

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JULY/AUGUST 2020



Those who are with us . . .

In a trying time, the prophet Elisha revealed to his fearful servant, “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” In a sermon the Rev. Bruce Rogers says we are also in a trying time but assures: “At times we may feel surrounded by hostile forces, forces intent on destroying ideals that we value and principles that we live by. And yet we are protected – protected by good people everywhere who share our values and principles.” (Page 279)

NEW CHURCH LIFE (USPS 378-180)

PUBLISHED BIMONTHLY BY

THE GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM

Bruce Henderson, Editor | bruce.henderson@newchurch.org

Michelle Chapin, Layout

SUBSCRIPTION: \$30 TO ANY ADDRESS. To order: 267-502-4990 or susan.wright@anc-gc.org

Postmaster: Send address changes to: New Church Life, PO Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 or e-mail:

datacenter@anc-gc.org

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

We are in turbulent, uncertain times but are not just uneasy spectators. An editorial asks, *What Does the Lord Require of You?* We each have a role, which starts with looking to the Lord and loving our neighbor. (Page 271)

And while we seem to be challenged more than ever – from the COVID-19 pandemic to an epidemic of racial unrest – the Rev. Bruce Rogers offers comfort in a sermon on the theme: “Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” Even though we may seem surrounded by hostile forces, with no hope in sight, “we always have the protection of many good people who share our values and principles.” (Page 271)

In a sermon on “Laughter,” the Rev. Derek Elphick points out that there are two kinds of laughter – that which is mocking and mean-spirited and that which is innocent and joyful. We need to be careful and thoughtful about what we are laughing at – and why. There is a laughter from hell that is all too enticing, but a laughter from heaven that leaves everyone feeling happy and uplifted. (Page 285)

The Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh offered a warm and loving Resurrection Address for his uncle, the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh. Kurt was a beloved pastor and principal in Pittsburgh and Bryn Athyn, whose doctrinal influence and personal warmth were felt all over the Church. “Kurt was a champion for the truth of the Word being brought into life. He might often have been a reserved and quiet champion of the Word brought to life but at the same time Kurt was surely principled and resolute.” (Page 291)

In a message From the Bishop’s Office, the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. finds comfort in these troubling times that the Lord is “a very present help in trouble.” We may be inclined to despair on a number of fronts but the Lord is always “urging and pressing to be received” – and that is our enduring hope. (Page 299)

Bryn Athyn College – like most colleges and high schools in this year of the shut-down virus – had to settle for a “virtual graduation” in May, with the traditional ceremony postponed until September. But there was an online

presentation of awards and President Brian Blair offered a Celebration Address. He told the graduates: “One of the hallmarks of New Church college education has been to introduce you to the importance of being useful while extending love to your neighbor and in turn to all mankind.” (Page 302)

The Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn describes how Bryn Athyn College is extending the reach of New Church education through a new Institute for Swedenborgian Studies. It’s already launched an online course on The Afterlife. Such outward-looking forms of education, Thane says, are true to the original Charter of the Academy and provide an avenue to put Swedenborgian thought in dialogue with the world. (Page 305)

The Rev. Todd Beiswenger is having success experimenting with evangelization on YouTube in Australia. The more people connect with the church this way, he says, “the more likely they are to come back and watch the next video I post, which will inevitably be full of New Church theology.” (Page 310)

Were high school students bored when their classrooms were shut down by the coronavirus and their classrooms became computer screens? Not at the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools, where a group of students – under the direction of the Rev. Christopher Barber – used a creative computer program called Minecraft to recreate their school buildings and campus. “This project is more than mere amusement and frivolity. It goes beyond being an impressive feat of design, stamina and follow-through. It is the team’s endorsement of community and it is a cry for normalcy.” (Page 316)

Church News (page 322) includes:

- The first phase of the Bryn Athyn College graduation and awards
- The Academy Secondary Schools graduation – including a parade of decorated cars through Bryn Athyn – an address by retiring faculty member Brian Horigan, plus academic and athletic awards
- A change in the major Girls School Athletic Awards, named in honor of Elaine S. Asplundh and Marah P. Boyesen
- Highlights from meetings of the Academy Board of Trustees
- A new distance learning course at Bryn Athyn College
- Cancellation of next year’s Boynton Beach Retreat – another victim of the COVID-19 pandemic

Editorial

Bruce Henderson, Editor

WHAT DOES THE LORD REQUIRE OF YOU?

This has been a trying year. The COVID-19 pandemic shut down the world, sickened millions, killed hundreds of thousands, disrupted all sense of normalcy. Then racial unrest erupted from peaceful protest to rage and chaos, threatening all sense of order. But we are not meant to be just fearful, concerned witnesses. What is the Lord calling on us to do?

It is easy to excuse ourselves from the fray: “Well, I’m not a racist.” That’s true for most of us. We recoil from the overt racism of segregation, denial of rights and opportunities. But instincts can be more subtle and self-justified: judging others, feeling superior, looking down on, withholding charity.

We have the Two Great Commandments: Love the Lord, love your neighbor. We have the vision: “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity.” (*Psalms* 133:1) But we may also want to keep separate, to judge, to dominate, to be uncharitable – when we should know better. “It is charity alone, or love toward the neighbor and compassion, which join a person to the Lord.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 389)

This is the enduring challenge of regeneration and building a relationship with the Lord. The despair born of racism may manifest itself in violence, anger, rioting, destruction, but this is essentially a spiritual issue in need of spiritual solutions. When the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was leading nonviolent protest marches in the 1960s, he always carried a Bible. We don’t see that now – and it makes a difference.

Early in the unrest, as cities erupted across the United States and throughout the world, a young man who could have been a spokesman for the anger lamented: “We need to get back to the fear of God. We have forgotten God.”

“Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” That is where we all need to be focused – looking to the Lord, following Him, learning to really “love one another.” We are all created equal in His eyes. We are all equally loved by Him. He wants to raise all of us to heaven. To truly love and follow Him is to obey

His commandments and love as He loves.

“Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (*John* 14:27)

Fortunately, we’ve had many words of wisdom throughout the Church to guide our thoughts and our ways.

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. put out a statement to the General Church in early June “Against Racism,” which said in part:

“Many of your friends, your pastors, and you yourselves have been reacting to the death of George Floyd – an inexcusable event that has reminded us of the pernicious evil of racism. This took place in the United States, but we know that similar tragic things happen the world over. As a spiritual community it is imperative that we acknowledge the reality of all forms of hatred and respond.

“We have available to us vital perspectives from the Heavenly Doctrines – that variety is a part of perfection, and that each soul is an angel in the making loved by the Lord. A particular teaching has demanded attention in my mind . . . that ‘evils cannot be removed unless they appear.’ (*Divine Providence* 278) The thing that led me to this passage is the rejecting part – the Lord doesn’t cause evil to happen but can work with us to abhor it when we see its destructive nature. We are seeing that rejection, and that is as it should be.

“Our church is here to do its very best to underscore the value of all human beings. We can celebrate the fact that the General Church, while still small, is ‘a house of prayer for all nations.’ (*Isaiah* 56:7)

“The passage from *Divine Providence* about rejecting evil goes on to draw attention to any evil that lurks within the individual heart. It calls us to examine ourselves and reminds us of the power of the Lord to help us fight against what springs from hell within us. As so aptly demonstrated by the disciples – good people in general – that includes attitudes of superiority and the desire to dominate.

“No message from me or another pastor can undo the damage caused by racism. I pray, however, that we can use this time to grow as a church and as individuals within it. I am personally humbled and inspired by the words and actions I am seeing – from colleagues and other New Church friends across the world. Ultimately, as we know, any lasting change will come by means of people’s individual choices, springing from principles in the Word and the guidance of the Lord through conscience.”

The Rev. Mark Pendleton, like many pastors, put out a message to members of his Glenview New Church, which included:

“Where does our church stand on things like this? What do we stand for? I hope this can be clear to all of us. I believe we stand for justice and equality – especially racial equality – that extend themselves to everyone involved. We

stand for proper exercise of authority and power. We stand for the freedom of people to speak up and let their voices be heard, and to protest and demonstrate peacefully against perceived injustices. We stand for individual safety and protection of property.

“As we begin to move through this uncertain and now upsetting time, I hope all of us will be able to find our way to calm, settled and peaceful shores. For those who feel called to stand personally against racism and other injustices . . . I hope you will find ways to do so that are good and true, and genuinely useful for our city, state, country and world.

“Above all, I hope we can keep the Lord in mind and continue looking to Him to help and guide us, remembering especially His two overarching laws that are the leading solution to all the unrest that faces us: ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength. . . . and You shall love your neighbor as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these.’”

The Rev. Todd Beiswenger, pastor of the Hurstville Society in suburban Sydney, Australia, is having success reaching out on YouTube. (See his article, “Adventures in Evangelization on YouTube,” page 310.) He has posted an excellent video on this subject: “What am I supposed to do?” (Search under Todd Beiswenger on youtube.com)

He begins with *Habakkuk* 1: “O Lord, how long shall I cry and Thou wilt not hear! Even cry out to Thee in violence, and Thou wilt not save! Why dost Thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? For spoiling and violence are before me: and there are that raise up strife and contention.”

And then the response: “Behold, ye among the heathen, and regard, and wonder marvelously: for I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told to you. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it, because it will surely come.”

And he offers the assurance from *Luke* 9:56: “For the Son of man is not come to destroy man’s lives, but to save them.”

The Lord’s calling throughout the Word is for us to change our ways, and He will not give up on us. Indeed, Jesus spent His time with sinners, not the righteous, because they were most in need of His healing change.

So what is God calling on us to do in these challenging times? The message has not changed. Repent. Regenerate. Change for the better. And “wait for it.” Help will come.

In an Open Letter to the Bryn Athyn College community, President Brian Blair said: “We must do our very best to live a life of true love to the neighbor and lead by example. To that end, we recognize our mission is to help young people learn not only of the world, but how to live in it, recognizing

and turning from evil and bias, and expressing love to the neighbor in acts of kindness and usefulness.

“We cannot change the world all at once but we can, as our New Church mission guides us, pledge to continue to diligently teach each of our students not only natural truths to serve them in the world, but spiritual truths that lead to the good of life, and to creating a better world. May the Lord lead and guide all of us, equal human beings worthy of His love, toward this end.”

Academy Boys School Principal Jeremy Irwin and Girls School Principal Kira Schadegg, offered their thoughts for the Academy Family, against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic:

“Racism infects and spreads like most viruses. It looks for a host that has the right composition for incubation and it settles in. New carriers don’t always realize what they have, but as the infection grows, the true nature of the sickness becomes ever more apparent. By then it’s too late. The infected have transmitted to a new batch of hosts. And the cycle continues

“Education, at its core, is about changing the world. As students. As teachers. As communities. Learning is never-ending, and two blessings buried in its longevity are the eventual realization of how little we know and the acceptance that there will always be more questions in the universe than there are answers.

“While we don’t have complete answers, we do have the opportunity to look, to listen, and to learn. And we can do even more. We can feel. We can connect. We can support. We can believe. We can love.”

The challenges we face are daunting, even overwhelming. But we always have hope: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And He that sat upon the throne said: Behold, I make all things new.” (*Revelation 21:4,5*)

And what does He ask of us? Simply “to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with our God.” (*Micah 6:8*)

Letters to the Editor

Letters may be sent to the Editor of New Church Life at
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
or e-mailed to Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

Another View

(In response to the letter, "A Broader View," by Barrie Ridgway, *New Church Life*,
March/April 2020.)

To The Editor:

The author of the *Moral Case for Fossil Fuels*, Alex Epstein, says you must name your standard of value: "By what standard or measure are we saying something is good or bad . . . right or wrong, moral or immoral." He adds: "I hold human life as the standard of value." And, "Many leading environmental thinkers . . . hold as their standard of value what they call 'pristine' nature or wilderness – nature unaltered by man."

I think it obvious that New Church people hold the Word of the Lord as our standard of value. The Rev. Walter Orthwein mentions in his piece, *Saving the Planet*: "First of all, working to reduce pollution and to preserve and improve the natural environment is a good thing. The world was created for us by God, and we do have a responsibility to take care of it. We find the first indication of this in the creation story in *Genesis*: "The Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed . . . to tend and keep it." *Genesis* 2:8,15. (*New Church Life*, November/December 2019 Life Lines p. 565)

He further goes on to say: "But every truth can be distorted and turned into a heresy by over-emphasizing it at the expense of other, qualifying truths. It is human nature to do this, and extreme environmentalism is an example."

Humans have feared over-population for a long time. Perhaps the first time it became popularized was by Jonathan Swift in *A Modest Proposal* in the 18th century when he sarcastically suggested a "solution" to the Irish problem could be a nice supper. I suggest the Irish were at that time what the third world

is to the first world today: a population problem for those of us who no longer keep reproducing more than “we should” according to climate alarmists.

How many people were on the planet in Jonathan Swift’s time? It was approximately one billion. There were clearly local shortages of food that caused problems that were alarming for them. In 1950, when I was born, the world population was a little less than 2.5 billion. Then there was relatively slow growth from the early 1800s to 1950. But what about today? According to both the United Nations and other interested parties today’s world population is approximately eight billion. Amazing! In just 70 years the world’s population has grown from 2.5 billion to almost eight billion.

More amazing than that, people are living longer and are better fed than they were 70 years ago. (“By 39 and 40 percent, respectively, since 1990,” he says. “That means, in a world with a growing population, billions of people are better fed than they would have been just a few decades ago.”)

So why do so many people think that the world is over-heating and that population growth is causing this problem and therefore is a bad thing for the planet? I think there are two main reasons people are prone to believe these things:

1. The earth has mostly been warming since about 12,000 BC, but also cooling periodically. There has been a lot of climate change in the last 12,000 years. There is no “normal climate” but we are told over and over again in the media that there is and that change is bad. We are told that CO₂ is a pollutant and a “greenhouse gas” and that it is increasing at a rapid rate. But in fact it is an essential gas in our atmosphere and it exists as a trace gas at about 0.04% of the total today. It is true there has been an increase since the industrial revolution when it was about 0.029%. But it is essential and it is not a pollutant. Plants could not grow without it and without plants, nothing could live.

2. In 1968 two Stanford University professors, Paul R. Ehrlich and Anne Ehrlich, wrote a popular book, *The Population Bomb*. They said that in just two years there would be a famine across the world and that within a decade after that, in 1980, because of the huge population, society would break down under its weight. They are apparently still waiting for this apocalypse and claim the only reason it hasn’t occurred is because their warnings stopped people from having so many children.

