

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

MARCH/APRIL 2025



Stepping stones form the pathway to a stronger marriage – from courtship to eternity. (Page 133)



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*... Everyone whose willing spirit moved him,
should bring the Lord's offering for
the work of the tabernacle*

Exodus 35

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New Church Life

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

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New Church Life is available online back to 2006 at <https://newchurch.org/connect/subscriptions/new-church-life>. All issues can be researched back to 1881 at www.heavenlydoctrines.org.

In This Issue

Editorials (page 104) include:

- *Easter is When the Church Began*: At Easter, we celebrate the Lord's triumph over the power of hell. We also celebrate the fact that He founded the external organized church on earth. It is good for us to understand that coming together for worship, instruction and mutual support is crucial for the development of His church in the hearts, minds and lives of each one of us.
- *The Easter Test*: The Lord was tested throughout His life on earth, culminating in His crucifixion. His disciples also were tested, faithfully following Him and preaching in His name – until they abandoned Him on the cross. We also are tested through our lives: challenged to walk in His footsteps, to take up His cross, and to follow Him.

In an Easter sermon – *Taking Up the Cross* – the Rev. Coleman Glenn explains what it means to learn from the Lord's life of suffering and persecution on earth and make His victory our own. "Even through temptations," he says, "we allow the Lord to transform us so that His goal can be accomplished, the goal of drawing each person He has created into an eternal union with Himself, to give them eternal joy." (Page 112)

In another Easter sermon the Rev. John Odhner reviews *The Lord's Last Words* and how they echo through our lives. These words, he says, "are addressed to all of us, that we should love and care for each other, because that is what His love does." It was by means of trials that He made His Human Divine. In the same way we can overcome our own evils and be regenerated – but only by going through our own spiritual struggles and trials. (Page 118)

The Resurrection Address for the Rev. Christopher R.J. Smith, long-time pastor in the General Church and teacher of Religion in the Academy Secondary Schools, by the Rev. Lawson Smith, retired pastor in Kempton,

Pennsylvania, where Christopher retired with his wife, Heather. Also included are insightful biographical notes from conversations with Christopher. (Page 125)

Shawn Synnestvedt summarizes a popular presentation he gave at last year's General Assembly: *Through an Open Door – A Path to a Stronger Marriage*. This is the work of a marriage – beginning in the early stages of friendship and progressing through all the stages of a happy, eternal marriage. He states: “I believe that the benefits of a marriage, built on character and principles, are incalculable, not only to the couple, the children and the family unit, but to the greater society surrounding that marriage. Successful marriages are a centerpiece of successful societies.” (Page 133)

Global Healthy Congregations is a new initiative of General Church Outreach, under the direction of the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth. Jane Enis of Glenview, who is leading the program, writes about its initial projects in a number of societies and hopes for the future throughout the church. (Page 146)

In an article – *I'm Right, You're Wrong – Managing Dissent in the Church* – the Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick offers strategies for avoiding division and promoting understanding and mutual respect when potentially divisive issues arise in the church. He warns: “The only internal cause of dissent is lack of charity. It's not different ideas. It's a lack of care for another and their ideas. It's trying to 'win' too much.” (Page 150)

We are told in the fourth commandment to honor our father and mother, but the Rev. Calvin Heinrichs wonders how that applies as we become adults ourselves. We know that in heaven the Lord is our only Father and the relationships that exist on earth dissolve, but does it also change on earth? (Page 166)

The Glendale Parish of the New Church in suburban Cincinnati, Ohio, is coming to an end after a long and valued history. A look back on those years includes personal memories from former member Gillian Simons Mayer. (Page 171)

Church News (Page 182) includes:

- New assignments for the Rev. Erik Buss, the Rev. Steven Gunther, and the Rev. Sylvain Agnes
- Jim Adams extended as Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools
- Sale of the Colchester Church finalized
- Highlights of the February meeting of the General Church Board of Directors
- Exciting new developments at the New Christian Bible Study website
- The Jacob's Creek Family Camp and Academy summer camps

Editorials

Bruce M. Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

EASTER IS WHEN THE CHURCH BEGAN

At Easter we celebrate the Lord's resurrection and His victory over the power of the hells. This restoration of spiritual freedom literally saved the world. This is the most important thing about Easter. We usually pay less attention to the fact that Easter is when the Lord formally began the organized Christian Church in this world, which is also important. He set it up not only as a spiritual entity in the hearts and minds of those who love Him, but also as a physical organization, with specific leaders, structure, methods and recorded doctrine.

If the Lord had not come into the world and carried out the redemption, no flesh could have been saved. Carrying out redemption means founding a new heaven and a new church. . . . The Lord is carrying out redemption today too, founding a new heaven and starting a new church, for the sake of man's salvation. (True Christian Religion 182)

So He started a new church at His second coming as well. One difference between the Lord's first coming and His second coming, though, is that whereas at His first coming He literally set up an organized church, He did nothing like that at His second coming.

The Gospel accounts describe how He went about gathering disciples and His instructions to them about how they were to go about establishing His church in the world. While they were not actually commissioned to go out and do this until after His resurrection, He repeatedly showed them what to do and told them what to say from the very beginning. He criticized their misunderstandings and problematic impulses and praised them when they got it right.

An interesting aspect of the way that the Lord organized the church was the extent to which He played favorites. Although it is clear in the Gospels that He attracted many followers, He chose 12 disciples to be His inner circle: "He called His disciples to Himself; and from them He chose 12 whom He also named apostles." (Luke 12:13) Not only did He choose 12 apostles, but He also

established a hierarchy within that group. Peter, James and John were often singled out as the Lord's closest companions, and it seems that Peter was the leader of these, although John was called the disciple whom Jesus loved.

In stark contrast, during His Second Coming, the Lord did not establish any such organization. Swedenborg did not organize any movement. He did not have followers, friends, or family members who established any lasting organization. The organizations existing today all began with people who had read the books, none of whom had any personal connection to Swedenborg. The advantage to this is that it means that no organization has ever had any claim to any kind of legitimacy based on that personal connection or inside knowledge of how Swedenborg wanted things to be. There is no New Church organization with any greater claim to being genuine than any other.

Because of this some have felt that Swedenborg never intended there to be any formal church organization based on the Heavenly Doctrine. Yet the Writings everywhere assume that there will be churches, preaching, a clergy and all the means for organizing and leading people to know and follow the teachings of the New Church. They also provide teachings about the necessary elements for a stable and united organization, and they apply these teachings specifically to churches in passages such as the section on "Government of the Church and State" in *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 311-325.

The point is that human organizations are indispensable aspects of the Lord's church. While they are naturally imperfect, and while it is a mistake to see them as the Lord's Church itself, they serve that church by carrying out its uses. Without these organizations there would be no spreading of the Word, no instruction, no gathering of people for worship and support, and no publication of the books of the Word itself or collateral materials.

We are well aware, though, of the problems associated with placing too much emphasis on the external church. Some of the most numerically successful church organizations have adopted measures that provide strong incentives to conform to church beliefs and practices, and disincentives to nonconformity. Examples of such measures can be seen in the Mormon Church and Amish communities, which have maintained their beliefs and practices through community structures and social incentives. These communities are often greatly admired, and their members are generally wonderful people – honest, kind, moral and faithful. Close association with churches like these, however, often reveals that this kind of conformity comes with considerable coercion and a lack of freedom that the Doctrines specifically warn us against. (*Divine Providence* 129) Free will is an indispensable aspect of true religion.

One result of its focus on free will is that the General Church has traditionally had a somewhat passive attitude toward such things as church attendance and membership, the need for contributions, volunteer service, the

need to send children to church schools, and even the need to baptize children. The truth is that these things are important. In recent years we have seen this borne out, because when these things don't happen organizations decline and eventually disappear. Schools and churches close their doors. Then the uses that the church organization filled are no longer carried out. In places where there is a stronger community recognition of the importance and goodness of these things, these uses are able to thrive.

At Easter we celebrate the Lord's triumph over the power of hell. We also celebrate the fact that He founded the external organized church on earth. It is good for us to understand that coming together for worship, instruction and mutual support is crucial for the development of His church in the hearts, minds and lives of each one of us.

(JFS)

THE EASTER TEST

The Lord's life on earth – from His birth to crucifixion and resurrection – is a drama that cycles through all time and remains intensely relevant to our lives.

Christmas is all about promise and joyful potential but has its counterpoint as well: the birth first of John the Baptist, proclaiming the coming of the Lord as Savior and calling all to repentance; and the evil Herod ordering the death of all male children under age two to protect his power.

