome with an unexplainable love for her that can only be described as love at first sight!”

Calvin says, “I have always been a bit of a self-starter so it’s not surprising that while in high school I put an ad in the *Bryn Athyn Post*: ‘Have chainsaw, will travel.’ That was the beginning of Odhner Tree Company, which kept me busy on weekends for the next two years and allowed me to save \$848 for an engagement ring for Maggie.

“This was also the beginning of many different jobs as I was trying to figure out what I should do to make money to raise a family. Although I always knew I would be a minister I thought that would have to wait since I needed a career path to take care of my family.”

He worked on the Tanner and Jungé Farms, Davey Tree Company, a construction crew (for Maggie’s father, van Zyverden Construction), Acme Engineering (building hydroelectric gates), H&S Electric, camp counselor at Camp Westmont in upstate New York, Jungé Construction, and finally his own company, Odhner Electric, for six years.

Then he worked in sales for 15 years, selling all kinds of things, including caskets for the Elders, forklifts and medical equipment. He also worked for Sterilic Inc. during this time selling medical waste contracts to hospitals.

In the midst of all this, he graduated from the Academy Boys School, received an AA degree from Bryn Athyn College and earned a bachelor’s degree in Agricultural Mechanization at The Pennsylvania State University.

He returned to school to get a degree in Clinical and Counseling Psychology from Chestnut Hill College, with a specialty in Marriage and Family Therapy (MFT) in 2005. Then he taught Psychology at Bryn Athyn College as an adjunct professor for six years. And the learning continues. Now he is in the doctoral program at Capella University.

He started his own therapy practice in 2005, operating Balance Point Counseling from his home in Kempton, Pennsylvania, until 2008. That is

when he finally entered Theological School.

He says “this had been working hard in the back of my brain ever since I started to teach at the College, and one day, instead of going down the stairs at Pendleton Hall, I went as if in a dream up the stairs into Dean Andy Dibb’s office.”

He told Andy, “I’m here to tell you that I want to go to Theological School in a couple of years. I’m just telling you in advance.”

“What happened next was sort of a dream. First Andy said, ‘We don’t want you in a few years; we want you now! And we have a special program you may be interested in. You will be with seven or eight other second-career theologs. How does that sound?’

“Well,” I said, “I need to talk to my wife.”

“Naturally Maggie said what any sane wife would: ‘No.’ But she knew deep down inside that this is where I was always going to end up anyway and it was a hopeless battle. Less than six months later I was commuting from Kempton to Bryn Athyn for Theological School.

“I remember crying quite a bit during my first year. The doctrines were so powerful and the truths so beautiful I would just break down into tears. The other students were very patient and compassionate with me, waiting for me to recover before moving on. It was an extremely rigorous program and having just been in a Master’s Program at Chestnut Hill this felt every bit like a doctoral program, in quality and workload.

“Classes were excellent, discussions were deep and meaningful, and the submersion into the doctrines was overwhelming. There is so much there it was really impossible to get an overview or even begin to touch on every subject. Theological School is merely a ‘gateway drug’ to a lifetime of studying these life-giving truths. The way the doctrines are written it’s hard to grasp everything there is on one subject, as each subject seems to be revisited in different numbers depending on the book of the Heavenly Doctrines you are studying.

“When I was younger and raising a family, Maggie was the one who would wake up Sunday morning and say, ‘We are going to church.’ I was working, raising a family, and despised this interference with my short weekend time. Yet we would always comply. I totally understand why people don’t go to church, but now I understand the great importance of going!

“Now in my fifth year (as a pastor) I really get that if people would read the Heavenly Doctrines, not just one or two numbers at a time and then put them down, but really read for two and three hours at a time, they would begin to love these books and see that they are truly the Word of God speaking to us.

“I remember writing a sermon and right in the middle of my studying I realized that so many things I had been reading had sort of collided all at once,

making what was written on these pages the irrefutable truth! I immediately had a crisis of conscience, realizing that, Oh no, not only is this true, heaven and hell are real, and the Word has an internal sense, but I am so far from what these books are telling me to be like that I am in real trouble!

“That is when I tried to catch up what I was preaching with how I was living. Turns out this is going to take a lifetime of work but just really knowing the path to take has saved my marriage and made me someone worth being with. Looking back I don’t know why Maggie stayed, but looking forward we are now having a lot of fun together.”

Backing up a bit, Calvin says he always had known he would be a minister since he was the spiritual counselor at Camp Blairhaven in 1980. He was 20 years old, reading the *Dole Notes* to 11- and 12-year-olds “who were actually listening intently. I can’t describe the delight I got from sharing the spiritual messages but it was so intense. I couldn’t imagine getting paid to do this.

“Having a great grandfather as a bishop (Bishop Acton), a grandfather who was a minister, and then great uncles Elmo Acton and Wynne Acton, plus minister cousins like Alfred Acton II, I feel like it must be in the blood! It’s a feeling that has always been with me, and it is a great feeling to be a servant of the Lord.”

That heredity no doubt helped to influence his eventual career path, but there was also a great love “for the intellectual elements of the Writings. Only later have I come to love the whole spiritual structure of the spiritual world and everything related to that world.”

Asked about key experiences in Theological School that affected how he approaches the ministry, he said he would prefer to reframe the question to key experiences afterward “because while you are in Theological School you are basically shell-shocked. There is so much coming at you and you have to face your fears of speaking in front of people.

“However, I can relate one incident that stands out in my mind. We were about to give morning worship to 325 children and teachers at the Bryn Athyn Elementary School. This would be the biggest crowd we had been allowed to speak to and the Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh was our instructor. ‘All you have to do is go up there, open the Word, close it, and come down,’ he said in his cool tone of confidence. ‘If you say anything, that’s icing on the cake.’ Do you know that one of us forgot to close the Word and one forgot to open it! It looks easy but it is very deceptive – even with a forgiving audience like the elementary school.”

After his ordination in 2011, Calvin was assigned to Toronto “and had an excellent experience at the Olivet New Church and School. I was a teacher, counselor, minister and friend to so many people that it was not hard for Maggie to see that we had stepped into something we both love – people!

“It is a balance between working with others and studying the doctrines – a constant tension between both. You are placed in every imaginable preaching situation – in small homes, large homes, coffee shops, old warehouses, and sometimes just leaning over the hood of a car.

“People are so interesting and they want to make their lives better and depend on you to provide them with some spiritual food that they can digest or take home with them. It is an awesome responsibility and an honor. The other part is that you better have something they can use. You better have studied and be able to relate doctrine that is not in Swedenborg-speak. Nothing is more fun than giving a class and introducing concepts about heaven and hell that make it real and interesting!”

When they got to Atlanta “I was told to ‘take it easy, get to know them, and don’t do any radical changes right away!’ They knew what I was like! Best advice I ever got! When you say you are the pastor of Atlanta that means you are the pastor of a group of people who all have desires, wants and needs. It is the people who make the church, so anything you do better work for more than half of the people and be doctrinally sound. If you alienate people then you can’t be their pastor. That sounds obvious but it took me a while to figure that out.

He says he “feels good about what we have accomplished so far in Atlanta but I know we have a long way to go before we even begin to put a dent in growing our church. It seems that making a church work has hidden steps that need to be met before you can go to the next step.

“Some are more obvious than others – like you have to be making enough money to keep the lights on and the lawn mowed. If you try to start a strategic plan before the basics are met it doesn’t work. I’m still discovering the ‘hidden steps’ but I am very hopeful and feel positive about our future here in Atlanta, and for the future of the New Church. Besides, the Lord said this will be the church of the future and He hasn’t been wrong yet!”



The Odhner children, left to right: Kale, Asher, Kelsie, Briggs, Brittany

Among personal interests, Calvin says a transformative experience was when he and Maggie went to Italy for two weeks. “It was really hard to come home!” They hope to travel more as the years go by. He loves his guitar and saltwater coral tanks, and recently has become “a closet Bonsai grower.” *The Five Love Languages* by Gary Chapman still stands out as one of his favorites. And he says the Matrix series “should

be seen by every man who wants to wake up to spiritual reality.”

He says people might be surprised to learn that he and Maggie have an “underground ministry” running our own bed-and-breakfast through Air B&B.

Calvin and Maggie have been married 33 years and have five children: Brittany, 30, Briggs, 28, Kelsie, 26, Kale, 23, and Asher, 19. Asher just graduated from the Academy Boys School in June, where Calvin and Maggie gave the commencement address together. (See *New Church Life*, July-August 2015, page 384.)

Calvin’s favorite passage from the Writings is the familiar *Arcana Coelestia* 8455: “. . . for peace has in it confidence in the Lord, that He directs all things, and provides all things, and that He leads to a good end.”

To contact Calvin Odhner: codhner@gmail.com

We Are All Born Blind

A Sermon by the Rev. Calvin A. Odhner

Lessons: John 9:1-15; Arcana Coelestia 6669

One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see. (John 9:25)

Anybody here have an old sports injury? Injured when you were younger and feeling it now? You may have said, “Oh, it will get better on its own.” But what really happens? It hurts every day until we get it fixed! Right?