So why are people across the planet living longer and healthier lives? It is because we are living wealthier lives. As fuel becomes relatively less expensive everywhere (except in Europe) life for all people becomes easier to live. Fuel = energy. Energy = wealth. Wealth = health. It just does.

If the wealthy first world denies the poorer third world the right to cheaper energy because they want them to either procreate less or pollute less then shame on us! And they have it all wrong anyway: wealthier countries, it turns

out, have fewer children (rightly or wrongly) and they pollute less too.

Human life on earth fills a special use in the Lord's kingdom, the Writings say. I believe that it is within His Divine Providence that we live here and spread His Word. As revealed in the Third Testament, the purpose of creation is a heaven from the human race. That is ALL humans, on all continents, all colors, all races. Rich white people have no right to dictate to poorer Africans or Asians that they must live in poorer conditions and have fewer children with less energy because we have some silly sense that CO2 is a pollutant because it isn't.

Suzy Laidlaw
Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania

The Stone Masons

To The Editor:

We all, from God, are created to be master masons – builders in contract with the Lord. Near to our hands lie all the materials available for the work, piled in heaps and scattered about. Some materials are tasteless, some burning hot. Others are as sweet as honey, demanding ever-increasing attention, while yet still others are wholesome, warm and useful. Each item savored is either rejected, or stored – a foundation for the edifice scarcely begun.

Not yet are we masters. As we strive – now here and now there – so we choose the things we will use while the plans that we dream take shape. We can make walls as on a stage with stones and mortar merely of paint. We can do highways, either solid or shoddy, pyramids of amazing grandeur, or images of many gods. Yay, even virtual towers can we now build. To what will we lay our hands?

When our building is in place, when the truths of God have been fitted finely together and steps to the fountain of life have been set, then let the star drills be hammered and the pitons set. Let cables be stretched for the clinging wisteria and flowering baskets of goodness to enshroud the moss-covered stones. For this is our temple to God, our dwelling for ever and ever!

By the mercy and grace of our God and Lord, He has let us be master masons, builders one and all.

Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, Florida

Planning Ahead

To The Editor:

Thank you for the March/April issue of *New Church Life*. The cover for this and the January/February issue are truly inspiring. I have to keep examining them for their beauty and inspiration.

Like many others who receive this bi-monthly journal I turn to the last couple of pages to see if any of my friends or acquaintances have died within the past month or two. As a member of the Class of 1947 I find our ranks are thinning out with these losses: Marlyn Smith, Drucie Heilman and Helga Synnestvedt.

One of your "Life Lines" caught my eye when you said as part of a "Memorial Gift" you should line up a minister for your final service. Well, with that thought in mind I asked our son, the Rev. Chuck Blair, to be aware that I wanted him to do the funeral service when I pass on. (I am 91 and pleased to still be around.) I told him I would like to have a regular church service.

His recent "live" online service for Karen Heilman Muth drew more than 800 viewers. His reply was: "Don't worry. We'll do both!" So there you have it – all lined up!

Kenneth Blair
Sarver, Pennsylvania

Those Who Are With Us

A Sermon by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers

Lessons: 2 Kings 6:8-15; Mark 9:33-40; Arcana Coelestia 1032:1,2

"Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." (2 Kings 6:16) This the prophet Elisha said to his servant Gehazi when they found their city surrounded by a great Syrian army, an army which had come to seize Elisha in order to prevent him from continuing to reveal their plans to the king of Israel.

This incident occurred during one of the frequent wars the northern kingdom of Israel became involved in against Syria. Earlier Israel had been engaged in wars with the southern kingdom of Judah, too. Warfare was an only too common experience.

It was a trying time. And something of the same may also be said of the Church's conflicts today. We, too, are living in trying times. Everywhere we turn we seem to see our traditional culture under assault and collapsing about us. What has happened to traditional morality? What has happened to Christianity? The precepts of yesteryear – precepts many of us were brought up with – are they no longer to be valued?

And yet . . .

And yet, as the prophet Elisha said to his servant Gehazi: "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." Elisha's reference was to an unseen supernatural army, ready to come to the city's defense, and we may hope that his words are still true today. But in a natural sense, it is also true that there are in this world more who are with us than those who are against us. "For," as the Lord Himself said in His advent, "he who is not against us is with us." (Mark 9:40)

The truth is that the world seems worse than it really is, because news outlets regularly and universally deliver news of unusual happenings and circumstances, and these for the most part represent occasions of strife and violence, crime and unfortunate accidents.

Everywhere we turn we seem to see our traditional culture under assault and collapsing about us. What has happened to traditional morality? What has happened to Christianity? The precepts of yesteryear – precepts many of us were brought up with – are they no longer to be valued?

Mr. and Mrs. Happily Married are almost never reported. Mom and Dad Family Man and Woman who get up in the morning, feed their children breakfast and see them safely off to school, are never reported. Faithful Servant who goes to work, does his or her work faithfully and honestly, is never reported. Mr. and Mrs. Farmer who get up early to get the farm's necessary chores done are never reported. Mr., Mrs. or Miss Factory Worker who does his or her work competently and well is never reported. Mrs. Den Mother who volunteers her time and energy as a Cub Scout leader is never reported. So, too, the father who volunteers his time and energy as a Boy Scout leader. And so on.

Good people, the backbone of the culture, are overlooked. They are not news, because their lives are not unusual. If they appear on television it

is as contestants on a game show. Or if they are famous it is because they have died and merit an obituary. Otherwise all those good people who keep the nation going, who are faithful to their spouses and children, who don't make waves (as they say), who are not unusual in what they do or how they live – they do not make the news. They are not reported on. They seemingly don't exist.

But in fact they do exist, and they are more in number than those who deviate from what is expected of them in their lives and actions.

Where is Divine providence in all of this?

To consider this question, it may be instructive to review the state of the spiritual world prior to the Last Judgment, begun in 1756 and completed in 1757. We may find in our present western world something of a parallel.

The Last Judgment became necessary at that time because ill-intentioned people – people driven to achieve and maintain power – began to accumulate in the world of spirits and to support one another. To maintain their power they employed various arts to deceive the good into believing that those in power – namely, themselves – were wise and devoted to the people's welfare. Thus they ensnared the good. And those whom they could not so ensnare they

endeavored to cast down into hell.

The latter – those they endeavored to cast down into hell – were spirits depicted in the Doctrines as protected in the lower earth – a term taken from the Old Testament – protected from further victimization by the powerful in the world of spirits, and protected from the evil already present in surrounding hells.

Thus they were protected. But protecting them may be likened to protecting innocent people by locking them up in a prison cell. Though protected, people locked up in a prison cell are not free; and so people cast down into the lower earth were

not free. Therefore they are represented in the book of *Revelation* as souls under the altar, crying out: “How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” (*Revelation* 6:9,10, *Apocalypse Revealed* 325-327)

Some of us may be able to identify ourselves with those souls under the altar. For at times we may feel surrounded by hostile forces, forces intent on destroying ideals that we value and principles that we live by. And yet we are protected – protected by good people everywhere who share our values and principles, even though they are not often represented in the news media.

“Blessed are those who mourn,” said the Lord, “for they shall be comforted.” (*Matthew* 5:4) And so those in the lower earth were comforted. They were comforted in their new state following the judgment on the ill-intentioned and powerful spirits who had cast them down.

This last judgment was carried out, not by force, not by attack, not by any spectacular or awesome event, but by an urgent exposure of the ill-intentioned and powerful spirits’ true nature, so that those they had ensnared could see their lust for power for what it was, namely a lust for power for the sake of power, and not for any useful purpose. This exposure may have been effectuated on the basis of the Latin *Arcana Coelestia*, which, translated, means *Secrets of Heaven*. It is reasonable to suppose that it was not a coincidence that the Last Judgment in the 18th century coincided with the writing and publication of the last volume of the *Arcana*.

Something of a parallel may be providentially occurring in the world today. For there are many in our culture who mourn the apparent passing of Christian

At times we may feel surrounded by hostile forces, forces intent on destroying ideals that we value and principles that we live by. And yet we are protected – protected by good people everywhere who share our values and principles.

The possibility may be, and we can hope for the possibility, that we are living in an age leading to a judgment, to a Divine judgment, brought about by the exposure of evils promoted and fostered by men and women more interested in power than in justice and righteousness.

virtues, values and principles and who are in need of comfort. In His advent the Lord also said: “Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven. . . .” (*Matthew 5:10,11*)

The possibility may be, and we can hope for the possibility, that we are living in an age leading to a judgment, to a Divine judgment, brought about by the exposure of evils promoted and fostered by men and women more interested in power than in justice and righteousness.

It is interesting to note that Emanuel Swedenborg lived at a time and in a period termed the Age of

Enlightenment, characterized by an intellectual and philosophical movement that dominated the world of ideas in Europe during the 18th century. It was a movement that substituted human reason for Christian dogma. Philosophy pushed aside traditional theology and attempted to create a new set of values and principles founded on the ideas of men.

And yet the following century saw a renewal of interest in the Bible and Christian theology. Churches flourished. New forms of Christianity appeared. Spiritism introduced a new interest in the possibility of a spiritual world and the immortality of the human soul. The Age of Reason passed and was replaced by a theistic outlook and culture.

Throughout history a number of judgments have occurred in the spiritual world, followed by a renewal of religious faith and life in the natural world. Today we may be ready for a new judgment. Certainly we are seeing evils exposed to a degree not seen two or three generations ago. These evils horrify, not just the religious and church-going public, but all good people everywhere, wherever they may be, whatever their station in life, whatever their occupation or marital status.

Regarding the latter, people’s marital status, it is true that the divorce rate in the United States hovers around 50%. However, this statistic includes

second and third marriages, which for the most part do not last as long as first marriages. The divorce rate of first marriages is actually about 40%, which means that 60%, the majority, do not end in divorce but endure.

Furthermore, we read in the book of the Heavenly Doctrines called *Conjugal Love*, or alternately *Married Love*, that the marital union of one man with one wife is the precious jewel of human life and the repository of Christian religion. (CL/ML 457, 458) Traditionally, in the New Church, the statement has been taken to refer to the new, true Christian religion. But we note that the statement refers simply to Christian religion; and we note further that Christianity is the one religion in the world that teaches monogamy as an article of religion. It is this, monogamy adhered to as a religious requirement,

that makes the marital union of one man with one wife the repository of Christian religion, whether it is a marriage of true married love or not. Perhaps this applies also to civil unions, provided they are monogamous and adhered to not simply for natural reasons, but as a religious obligation.

The truth is, we cannot judge of any marital union that it is one of true married love or not. For as the same book, *Married Love*, concludes, “one ought not to take the appearances in marriages or the appearances in acts of licentiousness and infer from them that someone does or does not have married love.” (*Ibid.* 531)

Considering how many monogamous unions occur and endure, it is clear that in this respect there are more who are with us than those who side with something else adverse to us.

When the Lord made His advent into the world, He did so to occasion a previous judgment in the spiritual world. For then, as in the 18th century, ill-intentioned spirits, driven by an appetite for power, had taken over the world of spirits, either beguiling and deceiving good spirits or thrusting them down into lower earths. These ill-intentioned spirits the Lord exposed as to their true nature, setting good spirits free from their deception in the world of spirits and raising up those previously imprisoned in those lower earths. The basis of their

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exposure rested in the Lord Himself, as He fought against the persuasions of the hells and glorified His humanity.

So it is with every spiritual judgment. It becomes necessary when people driven by a lust for power take control over the good and persuade that virtues are vices and that immoralities are acceptable, even praiseworthy. The judgment takes place, not by force, not by compulsion, but by an exposure of false notions and practices, so that they are seen to be neither true nor virtuous. Thus the power of the ill-intentioned is broken, and the victims of their persuasions are set free.

Let us remember and consider, then, the words of the prophet Isaiah to his servant Gehazi: “Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them.” (*2 Kings* 6:16)

We leave you with these words of the Lord, addressed to His followers in His first advent: “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” (*John* 16:33)

And with the apostle John we pray: “Even so, come Lord Jesus!” (*Revelation* 22:20)



The Rev. N. Bruce Rogers is retired and lives with his wife, Kirsten (Rydstrom) in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. He has been an associate professor of Religion and Latin in Bryn Athyn College and served for many years as a General Church translator. Contact: nbrogers@verizon.net

Laughter

A Sermon by The Rev. Derek P. Elphick

*And Sarah said, God has made me laugh,
so that all who hear will laugh with me. (Genesis 21:6)*

When the truth "hits" a person laughter is often the emotion that is released. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2072, 2216) Both Abraham and Sarah laughed when they were told by an angel that Sarah, at 90 years of age, would give birth to a son. It was not an incredulous laugh, but a happy one. They laughed at the good news, at the truth contained within the angel's announcement, and so gave their son a name meaning "laughter."

In the New Testament it seems quite clear, although it is not explicitly said, that Zacharias laughed when he was told by an angel that his aged wife, Elizabeth would bear a son. But his laughter must have been of a different kind because he was temporarily struck mute for his disbelief. (See *Luke* 1:20)

Laughter is a raw, untamed emotion. It's untamed because a burst of it can just as easily be triggered by an innocent, playful response as it can a snide, cruel one. It cuts both ways. Today we will be exploring a good kind of laughter, one that comes from God, and is represented by the birth of Isaac. It's a type of laughter that has a certain level of maturity to it; it sees the contrast between opposites; it notices the absurdity of evil and the sheer lunacy behind it, which, in turn, strengthens a person's resolve to live within the order and structure of the Lord's Word.

You may remember that Isaac had an older brother named Ishmael. Ishmael was notorious for being wild and reckless, and spiritually he pictures a mind that acts in a similar way. It's an immature mind, one that is mocking and disrespectful of the good and wholesome things in life.

In the story, it is Ishmael who is eventually cast out of the home. This allows Isaac, the younger brother, to grow up unhampered by the mocking presence of his older brother and, spiritually, marks an important transition point in us when a new kind of rational thinking takes over. This new, more

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mature way of looking at life is pictured by Isaac. Most importantly, a different kind of affection begins to assert itself, the "affection for truth" which is said to produce gladness, merriment and laughter in the face. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2072)

But before we examine this innocent, joyful laughter in more detail, something should be said about its opposite since in "*laughter there is usually something that is not good.*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 2072: 2)

Laughter and humor can obviously be used at the expense of others. As a character in one of Shakespeare's plays declares: "*I will use you for my mirth, yea, for my laughter.*" (*Julius Caesar IV*, iii, 49) We know that comedians and playwrights would have little material to work with if they didn't have people to "use for their mirth," to poke fun at. It's part of their business.