Easter is the fulfillment of why He came on earth – to overcome the hells through grievous trials and temptations and to show us the way to heaven. It is a time of testing – for Himself and for us as we endure our own trials in following Him.

Easter was also a time of testing for His disciples, who had given over their lives to following Him and preaching in His name. But at the time of testing – while witnessing His crucifixion – they abandoned Him. Peter denied Him three times – then wept in shame. They all were left with terrible feelings of guilt and lost hope. But the Lord did not abandon them. And when it came time for the ultimate triumph in heaven – the creation of His New Church – it was these same disciples He called together to go and preach throughout the heavens that “the Lord God Jesus Christ reigns!”

And what about the people of that time, and continuing down through the generations? On Palm Sunday they hailed His triumphant return to Jerusalem, spreading palms in His way, with gleeful shouts of “Hosannah!” But within a week these same people were stirred to hatred, spitting at Him and shouting, “Crucify Him!”

How could this be? We are stunned at the betrayal, certain that we would never turn on our Lord like this. But we do just that in subtle ways – often without even being aware – when we make a God of whatever we are choosing to love at the moment. We may not be chanting “Crucify Him,” but we are turning our backs, even subconsciously. This is all part of our ongoing trials.

Our testing is obviously less severe than what the Lord endured on earth, but it is just as critical to our own resurrection and salvation.

The Lord came into the world because the power of the hells – on earth and in the spiritual world – was threatening the peace and stability of the heavens. The temptations He suffered throughout His life on earth were all a part of the process that we all go through in our own trials and temptations. He knew what He would have to endure and triumph over, and why that was essential to give us hope and confidence in our own journeys.

We are blessed with freedom – to live between the influxes of good and evil, free to choose among them. When the Lord witnessed the adulation on Palm Sunday, He wept – not because He knew what was going to happen but because He saw that the people did not understand what He was teaching them – and would demonstrate that so harshly within the week.

But He didn’t give up on them – and never gives up on us – which is why Easter remains always with us and relevant to our lives.

He knew His life would not be easy but knew also that the suffering and pain and humiliation were all a necessary part of the testing – and the triumph.

So it is with us. We are challenged to walk in His footsteps, to deny ourselves, to take up His cross and follow Him. And as with His life, it is not a one-time experience but a lifetime of testing. But His yoke is easy as we turn again and again to follow Him – to commit ourselves to lives of purpose, use and love – to be transformed as an image of God in our own humble lives.

At Easter we are reminded that the Lord endured more suffering than anyone on earth – to the point that He lamented: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” We may also feel abandoned, especially in dark times, but He never leaves us or forsakes us, most especially in our temptations, when we feel most alone – but are not.

The Lord allowed Himself to be attacked and never stopped fighting against the hells – not for His own sake and glory, but for all of us and our salvation.

In his sermon, *Taking Up the Cross* (page 112), the Rev. Coleman Glenn says:

When we repent of evils and seek to be freed from their hold on us, we are not simply doing so as a self-improvement project, to make ourselves better. We seek to be regenerated and born again so that we can participate in the Lord’s love, a love of serving and ministering to one another.

Even through temptations, we allow the Lord to transform us so that His goal can be accomplished, the goal of drawing each person He has created into an eternal union with Himself, to give them eternal joy.

This is the test. And this is the triumph.

(BMH)

Letter to the Editors

Letters to the Editors may be sent to:
Editors of *New Church Life*
Box 743, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
or email Bruce.Henderson@newchurch.org

The Lord's End in View And Our Role in It

To The Editors:

I would like to express my appreciation to Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom for his excellent article, *Baby Jesus*, in the November/December 2024 *New Church Life*. Also, a personal "Hello" to Erik who, for a number of years, was pastor of the Hurstville Society, Sydney and visiting pastor to the small Canberra group to which I belong.

Erik's article is comprehensive, starting from prehistory and the time of the Most Ancient Church, continuing through the ages to the time of the First Coming, the spread of Christianity throughout Europe and the world, to the Second Coming and the New Church. That covers all the time that human beings have lived on this earth. It is an in-depth study on several levels: theological, historical and geographical, too detailed for me to try to summarize here. However, below are some of the many areas that he covered and that have been of great interest to me.

Erik writes that the Lord's first mental awareness as an infant was that the Divine in Him was to be united to the Human and the Human to the Divine. That the Lord's life from His actions down to His very thoughts, are recorded. I had read the latter before, in the *Arcana Coelestia* I think, and was intrigued and incredulous that the Word includes such as these in its internal sense. However, Erik continues that the Lord virtually wrote His own "autobiography" which He then lived through during His life in the world. To that I will add that, although from coming into the world as a mortal baby, cared for by Mary and Joseph and seen and worshiped by the shepherds and Wise Men, as God He was invisible. He had assumed the Human to become a visible God.

I will add a passage from *Heaven and Hell* 287 which seems to me to describe what the full accomplishment of the union between the Divine Itself and the Divine Human brought to the heavens and the church at the end of the Lord's life on earth and His glorification:

Peace signifies the union of the Divine Itself and the Divine Human in the Lord, also the conjunction of the Lord with heaven and with the church, and with all who are in heaven, and with all in the church who receive Him, so the Sabbath was instituted as a reminder of these things, its name meaning rest or peace, and was the most holy representative of the church.

As said, Erik's article covers the times of the Word and the churches from prehistory to the Second Coming, including not just interesting but also important matters such as the earliest writing, the geography of certain areas, the possible preservation of the earliest artwork which has a spiritual correspondence, also names and speech. Much of all these set within the history of the various times, the careful selection of geographical places and names of people specifically named and selected by the Lord for inclusion in the Word if they had appropriate correspondences pre-planned by Him, all to maintain the vital connection between heaven and earth in the Word.

Not only did I find this article very interesting, thought provoking and enlightening but also it brought the Word to me in ways that I have never before known. I have certainly never come across such an in-depth New Church study as this, covering the Lord, the Word, the progression of the churches and also world geography and history for the sake of, and inclusion in, the Word. As well, times from prehistory to the First Coming, then post First Coming to the spread of Christianity around the world and on to the Last Judgment and Second Coming which finally put both the heavens and hells in order for all times under the authority of the Lord.

In addition, this article with its wealth of information, much of which I have not known of before, gave me more of an understanding of where the New Church and its Heavenly Doctrines fit into the progress of the churches and their peoples from earliest times and our contact with the heavens and the Lord through the Word in the various progressions through the millennia. They weren't just churches that rose and fell and were succeeded by the next church. From the beginning, the Divine omniscience had both foreseen and overseen every moment to reach the culmination in the New Church.

All four previous churches prior to the New Church, namely the Most Ancient church prior to the flood, the Ancient church post flood, the Israelitish church, then the church called Christian, did not acknowledge a visible God. *True Christian Religion* 786 and 787 summarize the beliefs regarding an

invisible God, leading up to a belief in a visible God in this way:

(786) *All churches depend on a knowledge and acknowledgement of one God, with whom the man (person) can be conjoined, and as none of these four churches has possessed that truth, it follows that a church must follow these four which will know and acknowledge one God. The sole end of God's Divine love, when He created the world, was to conjoin man to Himself and Himself to man . . . the Most Ancient church . . . worshipping an invisible God with whom no conjunction is possible; the Ancient church . . . did likewise . . . the Israelitish church worshipped Jehovah, who in Himself is an invisible God. . . . The fourth, which is called the Christian church, did indeed with the lips acknowledge one God, but in three Persons, each One of whom was singly or by Himself God . . . they still do not know that the one God who is invisible came into the world and assumed a Human, not only that He might redeem men, but also that He might become visible.*

(787) *This New Church is the crown of all the churches that have hitherto existed on the earth, because it is to worship one visible God in whom is the invisible like the soul in the body.*

Erik's article, showing the development of the Word and progress of the churches with the addition of the two passages from *Heaven and Hell* and *True Christian Religion* showing the Lord's end in view which was the New Church, leaves me with a strong feeling that although it is important to try to grow the Church numerically, we should also try to see and fulfill the need for each of us currently living on earth to play our small part in progressing the future of this crown of all the churches worldwide but most especially to aim to progress it doctrinally during our allotted timespan in this mighty passage of time.

Many thanks, Erik, for making your study available through *New Church Life*. It has opened my eyes to a great deal of which I had no previous knowledge.