How about strained relationships? What happens when we ignore them? Do they just get better?

Just imagine if most of your thoughts are not healthy right now and 5 or 10 years go by. Is this habit going to be more troubling later – even harder to deal with? You bet it is!

If we choose not to improve ourselves we don’t really stay static, do we? We spiral down. I call it the “hell factor.” If we give the hells an inch they take a mile – unless you choose, unless you decide to do something to change that.

This is especially true of our spiritual life. When we keep our mind in darkness regarding spiritual things we stay blind. We remain in a state of ignorance as to the value of the Lord and His Word. This kind of blindness makes us unable to see the things of heaven. If we die with this type of blindness it can never be cured.

This morning we are learning about a blind man who was cured of this problem by the Lord. Many who lived in the world at the time of the Lord’s coming suffered from spiritual blindness. They could see perfectly the things of the natural world, and they thought they were very learned and wise. Yet they were spiritually blind with their false ideas, and the Lord knew that when they came into the other world they would be unable to see the things of heaven.

It was because they had forsaken Jehovah. They had rejected His Word, and no longer knew the God who is to be loved and obeyed.

So how can we prevent this from happening in our lives? How can we make sure we don’t have spiritual apathy? That we just let things go so long that we can never recover?

Our story opens with the Lord coming out of the temple during the “feast of the tabernacles” in Jerusalem. He and His disciples pass by a blind man.

As always, the Word is a spiritual road map, describing the spiritual paths we can take. So the “feast of the tabernacles” symbolizes a good state in us – a time when we are open to the Lord, where good is being formed in our mind.

This state comes to those who are moved by an affection and an obedience to the Word. It is when we first begin to open our mind to the idea that a spiritual sphere and spiritual ideas can help us in our life even though we are blind as to how. We then stand, as to our spirit, in a place where the “Lord will pass by.”

Now as Jesus passed by, He saw a man who was blind from birth . . .

We all begin this life spiritually blind, in a state of ignorance from birth, just like this gentile, who had never been able to see. We all know there are limitations to everyone’s mental sight. For instance, no man will ever know what it is like to view life through feminine eyes – thank goodness!

The skilled and talented artist views life quite differently from others. The state of marriage opens the eyes to see life in an entirely different way than it is seen in the unmarried state. The optimist and the pessimist, by definition, view life in opposite ways. But the blindness spoken of in the *Gospel of John* refers to an entirely different kind of vision.

The Lord was speaking of a new light that comes only from heaven. He came on earth to teach people of the wonders of another world, one beyond vision in natural light. His miracles were performed to illustrate this message of a new kind of light available to all who seek it.

The Gospels speak of a blindness to this kind of light with which everyone is afflicted from birth. When a person is born blind he has never seen the light of day! He can only imagine what colors and vistas are like, and he is bound to be way off from reality when he finally can see.

In fact, the difference between being blind and having sight is so profound that the re-adjustment you would experience would create virtually a new you! If you had been blind and now could see, it would dramatically change who you are. This kind of dramatic change in our thinking is what the Lord is looking for in us spiritually, the creation of a new will and new understanding – what He calls regeneration.

So as we are moved by affection and obedience from the Word we invite the Lord into our life. We may be blind as to why, but we are drawn to Him and He comes near to us.

He spat on the ground and made clay with the saliva; and He anointed the eyes of the blind man with the clay. And He said to him, “Go, wash in the pool of Siloam.”

The clay on the ground is in the land of Canaan. This represents the church where the Word is. When the “church” is mixed with the moisture from the Lord’s mouth (the truths from the Word), and this ointment applied to our intellect (our blind eyes) by the hand of the Lord, faith in the Lord is born.

The Lord can then begin the “re-formation” of our mind, but this is not enough! We can allow the Lord to anoint us with truths but we must do our active part or we still cannot see. We must go, in freedom, and wash in the Pool of Siloam. We must let the truths from the Word wash our false ideas away. Then we can see!

So he went and washed, and came back seeing.

This is the process we must all go through, many, many times, as we develop a faith in the Lord.

Our blind and dark understanding is enlightened by the truths from the Word and for the first time we “see.” We believe in something higher than ourselves.

We must invite the Lord to make vital changes in our attitude, thinking and behaviors. This is the function of reformation.

As the term implies, reformation is a reforming, a reorganizing, of the content of the understanding, which is effected by arranging a person’s thoughts around a new center, around the Word of the Lord, instead of around self-intelligence, where it was concentrated before.

The reformed understanding is the home of the new will and this becomes our living faith. We not only understand how to love others but we live it! We love it!

We are all in freedom to remain spiritually blind if we choose. We read in *Heaven and Hell* 603 that most spiritual blindness results not from ignorance or an inability to understand spiritual things, but simply from a lack of interest in such things.

The “Pharisee” in all of us wants to deny the power of the Divine and the light that it brings. It would have us focus only on the things of this world, obsessed with the “broken law” of healing on the Sabbath.

But the Lord wishes to heal our spiritual infirmities. He asks each of us to bring our intellect to Him so that He may anoint it with the precious truths that bring light, so that we can hear the Lord say:

You have both seen Him and it is He who is talking with you.

... and we can answer, “Lord, I believe!” And worship Him.

Take a minute – close your eyes if you like – and think back to some struggles, some temptations, some difficult times you have had in your life. A time when you were “blind,” not sure what to do next, when you were ignorant

of the truth, unsure. When you weren't confident in which direction to turn. A time when you couldn't see a clear path. But now, looking back, you see clearly the whole situation. You see how Divine Providence gently led you through, step by step. How the Lord protected you, and gently supported you as you made your way, so that today, with confidence, you can say: "One thing I know, that though I was blind, now I see."

Amen.

True Freedom

A Sermon by the Rev. Ryan M. Sandstrom

Lessons: Revelation 21: 1-8, 22-27; Divine Providence 81; New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 143; True Christian Religion 478

And the city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it, and the Lamb is its light. (*Revelation 21: 23*)

My three-year-old daughter, as young as she is, has come to develop a taste for certain things. She has clearly identified things she likes and things she doesn't like. The other day she came running to me, all terrified, from the other side of the house and told me that she had seen a HUGE spider in her room and she wanted me to take care of it. So I went to check out this huge spider, which was about the size of a bread crumb, and I got rid of it.

What I found fascinating is that she knew there was something dangerous about the spider. How did she know? Did someone tell her to watch out? Maybe she copied a reaction that someone on TV had to a spider. Or maybe it was simple intuition. However she knew, her reaction was to get away and keep safe. And that's a good thing!

Now think of all the things you see in the world that you know are dangerous. It could be anything ranging from certain animals, plants, places, and even types of people based on their behavior. For the most part, we can identify danger and types of evil when we see it. And like my daughter to the spider, we react to these things in a certain way. Our reaction is actually quite important because it prompts us to get to safety. We know how to get away from danger and be free from it. After all, isn't that what we want – to be free from danger, free from evil?

The idea of freedom is the theme of this sermon. It is also the theme for the final vision of the Lord we are given in *Revelation 21: 1-8, 22-27*. As you read this, imagine what it must be like to get to the other world and experience freedom and safety like you never have before.

This is the last of seven visions of the Lord throughout the book of *Revelation*. All the previous visions (the Son of Man in the midst of seven lamp stands; the Lamb as though slain with the scroll; the Mighty Angel with

the Little Book; etc.) speak of the changing states we experience throughout life, and each state describes how we might see the Lord at that moment. We go through these states while *in this world*, which means we will always be in the continual struggle against evil – that is, a struggle to get free and safe from evil.

The final vision, or stage, in *Revelation 21* shows us a picture of eternity, where there will no longer be combats against evil and falsity. It's just pure safety with the Lord. The Lord is the source of light in this vision. There is no sun or moon to give light. Typically the sun and moon in the Word represent ideals of charity and faith from the Lord. But in this case, they represent our own reasonings and desires, or loves and opinions, which now no longer get in the way of the Lord's will. It's just the Lord and His will, which can become our will.

Evil is not in this vision because theoretically at this point we have, with the Lord's help, rejected it from within our own reasonings and desires so that there is nothing left but freedom and peace.

This is a perfect vision of heaven, one we would love to be in. But the catch for us now is that in order to be truly free and with the Lord in this eternal state, we must first learn about evil, know what it is, and avoid it. Like my daughter and the spider, there are certain things in this world we just know are wrong. With other things it might take a while for us to discover the danger. But the bottom line is that one definitely ought not to experience an evil to find out that it is evil. We have all we need to know about evil right in the Word, and the Word talks about it so that we can stay away from it.

Look through the Old Testament and you will see countless things that people did against the Lord. There are wars, killings, idolatrous practices, and all sorts of things that destroy marriage. All of them are downright wrong. In the New Testament we see how people treated the Lord, which again was just wrong. And now with the Heavenly Doctrines we're given hundreds of pages of what defines evil.

Basically we are taught from the Word that anything that goes against the Lord and His teachings is considered evil. It's not evil because we might get in trouble, or it's against the law, but because it is a sin against God and therefore we don't do it.