They might try to dodge the rather stark nature of their profession as one comedian did when he said, "*I'm not laughing at you, I'm laughing next to you!*" It's a clever response, but poking fun at other people is nevertheless part of the business. Of course, not all comedy is unkind or directed at people. It depends a lot on the subject matter and whether or not it's said with ill-intent. (We all need to be reminded not to take ourselves too seriously and have a good laugh.)

But there's a darker side to laughter. Sarcasm, for example, hides a mixture of emotions, and many that are not very healthy at all. In fact, any laughter which hides feelings of contempt or cruelty toward others is very hurtful to the person entertaining them. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2216, 5720)

The Scriptures offer many examples. Think of Ham who laughed at his father, Noah, who was found in his tent lying naked after drinking too much wine. (See *Genesis* 9:21-23) Think of another ancient parable, Job; he knew only too well what it was like to be sneered at, who said in a moment of deep sadness, "*The upright man is laughed to scorn.*" (See *Job* 12:4) Or think of the crowds who laughed in the Lord's face when He announced to them that the girl He was about to bring back to life was only sleeping. (See *Luke* 8:53) And think of the most shocking example of all when the crowds jeered and mocked the Lord as He lay pinned to the cross. (See *Luke* 23:35-37)

The teachings of the New Church explain the origin of this kind of

laughter. The unregenerate mind is ready to "*laugh and mock*" any truth which suggests that we do not live from ourselves but from God. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2654:3) The "*unenlightened rational*" simply laughs at interior truths, we are told. (*Ibid.*)

Emanuel Swedenborg witnessed the root cause of such laughter over and over again. As a reporter of things "heard and seen" in the spiritual world, he describes many of his encounters with evil spirits and devils. They spoke to him quite unabashedly, even proudly, about their deeds. (See the Supplement at the end of *Divine Providence*)

They deemed cunning plots as "ingenious," and adulterous liaisons as "honorable," and they laughed and mocked those who considered these acts to be cruel and heinous. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6666:3) Some devils take great pleasure in laughing at the misery of others. (*Ibid.* 2747) Once Swedenborg asked some devils if they remembered that adultery was against the seventh commandment. They laughed at him and said, "*What have we to do with that childish code?*" (*Divine Providence* 223)

There's an obvious lesson here. There *is* a bad kind of laughter, a mocking kind, and it can get the better of us at times. We may think it relatively harmless, and yet any laughter which has the tiniest bit of contempt in it ought to give us cause for concern, especially when we realize that evil spirits attach themselves to any snide, sarcastic remark and will work in secret to build it up into a reckless disregard for everything holy, pure and clean, and will not stop until everything of innocence has been destroyed. (See *Heaven and Hell* 380)

But let us return to the good kind of laughter represented by Isaac, the innocent, joyful kind that comes from God. As noted earlier, this kind of laughter is triggered by a different kind of rationality, a different kind of affection, and one that gives a person the ability to see truth clearly. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2216)

It is the kind of laughter which the angels in heaven enjoy every day. It is a playful, healthy kind because it has no contempt within it. All laughter in heaven gains its expression from seeing the truth of a matter ever more clearly. Swedenborg speaks of angel wives laughing in astonishment at some of the notions men have about women. (See *Conjugal Love* 56:2, 331, 355:2)

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He describes angels laughing in surprise at some of the ideas newly arrived spirits carry with them into the spiritual world. (See *True Christian Religion* 17:2) And the laughter is not reserved just for angels. Newcomers to the spiritual world will often burst out laughing when they see how "insane" their thinking had been while in the world. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5398:2)

The beautiful thing about all this laughter is that it's not done at the expense of somebody else. In some cases, it's people laughing at *themselves*, laughing at how wrong, how foolish they had been in their thinking. Good, clean laughter comes as a result of having our rational "tickled," as it were, of having our mind presented with two contradictory ideas so shockingly disparate that the truth of the matter

can no longer be ignored!

This explains the teaching of the New Church which says people only learn the truth of a matter by seeing its opposite. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5356) Gaining "*a sense and perception of what is [truly] satisfying and happy*" in life, we read, "*is impossible without a comparison with opposites.*" (*Ibid.* 6144)

The Lord used this type of teaching method in the New Testament quite frequently, and used some outrageous, even ridiculous analogies to drive the point home – which surely caused people to laugh (or at least smile) when they saw the truth of what He was saying. "*How can you say to your brother, 'Let me remove the speck out of your eye'; and look, a plank is in your own eye?*" (*Matthew* 7:4) And also, "*Do men gather grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?*" (*Ibid.* 7:16)

The Lord used extremes and taught by opposites to help people see the truth of a matter, to help them laugh at themselves, laugh at the absurdity of their own thinking. "*I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than it is for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.*" (*Ibid.* 19:24) What was the Lord saying? He was pointing out how ludicrous it is to think that a totally selfish heart could find a place in the kingdom of God.

Now, it's true that most of us are rarely in the mood to laugh or smile at evil (especially our own). It's hardly a regular source of amusement. We

see too much evidence of its destructive work in and around us to treat it lightly and besides, our day-to-day lives carry heavy responsibilities – bills to pay, pressures at work, health issues, challenges in a relationship or with our children, and so on.

What is there to smile and laugh about? Well, if we can admit to ourselves how ludicrous it is to hold onto a grudge or refuse to forgive or never admit fault, we are actually teaching ourselves to forcefully reject evil and see it for what it truly is! (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5356, 6114)

Hannah's beautiful prayer, spoken after learning she was pregnant (after many years of trying) begins with the words, "*I smile at my enemies because I rejoice in your salvation.*" (*I Samuel* 2:1) Yes, we can actually teach ourselves to smile at evil, smile at its impotence, its absurdity, its inability to make us happy.

When Swedenborg was taken through the process of resuscitation he noticed that the highest angels "*made light of all fallacies and falsities, smiling at them not indeed as matters for ridicule, but as if they cared nothing about them.*" (*Arcana Coelestia* 180) Another teaching adds that "*they made all the fallacies and falsities of the spiritual to be of no account, thus ridiculous, not at all by scoffing at them, but as if by caring nothing for them and remaining in their own tranquil state.*" (*Spiritual Diary* 1105)

This is what the angels do; they smile at evil because they see it stripped of all its illusions and appearances. They smile at evil because it is, quite literally, nothing in comparison to the joys and delights of heaven.

And so we smile, we laugh, not at the people who have chosen to live this way (which is truly sad), but at the absurdity of evil and falsity itself, how it can trick us into thinking it's a tantalizing option, that it will somehow bring us pleasure and make us happy. Our rational mind laughs, knowing that this is a lie, that there's a much better way to live our lives, a much better way to use the precious gifts and talents which the Lord has given us.

The good, mature, innocent kind of laughter represented by Isaac helps us to step back from ourselves and see the Lord's truth free of obstruction, in a totally new light. Good laughter comes from seeing the blind spots in our own thinking, from seeing the contradictions in our own behavior, from not taking ourselves too seriously and, yes, learning to laugh at ourselves. For when we laugh in this way, we are laughing because we finally see the truth of a matter, and to see the truth is to see the work of God, His love for us, and His eternal purposes for us.

The Lord has given us plenty of reasons to laugh and smile and it has everything to do with our spirit. This is because our spirit is the driver – our spirit (or rational mind) is responsible for how we choose to *interpret* that which goes on in our outward life. When we fill our minds with the rational truths of the Lord's Word, a new kind of *affection* begins to take root. It slowly

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look like mountains, and are constantly bathed in the light of heaven there. They know nothing of the kind of darkness we have at night in the world, and they live in a springtime climate as well. Their scenery offers them views like fields ripe for harvest and vineyards. Everything in their houses gleams as though it were made of precious stones. As a result, everything they see seems to laugh and play and come alive. (*Ibid.*)

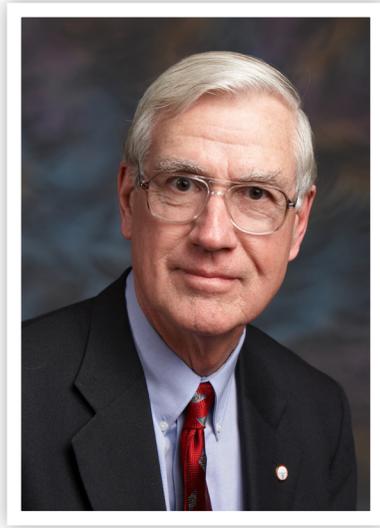
Amen.



The Rev. Derek P. Elphick is Pastor of the Oak Arbor Society in Rochester, Michigan, and is Regional Pastor for the Midwestern United States. He and his wife, Gay (Hodgell), live in Rochester. Contact: delphick@oakarbor.org

RESURRECTION ADDRESS

The Rev. Kurt
Horigan Asplundh



By The Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh

Bryn Athyn Cathedral, May 10, 2020

What shall I render to the LORD,
For all His benefits toward me?
I will take up the cup of salvations
And call upon the name of the LORD. (Psalm 116: 12, 13)

The cup of salvations . . . A cup is a vessel, just as truth is a vessel. Vessels are important, but only because of their use in containing what is within them.

The Lord, while He was in the world, said: “Whoever gives you a cup of

Kurt was a champion for the truth of the Word being brought into life. He might often have been a reserved and quiet champion of the Word brought to life, but at the same time Kurt was surely principled and resolute.

water to drink in My name . . . will by no means lose his reward.” (*Mark 9: 41*) We are told that this refers to “instruction in the truths of faith.” (*Arcana Coelestia 5120*) So, taking up and drinking from a cup means spiritually to be instructed, to learn something, about what is true.

In the 116th *Psalms*, the psalmist speaks as someone who has learned much hard truth from bitter experience but has also come to see the wonderful truth about the Lord’s deliverance and bountiful dealing. And so, when that psalmist pondered what it is that can be rendered to the Lord, for all the benefits that He provides, this is the answer: “I will take up the cup of salvations.” We are to “take up the cup,”

to learn the truths of faith – and to learn them for the purpose of our salvation, so that the Lord can lift us up and bring us into the blessings of eternal life in heaven. Truth is a vessel like a cup is a vessel and truth is given to us for our lives.

And when it comes to truth being applied to life, the truth of the Word is pervasive. We read:

[In] the Word are all things that are of life, for those things have in them life itself; because in the Word is the Divine truth which has proceeded and still proceeds from the Lord, who is life itself. It is from this that all things in the Word are matters of life; and also that all things therein have relation to the life. (*Arcana Coelestia 9383*)

One week and one day ago, the Reverend Kurt Horigan Asplundh passed from life in this world at the age of 86 and has now been resurrected to new life in the spiritual world. Kurt was a champion for the truth of the Word being brought into life. He might often have been a reserved and quiet champion of the Word brought to life, but at the same time Kurt was surely principled and resolute. And also, we say “quiet,” but by no means is that to say he was mute. We are fortunate to have much of his prodigious output, during a 36-year pastoral career and beyond, of both the written and spoken word, in sermons and classes, in stories and articles, available to us electronically, just a few keystrokes away.

Here is just one example of a paragraph transcribed from a recording of a 1989 sermon, given here at the cathedral, entitled, *Hope and Encouragement*. It

shows his devotion to the truth as the “cup of salvations”; it shows his careful and caring pastoral touch; and it also shows his considerable craftsmanship with the English language:

We tend to be discouraged about our progress in regeneration as we learn more truths that are the means to that end because we measure our life by those truths and we find our life wanting. It is well then to remember the purpose of truth. It is not to condemn us or to discourage us but to heal us. . . . These teachings of revelation look to our salvation. They've been given in mercy, not to shame us, not to depress us, not to discourage us, but to help us. The Lord points out our faults and we may free ourselves from them because “the truth shall make you free.”
(Transcribed from a New Church Audio recording)

We are told in the Heavenly Doctrine: “The first of the church is good, the second is truth . . . For the truth of the doctrine of faith is for the sake of the good of life. That which is the end for the sake of which something else exists, this is the first.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 7755) Good is the first of the church; the truth of the doctrine of faith is for the sake of *the good of life*.

Kurt once shared with a young colleague his desire to write a book, intended for everyone. He was unsure of the exact title but wanted it to be some kind of play on words, putting this term from our doctrine, “the good of life,” alongside the more worldly term, “the good life.” The details of the conversation are vague, but it is clear to this day that Kurt felt strongly that a good life in the world and the good of life that comes to us from the Lord and from heaven, are not so far apart as many might believe.

To be sure, they are distinctly different things, and he would make that clear in this book he wanted to write, but he also wanted people to understand that there is all this truth available and that the pursuit, on a higher level, of the good of life, as opposed to the pursuit only of a good life, is the way to sustainable and lasting, indeed to eternal happiness. “Answers are [in the Word],” Kurt wrote in a 1974 article, “answers more deeply relevant and applicable than we may realize.” (*New Church Life* 1974: page 378)

Kurt Horigan Asplundh was born in July of 1933, the third son of Lester and Grace Horigan Asplundh, coming after brothers Boyd and Bob and before sister Leslie. Home movie footage from Kurt’s boyhood days shows a happy young lad, not at all shy about making faces for the camera. In an autobiographical poem written at his 50th birthday Kurt described his youth with these words:

My childhood days were precious
There were woods and fields and creek
And a town dump on the outskirts
For such treasures boys will seek

Casting himself as a budding outdoorsman in this way was confirmed this

“The Lord’s church exists throughout the whole world,” we are told, “although it is especially located where the Lord is acknowledged and the Word is known.” (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 244) Kurt and Martha lived that teaching.

week by a neighborhood contemporary. She said, “We girls called Kurt the Woodsman because he was always off tromping in the woods.”

But Kurt’s appreciation for the Lord’s creation was not limited in those early days just to the wilds of Bryn Athyn. When Kurt was seven, a seashore house for the family was built at 2701 Wesley in Ocean City, New Jersey. A love for the beach and for water sports like sailing and fishing is something Kurt has passed down not just to his own children, but also to grandchildren and now to great-grandchildren.

“The Lord’s Divine providence,” we are told, “is most specific and most universal in connection with marriages.” (*Conjugal Love* 229)

There are three stanzas in that autobiographical poem that describe Kurt’s high school days at the Academy of the New Church Boys School. The first mentions the Sigma Delta Pi and the second serving as Social Representative in his senior year. The third of those three stanzas goes like this:

A Lindsay girl in Glenn Hall
Had earned my highest rating
But I didn’t take her out too much—
There was no steady dating

This, of course, is a reference to the beginning of Kurt and Martha Lindsay’s relationship, which led in due time to their marriage that has continued now for nearly 64 years. In actual fact, though, Kurt and Martha had already once met briefly before she had come from Pittsburgh to the Academy Girls School. In June of 1950, the 19th General Assembly of the General Church took place in Bryn Athyn and teenaged Kurt and Martha met at a young people’s social event.