Heulwen Ridgway
Canberra
Australia

Taking up the Cross

A Sermon by the Rev. Coleman S. Glenn

Lessons: Isaiah 53:1-7, 11,12; Mark 10:32-45; Arcana Coelestia 1812

Our lesson from the *Gospel of Mark* began with Jesus speaking to His frightened, confused disciples, and telling them of events about to occur which they did not understand. Aside from mentioning their astonishment and fear, this passage in the 10th chapter does not detail how the disciples reacted to the Lord's prediction. But this was not the first time He had talked to them about these things.

Mark records two previous instances, in chapters eight and nine, of the Lord predicting His suffering, death and resurrection. And when we look at those earlier scenarios along with this one from chapter 10, we can start to see some patterns in the disciples' reactions – patterns that might speak to how we sometimes respond to the idea of the Lord suffering and what it might mean for us.

The first time the Lord is recorded as speaking openly about His suffering, death and resurrection is in *Mark* 8. Peter had just confessed a belief that Jesus was the Christ. Then we read:

[Jesus] began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. (Mark 8:31)

On this occasion, we do see the disciples' immediate reaction. Peter, at least, responds with apparent indignation: *“And Peter, taking Him aside, began to rebuke Him.” (Mark 8:32)* The Lord's response to Peter is startlingly blunt:

But turning and seeing His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying: “Get behind Me, Satan; for you are not wise in the things that be of God, but the things that be of men.” (Mark 8:32-33)

As would happen on every similar occasion afterward, when the Lord foretold His suffering and death, His disciples demonstrated a lack of

understanding about what kind of Christ, what kind of Messiah, the Lord was to be. He was not going to be an earthly warrior, an invincible superhero immune to all suffering, hailed by all as a glorious hero. He would feel pain. He would be mocked and spat on. He would even die – but He would rise again.

But that is not all. On all these occasions, the Lord followed His prediction of His own temptations and death with a call for His disciples to walk in His footsteps. On this first occurrence, after rebuking Peter, the Lord said,

Whoever wills to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. (Mark 8:34)

So, it's not simply that the Lord would suffer and die before rising again, but that anyone who wanted to be His disciple would have to be prepared to undergo something similar. And again, this is something that the disciples seem to have had a hard time grasping.

When the Lord predicted His crucifixion and resurrection a second time, in *Mark 9*, we read again that the disciples did not understand: *"They did not understand the saying and were afraid to ask Him."* (*Mark 9:32*) This time, immediately afterward, they demonstrate their lack of understanding by arguing over who would be greatest, as they would again in chapter 10.

Later, when they admitted what they had been arguing about, the Lord said: *"If anyone wills to be first, let him be last of all, and a minister to all,"* (*Mark 9:35*), and placing a child in the midst of them, He said: *"Whoever shall receive one of such little children in My name, receives Me."* In doing so, the Lord emphasized His own willingness to be small, to be the least, and He called them to have that willingness as well.

That brings us to *Mark 10* and the lesson we read of the Lord's third prediction of His suffering, death and resurrection. Here, the Lord again made that connection between His own willingness to suffer and the importance of the disciples' willingness to do the same. They would have to "drink the cup" the Lord was about to drink and "be baptized with the baptism" He was about to undergo.

On a literal level, this meant they would have to be prepared to undergo persecution and death. But the Lord wasn't simply calling His disciples to undergo a one-time period of pain; He was calling them *always* to be laying down their lives, to live entire lives of service as He had. So, He said:

Whoever wills to be great among you shall be your minister; and whoever of you wills to be the first shall be the servant of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered to, but to minister, and to give His soul a ransom for many. (Mark 10:43-45)

To be like the Lord is to be servant, not a dictator.

It is easy to feel superior to the disciples in these cases. We live in a society that has been shaped by the Christian ideal of servant leadership, and even if leaders don't always act as servants, they know that they must play lip service to the idea. We know we are *supposed* to prefer service to greatness. But if we take an honest look at ourselves, we might find places where our own experience isn't so far off from that of the disciples, both in their desire to be first rather than last and in their unwillingness to think of the Lord as suffering.

For the disciples, those two things might have been connected – that discomfort at the idea of the Lord suffering and dying, and that misunderstanding of their own calling to be last rather than first. In the literal sense, the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah predicted a great warrior, who would free Israel from her enemies all around, and who would make the people of Israel the envy of all the surrounding nations. To be told that the glory they could expect was an as-yet-intangible heavenly glory, and that the road there necessarily involved suffering, might have been a hard thing to hear.

For us now, it can still be difficult to look squarely at the kind of hardships the Lord had to undergo in the world. Partly, that's from a good motivation; we want to emphasize the Lord's divinity. But it may also include a desire to look away from the fact that His path is not always easy.

The teachings of the New Church are clear: from the time of the Lord's early childhood – that He was continually attacked by the entirety of hell, going through the most grievous trials or temptations imaginable. Because His soul was Divine, the Lord would conquer all. But before His resurrection, there were parts of Himself which He inherited from His mortal mother where the Lord's experience was not one of peaceful confidence, but one of anguish and battle. When He was operating from those parts of Himself, the Lord experienced the Divinity within Himself as something separate, which is why we see Him praying to the Father as if to someone other than Himself.

The humanity that the Lord took on in the world was thus a servant in two senses. The Lord came to serve all people, but that human part of Himself also acted as a servant to the Divine part of Himself, carrying out the Divine will. When the Lord spoke to His disciples about His suffering and His servitude, He was echoing passages from Isaiah about the Messiah as a “suffering Servant.” We read from *Isaiah* 53 of this Servant who would be despised and forsaken, who would know pain and weakness, who would bear the burden of our sins. *Arcana Coelestia* 1846 says of this passage:

By these words are signified the Lord's temptations; by His “bearing our sicknesses, and carrying our sorrows,” is not meant that the faithful are to undergo no temptations, nor is it meant that He took their sins upon Himself, and so bore them; but it means that by the combats and victories of temptations He overcame the hells, and in

this way would alone, even as to His Human Essence, endure the temptations of the faithful.

This passage highlights the connection between the Lord's own temptations and the temptations or trials that a person undergoes in the process of being regenerated – the process of being transformed into a truer image of the Lord. The Lord told James and John that they would drink the cup that He drank and be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized. The internal sense of this is laid out in *Apocalypse Explained* 893:

“To drink the cup that the Lord drank” has the same signification that the “cross” has [in other passages], namely, to undergo temptations; and “the baptism with which the Lord was baptized” signifies to be regenerated by temptations.

Just as the Lord became one with the Father by overcoming temptations, so we become conjoined with the Lord by overcoming temptations. But there is a vital difference. That passage from *Apocalypse Explained* continues:

But between the cup which the Lord drank and the cup which they are to drink there is the same difference as between the temptations of the Lord and the temptations of men. The temptations of the Lord were most grievous, and against all the hells; . . . but the temptations of men are against evils and falsities that are from the hells with them, and in these the Lord and not man himself fights, except against certain painful feelings. There is a like difference between the baptism with which the Lord was baptized and the baptism with which men are baptized as there is between glorification and regeneration.

Unlike us, the Lord fought from His own power; when we fight in temptations, the Lord is the one bearing the burden for us. He continues to *bear the burden of our sins*.

This reality is both encouraging and challenging. It is encouraging to know that the Lord has already overcome the hells and that He holds them in His power to eternity. But it is challenging to realize that the perfect Human, the only person in existence to have lived exactly as He was called to live, did not avoid suffering. In fact, just the opposite; He endured *more* suffering than anyone else in history. And as He told His disciples, if we are to sit on His right hand and His left hand, we will have to undergo trials and tribulations too. Like Him, we are called to humble ourselves as servants and ministers rather than rulers and great ones.

This doesn't mean we should go out of our way to seek suffering. Far from it! We pray in the Lord's prayer, “Lead us NOT into temptation.” We do not go seeking trouble and hardship, but we do need to be prepared for it. Because

there are things in us – or more accurately, communities of hell that we are connected to – that do not want us to be transformed, that do not want us to be regenerated. And they will do everything they can to stop it from happening.

They will mock us and tell us we’re being foolish to think we could change. They will tell us we don’t need to change. They will throw a thousand failures in our faces as evidence that we are hopeless. And when we start to get on the right track, they will try to convince us that it could not possibly be the right track, just as Peter unwittingly spoke in opposition to the Lord’s prediction of the suffering He would endure.

What this means is that sometimes doing the right thing will be uncomfortable. We sometimes have a sense that we will know right from wrong just from our feelings; if it feels right, it’s probably right, if it feels wrong, it’s probably wrong. But our feelings can be misleading. We need to act as *servants* of the Lord – to live by our understanding of the truth, whether it feels right or not. We serve the Lord just as the Lord served the Divinity within Himself that He called the Father.