As New Church people and as Christians, given what we are taught in the Word, we all

As New Church people and as Christians, given what we are taught in the Word, we all have a responsibility and a duty to know the doctrines *and* stand up for them. There is no other way to be truly free.

have a responsibility and a duty to know the doctrines *and* stand up for them. There is no other way to be truly free.

Now it can be quite daunting to try to remember every single teaching in the Church. However, there are specific teachings that are core to all religion and life that should not be taken lightly. For instance: We have clear teachings on humility. Humility involves a heartfelt acknowledgement that of ourselves we have no life of our own and that God alone is the Creator of all life. As soon as anyone decides that he lives life of himself despite what he knows from the Word, he is going against that teaching.

We have clear teachings on freedom and reason, that according to *Divine Providence* 71 we are to act in freedom according to reason. Everyone is given freedom, but this does not grant us to do or say whatever we want. The “reason” aspect must be there in order for freedom to be truly free. When someone abuses reason and freedom, he turns away from the Lord.

We have clear teachings on marriage, how all marriage comes from the Lord and is the perfect union between love and wisdom, goodness and truth, charity and faith, willing and understanding. And this union descends to the world on a natural level with the marriage of one woman with one man as to their souls, minds and bodies. All this makes up the “precious jewel” of conjugal love.

Each pair (Love + Wisdom; Good + Truth; Charity + Faith; etc.) are like perfect puzzle pieces that are meant for each other. Just as you cannot put two identical puzzle pieces together, you cannot marry love with love, or truth with truth, and so on. Any “union” outside of marriage goes against the Lord.

We also have clear teachings on repentance. This involves a person examining himself and acknowledging his evils, then asking the Lord for help so he can effectively “go and sin no more.” Knowing about evil from the Word but refusing to see whether these evils might reside within our thoughts and intentions goes against the teachings on repentance.

These and plenty of other teachings clearly show us the way. Let us not go against them. The moment we try to make exception or say that a particular kind of evil is actually okay becomes the first step to a steady decline within the individual and eventually in society at large. Let us be reminded from *Divine Providence* 81 of the danger of allowing certain evils:

Heavenly freedom is basically freedom from the influence and torments of hell. And we can get heavenly freedom because we are all given freedom in the first place.

The evils which a man believes to be allowable, even though he does not commit them, are also appropriated to him; since whatever is allowable in the thought comes from the will, for then there is consent. When, therefore, a man believes any evil to be allowable, he loosens an internal restraint upon it, and he is withheld from doing it only by external restraints, such as fears; and because his spirit favors that evil, when external restraints are removed he does it as allowable; and meanwhile, he continually does it in his spirit.

As mentioned, our reaction to evils or anything that opposes God and His teachings is crucial. The trick is to be able to avoid the evil we see within ourselves, and react to it the same way we do to the outward things we see in the world and in other people. How often have you cringed upon realizing something about yourself? It's not a sign that we are condemned but rather an opportunity to flee to safety. We may not be able to run away from ourselves, but we can avoid the tendencies and desires toward evils in ourselves by not willing them. This way we can make our way to true heavenly freedom.

Remember that freedom is the theme not only for this sermon, or the vision in *Revelation*, but for our entire lives. Heavenly freedom is basically freedom from the influence and torments of hell. It's when we are no longer bound by the things that bring us down. And we can get heavenly freedom because we are all given freedom in the first place. See what is said in the Heavenly Doctrines regarding the use of our freedom:

That man has the freedom of thinking evil and falsity, and also of doing it, so far as the laws do not withhold him, is in order that he may be capable of being reformed; for goods and truths are to be implanted in his love and will, so that they may become of his life, and this cannot be done unless he have the freedom of thinking evil and falsity as well as good and truth. This freedom is given to every man by the Lord, and so far as he does not love evil and falsity, so far, when he thinks what is good and true, the Lord implants them in his love and will, consequently in his life, and thus reforms him. (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 143)

We can all use this freedom now and start anticipating the real freedom of heaven where it's just the Lord and His will – no sun or moon. As described in *Revelation*, we will get to experience no pain, no sickness, no discomfort, no tragedy, no hunger, no thirst, no debts, no stubbing your toe, no allergies, and so on. “He will wipe away every tear” and bring us to heaven in freedom.

Let us keep in mind that only the Lord can tell us how to get to heaven and He lays the steps for us to take in the Word. Everything happens according to order; there is a process to everything.

It works this way:

A person would not be very different from [the animals], if he were as free to act as he is free to think; he too would be impelled only by his bodily senses at the promptings of lust and pleasure. The case is different if he drinks in the spiritual teachings of the church and uses them to control his free will. The Lord leads him away from lusts and wicked pleasures and the innate longings he has for these; he strives after good, and turns his back on evil. He is then moved by the Lord nearer to the east and at the same time to the south in the spiritual world, and brought into heavenly freedom, which is true freedom. (*True Christian Religion* 478:3)

Let us keep in mind that only the Lord can tell us how to get to heaven and He lays the steps for us to take in the Word. Everything happens according to order; there is a process to everything. How we see the Lord, what we think about Him and our relationship with Him determines our way of life, and this determines where we will end up in eternity. But as long as we are doing something to avoid all evil, such as described in *Revelation* 21: 8, and trying to live a good life based on the Lord's teachings, He will be with us and lead us to true heavenly freedom.

Amen.



The Rev. Ryan M. Sandstrom is pastor of the Ivyland New Church in Ivyland, Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife, Daniela (Nobre), and their family.
Contact: rmsandst@yahoo.com

Ready to Grow? Come to the Sunroom

Kendall Hyatt

God loves each and every human being; and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love. – *True Christianity* 457

The New Church teaches that love and service are key elements of a heavenly life. Love and service on their own, though, are concepts; they are lifeless. It is *community* – a group of people gathered together for a purpose – that creates an opportunity for love and service to emerge.

In an effort to build community on a global scale, General Church Outreach launched a new program in late December, 2014. As a prelude to a sermon series for the new year at NewChurch LIVE, the Rev. David Lindrooth introduced the opportunity for people to plug into what is called a “Sunroom Spiritual Growth Group” – or simply, a “Sunroom Group.”

He spoke not only to the local congregation but to those watching online around the country. A Sunroom Group, he explained, is for anyone, anywhere, with internet access: “If you can press play, you can start a group.”

The words “press play” refer to the button that initiates a video stream. A Sunroom Group is video led and therefore simple to run. This simplicity is what sets the program apart from other small group formats.

Sunroom is for busy people who don’t have time for content preparation but do have interest in making time for meaningful conversation with others. While the program was developed for face-to-face group discussion, all of the resources can be found

Sunroom is for busy people who don’t have time for content preparation but do have interest in making time for meaningful conversation with others.

online and therefore translate to a virtual group experience as well. (Note that internet capacity plays a part in the success of the online experience, especially with online video chat.)

The vision for this project came out of a drive to serve others by finding a way to circulate Swedenborgian ideas in an accessible format. Founder Glenn Bostock wanted to provide a place for people to share authentically and grow spiritually – with as few barriers to entry as possible.

In light of the New Church's emphasis on regeneration and on service to each other in community, a small group is a perfect setting to step deliberately into one's spiritual journey and start practicing the steps that lead to change. Chief among these steps are seeking to learn the truth, examining our own lives in light of it, and verbalizing a commitment to make changes in the presence of others on a similar journey.

Several Sunroom Groups have emerged in the months since the program's launch in January 2015 – three of them out-of-state, two international, one online, and several in Bryn Athyn. While many of these groups committed to a four-week pilot, some are still going.

Judith Keane, who attended the Small Group Systems Retreat in Bryn Athyn in April, is gearing up to host a group at Sunrise Chapel in Tucson,

Arizona – the first Sunroom Group to emerge in the southwestern United States. Peggy Andrews, of Corbett, Oregon, has just started her group – the first Sunroom Group in the northwestern U.S.

Earlier this year Jenn Beiswenger, of Hurstville, New South Wales in Australia – and wife of New Church minister the Rev. Todd Beiswenger – invited two mothers from her son's school to join her for a Sunroom Group discussion.

In a video testimonial recorded on Youtube, Jenn describes the experience: "It turned out that not only were these women not New Church, but one of them wasn't even Christian. . . . It was neat to discuss these different topics from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives."

One video Jenn downloaded from the Sunroom archive was called, "Being Community." This 13-minute video is one of 51 videos available in the archive and provides

In light of the New Church's emphasis on regeneration and on service to each other in community, a small group is a perfect setting to step deliberately into one's spiritual journey and start practicing the steps that lead to change.

material on the topic of unity in diversity. Hosted by the Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman, the video highlights a sermon by the Rev. David Lindrooth and offers commentary by Peter Rhodes, author of the book *Observing Spirit*.

To stream or download this video, visit www.sunroomgroups.org. For more on Jenn's experience, look for her story in the next issue of *New Church Connection* at www.newchurch.org.

One Sunroom Group that meets on a weekly basis is the Green Room Sunroom Group at the Mitchell Performing Arts Center in Bryn Athyn. Held on Sundays after the NewChurch LIVE service, this group is open to the community and provides an opportunity for people to visit and see if they enjoy the Sunroom experience.