This little scene seems fitting and moves us forward on the timeline to reflect on the service that Kurt – and Martha with him – have given to the worldwide General Church of the New Jerusalem throughout the years. It is true that Kurt was employed as a pastor and principal in just two societies, Pittsburgh and Bryn Athyn. But there are many New Church people, and

many far distant from the state of Pennsylvania, who have been touched by the warm friendliness and good nature of Kurt and Martha, whether visiting or staying with them in their home here or being visited by them in their far-flung societies. “The Lord’s church exists throughout the whole world,” we are told, “although it is especially located where the Lord is acknowledged and the Word is known.” (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 244) Kurt and Martha lived that teaching.

But back to the early 1950s: Kurt and Martha graduated from the Academy Secondary Schools in 1952 and then continued together for a year at the Academy College. Kurt then transferred to Amherst College in Massachusetts to study English. As evidenced by summertime employment for a few years at the *Ocean City Sentinel-Ledger*, Kurt was interested in writing and journalism. But at some point during his time away at college, he changed his mind. Let’s hear how Kurt himself put it, in a way we’d expect: with good humor alongside seriousness about the life’s work he had decided on:

I thought I’d be a writer
 So I went to Amherst fair
 Surviving that experience
 I graduated there

But instead of jingles selling soap
 Or journalistic prose
 To write about our doctrine
 Was the direction that I chose

So, after getting his bachelor’s degree in the spring of 1956, and marrying Martha on June 16th of that year, Kurt began his studies at the Academy Theological School the next fall. He finished school and was ordained in 1960 when he was appointed as an assistant to Pastor Louis King at the Pittsburgh New Church and School. Three years later, Louis was called to Glenview and Kurt continued in Pittsburgh. Those were very busy years for Kurt serving on his own as both pastor and principal of the school and paying monthly visits, too, to a group in the rural countryside outside Pittsburgh.

And there was also a growing family to be concerned with. Cathy had arrived during Theological School years, then, after the sad loss of another baby, there were Stewart, Betsy and Peter, all born in Pittsburgh. There is an enduring family memory from the Pittsburgh years of the sound of Kurt’s IBM Selectric typewriter, clicking away in his third-floor study in their home as he toiled at his sermons, classes and articles. IBM had only come out with the Selectric in July of 1961, so Kurt (who had taught himself how to touch-type) probably had one of the first and he surely put it to good use.

The year 1972 brought a new assignment as principal of the church school here in Bryn Athyn, and so Kurt returned to his home town and it would be his

home for another 48 years up to his peaceful passing, surrounded by family. Kurt served in Bryn Athyn as principal, then Dean of the society and finally becoming Bryn Athyn's first pastor who was not at the same time Executive Bishop of the General Church.

Kurt's pastoral care and leadership in Bryn Athyn could be described in many ways. We will mention two things that bring us back to the doctrinal theme in the light of which we are remembering the earthly life of Kurt Horigan Asplundh and celebrating his resurrection into the spiritual world: "In the Word are all things that are of life." (*Arcana Coelestia* 9383)

If bringing the Word to life was something that motivated Kurt, one way we could see it is in his leadership of festival pageants. There is a long history of pageant presentations in the General Church; Kurt was surely not the first to stage a pageant on the 19th of June, or at other times, as a whole school exercise, but many remember his enthusiastic leadership of these events when the Word was, literally, brought to life.

And speaking of enthusiasm, that is a word used recently to describe Kurt's involvement in a camp-style alternative worship service that was started up late in his pastorate in Bryn Athyn and continues to this day. Informal, contemporary worship may not have been his preferred "cup of tea." But his periodic participation in that come-as-you-are service is remembered with gratitude; he really seemed to embrace it. And maybe it was because a crucial part of that service has always been, weekly, acting out stories from the Word – bringing the Word to life. Kurt may not have liked everything about that kind of worship, but if it was helping people to see how the truth of the Word applied to their lives, helping them to "take up the cup of salvations," then maybe that was the most important thing.

Kurt retired as pastor of Bryn Athyn in 1996.

When he was ordained into the pastoral use of the priesthood on June 19th, 1962, his statement of faith and purpose at the rite of ordination included these words:

In presenting myself for ordination into the priesthood of the New Church it is my purpose to further the Divine end of salvation by teaching men according to the doctrine of the church from the Word and by leading them to live according to it, yet not compelling anyone.

" . . .yet not compelling anyone." That phrase comes directly from the Heavenly Doctrine: "Priests ought to teach the people, and to lead them by truths to the good of life," we read, "but still they ought to compel no one, since no one can be compelled to believe contrary to what they think from their heart to be true." (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 318) When Kurt invoked these words, "compel no one," he was being faithful to our doctrine and maybe also telling us something about himself.

There are many more examples that show Kurt's often creative efforts to bring the Word to life: his founding leadership of New Church Challenge; authoring children's stories; serving post-retirement as a temporary resident pastor in Australia and England; a two-year stint as editor of *New Church Life*; his interest in the work of the New Church Audio group; and much more.

Kurt found space in his life for projects like these because he wanted all of us to find space in our lives for the truth of the Word, the doctrine of our church and a life in keeping with those things. And the record suggests, along with the testimony of many, that Kurt lived up to his stated intention of teaching these things, "yet not compelling anyone."

"[The] Lord guards the freedom in a person," we read, "as a person does the pupil of his eye." (*Divine Providence* 97) Kurt could be seen as a defender of our faith and also a defender of our freedom.

Many remembrances over the past week have observed his strength and firmness and also his kindness and warmth. One young man put it this way: "So sharp yet gentle." And he continued, "I grew up with Kurt as the pastor and as a young elementary school child we were asked to draw a picture of the Lord. My teacher asked, 'Why did you draw Him with glasses?' Because Kurt Asplundh was the minister I always saw and to me, that's who he was then." That's a fun story, but the description at the beginning seems especially apt: "So sharp yet gentle."

The New Church on earth has lost a faithful teacher and leader and a family has lost a husband, a Dad and a Grandpa – and an uncle, too. His family would probably agree that "the good of life" was the most important thing for Kurt, but he did also seem to have something of a knack for "the good life," as

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well.

Here is a partial list of memories from four generations of Kurt's family: a honeymoon sailing trip in Bermuda, home movies, funny and heartfelt poems, the beach, fly-fishing, "a guy you could always trust," calmness, a dry sense of humor, turtle soup, a unique approach to sailing lessons, blowing the paper wrapper off a straw at Mack & Manco's, boat shoes, toast and jam, a signed copy of his book of Johnny Appleseed stories, setting up the Christmas representation and reading the Christmas story from the Word, strong hands holding a copy of the Word. Even assembling a list of family memories of the good life that Kurt lived, the good of life, taking up the cup of salvations, is never too far off.

The kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one. . . . After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, 'Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them.' His lord said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.' (*Matthew 25: 14, 15, 19-21*)



The Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh – nephew of the Rev. Kurt Horigan Asplundh – is retired but teaches theology in the Bryn Athyn College Theological School and religion at the Bryn Athyn Church School. He also does occasional chapel services for the Academy Secondary Schools. He and his wife, Jenn (Coffin), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: kasplundh@yahoo.com

FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

'A Very Present Help in Trouble'



The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

I love the way the Lord beseeches us in *Deuteronomy 30* – a part of the Word I rediscovered recently in my devotional reading:

This commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, “Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?” But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it. (vs. 11-14)

We do have the Word, in the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrines. The Lord has made known to us a full version of His will for our lives; it's readily available and we are wise to draw on its wisdom.

The same is true of the Lord Himself. He returned to the disciples in the resurrection to remind them, “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (*Matthew 28:20*) The Psalmist says much the same thing: “God is our refuge and strength; a very present help in trouble.” (*Psalms 46:1*) The Heavenly Doctrines add depth to this truth, saying: “As long as temptation lasts, a person assumes that the Lord is not present. . . . Yet at such times the Lord is more present than that person can possibly believe.” (*Arcana Coelestia 840*)

Let's reflect for a moment on the “very present help in trouble” portion of the message, using things from recent experience as examples. I draw attention to them to underscore the fact that the Lord in His Word can help with whatever comes before us.

The coronavirus pandemic has had negative effect on people's lives and livelihoods, and the ripple effects continue to be felt. For many people it is a time of increased concern about the future. Does it help to hear the Lord saying, concerning the necessities of life, “Your Heavenly Father knows that you have need of all these things, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you”? (*Matthew 6:32-33*)

We have the Word in its fullness readily available to us. We have the Lord right there “urging and pressing to be received.” Our calling is to take advantage of what the Lord has so graciously offered.

Or how about the quote from the Heavenly Doctrines that has brought comfort to many: “When the Lord is with someone, He leads them and makes provision so that all that happens, whether sad or joyful, may bring them what is good. This is Divine Providence.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 6303)

Still present in the hearts of many of us is an inexcusable death of a black man this past May that has rightly brought to the fore the reality of prejudice and hatred. We could agree that the Lord is readily available there, too, teaching us to regard and act toward others the way we would want

to be treated (see *Matthew* 7:12), and expanding the command against murder to include hatred harbored in the human heart. (See *True Christian Religion* 309)

In the positive sense, we read in the Heavenly Doctrines: “The Lord is present with people the moment they start to love the neighbor. It is in love that the Lord is present, and to the extent that people have love the Lord is present.” (*Arcana Coelestia* 904)

I raise a third challenge that to some may not be as clear-cut, namely a recent ruling of the Supreme Court in the United States broadening employment protections under the Civil Rights Act to include gay and transgender people. Again, we could conclude that the Word has helpful perspectives that can guide our response. On the one hand, the same teachings mentioned before apply regarding treating others as we would want to be treated. Other teachings about the civil realm may also bring perspective. But there is also value in reminding ourselves from the Word what brings the happiness the Lord wants for all people.

Is it helpful to read that the Lord is working, even in our mixed-up world, “to revive conjugal love such as it was among ancient people,” and that flawed people like ourselves can experience this love to the extent that we are “made spiritual by Him through His Word”? (*Conjugal Love* 81:e)

To say that life in this world brings challenges is an understatement. There will be future unexpected struggles to face, and we will be tested in terms of how to respond. In addition to these larger world issues, there are the personal questions and trials that come our way as we strive for a loving and wise response to all that life brings our way.

For these reasons it is vital for us to absorb again the exhortation of the Lord: “This commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. . . . But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.” (*Deuteronomy* 30:11,14)

We have the Word in its fullness readily available to us. We have the Lord right there “urging and pressing to be received.” (*True Christian Religion* 766) Our calling is to take advantage of what the Lord has so graciously offered. As that chapter in *Deuteronomy* concludes:

Therefore choose life that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the Lord your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days. (*Deuteronomy* 30: 19-20)

Contact: *Peter.Buss.Jr@newchurch.org*

GRADUATION CELEBRATION ADDRESS

Bryn Athyn College Class of 2020

President Brian Blair

May 29, 2020

Note: This address was presented at a Graduation Celebration on the date of the original ceremony, which was postponed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. An official Commencement, with awarding of degrees, is planned for September 26, with an address by Brian Henderson, former Dean and History teacher at the College, now Director of Glencairn Museum.

Good evening graduates, faculty, staff and friends. It is my pleasure to welcome you to the very first “virtual graduate celebration” in the 143-year-old history of Bryn Athyn College. Tonight, we want to recognize the Class of 2020 for becoming graduates of Bryn Athyn College as well as those who have received academic and service awards. (See the list of awards on page 322.)

Our program will conclude with our graduates being welcomed as new members of the Bryn Athyn College Alumni Association by David Cooper, President. We will end with a blessing on the Class of 2020 by Chaplain Grant Schnarr.

This is indeed a moving moment for us as we want to celebrate all that you have accomplished in pursuing your degree. However, we never imagined that we would need to celebrate your graduation tonight through the electronic medium of the internet. But COVID-19 is not going to deter us from expressing our joy and admiration for all that you have accomplished. The human spirit is a remarkable force that can overcome all forms of adversity. I know the Class of 2020 is made up of graduates who will pursue their dreams no matter what life may put in front of them.

Graduates, you have all met a major challenge by completing the academic requirements in order to be granted a bachelor’s degree at Bryn Athyn College. Obtaining a bachelor’s degree from our College is no easy task. As you have experienced, Bryn Athyn College engages students with a rigorous curriculum

taught by a dedicated faculty committed to academic excellence. We know your time here was filled with a huge amount of classwork, studying, writing and most of all: *thinking*.

You may not immediately realize it, but the practice of *thinking* has made you grow as a person, developed your rational mind and empowered you to think both broadly and deeply about everything associated with life. You have become a college-educated human being and now hold a gift that cannot be taken away from you.

Education is special gift that is cherished as a means to pursue a life-long use, whether in a career, to obtain an academic credential, or to satisfy a particular area of intellectual curiosity. Your education will take you to places you may never have imagined.

One of the hallmarks of a New Church college education has been to introduce you to the importance of being useful while extending love to your neighbor and in turn to all mankind. The Lord's Providence will lead you to greater uses if you make yourself open to His calling. At this point in your young life, you cannot possibly see how you are going to take this journey. But please know it will be filled with twists and turns, ups and downs, happiness and sorrow. You will be tested throughout your life, but you are now ready to take this journey.

The Lord's plan is to lead you to an everlasting eternal life of happiness. Having faith in the Lord will empower you to deal with adversity and support you when decision-making must be done, particularly in times of great uncertainty.

I expect the Class of 2020 has members who will choose professions such as inspiring educators, compassionate health care professionals, noble business leaders or inquisitive researchers, just to name a few. There may even be some of you who will help to save mankind from the ravages of disease or global conflict that often plague each generation.

With such pressing opportunities waiting to call you, there is still time to pause and enjoy the moment of recognizing your achievements. But why is it important to celebrate these achievements, one might ask? I would like to help you answer that question.

Celebrations can be defined as a special occasion or solemn ceremony

One of the hallmarks of a New Church college education has been to introduce you to the importance of being useful while extending love to your neighbor and in turn to all mankind.

Your joy of accomplishment should also be shared with your family and friends who stood behind you. They are so proud of you and this is a special moment for them also.

marked by some form of festivity or deviation from routine. Celebrations are also used to recognize milestones in one's life as a reminder of an individual's personal growth or commitment to a new chapter in their lives. Our graduates should reflect on what they have accomplished and the significance of their achievements.