But again, the good news is that we are not alone in this. In our temptations – even if they bring us to the point of despair, even when we feel abandoned, even as we put in every ounce of our own strength, as we must do – in all our temptations, the Lord is fighting for us, and we can fight from Him.

One of the most powerful things we can do as we strive to overcome evil is to watch the Lord do perfectly what we do imperfectly. *Arcana Coelestia* 9937 says that, although the Gospels say little of the Lord’s temptations, those temptations are described at great length in the *Prophets* and especially the *Psalms*. In a moment, I’ll read a section from *Psalms 119*, the longest of the *Psalms*.

If we were to think about David as the speaker, we might rightly have reservations: did David really follow the Lord this perfectly? We might have the same problem if we were to think of ourselves as the speaker; we know that we fall short of the ideal expressed here. But a little book from the teachings of the New Church called *Prophets and Psalms* says that this whole *Psalms* is about the Lord, and how He “fulfilled the Law, or the Word, from its firsts to its lasts, and therefore He was hated, and suffered temptations, and thus made the Human one with His Divine.” (*Prophets and Psalms* 369) And so,

The good news is that we are not alone in this. In all our temptations, the Lord is fighting for us, and we can fight from Him.

in the internal sense, the following words are about what the Lord did in the world, about the way His humanity would serve His Divinity:

*Remember the Word to Thy servant,
On which Thou hast caused me to hope.
This is my comfort in my affliction;*

*That Thy sayings have given me life.
The presumptuous have scorned me, even exceedingly;
I have not gone aside from Thy law.
I have remembered Thy judgments from an age, O Jehovah,
And have comforted myself.*

When we look to the Lord as the one experiencing these words, it can give us hope. Someone has done this right. And we can have a relationship with Him that mirrors the one He had with that Divinity in Himself. And because He is with us, He can overcome for us.

We can let this happen especially by remembering why the Lord continually allowed Himself to be attacked, why He continually fought and overcame hell. As we read in our lesson from *Arcana Coelestia*, in all His combats of temptations, the Lord did not fight that He might become the greatest in heaven, nor even that He might become the least, but only that all others might become something, and be saved.

When we repent of evils and seek to be freed from their hold on us, we are not simply doing so as a self-improvement project, to make *ourselves* better. We seek to be regenerated and born again so that we can participate in the Lord's love, a love of serving and ministering to one another.

Even through temptations, we allow the Lord to transform us so that His goal can be accomplished, the goal of drawing each person He has created into an eternal union with Himself, to give them eternal joy.

Amen.



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The Lord's Last Words

An Easter Sermon by the Rev. John L. Odhner

Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. (Luke 23:33-34)

As we celebrate the Lord's resurrection on Easter morning, the Lord's will is to forgive us, to help us love one another, to bring us into heaven with Himself. He fervently desires our happiness. So His purpose in coming into the world was not to be punished in our place, but to overcome the power of hell that was causing so much unhappiness and misery in the world, and to make His love for the human race evident, which He did by completely filling His human essence with love so that he became pure Divine Love. (*Secrets of Heaven 3212.4, 1737*) The Crucifixion, then, was not God's punishment but a way to overcome hell and make His Human Divine.

One of the great mistakes of the Christian Church has been to think that the whole of redemption was accomplished by Jesus' suffering and death on the cross. But in fact everything the Lord did was part of His redemption. He

was teaching, healing and going through temptations or trials throughout His life. His suffering on the cross was His final and fiercest test, yet everything that He said at that time was an expression of the same love that He showed for all people throughout His life.

The Lord continues the same work today:

*The women and men
who followed the
Lord saw what was
happening on the
cross and struggled
with their loss of
hope and their
guilt over having
abandoned the Lord.*

*In our struggles or temptations
the Lord carries out an
individual redemption, just
as He did a total redemption
when He was in the world.*

| (True Christianity 599)

The women and men who followed the Lord saw what was happening on the cross and struggled with their loss of hope and their guilt over having abandoned the Lord. Likewise, we struggle today with the loss of confidence in our ideals and relationships, for our shame in having at times gone against the Lord's love. Yet today the Lord expresses the same Divine love for us.

The Lord is mercy itself. Therefore, He forgives the sins of all people. He blames no one for any sin. He says: "They do not know what they are doing." (True Christianity 539.2)

For all who look upon My cross and suffer still with shame and loss, again, today, as long ago, "Forgive them, for they do not know."

The Lord often forgave people, as He forgave the woman who washed His feet with her tears and dried them with her hair. The Lord said: *"Her sins, which are many, are forgiven, for she has loved much." (Luke 7:47)* Divine love is always forgiving.

One might suppose that in saying, "Father, forgive them," Jesus was interceding on our behalf. When the Lord was going through temptations, He prayed to the Father as if He was praying to another person. At such times, He was not yet fully united with the Divine Love that was in Him, and He was still working to align His humanity with that Divine Love.

It's not that the Lord prays to the Father for us and intercedes in that way; for then He would be acting in an entirely human manner. Rather He is constantly excusing and constantly forgiving, because He is constantly showing compassion. The Lord Himself is doing this since the Lord and the Father are one. (John 14:8-12; Secrets of Heaven 8179.2)

You can see how insane people are who think God can condemn anyone, curse anyone, throw anyone into hell, predestine anyone's soul to eternal death, avenge wrongs, or rage against or punish anyone. . . . In reality, God cannot turn away from us or even look at us with a frown. To do any such thing would be against His essence, and what is against His essence is against Himself. (True Christianity 56)

On the cross, the Lord said to His mother: "Woman, behold your Son!" Then He said to the disciple John: "Behold your mother!" (John 19:26-27)
Love one another, as I have loved you.

It is significant that Jesus addressed His mother as "woman." He never actually called her "mother."

Through Mary, Jesus took on a human form that was limited, weak, and with inherited tendencies toward evil. As He perfected His human form He gradually put off all the limitations, weaknesses and evil tendencies that He inherited from Mary and put on in place of them the Divine humanity that He had from the Divine Love within Him. He became no longer the son of Mary, but entirely the son of God. For this reason, He did not call Mary His mother. Instead, He referred to all who did God's will as His mother.

Once Jesus' brothers and mother came, and they were standing outside asking for Him, calling Him. And a crowd was sitting around Him, and said: "Look, Your Mother and Your brothers are outside looking for You."

But He answered: "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" And He looked around in a circle at the people who sat around Him, and said: "Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." (Mark 3:31-35)

On the cross, the Lord asked Mary and John to take care of each other, expressing His desire for all people in His Church to care for each other.

John means good actions from a caring heart, and "the woman" and "mother" mean the church. So the whole statement means that wherever good actions are being done from a caring heart is where the true church will be found.

So in reality the Lord's words to John and Mary are addressed to all of us, that we should love and care for each other, because that is what His love does.

For God loves each and every human being; and because He cannot do good to them directly, but only indirectly by means of other people, He therefore breathes into people His love, just as He breathes into parents love for their children. (True Christianity 457)

"Behold your mother! See your son." All those who love Me, every one.

There were "two robbers crucified with Jesus, one on the right and another on the left." (Matthew 27:38) A few days earlier the Lord had told the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats, in which the good, compassionate people were on the Lord's right, and the selfish, uncaring people on His left. At the crucifixion it appears that the robber on the Lord's left was mostly concerned with escaping that terrible punishment, cursing Jesus even as he asked for His help. There is no indication that the man felt bad about the robbery he had committed, though clearly he felt bad about being punished for it.

In contrast, the criminal on Jesus' right felt bad about what he did; he acknowledged his sin and said that he deserved the punishment. To him, the

Lord said: *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (Luke 23:42-43)

How we feel about wrong we have done in the past is a sign of our character.

When we get ourselves caught up in evils, as usually happens when we grow up, if we feel anxiety when we reflect on something bad we have done, it is a sign that we will still receive an influence through angels from heaven. It is also a sign that we will later allow ourselves to be reformed. (*Secrets of Heaven 5470.2*)

The Lord desires to raise all without exception to Himself into heaven. (*Ibid. 2401*)

The Lord said: *"If I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all people unto Myself."* (John 12:32) Yet He can only bring into heaven those who turn to Him and repent of their evil.

When sin brings sorrow and dismay, the Lord says: *"I will be with you in heaven today."*

Throughout His life the Lord gave people the promise of eternal life. When Jarius' daughter died, Jesus said:

"Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, *"Little girl, arise."* Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately.