Bob Plefka, a newcomer to the New Church, attended a series of group meetings in January and offered this reflection on his sense of others' acceptance: "It helped me lower the barriers that I carry into it: judging myself, judging my past, judging my journey."

Jeremy Finkeldey attended the same series and in a video testimonial shared his motivation for attending: "What I like about it is the . . . boots-on-the-ground, side-by-side community."

There is nothing *easy* about the decision to grow spiritually – to become willing to change. But with a Sunroom video there's an easy way to jumpstart the conversation.

There are few barriers to hosting a Sunroom Group for the first time. All you need is internet access and the ability to press play – and a few friends for group discussion. While leader training is available online, it is not a requirement. The easiest way to test this format in your own group is to visit www.sunroomgroups.org and click "My Sunroom Toolkit."

This five-month pilot phase was a seed-planting endeavor, an experiment, a new way to serve those who are interested in small groups and spiritual growth. General Church Outreach has turned its attention now to plans for the future. The team plans to revise the Sunroom leader training pathway, expand the video archive, and create more robust resources for Sunroom Groups who want to meet online.

The next video project involves a collaboration between *New Church Journey* and Sunroom Groups for the *Living Gratefully* series in September

There is nothing *easy* about the decision to grow spiritually – to become willing to change. But with a Sunroom video there's an easy way to jumpstart the conversation.

2015. Look for this new series in the video archive at www.sunroomgroups.org/videos.

A seedling does not grow up into a mature tree in a single day. First there is a seed, then a root, then a shoot, which develops into a trunk; then branches come out of that and develop leaves, and finally flowers and fruit. Wheat and barley do not spring up ready for harvest in a single day. A home is not built in a single day. We do not become full grown in a single day; reaching wisdom takes us even longer. The church is not established – let alone perfected – in a single day. We will make no progress toward a goal unless we first make a start. (*True Christianity* 586)

For information, contact: sunroom@newchurchlive.tv

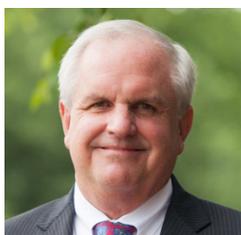
To get involved: www.sunroomgroups.org

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

LOOKING AHEAD AT BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE

Brian Blair, President



Bryn Athyn College began the academic year of 2015-2016 with an expanding student body projected to be close to 300 students.

The College is introducing a new major this fall in Business Administration with concentration options in Marketing Management, Sports Management and Museum/Landmark Management. This degree will include an emphasis

on the importance of business ethics, the value of quality work, and service to the community. This is the second new major introduced in the past year, which follows our Nursing program.

Bergen Junge is joining our faculty after a successful business career in information technology and production management. He and his wife, **Mary Jane (Bruser)**, have moved to Bryn Athyn where he will be a member of our expanding Business Department.

Bryn Athyn College is building on its theme *Think for Yourself, Live for Others*. The first part of the theme, *Think for Yourself*, is designed to challenge students to think deeply and broadly in their studies, while considering the evidence, to draw intelligent conclusions. The second part of the theme, *Live for Others*, introduces New Church perspectives where moral and spiritual values become the center of the Bryn Athyn College experience. Students are encouraged to understand and appreciate the importance of love to the neighbor and performing uses in their adult lives.

The College continues to receive positive feedback on our distinctive approach to a New Church college education. Our enrollment has steadily grown, supported by a dedicated faculty and staff who are committed to our mission.

More announcements on new programs, events and accomplishments can be found on the Bryn Athyn College website, www.brynathyn.edu.

TUNING IN TO THE AFTERLIFE

Bryn Athyn College sponsored a panel discussion September 19: *The Unintelligible Afterlife: What Deathbed Conversations Tell Us About a World Beyond*.

The program featured:

Dr. Raymond Moody, psychiatrist and author of the best-seller *Life After Life* and renowned near-death investigator

Erica Goldblatt Hyatt, DSW, psychotherapist and Bryn Athyn College professor, who has been studying dying people's last words

Lisa Smart, MA, linguist and founder of the Final Words Project

The panel planned to discuss the meaning of "deathbed conversations" – the sometimes touching, sometimes perplexing last words of loved ones. The panelists also were looking for what these last messages might tell us about the spiritual world beyond this life.

The program also launched the collaboration of the panelists in a groundbreaking project – Research into the Communications of the Dying – the first-ever scientific research on the topic. It is sponsored by Bryn Athyn College, using scientific protocols with approval from the Holy Redeemer Health System Institutional Review Board.

Dr. Moody coined the term "near-death experience" in the 1970s and changed how people think and talk about death and dying. He appeared briefly in Bryn Athyn after publication of *Life After Life* in 1975. He has written 11 other books, including the latest, *The Unintelligible Afterlife*, based on research into "unintelligibility" and "perimortal nonsense."

He discussed his "typology of unintelligible language" and its relationship to consciousness, and presented his thesis that the communications of the dying – especially those that appear to be puzzling or nonsensical – may offer new revelation of life after death.

Dr. Hyatt and Lisa Smart discussed what they have discovered and how they are applying Dr. Moody's innovative typology to their research design.

A NEW YEAR AT THE ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS

The 2014-15 school year was successful and we look forward to another great year in 2015-16. As of this writing (in August), we are projecting a total enrollment of 225 to start the year and look forward to welcoming many new students to our campus.

We have some staffing changes to announce.

After many years of faithfully serving the institution, **Francis Reinprecht** has retired from his role as Ecology teacher and Social Director of the Secondary Schools. We recognize Francis' commitment to the school and to the mission that we serve.



Susan O. Odhner,
Girls School Principal



Jeremy T. Irwin,
Boys School Principal

For several years, **Gwenda Cowley** has been the Senior Girls co-teacher for Religion, and for the last few years the **Rev. Michael Cowley** has taught Sophomore Boys Religion. Michael and Gwenda have been called to serve the Olivet Society in Toronto and we wish them great success in Canada.

Ivan and Amy Maddock will be moving to the West Coast in January. Amy stepped in to co-teach Senior Project last year, but will not return to that role. After a number of energetic and diligent years of service, Ivan will not return to the classroom this year, but has graciously agreed to serve one more year as the assistant director of the fall play.

Simon Daum is reducing his teaching load to make room for other pursuits, but will continue as co-director of the Instrumental Ensemble and will be assisting **Naomi Haus-Roth** in the Mitchell Performing Arts Center.

With these teachers leaving or reducing their teaching, we have an opportunity to welcome some new professionals on board.

Dylan Odhner is joining us full time, teaching Sophomore Boys Medieval History, Senior Project, Algebra 2, and serving as Social Media Manager in concert with the Admissions Office and other administrators.

Theolog **Elmo Acton** is teaching Sophomore Boys Religion. We are grateful for his willingness to step in and appreciate the flexibility and support of the faculty of the Theological School in facilitating this opportunity.

Greg Synnestvedt is teaching AP Statistics and Accelerated Algebra.

Martha Odhner is increasing her roles to include Chemistry and Honor Society Advisor.

Michaela Boyesen is coming on board to teach Latin 1 to freshman girls, and **Becca Uber** is teaching Algebra 3.

In addition to these staffing changes, we have a number of internal shifts to cover all the courses we offer.

In an effort to reduce our budget and streamline some processes, the Secondary Schools has embarked on a technology initiative that should improve our wireless connectivity and consolidate some of our IT functionality. As part of this initiative we have hired **Hayley Gunther** as our Instructional Technologist. In addition to being critical to the effective implementation of the initiative this summer, Hayley's main role is to facilitate effective technology

integration in all facets of our operations. She will be working closely with teachers and students to improve our technology engagement.

After a great deal of research and consideration, **Calebe Nobre** was contracted to handle the majority of the network restructuring and hardware switchover. He has been dedicated, responsive, professional and a pleasure to work with.

For the last five years a group of women – including current and retired Girls School faculty, plus ministers – have been meeting regularly to discuss how we can make the book *Conjugal Love* more relevant and meaningful to our girls. We realize many girls come to our school with baggage, and we want them to know that the Lord is there for them regardless of their past, and that they can live lives as valuable contributing members of society in spite of past issues.

It has been an enormous undertaking. We have not only read *Conjugal Love*, but also various secular works by New Church women and several MARS theses, and there is more to do. We met with the General Church Board Education Committee in September to bring them up to speed on our very relevant and important work.

This year the Boys School faculty is reading the **Rev. Prescott Rogers'** new book, *The Triune Word*, and reviewing it during faculty meetings.

The Academy Secondary Schools honor the unique and complementary nature of the sexes. For the past several years we have enjoyed our relationship with the Gurian Institute, which supports the concept that boys and girls are distinctly different and therefore have different needs as learners.

In late August, we welcomed Michael Gurian back to our campus for his second visit. We have made great efforts to be a more effectively inclusive environment. Mr. Gurian gave a talk to teachers and guests about gender learning differences as they apply to students with educational challenges.