As one takes on new stations in life, an awareness or new confidence should emerge about the expanded repertoire of skills you have developed while at Bryn Athyn College. Remember now the new strengths you possess and

know that you can achieve what you set your mind to. With confidence you will continue to learn, grow and become even better at what you set out to perform.

Getting back to celebrating, please know that your joy of accomplishment should also be shared with your family and friends who stood behind you. They are so proud of you and this is a special moment for parents to see their child gain a college degree. Your loved ones have looked forward to this time from the day you were born. Please join with them in celebrating but also extend the sincerest form of gratitude for all they have done to support you and prepare you for this milestone.

Speaking on behalf of Bryn Athyn College, we are so happy to be part of your graduation celebration. We look forward to September 26 where we hope you can return to campus to receive your diploma in a well-deserved commencement ceremony. Although your class has had to deal with historic difficulties associated with the pandemic, I am sure you will agree with me that this is a time you will never forget. You all will be forever known as that remarkable class of 2020 who overcame a very difficult time.

So let me extend the warmest congratulations to all of you and we do look forward to seeing you in September.

Contact: *Brian.Blair@brynathyn.edu*

The Reach of New Church Education:

An Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College

The Rev. Dr. Thane P. Glenn

“Thanks again for letting me take this course. I am a 66-year-old man from North Carolina. All things Swedenborg are new to me. I had never heard of Swedenborg until two months ago when I found one of his books on the internet. . . . This class has helped clear up thoughts I had that I didn't have answers to. It has helped me to understand myself more. My understanding of many spiritual things is much clearer now. The good news is that the spirit of goodness and mercy is with us every day all day.”

Bob has never set foot on the campus of Bryn Athyn College. None of the faculty or staff of the college has ever met him. We have no transcript of his past education nor any record of his plans. And yet he is a student of Bryn Athyn's curriculum.

He is one of the early enrollees in Bryn Athyn College's first non-credit, free online course – *The Afterlife* – with the Rev. Grant Schnarr. This is one initiative of the Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College, a recently formed body organized to advance the College's role as a center for broadly promoting the study of Swedenborgian theology.

Where does New Church higher education take place? For well more than a century, it has taken place in the classrooms and halls of Bryn Athyn's campus. And yet, for every student in that time who has had the opportunity to find his or her way to the campus, there may be untold others like Bob, scattered around the world, ready to engage in Swedenborgian thought. What if our campus could find them?

In 1899, 22 years after the founding of the Academy of the New Church, Bishop W. F. Pendleton gave an address to a General Church Assembly in

Why explore more outward-looking forms of education? We need look no further than the original Charter of the Academy.

Kitchener (then Berlin), Ontario, Canada, in which he outlined the *Principles of the Academy*. The last of his principles positions the Academy in a decidedly inward-looking stance, stating that “The most fruitful field of evangelization is with the children of New Church parents.”

Bishop Pendleton’s explication of the statement makes clear three reasons behind the principle:

1. A formal system of New Church education had been previously “neglect[ed]”
2. “A hundred years” of efforts in evangelization had yielded few results
3. The reading of the teachings for the New Church among early adherents of the Academy suggested “the hopelessness of the expectation that many of the former church will turn to the Lord in His coming”

This final principle of the Academy set in motion what was to become a long-standing tension between education and evangelization in the ecclesiastical body which developed from the Academy: the General Church of the New Jerusalem.

With the development of technology reaching a point that high-quality connection and communication are readily possible across the world, it may be a better time than ever to seek ways to combine the functions of New Church education and evangelization, to strive to establish modes of education that are primarily outward-looking. This goal is the reason behind the newly formed Institute for Swedenborg Studies, which seeks to promote the study of Swedenborgian theology in a wide variety of ways among a broad audience.

Why explore more outward-looking forms of education? We need look no further than the original Charter of the Academy. Calling on the Biblical metaphor of scattered and germinating seed – a metaphor ubiquitous in the teachings for the New Church – the first Charter purpose of the Academy is to “propagat[e] the Heavenly Doctrines of the New Jerusalem.” Propagation implies a spreading outward, both in space (scattered seed) and time (the continuing promise of new life-giving way to new life in cycles of germination).

The second Charter purpose is certainly no less broad in its scope: to “establish . . . the New Church signified in the Apocalypse by the New Jerusalem.” The vision of the New Jerusalem is of a spiritual city too vast to comprehend, with gates always open on every side, a perpetual invitation to the nations.

The third Charter purpose makes clear the manner in which this

propagation and establishment should take place, by “promoting education in all of its various forms.” The authors wisely left this Charter purpose general and uncertain, unable to foresee all of the forms that education might take.

Bryn Athyn College’s specific mission statement picks up on the language of broad reach established in the original Charter, stating that the institution should “serve . . . as an intellectual center for *all* who desire to engage in higher education enriched, guided and structured by the study of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg” (emphasis added). The mission says nothing about where that higher education should take place.

To reach *all* who desire to engage with New Church higher education was part of Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan’s vision for Bryn Athyn College and its scholarship. At the very end of her long and fruitful career as a Bryn Athyn professor and Swedenborgian scholar, Jane cast a vision for an institute of Swedenborg Studies at the College. She submitted a proposal for such an institute to several of her colleagues, myself included, on January 29, 2018 – the 330th anniversary of Emanuel Swedenborg’s birth.

Less than two weeks later, Jane passed away after a battle with cancer, but the seed she had planted took root and began to grow, with College President Brian Blair’s support, gradually expanding the scope of her original vision to include a number of initiatives for extending the reach of the study of Swedenborgian theology. A steering committee was formed, and late in 2018, the Institute was officially established with bylaws and an organizational plan.

The mission of the Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College is to *engage a wide variety of audiences with the study of Emanuel Swedenborg, Swedenborgian theology, and the impact of both; and to encourage such study in forms that can effectively be promoted and facilitated within and via Bryn Athyn College.*

Specifically, the Institute is focused on a handful of particular initiatives. These include developing the scope and reach of Bryn Athyn’s Master of Arts in Religious Studies program, creating non-credit online courses in Swedenborg studies, running non-credit campus programs, workshops and retreats focused on Swedenborgian ideas, developing resources to support Swedenborg studies, and holding periodic academic conferences on themes in Swedenborg studies.

In addition, the Institute hopes to generate research grants for faculty,

To reach *all* who desire to engage with New Church higher education was part of Dr. Jane Williams-Hogan’s vision for Bryn Athyn College and its scholarship.

students and others interested in pursuing Swedenborgian scholarship, and to host a program of visiting Swedenborg scholars. Down the road, the Institute might consider the enterprise of publishing a periodic academic journal devoted to Swedenborgian scholarship.

The Afterlife, the Institute's pilot non-credit online course, launched in April, the Monday after Easter. The course is designed so that anyone in the world with internet access can take it, anytime, at the participant's own pace. Through a series of readings and video lectures, Mr. Schnarr provides a detailed exploration of the ideas about life after death presented by Emanuel Swedenborg, examined in tandem with the phenomenon of near-death experiences.

The course highlights the remarkably vivid and human vision of the afterlife revealed in Swedenborg's works, a vision coalescing around themes of free will, individuality and community, and the promise that all are led to whom and what they love. Topical quizzes allow participants to test their knowledge of the information presented, and interactive exercises provide an avenue for further exploration. Discussion boards offer an opportunity for enrollees to interact with other participants, ask questions and share thoughts. Anyone interested in enrolling can find the course on the College's website at www.brynathyn.edu/afterlife.

Why set up an Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College now? Why put in place these non-credit online courses for anyone in the world? Why look beyond the College's enrolled students toward broader communities of those who might be interested in studying New Church theology, toward scholars who hold no affiliation with either the Academy or the General Church? Why put our efforts into establishing educational forms of outreach? The answer is twofold.

First, the success of programs—like *offTheLeftEye* (the Swedenborg Foundation) and sites like the New Christian Bible Study—at reaching a broad audience offers evidence that there are many people – more than we may know of or imagine – who will be interested in Swedenborgian theology and the world-changing insights this theology offers.

The Swedenborg Foundation and New Christian Bible Study reach a wide audience, but offer limited opportunities for sustained, guided engagement in study and personal interaction. The Institute hopes to seek opportunities to partner with these organizations and others like them and to find ways to fill lacunae in what they provide.

For instance, the Institute can create programs for sustained, guided engagement in study and personal interaction that the Foundation and NCBS site do not provide. The Institute can also provide programmatic engagement that promotes the kind of academic objectivity and encounter with a variety of thought that a church organization (such as the General Church) is perhaps

neither designed nor intended to facilitate.

The second reason for establishing an Institute for Swedenborg Studies at Bryn Athyn College now is that, quite simply, our mission, derived from our Charter purpose, calls us to extend the reach of our education to *all* who desire to engage in New Church higher education.

Consider the following statement, which formed the heart of Jane Williams-Hogan's original proposal for the Institute: We have a duty to promote the vision of a New Jerusalem, a New Church, that Swedenborg's theological writings contain. That vision touches every aspect of what it means to be human. Higher education explores in depth every aspect of our human world through the sciences, art, literature, the social sciences, mathematics, and many other disciplines. At Bryn Athyn College these are enhanced by the spiritual framework found in Swedenborgian theology.

Thus, scholarship at the College is of benefit to its own faculty and students but can also contribute an important spiritual framework to the broader conversation about how the world functions. We need to assume the task of making that contribution. In short, an Institute for Swedenborg Studies provides an avenue to put Swedenborgian thought in dialogue with the world.

Toward the beginning of this article, I raised the question: *Where does New Church higher education take place?* Perhaps a better question is this: *Where does the New Jerusalem descend?* That descent doesn't take place in a particular town, on a specific campus, or in a certain church building or classroom.

As we well know from the teachings for the New Church, it takes place in the hearts of those whose understanding and lives are being transformed by the message of those teachings. This is the well-known promise of the New Jerusalem: "*God Himself will be with them and be their God. . . . And He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'*" (Revelation 21:3,5)

In short, an Institute for Swedenborg Studies provides an avenue to put Swedenborgian thought in dialogue with the world.



The Rev. Dr. Thane P. Glenn is associate professor of Religion, English and Writing at Bryn Athyn College. He and his wife, Joralyn (Echols), live with their infant son in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: thane.glenn@brynathyn.edu

Adventures in Evangelization on YouTube

The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger

If Dr. Emmett Brown from the *Back to the Future* movies had a brother, one who was a minister, I think he would have been the Rev. Christopher R. J. Smith. I remember sitting in that classroom in de Charms Hall and Rev. Smith would come in with wide eyes, an odd little look on his face, and then start to speak. We couldn't help but pay attention, and like Dr. Brown, CRJS as we knew him seemed a little crazy, but we also wanted to know what he was up to. Like him or not, he was interesting.

One of his favorite things to say was something like: "Boys, I want you to burn this into the back of your eyeballs! The most important thing the Lord said, it was His first words in the book of *John*, 'What do you seek?'" As you can see, it has stuck. What do you seek? (*John* 1:38)

Going into Theological School I was very clear as to what I sought. I felt that I was on the path to being a better me, and I wanted to share that with others so they too could feel free from their bondage. In my mind, modern people already believed much of what the New Church taught, and therefore getting them to join in with a congregation wouldn't be hard.

I was optimistic, and as it turns out I was, maybe, half right. I did my best to get out into the local area and meet people, and yes, many people do believe what we teach. A few years ago it was our turn hosting the Christmas party for our block, and I got to talking to my neighbor who lives across the street from the church. I found that she already believes much of what we believe! But getting people to come to church and join in with a congregation has shown to be a much more difficult task that I had ever imagined.

Despite the shared beliefs, she sees herself as part of a different church, and so has never come to ours. I've encountered this many times. "Oh, I believe that too, but I'm Greek." Or "I'm Jewish." Or I'm a [whatever]. Their personal identity is wrapped up in their cultural community. This was not something I had ever considered.

Yet these very same people still wanted some explanations about the Bible. Well, Jesus didn't wait for people to come to Him, so He went to them. I decided to do likewise and start working on a YouTube channel that would give short explanations concerning the internal regenerative sense of the Word. It was an area in which I didn't see much competition, and therefore was fertile ground for exploration. As with many other endeavors of my life, my optimism regarding the ease of pulling it off has been met with a reality of it being harder than I had anticipated.

Oh, it's not hard to put a video on YouTube, but there are a lot of videos on YouTube, so getting somebody's attention is akin to going to a football game, standing in the stadium with thousands of others screaming, and trying to get the attention of the quarterback. You've got better odds of getting that elusive afternoon tea with the queen.

However, I had at least one trick up my sleeve. A church friend of mine was doing his own YouTube channel, and he introduced me to a program that would help me choose key words that would work well with my content to help it rank better in search results.

It worked. I created two videos to start with: "How to Understand the Bible for Beginners" and "The Creation Story Explained." I had no camera and a \$10 microphone but had figured out how to record what was on my screen so people could see images and text that I had put together in PowerPoint. Without my spending a cent on advertising my videos were getting views. For the first year they were getting about one view per day. People started to subscribe to the channel too, not a lot, but around one a week. "Not bad for free," I thought.

There was enough success that I decided to upgrade some equipment. I got a green screen, some lights, a better microphone and despite the fact that I have a face better suited to radio, I decided to use my phone as my camera. The goal was to create a studio that was similar to what had been successfully used by the Swedenborg Foundation's *offTheLeftEye* channel.

I decided that people wanted good explanations of those vexing stories of early *Genesis* that didn't make any literal sense. I mean, nobody really believed

In my mind, modern people already believed much of what the New Church taught, and therefore getting them to join in with a congregation wouldn't be hard. I was optimistic, and as it turns out I was, maybe, half right.

These very same people still wanted some explanations about the Bible. Well, Jesus didn't wait for people to come to Him, so He went to them. I decided to do likewise.

that Adam and Eve were literally the first people, right? But if not, what was this story about? Again, it turns out I was half right. More people believed in a literal interpretation of this story than I had suspected, and they kindly let me know in the comments. Here's one example:

I have to be honest, this is probably the most ridiculous thing I ever heard! The bible is the literal infallible and inspired word of GOD!!! End times are here! Everyone who believes this fool, better get to know GOD find out what HE wants and do what HE says!