The Lord did not create the universe for His own sake but for the sake of people He would be with in heaven. . . . It then follows that Divine love . . . has the goal of a heaven made up of people who have become angels and are becoming angels, people with whom it can share all the bliss and joy of love and wisdom, giving them these blessings from the Lord's own presence within them. (*Divine Providence 27*)

On the cross, Jesus cried out: *"My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?"* (Matthew 27:46)

The Lord came into the world to overcome hell and to make His human Divine. He could overcome the hells by allowing them to attack Him in His times of trial and then struggling against the hatred and contempt that they spewed at Him. It was also by means of these trials that He made His Human Divine. In the same way we can overcome our own evils and be regenerated only by going through spiritual struggles and trials, and at these times we may feel that God has abandoned us.

| During our spiritual tests, we are apparently left completely alone,

although in fact we are not alone; at those times God is most intimately present at our deepest level giving us support. (*True Christianity* 126)

As long as our trials continue, we think the Lord is absent, since evil demons disturb us, sometimes to the point where despair almost prevents us from believing God exists at all. But the Lord is closer than we can possibly believe. (*Secrets of Heaven* 840)

For since He Himself suffered when He was tempted. He is able to help those who are tempted. (*Hebrews 2:18*)

The Lord's trials were the very fiercest of all. A trial is as fierce as the love is great. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1820)

In His temptations in the Garden of Gethsemane, the Lord said: "*My soul is exceedingly sorrowful, even to death.*" (*Matthew 26:38*)

All trial carries with it some kind of despair; otherwise it is not a trial. . . . Those who are sure of victory feel no anxiety, so they face no test. . . . Because the Lord endured the most dreadful, fiercest trials of all. He too was inevitably driven to despair – a despair He was to overcome and dispel by His own power. (*Secrets of Heaven* 1787)

When hell attacks remorselessly: "God, why have you abandoned Me?"

The Lord was never abandoned by the Father (the Divine Love that was in Him). Yet the appearance of being abandoned was part of the trial that opened Him up to being completely filled with that Divine Love.

On the cross the Lord said: "*I thirst.*" (*John 19:28; Luke 22:17-19*)

When Jesus met a woman at Jacob's well in Samaria, He asked her for a drink. In the conversation that follows it becomes clear that His reason for asking her for a drink was because He wanted to connect with her. He wanted her to know that He could offer her eternal life if she embraced the truth He was giving her.

Jesus said to her: "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (*John 4:13-14*)

Likewise, when the Lord drank with His disciples at the Last Supper, His real thirst was to bring His disciples into His heavenly kingdom. He said: "*I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.*" (*Matthew 26:29*)

Because He came into the world to save humankind, He said: “*I thirst*,” which means that from Divine love He willed and desired the salvation of the human race. (*Apocalypse Explained* 386:30)

“*I thirst*” – to share My cup with you; in heavenly realms to drink it new.

On the cross the Lord said: “*It is finished.*” (*John* 19:30)

But what was finished?

The Lord's suffering on the cross was the final crisis by which He finished uniting His humanity with His divinity, and His divinity with His humanity, and in this way glorified Himself. (*Secrets of Heaven* 2776)

Now, “*It is finished.*” All is done: the Divine and the Human joined in one.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with you before the world was. (*John* 17:4-5)

In the world the Lord was continually in the process of becoming One with the Father, or of being glorified. The disciples had a glimpse of this when the Lord was transfigured.

His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them. . . . And a cloud came and overshadowed them; and a voice came out of the cloud, saying: “This is My beloved Son. Hear Him!” Suddenly, when they had looked around, they saw no one anymore, but only Jesus with themselves. (*Mark* 9:2-8)

When Jesus was transfigured (in a state of glorification or union with Divine Love) He does not appear beside the Father, but by Himself, because the Divine Love is in Him.

The Lord's Human, after it was glorified or made Divine, cannot be thought of as human, but as the Divine Love in human form. (*Secrets of Heaven* 4735)

Consequently, the Lord finally said:

*In the world
the Lord was
continually in the
process of becoming
One with the Father,
or of being glorified.*

“Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” (Luke 23:46)

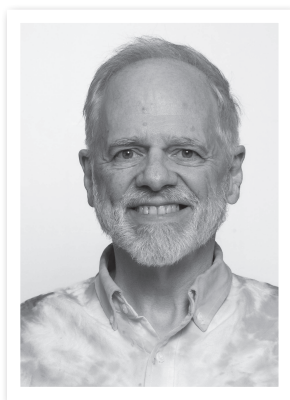
The right hand means a higher power, and sitting at the right hand of Jehovah means omnipotence. (*Secrets of Heaven 4933*)

All power has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (Matthew 28:18)

After the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. (Mark 16:19)

When the Lord was in the world He made His Human Divine truth. . . .But after the Lord had fully glorified Himself, which was done when He endured the last of temptation on the cross, He then made His Human also Divine good. (Secrets of Heaven 7499)

And yielding to Love’s command, *“I put My spirit in Your hand.”*



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A Resurrection Worship Service at the Passing of the Rev. Christopher Ronald Jack Smith

By the Rev. Lawson M. Smith

February 22, 2025, at the Kempton (Pennsylvania) New Church

Lessons: Psalm 23; John 14:1-6; True Christian Religion 301-304

The Lord commanded us to remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days we are to labor and do all our work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord our God, when we will do no work.

The Lord gave us this commandment to remind us that He creates us for eternal life. The six days of labor and doing all our work symbolize the work of repentance and reformation which the Lord gives us the strength to do in this life in preparation for life in heaven; and the seventh day, the day of rest, is eternal life. Heaven is a place of rest, not in the sense of mere leisure, but in being safe from the harmful lusts and delusions arising from the hells that make unrest in our minds and hearts. When we are free from the labor of resisting the hells, we can enter fully into the joy of our Lord in the wonderful, useful employment He gives us to do.

Today we can reflect on how, by the six days of labor in this world, the Lord prepares us for the Sabbath of eternal life. We can glimpse a few of the ways the Lord brings our labors in this world to fruitfulness when we think of how He prepared Christopher Smith: husband, father, grandfather, builder, pastor, teacher, citizen, and New Churchman.

Christopher's first job out of high school was in construction, a kind of work he loved and practiced all his life. In Kempton, he built barns for horses, and a second-story deck. He loved to keep the property in good shape, repairing things that were broken or worn out.

The Heavenly Doctrine teaches us about the correspondence of building a home. A house corresponds to our mind, where we live. In a good home there is wisdom and intelligence in the ways we serve the Lord and each other. To construct the frame of such a home, we need to gather all kinds of knowledges, especially from the Word, and fit them together. (*Arcana Coelestia* 1488)

In *The Doctrine of Charity* 129, we read: "In order that a house may be built, the materials must first be provided, and the foundation laid, and the walls

erected; and so finally it is inhabited. The good of a house is the dwelling in it." All through our lives, the Lord is helping us gather the materials for our eternal home, lay the foundation and raise the walls, until we are ready to dwell in it. We can imagine Christopher in the spiritual world preparing a home for his wife, and helping others frame and build their spiritual houses.

Spiritual construction rather than natural construction turned out to be his life's work, though he continued to love building as well. Christopher Ronald Jack Smith was baptized by a New Church minister as an infant, but he only began to learn about the New Church as a teenager. His parents sent him far from their home in Fiji to live with his first cousins in Durban, South Africa, so that he could go to a good high school there. Chris remembered riding bicycles with his cousins to attend youth group classes with the Rev. David Holm, and that the girls at the class were the main attraction. The materials for his eternal home were beginning to be collected.

After high school, he and his family moved to England in 1958. There Chris worked in construction during the day and took courses at night and on weekends, gaining further qualifications in his trade.

Then in 1959, the Rev. Frank Rose invited him to the first British Academy Summer School. There he also met General Church pastors: the Rev. Erik Sandstrom Sr. and the Rev. Alan Gill. The summer school involved three lecture-and-discussion periods each morning and serious examinations at the end of the camp. Chris learned a lot and loved it so much that he decided to apply to the Academy Theological School in Bryn Athyn. He found that he had learned more at the summer school than some of his colleagues who had been through the Academy Secondary Schools. Five years later, he graduated from the Theological School and was ordained in 1969, age 28. Now the foundation for his spiritual home was laid.

Chris was called to serve in Canada, first as an assistant in Toronto, then as pastor of Dawson Creek and the Pacific Northwest, and finally as pastor of the Carmel New Church in Kitchener, Ontario, where he served for 10 years. One of his customs was to bring a brown-bag lunch to a parishioner's workplace and have lunch with him, to discuss the state of the church and hear how things were going with him.