Last year we invited John Halligan to visit the school and address parents and students in two separate programs about bullying. This year the school will be working closely with the Growth Opportunity Center to roll out a “values-based anti-bullying campaign” that we hope will have a positive impact on the student body.

During the process the faculties will be articulating a vision of what character traits they want to support in the development of their students. This program will be implemented with our student body and parents through workshops, parent education and developing a parent-school partnership for protecting students from bullying.

As we head into the new year, we thank you for your continued support and warmly encourage you to stay connected, get involved, and join us for our many popular events. Please visit our website (www.ancss.org) for news stories

and information. Our Facebook page (www.facebook.com/ancss) provides regular updates on day-to-day activities and information for major upcoming events. You can also follow us on Twitter (@anclions), which should be more active moving forward.

Our athletic teams love to have fans in the stands, so please visit www.ancss.org, look at the athletic calendar and come cheer our student-athletes as they represent ANC. The social calendar, also available on our website, is updated regularly and provides information for other popular events including Charter Day, Telegrams, the fall/winter production (*SantaLand Diaries*), the Oratorical Event and the spring production (*Oliver*).

BRITISH ACADEMY SUMMER SCHOOL 2015

The Rev. Howard A. Thompson

As they have for more than 50 years, young people gathered at the Purley Chase Centre in July in the English Midlands for two weeks of spiritual discovery and fun. This year's British Academy Summer School included 32 students from across the United States and three European countries. Our regular staff included: the **Rev. Alan Cowley** (Pastor of the Michael Church, London) and his wife, **Susan**; the **Rev. Howard Thompson** (Pastor of the Colchester New Church); the **Rev. Göran Appelgren** (Pastor of the New Church Society in Stockholm) and his wife, **Josephine**; and **Ivan Maddock** from the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn. The staff was supported this year by **Kyle Genzlinger**, a teacher from the Academy of the New Church, and the **Rev. Alain Nicolier** from France. Additional support was provided by **Philly Chambers** and **Jenny de Padua**.

I could go on for several paragraphs about the summer school this year but that would be from my perspective. I believe the best one to summarize this year's Summer School is **Brent van der Merwe**. (See below.) Brent has been attending for six years now and has truly come to embody the meaning and purpose of B.A.S.S. Each year I invite the students to return to B.A.S.S., telling them that returning students get more out of the experience as they come to take ownership of the school. (Brent and his brother **Erik**, also a regular at B.A.S.S., live in England but are originally from Durban, South Africa.)

The British Academy Summer School is open to young people from across the New Church from 14 years to 24 years (18 and older from the United States and Canada). For a unique summer experience feel free to contact the Rev. Howard Thompson, the Rev. Alan Cowley or any New Church pastor and we will make certain that you have a place at B.A.S.S. 2016.

The Student Perspective

Brent van der Merwe

B.A.S.S. is always a highlight of my year. I look forward to going back as soon as I leave. I have attended B.A.S.S. six times and every year is completely different from the last. For that I am so grateful.

Even though it is only two weeks, you end up making friends that you feel like you have known for a lifetime – sharing stories and growing spiritually in a safe, confidential environment. We are motivated to explore and ask questions about our faith.

The diverse lessons every morning open new thoughts and ideas that lead onto new questions and later discussions. The discussions at B.A.S.S. are by far one of my favorite aspects of the two weeks. It can be just sitting in the conservatory at night, playing a game of Uno, and then spontaneously starting a conversation that lasts several days. Learning and understanding other people's views on topics is always refreshing.

There are activities to suit all tastes – Capture the Flag, badminton, football, pool, table tennis and many more. We always enjoy Sports Day which included the “Lemonade Relay,” “Dizzy Lizzy” and an egg toss this year. Sports Day always culminates in a shaving cream war which is brilliant, messy fun!

Our day trips this year took us to Trentham Gardens and Stratford-Upon-Avon. The highlights of Trentham included seeing the monkey park, walking through the Italian Gardens (and finding fairies!) and putting our newly acquired photography skills to the test. At Stratford we were able to see Shakespeare's birthplace and we enjoyed motor boating on the river Avon.

Spiritual growth is happening all the time, whether you're thinking about it or not. In the relaxing atmosphere of Purley Chase, open minded and willing to learn, you are bombarded with knowledge and information and it is up to you whether or not you want to retain it. I have always found the bonfires and candlelight services to be really special times of self-reflection. Everyone sitting in a circle, mesmerized by the warmth and glow of the fire, sharing poems and readings from the Word, bringing us all closer together.

Let's start the countdown for B.A.S.S. 2016!

(See photos on page 531.)

EXPANDED LEADERSHIP IN GENERAL CHURCH EDUCATION

(photo IMG 4898: Scott and Rebekah Russell with daughter Jennica)

Rebekah Brock Russell, long-time educator in the Glenview New Church School and current Principal of that school, has been hired by General Church Education in Bryn Athyn as Assistant Coordinator for New Church Schools.

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., who is Head of General Church Education, explained how this position came into being:

“At General Church Education, one of our core objectives is to provide support to our General Church school system. We do so through curriculum development, teacher professional development, administrator consultation, hiring help, and the like. We recently said goodbye to **Gail M. Simons**, who helped us part time with our teacher support programs and curriculum development.

“We have also been doing five-year planning at our central offices and have determined that one key strategy is to enhance our ability to provide teacher professional development support. This led us to raise funds for, and propose, a full-time Assistant Coordinator position.

“With all the funding and job expectations worked out, we went ahead with a hiring process this past summer, with the understanding that we would negotiate carefully with the location from which the candidate is drawn, as to a mutually beneficial transition plan. A specific move date is still being considered.”

Scott Daum, who serves as Coordinator for New Church Schools, was also involved in the hiring process. Four things tipped them in favor of Rebekah:

- Her many years of school leadership, particularly in the realms of mentoring colleagues and curriculum development
- Her obvious love for New Church education
- Her personal commitment to professional development, keeping herself current with educational best practices
- Her ability to work with teams of people to bring those best practices to life for students

Bishop Buss added: “I am confident that Rebekah has the abilities to help our entire school system in very important ways and look forward with excitement to see how that unfolds.”

Rebekah (Brock) Russell is married to **Scott Russell**, and they have a sixth-grade daughter, **Jennica**.



Scott and Rebekah Russell
with daughter Jennica

CHANGES IN THE WASHINGTON NEW CHURCH SCHOOL

The Rev. Brian D. Smith, newly arrived from the Olivet Society in Toronto, is the new Principal of the Washington New Church School in Mitchellville, Maryland. Brian says he has fond memories of attending the school as a young boy.

In the *Echo Newsletter* he invited the congregation “to reflect on your memories and feelings about learning – both positive and negative. *Learning* is really the heart of what we’re hoping to accomplish here. *Teaching* really isn’t the point – it is just the means. The point is learning: real, deep, formative learning on all levels that matter on forming us into productive, generous, thoughtful human beings.

“Even though our teachers are employed to teach, their ability to teach effectively depends entirely on their own on-going, continuous *learning*. It depends on their attention to and curiosity about each one of their students. It depends on their energy and courage for tackling the conflicts and challenges which arise within the year. It depends on their own love of learning which they model and which inspires their students forward.”

He also noted: “At this point in my life, my love and interest in learning is one of the things for which I am most easily grateful. I find quiet, happy delight in the opportunity to read, listen to or discuss the meaning of life, the universe, and everything.”

The Washington New Church School also welcomed **Amy Dwyer** from Australia as the new teacher for the third and fourth grades. Amy has a BS in elementary education from Bryn Athyn College, and has several years of teaching experience in Bryn Athyn and Perth, Australia – with glowing reviews.

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At the annual meeting of the General Church Corporation in Bryn Athyn of June 27, 2015, five incumbents were re-elected and four new members. All were elected to three-year terms, concluding in 2018:

Incumbents re-elected:

Amy C. Buick	Jenkintown, Pennsylvania
Dawn R. Wadsworth	Atlanta, Georgia
Gregory L. Baker	Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania
Thayer L. York	Seattle, Washington
Jennifer B. Pronesti	Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

Newly elected were:

Wade W. Buick	Lehigh Valley, Pennsylvania
Stephanie A. Klippenstein	Maysville, Missouri
Bengt Boyesen,	Kempton, Pennsylvania
Ned Uber	Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Thanked for completing terms on the Board were:

Frederick A. Fiedler Phoenix, Arizona
Peer M. Snoep Boca Raton, Florida

Resigning from the Board were:

Justin C. Allen Bryn Athyn
Jeffrey S. Jackson Austin, Texas

Terms expire 2016:

Andrew R. Bruell Dunmow, Essex, England
Robert M. Dike Chamblee, Georgia
Charles H. Ebert Lafayette, Colorado
Darryl G. Hasen Scarsdale, New York
P. Blake Hill Toronto, Ontario, Canada
Lee Horigan Etobicoke, Ontario, Canada
Brent H. Hyatt Bowie, Maryland
Dain Kistner Huntingdon Valley
Daniel P. Martz, Secretary Huntingdon Valley
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CHANGES IN ADVANCEMENT

The Office of Advancement (previously Development) for the General Church, Bryn Athyn College and the Academy Secondary Schools is undergoing a restructuring, following the resignation of **Jessica Carswell** as Director earlier this year.