Hmmm, sticks and stones won't break my bones, and all that, but still I've got to say I wasn't really expecting comments like that. I can think of more ridiculous things, so maybe that person just lacks my imagination for the ridiculous. I do consider myself willing at least to entertain odd ideas. I've found that this ability isn't universal:

I can't listen to this. Adam and Eve were literally the first two people on earth. First of all God does not lie, and it is never okay to take a literal passage of the bible[sic] and figuratively interpret it. Bad interpretation makes for a bad doctrine for us to follow and will lead us right off a cliff. WOW! Listening to the first 7 seconds of this and truly offended. False teachers are BAD!!!!

Funny, because I thought everybody's Mom taught them, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." Oh well, at least that commenter didn't make it personal. Okay, I'm just having some fun in presenting one side of it, because while I didn't expect this type of comment, I'm actually quite capable of laughing it off. I've engaged with them, but it ultimately goes nowhere.

The Lord teaches His disciples that if you're not welcome, don't let the dust settle on your feet, just keep on going to where you are welcome. That and the harvest is plenty, so no need to sow new seed when there's much work to be done harvesting. In fairness, there actually were some positive comments too. There were more views, more people subscribing too, so I created more videos hoping to do some harvesting.

In all of my videos I was stating that these ideas weren't my own, but that they are found in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. I also made the effort to prove to people that these ideas were actually Scriptural by bringing in other quotes to bolster the argument where I could. I was getting some positive feedback in the Australian New Church community, and last July was able to

secure some money for advertising and a better camera.

You can guess what happened, right? As history would suggest, I was optimistic about how easy it would be, and I would be proven to be half right. I didn't expect amazing results, and well, I didn't get them. They were decidedly mixed. I was getting more subscribers for sure – somewhere around 50 a month – so it went from one or two a week, to one or two a day. But I was getting even more negative feedback.

The ratio of people clicking “like” to “dislike” was trending more and more in favor of the “dislikes,” and still more negative comments, including my personal favorite: “Most Christians don't believe their own Bible. God doesn't love everybody and he doesn't hate sin, He hates the workers of iniquity like you.” Feel the love.

Maybe in my optimism I was over-estimating the readiness of humanity for these teachings. But I couldn't help but notice that *offTheLeftEye* just didn't get the same level of negative comments and “dislikes” as I was. Clearly there are *some* people who get it.

However, at this point in the venture even I was starting to learn. I may be a slow learner, but like the *Little Engine that Could* I can huff and puff and eventually get over that mountain. Eventually. Instead of using Google's “expert” suggestions on how to best advertise, I decided that changes would be made to the program.

I added some key phrases like, “Bible Study,” “Understanding the Bible,” and “Bible Explained” to narrow my target audience. I ended up with fewer views, but those who did watch, watched more and were much more positive to what they saw. The subscriber rate doubled to around 100 a month. Comments were better too:

“This [Noah's Ark Explained] is fantastic!! Thank you. I am sharing this with my 6th grade ccd [Roman Catholic Children's Education Program] class tomorrow and it's perfect – they are just at the age to create their conscience and be aware of it!! LOVE !!!”

“I think I will share this [What is the Meaning of Bread in the Bible?] with my daughter for part of homeschooling . . . great message even for kids”

There were still some negative comments, including some users whom I had to ban from commenting. But things were getting better. The channel

The Lord teaches His disciples that if you're not welcome, don't let the dust settle on your feet, just keep on going to where you are welcome.

had developed to the point where I felt like I was winning some victories. I'm getting around 9,000 views and 400 hours of watch time on the channel per month. My videos were ranking in the top five in YouTube searches on the subject.

I was noticing that videos I wasn't advertising were actually doing reasonably well. During the first quarter of 2020, "Adam and Eve Explained" received 683 views, and "David and Goliath Explained" received 677. "Creation Story Explained" video got 767, and the last couple months it's getting more like 30 views per day. For free.

Yet there was still one problem that I couldn't quite explain. Despite picking up more and more subscribers, when I would publish a new video I didn't find that I was actually getting more views on it than previous videos. Clearly I was doing something wrong. But what? I was given the opportunity to take a class for people who wanted to raise their skills on YouTube, and I figured this was what I needed at this point. Less guessing would be nice for a change.

The class showed me there were two fundamental problems. The first was while the videos were doing well with YouTube's search features, the reality is that they weren't holding people's attention once they clicked on it. This led to the second problem because it meant that YouTube wouldn't "recommend" the video to a person. YouTube will put a video on your screen even if you didn't search for it, if it thinks it's a good match for you and that it will keep you watching more on YouTube. The key to going "viral" is having YouTube do that for you.

Believe it or not, these are obstacles that can be overcome. Yeah, I know, there I go being overly optimistic again, but it's not blind optimism. I've got some results to back it up! The first change was easy. With a last name like Beiswenger – that even some of my friends can't spell (they *think* they know how to spell it) – I decided that having the channel named "Todd Beiswenger" wasn't a good idea. A new channel name was in order, something... simple. "Lord, I'm Trying" is what I finally came up with. I like it. I think, hope, it conveys a sense of humility about what I'm offering.

Another simple fix was just to the production of the video, which essentially means a better studio and editing the video in a way so that there are more changes on the screen. You can't keep things static. That was actually a pretty easy fix, and the results were impressive. Before that, on average about 30% of the people who clicked on the video would watch it to the end. With this change it moved up to 41%. The target is 50%. I was moving in the right direction, but still seeking more.

The other fix was a change to a storytelling format. Instead of just giving information, like "Goliath represents a life of faith separated from charity," I had to turn it into my experience with the teaching. It then becomes something

like: “Goliath is like those voices in my head that want me to give up, and do nothing, despite the Lord’s call for me to be useful.” It makes sense. You probably wouldn’t still be reading this if all I had done was given you a page showing the data of my channel.

But I wonder what percentage of people made it to the end of this story? Probably more than if I had just given data. Using stories as a teaching device makes sense. After all, Jesus did it, and the whole Word is a story, so it isn’t hard to see how we, too, can use stories to connect with people. Using all of this, my video on “Dealing with Self Doubt and Insecurity” was getting 60% of the people to the end. Nailed it.

I’m not convinced at this point that every video needs or should be in a storytelling format. There is a place for the straight-up educational video, but the stories will help people connect with both me and the material better. The more they connect, the more likely they are to come back and watch the next video I post, which will inevitably be full of New Church theology, and they will be more likely to watch the video that I do create that isn’t in storytelling format.

I know some will argue that we’re not supposed to make ourselves the center of attention, and I get it. Making me a YouTube celebrity is not the goal. It comes back to this: what do I seek? I want people to experience the power of living a God-centric life, to feel what it is like to live free from the bondage of our past and create a new identity for ourselves in God, not one based on who we have been, who the world tells us we are, or who we think we are.

They’re only going to get there if they are exposed to the teachings of the Word, and if I have to come off a little crazy, tell some stories about myself, or use some self-deprecating humor to keep things interesting and hold their attention, well, I’m good with that.

The more they connect,
the more likely they
are to come back and
watch the next video
I post, which will
inevitably be full of
New Church theology.



The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger is Pastor of the Hurstville Society (outside Sydney) and the Brisbane New Church in Australia. He and his wife, Jenn (Jorgenson), live with their son in Penshurst, New South Wales, Australia. Contact: todd@hurstvillenewchurch.com

The Minecraft Academy of the New Church

Coping with Quarantine through Creative Construction

The Rev. Christopher A. Barber

The Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools campus might be closed as part of measures to slow the spread of the COVID-19, but when it comes to its digital effigy – formed in blocks made within the confines of the popular online computer game Minecraft – school is in session!



Benade Hall, the main building of the Secondary Schools, in Minecraft (left) and real life (right)

During the time of COVID-19, a group of students have demonstrated their love of ANC in the form of a meticulous room-for-room, building-for-building, re-imagining of their school. Over roughly two months they rendered their school on a private multiplayer server where everyone involved

had construction privileges. It truly was a collaborative effort – begun from memory and later informed by reference photographs and official school schematics solicited from ANC staff.



A Bird's-Eye rendering of the campus rebuilt in Minecraft.

As early as March 22, the second week of the Academy shutdown, efforts on this project were underway. The work was partly inspired by a smaller-scale project of this kind presented by me, their Religion teacher, who recreated his classroom in the game as a venue for recording his lectures during distance learning. “Lucas [Synnestvedt] and I both wanted to expand on Mr. Barber’s work,” reflected Ben Evans, cofounder of the project. Expand they did. They rallied their peers and before they knew it, a team of 13 students was formed.

The ANC Build Team

Benjamin Evans – Server Host, Website, Builder, Cofounder
Lucas Synnestvedt – Lead Architect, Lead Builder, Cofounder

Evan Buss – Lead Builder

Rev. Chris Barber – Maps, Builder

Builders:

Kat Stein, Brian Frazier, Dante DeMaria, Jarvis Friesen, Gresham Brown,
Ian Kistner, Linus Orthwein, Leopold Kline, Tara Pitcairn, Wyatt Smith

As of this writing there is still plenty of work to be done. Dorm rooms remain uninstalled, though the shell of those buildings stand proudly and the lobbies of each are completed and furnished. The Asplundh Field House is in a

rudimentary and comically cavernous form. On the converse, it is fun to note that the students completed the new Turf Field well in advance of the real-life contractors who were stalled by state-imposed restrictions. They even have set a soccer ball on the field (and bizarrely a polar bear named after their English Teacher, Baird Kistner, complete with a Frisbee.)



Jeremy Fehon's Introductory Physical Science classroom, populated with student desks and fish

Campus life has halted in real life, but continues on the Minecraft Academy. Though the auditorium has heard neither hymn nor homily in two months, the student construction has hosted a handful of worship services led by invitation by me, complete with the standard liturgy, prelude, prayer, postlude and the Pledge of Allegiance.

They decorated the room for Easter and had an Easter egg hunt on back campus, complete with an Easter fireworks show (possibilities are limitless in this game). The students have even taken turns giving announcements after chapel – sadly, as they announce week after week, Broomball is *still* cancelled.



Benade Hall Auditorium set up for Easter worship

At first glance, the school they have constructed is very true to life. However, closer examinations reveal certain departures from reality. Some of these reveal the builders' blind spots as students; the faculty lounge, for example, was a void and required faculty assistance to complete. Other differences were more deliberate, such as their decision to make the disused fifth floor of Benade Hall a fanciful wonderland of mushrooms, ponds and other mysteries – one never knows what might be hidden away up there.

The creativity the build team has shown throughout this process echoes sentiments offered by Managing Director Jim Adams when he had a chance to review their progress. Jim, no stranger to facilities management and development, said that he is “very impressed by the detail, accuracy, care and the many hours that our students put into developing this wonderful project. We are blessed with a beautiful campus and facilities which are featured in this project, but what makes the Academy so special is our students and faculty”



The Mysteries of Fifth-Floor Benade, complete with skulls and cake

In the end, this is no small feat. It is an impressive effort and a true labor of love offered from a place of deep appreciation for their school, their friends, and their faculty and staff. Their appreciation shows in the inside jokes they pepper throughout the halls and restrooms, and the little personalized touches they add to the classrooms and offices evoke memories of the teachers who occupy them under happier circumstances. When Liam Mohan visited the server, he thought that “it’s a manifestation of our sense of community and cooperation.”



A group assembled on "Back Campus" after Palm Sunday Church

While this is in no way an official Academy project, it has brought a smile to the faces of Administration. When Girls School Principal Kira Schadegg saw what the students had developed, she said: "I am always amazed at the creativity exhibited by our students. It looks like they had fun creating their Minecraft buildings and campus." Jeremy Irwin, Principal of the Boys School, was equally as impressed. "It's a brilliant example of the ways people can adapt in difficult times and also highlights the value of community regardless of circumstances." He also found that it was another mark of the "uniqueness of ANC."

All students at the Academy of the New Church have been working hard this spring term. They have overcome great challenges in the sudden transition from face-to-face education to distance learning. They have learned to cope with the loss of campus life and beloved athletics, performing arts and other anticipated events. Each student is different, and so each experience is as well, yet for this team of students, they have found value in the challenges faced by this project. As Principal Schadegg noted: "True educational value occurs when you can develop a project that incorporates student interest as this one has done."

This project is more than mere amusement and frivolity. It goes beyond being an impressive feat of design, stamina and follow-through. It is the team's endorsement of community and it is a cry for normalcy. As Lucas Synnestvedt put it: "I learned that I appreciate my school and the community way more than I thought I did." He also found, "that school is a lifestyle and the more you get that, the more fun it is." Let's hope these lessons can endure into next year when all can be back together again. The team has launched a website (<http://ancbuild.ueuo.com/>) where people can view color photos and a brief video overview of the project. For those who play, there is a download of the

world file so anyone can run through it and explore it for themselves. Please stop by and see the inspiring work these students have done.



The Rev. Christopher Barber teaches religion in the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools. He and his wife, Annika (Fitzpatrick), live in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: [*chris.barber@ancss.org*](mailto:chris.barber@ancss.org)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE GRADUATION

The Commencement ceremony scheduled for May 29 fell victim to the coronavirus epidemic, which had shut the College from mid-March, with education continuing online through the end of the academic year. However, there was a virtual celebration and awards on the 29th, with an address available online from President **Brian Blair**. (See page 302.)

The College is determined to give its seniors a real graduation experience, which is planned for September 26. The Commencement Address will be given by Brian Henderson, former Dean and History professor at the College, now Director of Glencairn Museum.

We expect to publish that address, along with a list of the graduates – and honors – in the following issue of *New Church Life*.

Academic Awards

Three graduating seniors received College Academic Awards:

- **Hannah Dewees** (B.S. Biology)
- **Brittany Gunther** (B.A. Human Society)
- **Redate Kibret** (B.S. Biology)

Redate Kibret also received the Spirit of Service Award.

Department Academic Awards included:

- **Zachary Brock** – Biology
- **Nikita Smirnov** – Business (Gerald Hurst Award)
- **Margaret Echols** – Interdisciplinary (English and Religion)
- **Rose Glass** – Psychology

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION AND AWARDS

This year's commencement for the Academy Secondary Schools was the most unique in their 143-year history. Because of the coronavirus pandemic, the schools had been locked down since mid-March. Education continued online but all of the usual events were cancelled: the musical production of *Beauty and the Beast*, Performing Arts Night, the Oratorical Event, Awards Night, spring sports – even graduation itself.

There was no *Pomp and Circumstance* in the Asplundh Field House, no white dresses and corsages, no suits, ties and tuxedos, no senior class song, no opportunity for family and friends to applaud the proud ceremony of awarding diplomas. But there was a graduation that was memorable and meaningful.