After his service in Canada, Christopher was called to teach in the Academy Boys School. There he helped many young men (and women) grow in their understanding of the teachings of the New Church and to have confidence in holding and expressing these truths. A former student wrote that Chris regularly challenged his students to participate in role-playing activities where they had to defend doctrinal tenets against attack. And he did it all with a wry sense of humor and a twinkle in his eye.

Christopher insisted that his students, like David, should gather five

smooth stones – five truths that they knew very well – ready to sling at any giant heresy or powerful lust that might attack them. He preached with drama and purpose, encouraging us to be spiritually armed like Michael and his angels to cast out the dragon. *Apocalypse Revealed* 564 says: “[T]he multitude of reasonings flowing from falsities that followers of the dragon put forward come to nothing in the face of the spiritual truths rationally understood that are advanced by the Michaels of whom the New Church is formed.” Perhaps in the Lord’s heavenly kingdom, Chris will have a role training young men to become Michaels for the New Church.

Christopher never felt that he was a scholar among his fellow priests, but he gave the Council of the Clergy an influential paper in 1985: “*Let Us Pray*.” One pastor recently observed: “I am grateful to Chris especially for his calling us clergy to think more seriously about prayer, and to use prayer more, and make it more central to our following the Lord in life. Much of the increased use of prayer in the General Church in the last couple of generations, I believe, goes back to Chris’s teaching . . . about our need to pray to the Lord.”

Through all his service in the ministry, Christopher continually called on us, priest and layman, to do as the Lord teaches in His Word and not merely talk about it, to build our house on the rock. (*Matthew* 7:24-27) Sometimes he spoke of the need for kidney spirits, whose job is to eliminate false and bad things that would make the church sick. Christopher gave a paper, both to the clergy and the laity, on *The Necessity of Betrothal*, and another clergy paper, *When Should a Priest Say No?* In all of Christopher’s work, helping others to build their spiritual homes, the Lord was helping him frame and erect the walls of his home on a firm foundation. We read in *I Samuel* 2:35: “*I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest who shall do according to what is in My heart and in My mind. I will build him a sure house, and he shall walk before My anointed forever.*”

After 12 years teaching in the Boys School and chairing the Religion Department, Chris retired from the full-time work of the ministry. Then the bishop called him to go to South Africa to provide oversight and support to the pastors there, a position in which he served for about two years. He and Heather were like grandparents to the children of the pastor of the New Church Westville.

Finally, when Chris and Heather moved to Kempton, he taught high school students here for several years before retiring altogether. Even after he retired, quite a few people continued to seek out his counsel with the challenges of their lives.

Christopher has a strong love of country and of the principles of justice on which our country is founded. For many years, he helped produce and distribute a Voter’s Guide for elections in our area, gathering information about the records and opinions of the people running for office, and sometimes arranging events to meet and talk with candidates. He would usually be at the polls on election days, offering information – along with Heather’s cookies –

to the voters. It's easy to picture Chris being a strong, active supporter of the Kingdom of the Lord in heaven. Through all the uses of his life, the Lord was preparing a place for him in our Father's house.

Chris had a number of hard, sad experiences in his life, but through these times, his faith in the Lord grew stronger. In a conversation, he said that we should remember the times when the Lord Himself on earth thought He had failed and could not overcome. These states of doubt were the means required for the Lord to appear vulnerable. He had to take on an ordinary human nature or proprium with its weaknesses through which the hells could get at Him, because if He hadn't, He could not have approached them, conquered them, and put them under His control. Chris said: "You can trust the Lord. He will always find a way to get done what needs to be done. His mercy is unquenchable. If it weren't for that, we would never make it."

In remembering the six days of labor in Christopher's life, perhaps we get a glimpse of our how our Heavenly Father has been preparing him for the Sabbath, for which He created him from the beginning. We can conclude with a beautiful passage about heaven, and think of Christopher and others we know participating in the uses and joys there:

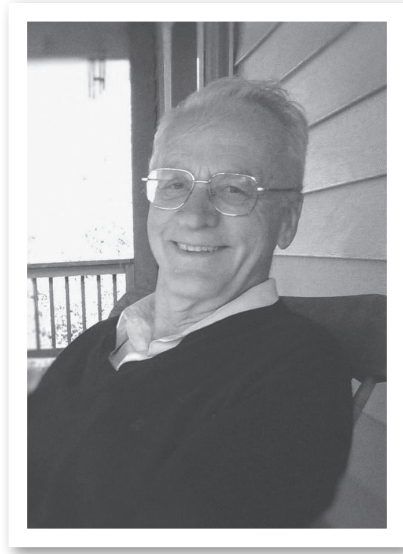
Angelic life consists in use, and in the goods of charity; for the angels know no greater happiness than in teaching and instructing the spirits that arrive from the world; in being of service to men, controlling the evil spirits around them lest they pass the proper bounds, and inspiring people with good; and in raising up the dead to the life of eternity, and then, if the souls are such as to render it possible, introducing them into heaven.

From all this they perceive more happiness than can possibly be described. Thus, they are images of the Lord; thus, they love the neighbor more than themselves; and for this reason heaven is heaven. Consequently, angelic happiness is in use, from use, and according to use, that is, it is according to the goods of love and of charity. (Arcana Coelestia 454)

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. (Psalm 23:6)

Amen.

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Christopher Ronald Jack Smith

Biographical Notes from

Conversations with Christopher

The Rev. Lawson M. Smith

Christopher Ronald Jack Smith was born in Harrismith, Natal, South Africa, on April 19, 1941. He was baptized into the New Church on July 10, 1942, by the Rev. Cornelius Bécherel in Curepipe, Mauritius (a small island near Madagascar in the Indian Ocean).

A little family background: Christopher's Grand-mere, Jeanne de Chazal, married his Grand-pere, Dr. Clifford Mayer, private physician to the Maharaja of Baroda in India, where Christopher's mother was born. Clifford and Jeanne Mayer raised their children primarily in Mauritius with totally French culture, even though it was a British colony. Christopher's mother was Mauritian, although born in India. When Christopher's father, C. Jack Smith, finished at the University of Bristol, England, he responded to an ad on the notice board there from the British Colonial Service, seeking a teacher of classics at the

Royal College in Mauritius, and he was hired for this position. While he was teaching in Mauritius, a fellow teacher, Harry Ardill, introduced him to the Mayer daughters: Berthe, Renée (“Batcha,” meaning “little girl” in India), who was Christopher’s mother, and Jeanne.

As a side note, an Indian surgeon who took care of Christopher, told him a few years ago that “Batcha” really means “little boy.” This surgeon had family living in Baroda, India, the very place where (Christopher was told) the Maharaja had given that name to his mother. Small world!

Christopher’s parents were married in Mauritius. As a de Chazal, his mother was born into a family with a New Church heritage, but she really didn’t know what the New Church was all about. However, she had Christopher baptized by a minister of the General Conference of the New Church in Mauritius. His father was raised in the Church of England.

Christopher’s family lived in Mauritius for his first five years, where his younger brother Clifford was born on May 28, 1945. The two brothers were very close. In 1946, their family moved to England for two years, after which time his father was transferred to Fiji to be the principal of the only Fijian boys high school.

So, Christopher lived in Fiji from age 7 or 8 (1948 or 1949) until he was sent away to high school in Durban, South Africa, at age 13. In Fiji, he would use a machete to make a bamboo raft and take it down the river into the sea, which had a lot of barracuda. He went fishing and had a lot of fun spending time on the sea. He didn’t wear shoes for months, and he could walk on gravel roads and coral reefs.

Christopher was told a story from his childhood that happened while his family was on a ship at sea. He had done something naughty and was locked into the family’s cabin. He escaped by climbing out the porthole of the cabin and into the porthole of the next cabin, and he was discovered exploring at large in the ship. There was also a story about his being spotted up on the boom of a ship. Apparently he had no fear of heights and climbing and was good with his hands and keeping his balance.

Christopher knew nothing about the New Church until his parents sent him from Fiji in 1954 to live with his mother’s older sister Berthe and her family in Durban, South Africa, so that he could go to high school there. In Durban, Aunt Berthe, who belonged to the New Church society there, took her four children and Christopher to church every Sunday. And in a young people’s class once a week with the Rev. David Holm, Christopher learned a lot about the New Church. He became very affirmative but didn’t want to talk about it to anyone outside of the church. He spent time especially with his first cousin Paul Mayer, who was a year older. During his stay in South Africa, he visited his parents only during the Christmas holiday.

At age 17, in 1958, the family moved to England, where Christopher lived for four years. In 1959, out of the blue, he got an invitation from the Rev. Frank Rose to attend the first British Academy Summer School (BASS, which is still going on in England every summer). The first BASS was run by three New Church ministers in the UK: the Revs. Erik Sandstrom Sr., Alan Gill and Frank Rose.