Judy Lopacki has returned as Director of Planned Giving, a position she held for five-and-a-half years before leaving in June 2014. She has been serving on two non-profit boards in Philadelphia

and Jenkintown, and has completed training as a Certified Advisor in Philanthropy (CAP) from the American College in Bryn Mawr.

Judy, who is already known throughout much of the Church, is available to help donors with planned gifts, such as a charitable gift annuity, gift of an insurance policy, gift from an IRA, or other planned-gift vehicles. Anyone interested in more information can contact Judy at 267-502-2485 or *judy.lopacki@anc-gc.org*.

Also continuing in the Office of Advancement are **Susan Wright**, Advancement Services Coordinator, and **Christopher Dunn**, Annual Giving Officer for the Academy. At this writing the General Church is advertising for its own Annual Giving Officer.

BOYNTON BEACH RETREAT 2016

The annual Boynton Beach Retreat is set for January 17-21, 2016, with the following speakers:

Curtis Childs, Swedenborg Foundation: *The New Church and social media*

Dr. Martha Gyllenhaal, Bryn Athyn College: *Art and Religion Through the Ages*

The Rev. Mark D. Pendleton, Glenview, Illinois: *Repentance*

The cost is \$235 per person until October 15, and \$260 thereafter. Director **Bob Brickman** says the rates at the Duncan Center, the venue for the Retreat, have increased, but the banquet cost has remained the same. The cost includes lunch at the Duncan Center. Attendees can pay extra (\$36) for breakfast there also.

Bob recommends making airline reservations early to avoid higher winter prices. The evening chartered boat ride on the Intercoastal Waterway, underwritten by a small group of generous donors, will continue.

For registration and housing forms, or any further information, please call Bob at 561-278-6037 or email *Bobbrickman@gmail.com* or *bbretreat@newchurchboyntonbeach.org*.

LOOKING FOR BOOKS OF THE WRITINGS?

About a year ago we sent out a note explaining that one of the uses of the Heavenly Doctrine Publishing Foundation is to keep the classic translations of the Heavenly Doctrines in print and available. We asked people if they would like to donate older translations such as those by Ager, Whitehead, Tafel and Potts (the older green and blue translations).

Since then we have received quite a few books, including a couple of whole sets. We placed some of these books already, such as a whole set for use in the new Kempton New Church High School. But we still have many

more books to offer, such as complete sets of *Arcana Coelestia*, *Apocalypse Explained*, *Apocalypse Revealed* and *True Christian Religion* and several books of the other works, at least one whole set of the Writings (mostly green but not including the *Spiritual Diary*).

Now that we have these books to offer, we would like to find out if anyone reading this would like to get a specific work, or set of works, or even a whole set. If we need to mail the book or books we would just need the postage in return, but it is also possible that rides may be able to be found for the books as well. So if you would like a book or set of books of these translations, please contact one of the following people:

If you live in the United States:

The Rev. Stephen Cole, Bryn Athyn
(stephen.cole@brynathyn.edu – 215 938 8663)

Gideon Alden, Kempton
(algoose2@verizon.net – 610 756 4142)

The Rev. Willard Heinrichs, Colorado
(willardheinrichs@gmail.com – 303 527 0051)

If you live in Canada:

The Rev. Nathan Cole, Kitchener
(AsstPastor@carmelnewchurch.org – 519 748 5802)

SEARCH IS ON FOR NEXT GIRLS SCHOOL PRINCIPAL

The Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools have begun a search for the next Principal of the Girls School, to begin serving effective July 1, 2016.

If you have interest in this position, a recommendation for a candidate, or any questions, you are encouraged to contact Jim Adams, Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools, at 267-502-2581 or Jim.Adams@ancss.org.

Applicants who are members of the General Church of the New Jerusalem are invited to send a letter of intent, a resume, and a statement of understanding regarding the mission of the Academy Girls School, postmarked by October 30, 2015 to:

ANC Girls School Principal Search Committee
Attn: Jim Adams
PO Box 707, Bryn Athyn PA, 19009



Ultimate Frisbee.



Ivan Maddock leads a session.



19 young ladies attended the Summer School.



Flexing muscles for sports day.



Camaraderie.



The 18 young men in attendance.



A quiet, candlelit moment.



Brian Keith, center back, with members of the congregation.



Evariste Dakouri, pastor of the Gesco New Church congregation.



Doukourou Moïse and his congregation moved into a new building.



Bishop Brian Keith carefully sets a stone in a ceremony marking their interest in starting a New Church school (the Swedenborg Memorial School) on the property adjacent to the Cite Verte church.



Six of the ministers' wives.



Children eager to be photographed after church.



Bishop Keith in a ceremonial robe, surrounded by the ministers of the Ivory Coast.

PHOTOS: GRETCHEN KEITH



Sylvain Agnes with Samuel Lompo and 3 of the people helping Samuel with church activities.



Samuel Lompo with a sign for his church.



The Sunday morning worship service was filmed by a local television station that focuses on religious programming. Afterwards, the reporter interviewed Samuel and had a few questions for Sylvain and Brian as well. We were told that the service would be broadcast the following week.



One of many happy faces.



Samuel purchased property for a church and a manse.



Samuel's 94-year-old father made a five hour journey to Ouagadougou to witness his son's ordination into the pastoral degree of the priesthood.



Thursday night doctrinal class group.



Danielle Hughes



Hannah Klippenstein and Camryn Buss



Braden Heilman



Tools 4 Life campers participate in a team-building exercise.



Tools 4 Life campers visit ANC alumnus Randy Gyllenhaal at the NBC 10 studio during career day.



Siblings, Monica and Brian McDonald.



ANC Campers during the gym jam.



Caitlin Irwin participates in field hockey as her ANC camp activity.



Tools 4 Life Campers.

PHOTOS: JASON BUSS, HOLLY FERRAR, AND NICOLE KING

Life Lines

AMAZING GRACE

Forgive and forget. It is easy advice, often hard to do – especially in the face of evil.

That's why what played out this summer in Charleston, South Carolina, was an inspiring illustration of what it means to live your faith.

The story quickly echoed around the world. A young, hate-filled white man welcomed into a Bible study session in an historic black church sat quietly with the group for an hour, then pulled a gun and opened fire, killing nine people.

The church, the city, the nation were stunned. Stunned not only by the wanton violence but by the response of the victims' families and community.

There was grief, there was anger, but there was no violence, no marches, no demands for vengeance. Instead there was forgiveness.

It was reminiscent of Amish parents in Pennsylvania in 2006 whose first instinct after a madman killed their children in a one-room schoolhouse was forgiveness.

We witnessed looting and chaos in Ferguson, Missouri, New York City and Baltimore earlier this year after provocative killings. But when national reporters flooded into Charleston they encountered something quite different.

A black man was selling T-shirts on a downtown street corner: "Charleston Strong: Standing as One Race." A banner on a building opposite the mourning church declared: "Behold how good and pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity." (*Psalms* 133:1)

These people – like those gunned down while reading their Bibles – already knew the teachings:

"Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." (*Luke* 6:37)

"Forgive, I pray thee now, the trespass of thy brethren, and their sin; for they did unto thee evil." (*Genesis* 50: 17)

They knew that when Peter asked Jesus how often he should forgive a brother who sinned against him, he was told not just seven times but "seventy times seven."

They knew the ultimate lesson from Jesus on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." (*Luke* 23:34)

But more than knowing all these teachings, they had made them part of their lives, which is what faith is really all about. And so they are examples to us all.

Amazing grace, indeed.

(BMH)

SAVING GRACE: THE MUSICAL

A musical version of *Amazing Grace* – the story of John Newton, former slave trader turned clergyman and abolitionist – opened on Broadway in New York in mid-July. It has an amazing connection to Bryn Athyn and the Glencairn Museum.

The production was the dream 10 years ago of Christopher Smith – not the well-known New Church minister, but then a part-time policeman in Bryn Athyn Borough. He was also a gifted film maker who helped produce the Glencairn Museum and Cairnwood Estate videos with Glencairn Curator Ed Gyllenhaal that are still a highlight of visitor tours.

Smith went on to do police work in nearby Bucks County – always with *Amazing Grace* churning in his mind – as if, he says, “by Divine providence.” He hadn’t even heard of Newton until he was killing time in a library in 1997 and randomly picked up a biography of him. Something clicked. Immediately he saw the drama in the story and the power in the hymn.

We all know the opening words: *“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me! I once was lost, but now am found; was blind but now I see.”* Smith dramatizes Newton seeing himself a “wretch” as a slave trader and how he was redeemed by embracing the cause of abolition and turning to the Lord.

Smith envisioned a noble musical out of all this, but had no training in how to go about it – writing the lyrics, the music or the “book” for such a production. But he persevered – with the help of friends and a computer that helped him put music to his words.

The result is not perfect in the eyes of critics, but commendable and inspirational. Smith also benefits from timing he could not have envisioned 10 years ago, with the nation reeling from racial tensions and in need of an uplifting, unifying message.