A full virtual commencement ceremony was held on June 6 – the scheduled graduation day – which can be viewed on the Secondary Schools website: www.ancss.org. Each graduate got into a decorated car, with their families, picked up their diplomas in front of Benade Hall, and then paraded through Bryn Athyn. Roaring fire trucks led a honking procession, with proud, smiling graduates cheered by friends and families all along the route.

There were 66 graduates – 26 from the Girls School (17 with honors) and 40 from the Boys School (14 with honors). They represented four countries (the United States, Canada, China and Japan) and six states (Florida, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Oregon and Pennsylvania).

Commencement Address: The Challenge of Kindness

The Commencement Address was delivered by **Brian Horigan**, retiring this year after 40 years of dedicated service as a teacher and coach. Here are excerpts from his talk:

“Our mission at the Academy of the New Church states: ‘We are preparing students for a principled and useful life in both the natural and spiritual worlds.’ I strongly believe in this mission. It may seem rather corny to you graduates, but each year at this time, I love reflecting on the fact that we are helping to make the world better place – one student at a time.

“Guess what? This means you. You are now moving on to whatever is next. We are all counting on you, graduates, to continue forward wherever life takes you, to help make the world a better place. You have some tools. Perhaps more importantly, you have at least some of the reasons why you should.

“Obviously this is a big challenge. None of us can be our best all of the time. But if we are positively contributing to society and trying to be our best selves, we can make a difference for good.

“One of my favorite quotes is from Swedenborg's *Doctrine of Life* and says simply: ‘All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.’

This concept illuminates a fundamental truth: simply living a good life is a religious act. So I am expecting you members of the Class of 2020 to move forward doing good.

“I know the boys at least are familiar with me talking about moral virtues. Any of them could tell you that the four foundational virtues are Honesty, Courage, Caring and Kindness. I would like to focus today specifically on kindness.

“You can see why honesty and courage are also foundational virtues. It often takes courage to be kind. We have to be honest with ourselves about our behavior and motivation. Being kind is not always as easy as it sounds like it should be.

“We have a pretty well-established love of self that we need to subdue to truly learn and practice kindness. This takes time. But I am encouraging you to get started on the process of becoming kinder sooner rather than later. Practicing the Golden Rule would definitely help us along the way. Think about the people in your own life whom you are most fond of. Probably they have been the kindest to you. So let’s return the favor. And perhaps, more importantly, we can go beyond just being the kind of people who are kind to us. Expand the group. Work towards being kind to everyone.

“You will benefit from being kinder toward others and they will certainly appreciate being treated with kindness themselves. One of the best ways to feel good about ourselves is to do something nice for someone else, like being kind. More good news is that kindness is contagious. The idea of paying it forward is a real phenomenon.

“So I encourage and challenge you, Class of 2020, to make yourselves, your families, your friends, your teachers, and your school proud by moving forward and making the world a better world by becoming kinder.”

Graduates of the Girls School (* indicates With Honors)

Adele Allen,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Isabelle Kline,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Lisa Antwi,* North Brunswick, NJ

Annica Martz, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Alyssa Asplundh, Bryn Athyn, PA

Nicole McCurdy,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Carling Brock,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Aven Mergen,* Corbett, Oregon

Ava Closterman,* Doylestown, PA

Alana O’Grady, Glenside, PA

Maren Cole, Kempton, PA

Aurelle Odhner,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Navon Cooper, Philadelphia, PA

Hope Odhner,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Jade Deibert,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Erika Frost, Tokushima, Japan

Andie Gay,* Elkins Park, PA

Reyana Heinrichs,* Kitchener, ON, Canada

Isabelle Holahan,* Elkins Park, PA

Katherine Hyatt, Bryn Athyn, PA

Zakiyyah Reed, East Lansdowne, PA

Megan Scanlon, Philadelphia, PA

Heather Walsh,* Pittsburgh, PA

Yihan ‘Dannie’ Xue,* Beijing, China

Yongshi ‘Cici’ Yu,* Guangzhou, China

Madison Zagorski,* Warminster, PA

The valedictorian for the Girls School was **Aurelle Odhner**.

Theta Alpha Medals were awarded to:

Gold: **Nicole McCurdy**

Gold: **Aurelle Odhner**

Gold: **Hope Odhner**

Silver: **Madison Zagorski**

Honorary Girls School Diplomas were awarded to:

Melissa Cornell Closterman

Elizabeth Rabino Hyatt

Graduates of the Boys School (* indicates With Honors)

Owen Adams,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Kai Mincer-Allen, Norristown, PA

Levon Austin, Bryn Athyn, PA

Henry Baltz,* Rydal, PA

Jared ‘Snacks’ Banks, Philadelphia, PA

George Boulajeris, Philadelphia, PA

Jeb Brenfleck,* Philadelphia, PA

Devin Bryant, St. Albans, NY

Honghao ‘Harley’ Chen,* Shanghei, China

Ryan Childs,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Gregory Clark, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Gavin Johns,* Huntingdon Valley, PA

Wonseop Lee, Seoul, South Korea

Isaac ‘Zeek’ Marshall, Philadelphia, PA

Sean McCurdy, Philadelphia, PA

Griffin McGinley, Philadelphia, PA

Nikolai Plefka, Ambler, PA

‘Tony’ Xu Rao, Chongqing, China

Nandin Rhodes,* Bryn Athyn, PA

Daniel Rogers-Petro, Hatboro, PA

Glenn Sabb II, Philadelphia, PA

Owen Thygeson, Jenkintown, PA

Karl Cranch ,* Bryn Athyn, PA	'Barry' Yihe Tian , Taiyuan City, China
Ruipeng 'Jim' Deng ,* Harbin, China	Michael Trost III , Philadelphia, PA
Teagan Dewees ,* Hunt. Valley, PA	Samuel van Zyverden ,* Hunt. Valley, PA
Sean Frost , Bryn Athyn, PA	John Veit , Bethlehem, PA
Cody Glunz , Charlotte, NC	Chakra Wade , Huntingdon Valley, PA
Blake Halterman ,* Bryn Athyn, PA	Leo-Paul Wahl ,* Philadelphia, PA
Hayden Hoffman ,* Bryn Athyn, PA	Declan Williams , Bryn Athyn, PA
Josh Howe , Philadelphia, PA	Jordan Wilson , Miami, FL
Gavin Hungaski , Kempton, PA	'Francis' Zhanghan Xia , Chengdu, China

The valedictorian for the Boys School was **Gavin Johns**.

Boys School Faculty Awards were presented to:

Gold: **Teagan Dewees**
Gold: **Nandin Rhodes**
Silver: **Karl Cranch**

An Honorary Boys School Diploma was awarded to: **Steven Glunz**

Academic Awards

Academic Excellence: **Pehri Rhodes**
Emilie K. Asplundh Performing Arts Award: **James Gay**
American Mathematics Competition Winners: **Levi McFall, Simon Wang**

Theta Alpha Education Scholarships

ANC – **Natasha Carvalho, Kat Stein**
Bryn Athyn College – **Jade Deibert**

Theta Alpha Laws of Life Essay Contest

First – **Deidre Bongers**
Second – **Leah Synnestvedt**
Third – **Emma Bryntesson**
Honorable Mention – **Dylan Blumenthal and Celeste Friend**

National Merit Scholarships

Winner – **Hope Odhner**

Commended – **Blake Halterman, Aurelle Odhner**

GIRLS SCHOOL ATHLETIC AWARDS

The Academy of the New Church Girls School has renamed its end-of-year athletic awards to honor two graduates who have had a lasting impact on the program: **Elaine S. Asplundh** and **Marah P. Boyesen**.



ANC Girls School Names Major Sports Awards

Elaine Asplundh and Marah Boyesen

The Outstanding Athlete Award is now the Elaine S. Asplundh Award and the Sportsmanship Award is the Marah P. Boyesen Award.

Girls School Principal **Kira Schadegg** says: “Coaches Asplundh and Boyesen exemplified many of the qualities that we hope to instill in our athletes. Naming these awards is a way to honor their legacies and contributions to ANC Girls School Athletics.

Elaine Synnestvedt Asplundh (Mrs. Reed) attended the Girls School in the 1970s when the only athletic options for girls were intramural sports and determined then to give girls the opportunity to compete in interscholastic athletics.

She graduated in 1974, then from Temple University, majoring in Physical Education and Health. She returned to ANC to teach physical education and head the Girls Athletic Association where she began working with others to petition the faculty to allow an interscholastic sports program. It took three years to win approval in 1981.

Elaine became the first head coach for four different sports – tennis, volleyball, basketball and lacrosse – continuing for 37 years in many roles, including volunteer coaching after her retirement.

The Girls School says: “Elaine was always fully invested in her players – both as people and as athletes, and served as a role model for an excellent work

ethic and sportsmanship. Her students characterize her as caring, kind and a pioneer for girls athletics.”

The Elaine S. Asplundh Award “is given to a top Girls School athlete who best exemplifies qualities modeled by Coach Asplundh: dedication to athletic excellence, competitive spirit, sportsmanship, camaraderie, teamwork, consistent work ethic, and a role model and advocate for her teammates and players.”

Marah Pendleton Boyesen (Mrs. Eyvind) graduated from the Girls School in 1985, where she played tennis, volleyball and field hockey. She attended Bryn Athyn College, playing for the first lacrosse team there, then transferred to James Madison University. She returned to work for the Girls School, where her roles included PE and Health teacher, field hockey coach and co-teacher of the Senior Seminar. She also was a volunteer mentor for students and entire teams.

She avidly studied the mind-body connection and inspired teams with her motivational talks. She loved athletics as a means to develop moral values and love of competition. She cared deeply about all ANC students, on and off the field, in and out of school. She was able to push girls beyond their perceived limits and leave them feeling empowered.

In her own words to her students: “I love you. I love you all. I love who you are and I love what you stand for. I think you are beautiful. Live and play in trust, faith, love, gratitude, courage, kindness and joyous abandon – for this is what makes a true team. This is why we play. Forever yours in pursuit of Spectacular. Coach Boyesen.”

The Marah P. Boyesen Award “is given to the Girls School Athlete who best exemplifies the values modeled by Coach Boyesen: sportsmanship, competition as a vehicle for furthering moral values and practicing mental toughness, charitable actions both on and off the field, the power of teamwork and commitment to girls athletics.”

Girls School Athletic Director **Jackie Pennink** says: “We are proud to honor these two exceptional women, who are forever a part of our history. Their work with our girls and our institution has had a lasting impact on our program, and athletes in years to come will follow their example.”

This year’s award winners in the Girls School:

Elaine S. Asplundh Award: **Nicole McCurdy**

Marah P. Boyesen Award: **Carling Brock**

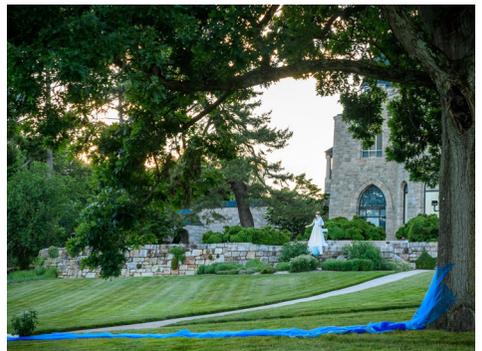
This year’s major Athletic Awards in the Boys School:

Stanley F. Ebert Award – **Jeb Brenfleck**

Payson Lyman Sportsmanship Award – **Devin Bryant, Sean McCurdy**

19th OF JUNE DRIVE-BY PAGEANT AT BRYN ATHYN CATHEDRAL

(Photos by Steve Conroy)



(Photos by Holly Adams)



Kira Schadegg presents diploma to Navon Cooper



Nikolai Plefka



Annica Martz



John Veit



Katherine and Elizabeth Hyatt (Honorary Diploma)



Class of 2020

(Photos by Holly Adams)



Aurelle and Hope Odhner



Katherine Hyatt and family



Nicole McCurdy and family



Gavin Johns



Jeremy Irwin presents diploma to Karl Cranch



Ava and Melissa Closterman (Honorary Diploma)

(Photos by Holly Adams)



Madison Zagorski



Isabelle Holahan



Steven (Honorary Diploma) and Cody Glunz



Jordan Wilson



Jeremy Irwin presents diploma to Leo-Paul Wahl

ACADEMY BOARD OF TRUSTEES

(Highlights from the meetings of February 7-8)

Bryn Athyn College

The College's marketing consultant, Truth & Consequences, said it would finish the first phase of its marketing efforts in April. It has conducted a comprehensive study and developed a "brand positioning statement" (*connect more deeply*), a target student profile, and "brand pillars" (*compassionate advocate, crafting character, unmatched attention*).

Academy Secondary Schools

The Middle States Association accreditation team had been scheduled to visit in early May, but with the coronavirus shutdown of schools that process is on hold.

Twelve granite stones with carved passages from the Writings will be placed at campus entranceways.

Glencairn Museum

With the provenance of a Greek lekythos in doubt, it will be appraised before the Board decides whether to return it to Greece.

The Board affirmed Glencairn's decision to proceed with its geo-thermal project. Glencairn does not anticipate any reduction in operations during the work.

Cairnwood Estate

Cairnwood is anticipating a \$175,000 decline in revenue, which will result in a deficit. Steps are being taken to remedy the shortfall although the "reception industry" is in considerable flux.

Finance

The portfolio of the New Church Investment Fund increased 18.2% in 2019, compared to a benchmark increase of 21.2%. The Board is looking at corrective procedures.

Based on certain assumptions, if deficits are eliminated future endowment values will stay even. If investment returns are as predicted, along with no deficits, the endowments of the schools will rise – the Academy Secondary Schools most dramatically.

(Special Board meeting, March 19)

The College, Secondary Schools, Glencairn Museum and Cairnwood Estate all

have been closed in response to the coronavirus pandemic.

Bryn Athyn College

Courses are being taught online. Dormitories are closed (except for six international students who have no housing options). The athletic program has been suspended. Rentals of the Cottages are significantly affected. The impact on admissions for 2020-21 is unknown.

Secondary Schools

With everything shut down maintenance is checking all buildings and deep cleaning is being performed. Classes are continuing with remote learning. The Emergency Management Team meets regularly and the Managing Director is in regular contact with staff.

Glencairn and Cairnwood

Staff is working remotely and buildings are checked regularly. A robust presence is maintained in social media but the impact on programs and events is significant.

(Highlights of regular meeting, April 15)

Bryn Athyn College

With online learning continuing there has been no significant loss of enrollment so far but financial losses are estimated at \$500,000. Grants from the CARES act may provide \$350,000 of aid to students.