After attending that first summer school, Christopher did a fair amount of reading of books like Cyriel Sigstedt's *The Swedenborg Epic*. It didn't take long before he found himself in full agreement with the General Church belief that the Heavenly Doctrine (the Writings) is Divine Revelation.

He attended BASS every year until he left England. In about 1961, he told Rev. Rose that he wished he could go to Bryn Athyn, where there was a General Church college (the Academy of the New Church College, now Bryn Athyn College). Frank responded by simply asking, "What's stopping you?" That did it! By that time, Christopher had also decided he wanted to be a minister.

For two more years, he continued to work as a building surveyor for John Laing Construction. (This work had been his ticket back to South Africa, where Laing was well established.) He went to technical college for one day plus three evenings a week, to earn a degree that would be his fallback employment in England in case the ministry didn't work out.

At the end of those two years, he immigrated to the United States in September 1963, with a green card allowing him to work to pay his way. He started freshman year at the Academy of the New Church College that fall. It took five years to graduate from the College and one more year to complete Theological School, which he entered in 1966 while still in college. He graduated from college in 1968 and from Theological School in 1969, when he was 28 years old. He was ordained in Bryn Athyn on June 19, 1969, by the Rt. Rev. Willard D. Pendleton.

Christopher was a citizen of a number of countries over the course of his life. When he was sent from Fiji to attend high school in Durban, he got his first passport as a British Colonial. Later, moving to England, he got a regular UK passport. When he served in Canada for 17 years (in Toronto, Dawson Creek and the Pacific Northwest, and finally as the pastor of the Carmel Church in Kitchener), he got Canadian citizenship. After settling to be a teacher at the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools in Bryn Athyn, he became a U.S. citizen and got a U.S. passport. He wanted to be able to vote where he lived.

From conversations in the months before he died:

To a young relative trying to figure out what to study in college, Christopher said: "Do what you love." These words set the groundwork for her to pursue a

career that she loves.

In answer to a question about regeneration/spiritual rebirth, Christopher wrote: “Our regeneration, being fit to live in heaven, is accomplished only by the Lord. As you know, for the Lord to do that, we have to reform, by shunning evils as sins, which means living according to what we know to be the truth that is given to us in the Word. Then we’re told we can ‘have confidence’ that we will be saved by the Lord.” (*New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 115)

Christopher expressed full trust in the Lord, even as he faced disease. He talked about how you can always trust the Lord, because He will always find a way to get done what needs to be done. Christopher said: “The Lord’s mercy is unquenchable. If it wasn’t for that, we’d never make it.”

“Through An Open Door” A Path to a Stronger Marriage

Shawn O. Synnestvedt

*Note: This article is based on a presentation by the author
at the 2024 General Assembly in Bryn Athyn*

During my high school years at the Academy of the New Church in the mid-’70s, the school had many weekend social events, including four formal dances. These dances and other opportunities were designed as much more than social events. The need to teach secondary school students (and younger) the proper relationship between the masculine and feminine was (and still is) a critical part of the educational process and should be a continuation of what is being taught in the home. There used to be a term in New Church education: “The school is an extension of the home.” That concept of the home and school on the same page was an important part of raising young people in a holistic New Church environment.

In February 1976, our junior year, Aileen Horigan and I had our first date to the Sigma/Deka Dance. Spending time with her and others decorating for “The House at Pooh Corner” was a great opportunity to get to know her and others in an environment of mutual respect for the opposite sex. Teaching the fundamentals of courteous morality, genuine respect and honoring the unique qualities of the masculine and feminine is a critical aspect of learning to love the opposite sex respectfully. This can pave the way to marriage, with aspirations for an eternal union.

Living in Bryn Athyn at the time, with good role models strengthening the values in marriage, certainly implanted them within us as well. But not all marriages in society were strong. The divorce rate in the ‘60s, ‘70s and ‘80s was growing and fewer couples seemed committed to their marriage vows.

Between my freshman and sophomore year of college, I chased Aileen to Florida for a summer job and the chance to be close to her. I rented a room from a young married couple close by. When we met, they had everything going for them. They were intelligent, attractive, outgoing, had good jobs and their marriage seemed happy and healthy. But I started to see they weren’t as close as they seemed. Arguments were regular and within two months she moved out, the marriage fell apart and they divorced.

I started to wonder, what were the things that brought them together? What concepts led them to marry? What, if any, principles did they follow to build the best union possible? And what caused them to look outside their marriage, driving them apart? This has stayed with me for many years, and I think it's a big part of why I am writing this article.

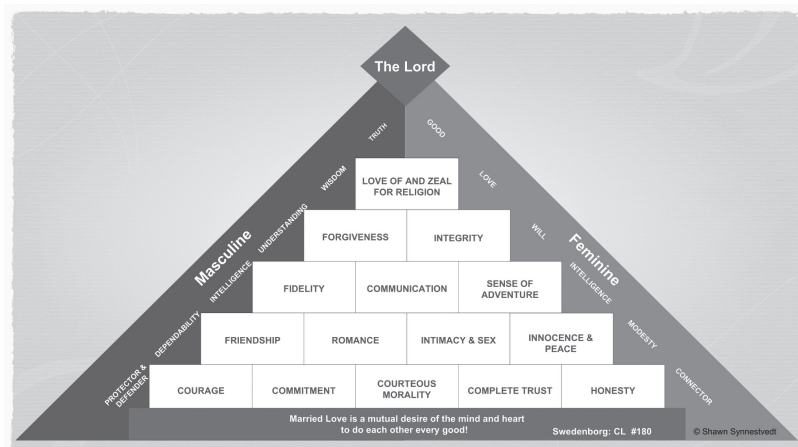
To this day I believe that the benefits of a marriage, built of character and principles, are incalculable, not only to the couple, the children and the family unit, but to the greater society surrounding that marriage. Successful marriages are a centerpiece of successful societies. Too often people enter marriage with unreal expectations. This can happen if we think that the wedding day is the goal or pinnacle, not the beginning.

I believe that the benefits of a marriage, built of character and principles, are incalculable, not only to the couple, the children and the family unit, but to the greater society surrounding that marriage. Successful marriages are a centerpiece of successful societies.

There is no perfect or easy marriage. They are all hard work, and they all have problems to overcome. The question isn't if you'll have problems, but rather how will you tackle the ones that you are certain to encounter. (Ashley McIlwain - Foundation Restoration)

A *Pyramid to a Stronger Marriage* (below) is a concept developed from a John Wooden book, *A Pyramid of Success* – a five-level pyramid with the character traits we need to be successful in life. Adjustments have been made which led me to present a *Pyramid to a Stronger Marriage* at the 2024 General Church Assembly. This is a work in progress, but aren't all marriages? The Pyramid can get better, and the building blocks and descriptors can improve, but this is presented for consideration within your own marriage, or for any young person or couple looking toward marriage and seeking a strong, committed and happy life together. No matter the stage of your relationship or marriage, seeking continuous improvement is something that could benefit all of us.

“THROUGH AN OPEN DOOR” A PATH TO A STRONGER MARRIAGE



The teaching of the New Church that marriages are eternal and not an “Until Death Do Us Part” venture is one of the strongest teachings of our faith. Parallel to it is this quote which is the granite foundation of this pyramid:

Married (Conjugal) Love is the mutual desire of mind and heart to do each other every good. (Conjugal Love 180)

The teaching of the New Church that marriages are eternal and not an “Until Death Do Us Part” venture is one of the strongest teachings of our faith.

Just imagine if every marriage followed this basic principle. It is incredibly profound, yet such a simple and sometimes overlooked and difficult concept to achieve. The idea that within our marriage we are here to meet the needs and provide every good for our married partner and vice versa is a beautiful concept of a heavenly union.

Building from this foundation, the bottom five blocks are:

- **Courage**
- **Commitment**
- **Courteous Morality**
- **Complete Trust**
- **Honesty**

In a world where the secular is trying to do everything it can to redefine the framework of binary marriage that the Lord has given to us we need to

remain vigilant to the teachings of the Word and the Writings.

It can take **COURAGE** to stand up for the purposeful creation of the Masculine and Feminine, the reasons that the Lord created a binary system in the human race, and the different gifts with which He has endowed each gender. Bringing these gifts together is what forms completeness in a true marriage union. While there are many things that define Courage in marriage, I'll mention just one more.