The show tried out in Chicago, where it went through inevitable revisions. “The industry didn’t know how people would respond,” Smith was quoted as saying. “But when you get 1,800 people in Chicago standing up and singing at the end of the show, crying, and coming back three or four times, that’s when they said, ‘OK, we’ll give you a shot.’”

When the show opened on Broadway on July 16, the reviews were mixed.

They generally found the script preachy and moralizing, the sets and staging stunning, and the overall message transformational. The soulful hymn, *Amazing Grace*, is saved for the climactic ending, with all of the cast belting it out and audience members rising to their feet to join in. Tears flow. So does hope.

That is the power of *Amazing Grace* – almost 250 years later. And to think that at least some of these seeds were sown 10 years ago, during lonely patrols of Bryn Athyn roads late into the night.

Divine providence, indeed.

(BMH)

THE GLENCAIRN CONNECTION

Brian Henderson, Director of the Glencairn Museum, remembers Chris Smith talking about his dream for *Amazing Grace* while he was working on the Glencairn video. Brian also knows all about New Church connections to the abolitionist movement in England that pre-dated the end of slavery in America.

He lectured on all this as a history professor at Bryn Athyn College, enthralled an Eldergarten audience in Boynton Beach several years ago with the dramatic history, and also presented a paper at the 2011 conference in Bryn Athyn on Swedenborg and the Last Judgment: *From Thought to Action: The Last Judgment, Swedenborg and the Antislavery Movement*.

He says he played a small role with Curator Ed Gyllenhaal and Chris Smith in making the Glencairn video and remembers Chris talking even then about his dream for *Amazing Grace*.

“As for Newton himself,” Brian writes, “I am not aware of any specific New Church connections. Newton may well have been familiar with Carl Wadstrom (the New Churchman) through both of their work with William Wilberforce and Thomas Clarkson in 1788-89. By this point Newton (34 to 35 years past his slave-trading days) was an ally of Wilberforce in his attempts to get Parliament to end the slave trade. There is evidence that Wadstrom testified in 1788 and 1789, I believe, but as far as I can remember or am aware, there was no direct connection between Newton and the New Church.”

Ed Gyllenhaal writes: “I first became aware of the musical, *Amazing Grace*, in 2007, when Chris Smith and I were working together on a documentary film (*Embracing the Sacred: The Story of Glencairn Museum*). One day Chris suggested that we go out to lunch together because he wanted to tell me about another, much bigger project he was working on.

“What followed was a scene-by-scene description of a two-act musical about the spiritual awakening of slave-trader-turned-hymnist John Newton.

He related the entire show to me from memory. Chris is a very earnest and animated guy, and he has a way of drawing you into his dreams.

“By the time I had finished my cheeseburger and fries I was absolutely convinced that such a musical should be made. However, inwardly I was skeptical that such a production could ever reach Broadway. I left thinking, ‘Blessed are the dreamers and the risk takers.’ I’ve never been happier to be wrong.

“As the Associated Press recently observed, ‘A serious musical with epic themes doesn’t come to Broadway that often.’ I recommend this musical to anyone who believes in the reality of personal spiritual redemption – and everyone who loves a really good show!”

Ed has maintained contact with **Chris Smith**, who submitted this account of his experience:

“For years I served the Bryn Athyn community as a police officer and then later as a producer of documentaries about historic buildings and the people who made them. All the while I was working on a crazy dream, a vision of bringing something completely new to Broadway. I wanted to have the central plot of a major musical revolve around the spiritual and moral redemption of an actual historical person.

“That person is John Newton, the 18th century slave trader turned abolitionist, hymnist and preacher. His journey from the docks and back alleys of Chatham, England, to Sierra Leone and Barbados turns this story of personal character development into an epic saga, complete with storms, sinkings and battles on land and sea.

“His journey back to the simple faith his mother bequeathed him, and that of Mary Catlett, his childhood sweetheart and the girl he would eventually marry, provide a very satisfying love story as well.

“I wrote the music, lyrics and book of the show. My mentor and co-author Arthur Giron helped guide the story process and my development as a writer, something for which I had no training and no professional experience.

“My dream became a reality on July 16th and I hope (people from Bryn Athyn) will get to experience it for themselves at New York’s *Niederlander Theatre*.”

Bret Bostock, Assistant Director of Glencairn Museum, traveled to New York for the first matinee of *Amazing Grace* with his wife, **Jessica**, who teaches dance at Bryn Athyn College and works as a choreographer throughout the region. He offers these memories:

“We got to attend the show through interesting circumstances. Jess has been working with Dr. Joseph Ohrt on shows at both Bucks County Playhouse and Central Bucks West High School for the past year. Through this collaboration she learned that he has been working with Chris Smith on *Amazing Grace* for

quite a few years, contributing several choral arrangements to the show.

“Imagine our surprise when we realized this was the same Chris Smith whom we knew as a police officer in Bryn Athyn and from his work on the Cairnwood and Glencairn tour videos! Strange coincidence. We got to reconnect with Chris when he attended the opening of CB West’s production of *Grease* last spring.

“We learned a lot over the course of the year from Joseph about the incredible process of getting this show to Broadway. Jess even got to sit in as Joseph rehearsed one of the show’s crucial choral pieces with his CB West choir. And so we were privileged to go with Joseph and a group of CB West choral and theater students to the premiere matinee, meeting some of the actors afterwards. It was a thrilling experience.

“From an entertainment perspective, the show is great. The sets and costumes are fantastic, the music and singing are strong and beautiful. But all of these things can be found in many Broadway productions. This show has something deeper because of its story, and so the overall impression is very powerful and moving. Some of the depictions of slavery are really hard to watch. But, as the song suggests, it is uplifting and inspiring in the end. The audience, mostly in tears, was on its feet before the curtain call.

“It has been fascinating to be connected, in some small way, to the last leg of this show’s incredible journey from Chris’s personal dream to the heart of Broadway.”

And thanks to Brian, Ed, Chris and Bret for this “amazing” Glencairn connection.

(BMH)

‘JUST WHO DO WE THINK WE ARE?’

It might seem that the matter of same-sex marriage was settled by the United States Supreme Court one-vote majority ruling in June, and that there is no point in discussing it further. But the controversy over such a sweeping and earthshaking change – one that a large portion of the population believes is so contrary to the spiritual and moral foundation of the culture that it may well spell the end of our civilization – will not go away any more easily than the abortion debate has in the wake of *Roe v. Wade* more than 40 years ago.

The seriousness of the cultural divide that is tearing the nation apart is very clear on the court itself. It is hard to imagine any more strongly worded rejections of the majority opinion than the ones issued by the four dissenting justices.

“The Court invalidates the marriage laws of more than half the states and orders the transformation of a social institution that has formed the basis of

human society for millennia,” the Chief Justice wrote. “Just who do we think we are?”

“The Constitution itself says nothing about marriage,” he noted, and its decision is “not a legal judgment.”

When four out of nine members of the court object so strenuously, how much confidence can we have in even the legal correctness of the decision?

But the real issue is deeper than legal. As the Writings explain very clearly, in terms of discrete degrees, civil order comes from, contains and expresses the two higher degrees of order: spiritual and moral. Or should.

(WEO)

EXTENDING THE BENEFITS

The way to extend the benefits of marriage to more people is not to redefine marriage, but to teach people what it truly is and why it is so valuable. Applying the *word* “marriage” more loosely does nothing to promote the reality of marriage, and in fact damages that effort.

And the way to extend the blessings of the New Church to more people is not to stop teaching certain doctrines because they are out of step with the times, such as many of those in the book *Conjugal Love*, but to teach them more clearly and effectively.

(WEO)

I’M NOT A ROLE MODEL, BUT I PLAY ONE ON TV

At the end of Bertolt Brecht’s play, *Galileo*, a former disciple turns bitterly on his fallen idol and laments, “Unhappy is the land that has no hero.” To which Galileo replies, “Unhappy is the land that needs a hero.”

We seem always in search of heroes, but often are looking in the wrong places. That’s why F. Scott Fitzgerald, with a writer’s eye for the drama of life, once said: “Show me a hero and I’ll write you a tragedy.”

We know the feeling. A popular hero for decades was comedian and actor Bill Cosby. In his long-running TV hit, *The Cosby Show*, and in countless appearances where he chastised young people to shape up their lives, he was the perfect role model for father, husband, family values. Now he has been exposed – although not convicted – as an apparent serial sexual abuser of women.

One more “hero” fallen in shame from his pedestal.

Sadly it is a story repeated throughout history – and throughout the Word. Consider David, the hero shepherd boy who slew Goliath with the “smooth stone” of the Lord’s truth, but as a grown man and leader made sure that the husband of the alluring Bathsheba would die in battle so that he could take her for himself.

Our eternal quest for heroes is a search for those who can lift our spirit above a troubled world. Yet the “hero” who matters most is not on a pedestal but in the mirror.