Academy Secondary Schools

Summer camps are cancelled and online teaching is continuing for the rest of the school year. The MSA accreditation has been postponed until September or October.

Glencairn Museum

All programs have been cancelled or postponed, including 43 school visits. Glencairn has been rated #1 for museums in social engagement, posting highly valued educational materials for schools doing online teaching.

Endowment

At the nadir of the market turndown, the ANC endowment was down 23% but has recovered to 11% down. The duration of the recession will impact the degree of loss.

The ANC portfolio has sufficient liquidity to make the quarterly payout to

institutions throughout 2020 without unplanned sales.

Budget Impacts

The Finance Committee is discussing future impacts. Lower enrollments in the College will impact revenues. Action plans need to be in place based on expected revenues.

Bryn Athyn College: Reopening depends on the status of the coronavirus pandemic. To improve student retention a short-term increase in financial aid is likely. Contingency plans are being prepared. The College expects to meet its deficit reduction goals.

ANCSS: The shutdown will result in an estimated \$49,500 hit to the budget. Donations are forecast to drop \$50,000. The preliminary budget for 2020-2021 forecasts 215 students. Unresolved questions at this point: What additional financial aid will be needed? Will international students be allowed to return? Will the fall semester begin online?

Glencairn: A current surplus of \$140,000 or more is expected in this year's budget. Phase 1 of the Geothermal capital project has been paused due to supply chain disruptions. Phases 2 (planned for fall 2020) and 3 (planned for spring 2021) are postponed for at least 12 months. Summer programs most likely will not occur.

Cairnwood: Until it can host events of 100 or more, Cairnwood is effectively closed. There was success in preserving as many reservations as possible.

GENERAL CHURCH CORPORATION

The annual meeting of the General Church Corporation was postponed from June 27 to September 26, at 3 p.m. in the Pendleton Hall Auditorium of Bryn Athyn College. The agenda remains in place.

DISTANCE LEARNING AT BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE

Are you interested in a deep engagement with a New Church theological framework? Consider taking or auditing a MARS course in the 2020-21 school year. Bryn Athyn College's Master of Arts in Religious Studies (MARS) offers students of Swedenborg's theological Writings an in-depth study of the Heavenly Doctrine. The program is fully set up for distance learning. Auditors are welcome at a reduced cost.

For further information on the program or individual courses offered, please contact the **Rev. Dr. Thane Glenn** at thane.glenn@brynathyn.edu.

BOYNTON BEACH RETREAT CANCELLED

The Boynton Beach Retreat scheduled for January 2021 has become another victim of the coronavirus pandemic – although there is a possible alternative. **Bob Brickman**, director of the popular event, put out this announcement in late May:

“Recently our Program Committee met to work on our program and roster of presenters for 2021. That led to discussion of COVID-19 and its effect on what we do. We have learned that any vaccine that could be developed in the near future would not be ready for widespread use before at least six to 12 months.

“As our audience contains a majority of senior citizens or those with health issues, this does not seem practical for our program for Winter 2021 using our current format. We have a meeting room for our use in a hotel. However, it is too small to allow for social distancing. The Duncan Center is not an option as they have raised their rates by an average of more than 225%. In addition, it is doubtful that our audience would be willing to secure airline reservations in time for our early registration.

“Therefore, we have reluctantly decided to cancel our Retreat for 2021. We are hopeful of collaborating with the Swedenborg Foundation to have some program around that time that could combine some physical presence with online participation. This would include information and insight into *offTheLeftEye* and its production – the very successful endeavor of the Foundation. If that works out as planned we will join forces – including sharing of mailing lists.

“Hopefully we can bring some good out of this pandemic and learn some new things while thinking outside the box.”

The Program Committee invites anyone interested to share ideas “regarding our path for the future.” Contact: BBRetreat@newchurchboyntonbeach.org

GATHERING LEAVES: SAVE THE DATE

Gathering Leaves, the international retreat for all Swedenborgian/New Church women, has been rescheduled for August 27 – 30, 2021, at the Purley Chase Centre in England.

All the generous donations to cover Purley Chase costs are still in place. If you have already booked please let Purley Chase know if you want your booking transferred to 2021. (Contact alison.southcombe@purleychasecentre.org.uk)

Information about new bookings will be available at a later date.

CHARTER DAY CANCELLATION

Kaylene Glenn, Director

Dear Alumni and Friends,

With the resurgence of the COVID-19 Pandemic and after receiving counsel from a number of constituents, the ANC Administration has made the decision to cancel Charter Day this year, as we have traditionally celebrated it.

This includes class reunions which will be postponed a year and celebrated in 2021 when people are hopefully more comfortable traveling and participating in large group gatherings.

We plan to acknowledge the signing of the Academy Charter by live streaming the Charter Day Cathedral Service on the day it would have been held, Friday October 9th. We are also looking into other ways to virtually acknowledge our Charter, but these plans are still under discussion.

With all of the uncertainty of this pandemic, we feel we need to make this announcement, now, so that our alumni can plan accordingly for next year.

Please know we have made this difficult decision for the safety of our students, faculty, staff, alumni and community members.

We look forward to welcoming you back to our campuses in October 2021. In the meantime, we hope you and your family are staying safe.

Life Lines

Bruce Henderson

ODE TO KURT HORIGAN ASPLUNDH

So how would Kurt want us to remember his life –
All those years as a pastor, shared with this wife?
Well, this serious man did let down his guard
When his doctrinal bent gave way to the bard
And a poem would capture what we value – and why –
With a playful grin and a glint in his eye.
His poems would make us laugh – and impart
Affections and insights that touched our heart.
We may have known him as Kurt Ho, not Hy,
But there were many more things to distinguish him by.
His life was defined by his pastoral flair
For the schools and societies under his care.
Ever the good and gentle shepherd
Serving the Lord with truths from His Word;
Always looking for that which is good and true –
Sound leadership tempered with humor too.
He gave us a spiritual sense of direction
Steeped in humility and true affection.
July 4th parades were always a treat
When he teamed as a Super Hero with Pete
But he was always a hero in our eyes –
Kind and gentle, caring and wise.
With Martha they looked for more things to do
Like New Church Challenge and New Church Life too.
Now his life continues on a spiritual plane
Where the Lord's love and truth supremely reign.
Here Kurt was a rock, as everyone knew,
And Martha was always a part of that too,
For his life was defined, for all to see,

By his love and commitment to family.
 Now our gratitude, love and respect are due
 For what he meant to the Church – and our own lives too.
 Now let others delight us with their memories –
 What he stood for with friends and families.
 Any tribute's a challenge – all that lore to recite –
 But for me, well, a poem just seemed right.

WHAT'S THE USE?

The toll of the coronavirus pandemic has been as much psychological as physical. The threat was primarily to public health and the toll – in sickness and death – was staggering. But millions more suffered in other ways as well – economically, emotionally, from feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. One “syndrome” equally devastating – but not given a name – was a lack of feeling useful.

We know that use is far more than vocation. In its ultimate, spiritual sense it is our influence for good with the people around us. We sense that our own pursuit of happiness is not an end in itself but a by-product of forgetting self in the delight of serving others. That is the joy of heaven – not sitting idly on a cloud, strumming a harp, as cartoonists portray, but living active lives of use.

That is what was missing for a lot of us sheltering in place from the threat of the virus. We still could be useful – especially for those able to carry on their work from home – but our spheres of influence were drastically reduced.

We come into heaven by bringing something of the life of heaven with us: a life filled with the delight of being useful, with no thought of reward other than the happiness that comes with unselfish service.

Since the angels who are in heaven are in goodness from the Lord, they desire nothing more than to perform useful services. These bring delight to their life, and it is according to useful services that they enjoy bliss and happiness. (*Arcana Coelestia* 6073.2)

GONE WITH THE WIND

The promise of the New Church descending out of heaven from a God who “makes all things new” is compelling and comforting. But the counterpoint to this year's 250th anniversary of that crowning vision from *Revelation* is discouraging: the coronavirus epidemic killing hundreds of thousands, shutting down normal life and devastating economies throughout the world. Then came epidemic unrest as sincere protests over the awful killing of a black man by a policeman in Minneapolis were overwhelmed by rage and chaos.

Many good people have been left with a sense of hopelessness and despair, longing for the bright promise of *Revelation* but perhaps resonating more these days with W. B. Yeats' dystopian poem, *The Second Coming*:

Things fall apart; the center cannot hold;
 Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world,
 The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere
 The ceremony of innocence is drowned;
 The best lack all conviction, while the worst
 Are full of passionate intensity.

But there is always hope from the Lord – that His love and providence are forever leading to good, no matter how bad things may seem on the surface.

Secrets of Heaven 842, for example, explaining the symbolism of “and God made a wind pass over the earth, and the waters subside,” teaches that chaos may actually be necessary to “putting everything in its proper place” – to restoring order.

Wind can represent both good and evil spirits – in this case the evil spirits represented by the flood. In the spiritual world such spirits are dispersed by groups of good spirits, called an east wind. The same is said to be true for our personal temptations – and the calm silence following a storm.

That same number tells us: “Before being reduced to order, it is very common for everything to fall into confusion or seeming chaos. This allows things that cling together poorly to separate, and when they have separated the Lord arranges them in their place.”

We see parallels in nature, where storms and fires restore a sense of balance, and even with our own health, where sickness sometimes brings a healing “east wind.”

Things may seem to be “falling apart,” with a “blood-dimmed tide” roiling around us, but the Lord is always in control, leading us to peace.

You will disperse them, and the wind will carry them off, and a storm will scatter them. And you will rejoice in Jehovah. (*Isaiah* 41:16)

VISIONS OF THE SECOND COMING

When Irish poet W. B. Yeats offered that dystopian view of *The Second Coming* in 1920, he was applying the Christian imagery of the *Apocalypse* to the grim atmosphere of post-war Europe. There were other ominous backdrops as well: the onset of the Irish War of Independence and the terrible flu pandemic of 1918-19 that killed millions throughout the world. The highest death rate – almost 70% – was among pregnant women and Yeats wrote the poem as his own pregnant and infected wife was recovering. It's no wonder the terrifying specter of “The Second Coming” was on his mind.

His vision continues:

Surely some revelation is at hand;
 Surely the Second Coming is at hand.
 The Second Coming! Hardly are these words out
 When a vast image out of Spiritus Mundi
 Troubles my sight: somewhere in sands of the desert
 A shape with lion body and the head of a man,
 A gaze blank and pitiless as the sun,
 Is moving its slow thighs, while all about it
 Reel shadows of the indignant desert birds.
 The darkness drops again; but now I know
 That twenty centuries of stony sleep
 Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,
 And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,
 Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

Compare that to the hope and majesty of the real Revelation:

And I John saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying: Behold the tabernacle of God is with men, and He shall dwell with them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself shall be with them and be their God.

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

And He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And He said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

And He said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

This is “the bright and morning star.” This is the real Second Coming.

WORDS TO LIVE BY: JUST BE KIND

Commencement addresses throughout the academic world tend to predictable themes: Be all you can be. Follow your dream. Find your passion.

It is a sign of our turbulent times that the past two commencement speakers for the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools were retiring faculty members whose messages could be reduced to two simple but profound words: be kind.

Last year it was Gail Cooper, retiring “Latin Queen” (*Magistra*), who spoke to the graduates of *Choices, Consequences, Responsibility*. Much of her message had to do with being aware of the impact of our thoughts and actions

on others – and why they should always be guided by kindness.

She concluded with: “Grant that we may realize that it is the little things that create differences, that in the big things of life we are one. And may we strive to touch and know the great human heart common to us all. And, O Lord, let us not forget to be kind.”

This year’s talk was given by Brian Horigan, retiring after an impressive 40-year career as teacher and coach. He quoted a guiding principle in his life that resonates with all New Church men and women: “All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.” (*Doctrine of Life* 1)

It is heartening in these stormy times that such simple, profound words – like the Golden Rule – touch our hearts and light our souls. We find them in Scripture, in the Writings, in personal philosophies:

Those who live a life of love or kindness worship the Lord God, because a life of love or kindness is his life. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1798)

Be kind and merciful. Let no one come to you without leaving better and happier.
(Mother Teresa)

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only what is useful for building up, as there is need, so that your words may give grace to those who hear. (*Ephesians* 4:29)

I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel. (Maya Angelou)

May those whose lives we touch always remember kindness.

Announcements

BAPTISMS

Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say unto you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish. (Matthew 18:10,14)

Atta, Grace Akasi– At Phoenix, AZ, May 20, 2020 (born April 27, 2020) daughter of Jean Aime Atta and Mary Edwige Atta, Rev. Jean Atta officiating.

Self, Ty Callaway– At Boynton Beach, FL, December 22, 2020 (born October 16, 2019) son of Ryan P. Self and Meaghan B. Self, Rev. Alan Cowley officiating.

DEATHS

Those who are in heaven are continually advancing to the spring of life, and to a spring so much more delightful and happy the more thousands of years they live, and this to eternity, with increase according to the progressions and degrees of their love, charity and faith. (Heaven and Hell 414)

Acton, Barbara Barnitz – June 23, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 87.

Acton, Berith Carswell – June 17, 2020, of Treasure Island, Florida. 90.

Alidjinou, Akossiwa – May 1, 2020, of Vogan, Togo. 91

Bostock, Peter Glenn – July 5, 2020, of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. 88.

Brannon, Matthew Lane – April 24, 2020, of Mt. Juliet, Tennessee. 33.

Cook, Cavilene Janice Umphress – June 5, 2019 of Columbiaville, Michigan. 88.

Johns, Patrice Pushpa Rhodes – May 8, 2020, of Burlington, Vermont. 63.

Jolliffe, Norman H., Jr – March 23, 2020, of Orono, Maine. 88

Kotsi, Odette – March 26, 2020, of Vogan, Togo. 64.

Simons, Barry Alden – July 1, 2020, of St. Augustine, Florida. 80

Zeitz, Mollie Glebe – June 29, 2020, of Sarasota, Florida. 91



ADVANCEMENT

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"For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." Matthew 6:21



New Church

OFFICES Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

PUBLISHED BY General Church of the New Jerusalem

EDITOR **Bruce Henderson**, Editor

Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

SUBSCRIPTIONS New Church Life, Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA, 19009
\$30 for any address, \$5.00 a single copy

TELEPHONE 267-502-4990

New Church Life

Published bimonthly by
the General Church of the New Jerusalem
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
U.S.A.

www.newchurch.org
www.newchurchlife.org
July/August 2020

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
LANGHORNE, PA
PERMIT NO. 81