When we stop looking to Hollywood, entertainment and sports celebrities, there are heroes all around us. Let every parent be a hero to a child, every teacher a hero in the classroom, every citizen a hero in the community – not by growing larger than life but larger **in** life, because of the way life and its challenges are met. It does not take fame and riches to be a hero.

- A hero looks to the Lord and His Word, and lives what he believes.
- A hero is not measured by how she is treated but by how she treats others.
- Heroes are more concerned with giving love and time to their children, rather than material things.
- A hero never looks down on anyone and makes everyone comfortable in his presence.
- A hero is always polite, gracious, dignified, kind, no matter how trying the circumstances.
- A hero always has time to read to a child.
- A hero always stands for morality and honor, always knows what’s right, and never compromises his values.

A simple lesson in a 1907 book, *The Children’s Friend*, put it nicely: “To live well in the quiet routine of life, to fill a space because God wills it, to go on cheerfully with a petty round of little duties and little avocations; to smile for the joy of others when the heart is aching; who does this, his works will follow him. He is one of God’s heroes.”

And all of us can be.

(BMH)

PROPER TRANSLATION IS CRUCIAL

In English versions of the Bible, the use of the pronoun “He” in reference to the Holy Spirit reflects the erroneous doctrine of the Trinity that divides God into three Persons, and serves to confirm that error in people’s minds. The original Greek of the New Testament, however, can just as well be translated “it” instead of “He,” and should be so translated – because the Spirit of truth is the Lord’s own Spirit, not a separate Divine Person.

The pronoun “He” is used in every one of the several dozen translations of the Bible I found online. Only one translation – the Kempton New Church version – uses “it.”

The Kempton version translates *John* 16:13-14 this way: “But when it shall come, the Spirit of truth, it will guide you into all truth; for it shall not speak

of itself, but whatever it shall hear, it shall speak; and it shall announce to you things to come. It will glorify Me . . . “

This shows how important a true doctrinal understanding is in the work of translating Scripture. And why the General Church should continue to train and support New Church scholars in that use.

(WEO)

SMILE, YOU’RE ON CANDID CAMERA

Many people are learning the hard way – from social media to criminal investigations – that video cameras have become ubiquitous. Big Brother – or anyone with a Smart phone – is recording almost everything these days and putting it out there for all the world to see on YouTube.

But long before surveillance cameras and iPhones, we have the warning, repeated throughout the gospels: “For nothing is secret that shall not be revealed; neither anything hid, that shall not be known.”

We also are warned, both in the Word and in the Writings, that we will have to answer after death for everything written in our Book of Life – everything.

That can be intimidating, although we also know that we will not have to answer for any transgressions where we have repented.

But the cameras increasingly intruding on our lives are good reminders that the Lord also is with us every moment. We also know that He is forever forgiving and striving to raise us up to heaven.

So we are not victims of whatever someone may capture on video. We are writing the script – and can always make it better.

(BMH)

MAKING THE ORDINARY EXTRAORDINARY

“The use of art is to make the ordinary extraordinary.” I saw this in a catalog from an art exhibit recently and thought what a fine statement it was about the use of art. Art does serve to open our eyes to wonders all around us that we might not see as wonderful because they are so common. The clear early morning sunlight coming in at a low angle through the tree branches onto the grass beneath, the way the stems of flowers in a vase are bent by the water’s refraction of light, the character in a human face – so many wonders hidden in plain sight because we just haven’t paid enough attention.

Religion also makes the ordinary extraordinary by revealing the spiritual significance of ordinary human events and everyday objects. This is especially true of the doctrine of the New Church.

The doctrine of the internal sense, for example, transforms the dull,

opaque “clouds” that cover the holiness of Scripture when it is viewed only literally, and opens our eyes to the life and beauty and humanity within. The doctrine of conjugal love reveals the holiness in marriage.

Again, the doctrines of use and correspondence show ordinary mundane objects to be expressions of love acting through wisdom, and thus reveal the Divine and human and spiritual realities embodied in natural forms – transforming a flower or a Nautilus shell, for instance, into objects of art and revelation.

(WEO)

‘THE ROOTS OF ART’

This is the title of one of my favorite books, a book of photographs of natural objects with brief comments by the photographer. His pictures focus on the incredible aesthetic sensibility and engineering genius displayed by seashells, seed pods, bones, bird feathers, frost on a windowpane and other such natural forms.

Again and again throughout the book he notes the intelligence visible in such things, and how they are the prototypes for human art and engineering. The burrs by which some plants spread their seeds, for example, inspired the inventor of Velcro; the cutouts that lighten steel girders without diminishing their strength mimic the structure of bones in birds; Greek columns resemble spinal columns.

How, the author wonders, does the brainless little blob of slime that lives in a seashell manage to construct such a brilliant, elegant, artistic masterpiece of a house for itself?

Incredibly, the very person who compiled this book of evidence for the Divine intelligence behind nature’s beautiful and mysterious forms, dismisses, in the introduction, what he himself sees as the obvious implication of them – namely, their Divine creation. He gives no reason. He marvels at the mystery, assumes there must be a natural explanation, but confesses that he has no idea what it is.

As for me, I much appreciate this beautiful and intriguing book – and am willing to let the evidence speak for itself.

(WEO)

SURELY THE LORD IS IN THIS PLACE

The sermon by the Rev. John L. Odhner, “Seeing the Lord in the Word,” (page 447), shows how we have been blessed by the second coming with the spiritual sense of the Word, so that we really can see and know the Lord there.

Without that sure guide to the internal sense, a lot of believers, from theologians to the faithful in the pews, struggle with the Bible – everything

from the creation story to the strange symbols and images of *Revelation*. Many of them assume there must be a deeper meaning to all this and speculate on interpretations, but much that cannot be explained is just accepted on faith.

There is great beauty and power in just the letter of the Word, but much as well that people find hard to reconcile with a loving God.

When the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible was celebrated in 2011, a reporter for *The Philadelphia Inquirer* praised it as “a mighty collection of wisdom, holiness and comfort – a warning against extremism in religion and secular life.”

This prompted a scornful letter from a reader wondering if the writer had been “so caught up in the language and translation that he’d missed all the violence: the jealous God full of wrath and vengeance; the genocide; the denigration of women; the approbation of slavery; and the approval of incest and infanticide? Extremism to the max! Most of us are taught to revere the Bible, not read it. When I actually did read it, I became an atheist.”

That is a sad reaction to the letter of the Word, but understandable. With so much in the Old Testament especially about a jealous, vengeful, punishing God – and without the clear explanations from the “Spirit of Truth” – it can be challenging to reconcile all the apparent ugliness there with an all-loving, merciful God.

One of the gems of New Church collateral literature is *The Bible that was Lost and is Found* by John Bigelow. He was a prominent lawyer, statesman and publisher in the mid-19th century who found himself stranded in Haiti by a smallpox epidemic. As was his custom, he studied the Bible regularly. He complained one day to the only other occupant of his hotel about the passage in *Genesis* where Abram asks Sarai to lie to the pharaoh, saying she is his sister, not his wife. Bigelow wonders why an honorable man should do such a thing.

His Danish companion quietly asked if he had ever read Swedenborg and handed him a copy of the *Arcana* with the explanation of the spiritual sense of this story.

Bigelow was intrigued and began reading everything of Swedenborg that he could get his hands on. But he brought a skeptic’s zeal, certain that he would come across something outrageous that would expose Swedenborg as a fraud.

That never happened. Instead Bigelow became convinced that this had to be revelation from God, not the product of a mortal mind. He had the epiphany that “once I was blind and now I see.”

Even though we have the gift of the second coming, unlocking all of the mysteries of the Word, we may still read it at times with the sudden enlightenment of John Bigelow – like Jacob awakening in the wilderness after dreaming of angels ascending and descending a ladder to heaven and saying: “Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not. . . . This is none other but the

house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.” (*Genesis* 28: 16,17)

That is the feeling we should have every time we open the Word: “Surely the Lord is in this place . . . and this is the gate to heaven.”

That is the gift we have been given.

It is a gift to treasure. It is a gift to use. And it is a gift to share.

(BMH)

A LOSS FOR NEW CHURCH LIFE

The unsung heroes of any publication are the proofreaders who read every word, diligently searching for mistakes in spelling, grammar and meaning. From the time we launched the new *New Church Life* almost five years ago one of our most dedicated and professional proofreaders has been Gwen McQueen Asplundh. With this issue she is giving up this noble volunteer work and we are enormously grateful for her conscientious pursuit of perfection.

Gwen was joined from the beginning by her sister, Judy Hyatt (also retired), Noelene Rose, and more recently, Katie Goerwitz. We are blessed to have such a caring and committed team, with Gwen and Noelene as the indispensable anchors.

We are also grateful that Alaine F. York has agreed to step in as Gwen's capable successor. Alaine retired last year as Secretary of the General Church.

(BMH)

CORRECTION

In my July-August editorial (“Organized Religion”) I referred to the religion of the Dalai Lama and Tibet as Hinduism. It is, of course, Buddhism.

(WEO)



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EDITORS **Bruce Henderson**, Editor
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

Rev. Walter Orthwein, Spiritual Editor
Walter.Orthwein@verizon.net

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