Married couples need to have the courage to approach difficult topics with each other in a safe, empathetic way that values each spouse in the marriage relationship. Partners need to work hard to align their priorities so that they can grow closer together, with common purpose. There are always tendencies to hold on to individual priorities from when each was single. The greater challenge is to work together to find common priorities to grow closer in marriage. Aligning priorities and forming a common purpose is essential in developing unity in marriage.

COMMITMENT. It seems strange that many of us don't seem to understand what the word means. Today, it appears to be more about commitment to self than to us, the married couple. Too many make a marriage "commitment" until it's not convenient to remain committed to the vows they made to each other and before the Lord. This is a reason, for people of faith, to come before the Lord and commit to each other in a marriage ceremony in a church.

A civil union may not carry the same principles and dedication needed to survive the challenges that every marriage goes through. When a masculine/feminine commitment through marriage occurs, it's what we anticipate will be a joint venture, with the Lord's help through eternity. It's a commitment for a deeper learning and understanding of the opposite sex, those qualities which when brought together, form the two into one. Some of these qualities are found in the mortar of the pyramid and are what bind a marriage together.

Commitment also is that it is being fully and completely engaged in the marriage through good times and bad, happy times and sad, times of harmony and tempest. True commitment (by both partners) is essential to an everlasting love.

Everybody wants loyalty, consistency and somebody who won't quit (commitment). But everybody forgets that to get that person, you have to be that person. (Anonymous)

We say that conjugal love begins through the agency of a love for the opposite sex because before a married partner is found, a person loves the opposite sex in general and regards it with loving eyes. In their company he also treats the opposite sex with courteous morality. (Married/Conjugal Love 98)

This is the only place in Swedenborg’s Writings where he mentions *Courteous Morality*. But as we raise children, the need for courteous morality grows every day in a world that lacks civility across genders. The definition I see is: “To put courteous and respectful thoughts into action toward the opposite sex.” And while courteous morality is something that should be practiced by the masculine and feminine, it’s the masculine that must lead. The masculine is responsible for protecting the innocence of the feminine. Truth (m) needs to envelop Good (f) and protect it. This means practicing courteous morality in all interactions with the opposite sex and is one more reason that the masculine must be a lifelong seeker of truth, with the intention to develop both moral and spiritual wisdom from those truths. We must pursue that inherent desire, rooted in the masculine to protect the feminine, sometimes even in the face of resistance by some women.

Complete Trust. *Conjugal/Married Love 180* goes on to say that “*complete trust has to do with the heart.*” Complete trust is when you commit yourselves – each to the other – without hesitation or reservation. Early in marriage this is something given to each other. But as the marriage matures, complete trust has been built and earned; it is given unconditionally because you know you are doing each other every good, from the heart.

Rounding out the first row and closely associated with courage, commitment, courteous morality and complete trust is **HONESTY**. This is considered one of the four foundational character traits. Considering any and all character traits, it is easy to see that a person can’t have any of them without honesty at the core. The other three foundational character traits are courage, kindness and caring. Honesty is an essential principle on which marriage must be founded. Courage often needs honesty when difficult topics come up that need to be discussed. So, too, are being kind, caring and empathic for your partner when a difficult subject is discussed.

Let’s consider the need for a couple to align their priorities. Every marriage goes through stages of alignment, because each spouse comes with a lifetime of heredity and environment. They have been raised with certain standards, values and inherent qualities, and deficits which have established their own foundation of life. Coming together in marriage presents a need for adjustment and, over time, merging their heredities and environments, leading to aligned priorities. It can take a lot of honesty to present your own priorities, but it might take more honesty and courage to listen to your spouse’s priorities and adjusting your own for the greater good of the marriage.

Much of the first row is rooted in character traits, mainly dealing with self. As we move up, the building blocks are more interactive – first on this level is **FRIENDSHIP**.

| *What is friendship? A single soul dwelling in two bodies. (Aristotle)*

The first attraction in a relationship often is physical. As the relationship moves forward some people work to develop that true friendship found in marriage. Others seem so engaged in the physical attraction or in their own self-interests that friendship is developed further down the road, if at all. Is this something seen when couples cohabit prior to marriage? Are they putting the cart before the horse to satisfy their own needs and wants rather than looking toward their opposite to develop a strong friendship that carries into marriage?

Order is important. And working on a couple's friendship prior to marriage is paramount to heading off issues down the road. Two questions come to mind:

1. Does the feminine get pressure from the masculine to move in together more than the opposite?

2. Would the feminine get a more timely and deeper commitment from the masculine if she said: "No, I am not moving in with you. If you want me forever, then we need to conduct our pre-married life in a more orderly way."

And would that commitment from the masculine come sooner than later if the feminine set a higher standard?

| *Friendship within marriage is what unites a couple's hearts and souls.
(Married (Conjugal) Love 334)*

Women should realize that they hold all the cards in a relationship – until they give a card or two away. If they do that before marriage – decide to move in together, to have a sexual relationship, to do all of the things that should be reserved for marriage – then why should they become frustrated when the male won't commit to marry?

| *It is inherent in men commonly to love the opposite sex in general,
whereas it is inherent in women to love one of the opposite sex.
(Married/Conjugal Love 296)*

Should we be surprised that until a male commits to one, that he will continue to look around even if he is living with a woman? And while the masculine has a more general love for the opposite sex, the inclination of the feminine is to attach to just one of the opposite sex.

The advice, "Marry your best friend," is so true. Are we taking enough

time in the dating process to really develop a friendship worthy of marriage? And when the friendship is tested with unwanted behavior, does the partner just put up with it? When a red flag goes up, pay attention to it. Neither partner should put up with behaviors that should be deal breakers. The message: work on the friendship early and often as you develop a young relationship. This is not something you work on just as you’re leading up to marriage; this is a lifelong commitment to continually build that friendship.

In many situations, but not all, the initial attraction is physical. While that may be the initial spark, over time – and looking to marriage – it can develop into a much deeper friendship. Both the masculine and feminine become salespeople trying to show their best attributes while burying their flaws. We need to look for both carefully as the friendship matures.

Friendship is built on similarities between a couple. The very first should be commonalities that exist in the celestial, spiritual and natural or the soul, mind and body – commonalities of faith. It only makes sense that the closer a couple is aligned in these areas, the closer the friendship within the relationship will be.

Marriage.com suggests four areas to strengthen a friendship in a relationship.

1. Don't stop dreaming together
2. Trust your spouse fiercely
3. Engage in shared time and activities together
4. Open up and share

To enhance their life by that love, it is incumbent on men to make appeals to women, by politely, respectfully and humbly courting them and asking them to grant that sweet addition to their lives. (Ibid. 297)

Romance plays a strong role in this. In a very natural way, the masculine wants to gain the favor of the feminine, often through romancing her. But men need to understand that romance is not something limited to dating, courtship, engagement and the wedding. Romance needs to be a lifelong pursuit in their marriage. The masculine continually needs to draw the feminine closer to him,

Many men may see the wedding as a conquest or a mountain to climb, and that after the honeymoon those states can be ignored. But understand this: marriage is not the end of romance; it's the beginning!

and one of the ways is to work on the romantic aspects through the entire relationship to eternity. Many men may see the wedding as a conquest or a mountain to climb, and that after the honeymoon those states can be ignored. But understand this: ***Marriage is not the end of romance; it's the beginning!***

There are many different ways to romance the woman you love, including:

- Listen to her with genuine interest
- Surprise her with small, thoughtful gestures
- Plan a date night tailored to her interests
- Write her a heartfelt note or letter
- Cook her favorite meal
- Spend quality time together without distractions
- Compliment her sincerely and often
- Show appreciation for all the little things she does
- Plan a “spontaneous” adventure or trip
- Introduce her to your favorite hobbies or interests
- Create a playlist of songs that remind you of her
- Remember important dates and celebrate them together

As much as the feminine needs to be romanced, the masculine needs to see and feel the intrigue of the feminine. Because while women need romance, men need intrigue. Intrigue holds their attention and draws the masculine closer to the feminine. Here are a few things of intrigue to consider:

- Grace and Poise
- Mysteriousness
- Subtle Confidence
- Softness and Warmth
- Sensuality

Intimacy and Sex, in the same pyramid block, have a direct relationship; intimacy is far more involved and goes much deeper than sex in a marriage relationship. Intimacy takes on many forms. We can get stuck on it being of physical or sexual nature. But it's much more than that. Everyone needs to share in intellectual, emotional and spiritual intimacy, continually showing passion and trust. All the while physical and/or sexual intimacy remain open with a level of vulnerability between each other. Both spouses opening up to each other is a demonstration of complete trust.

And while a healthy sexual relationship in marriage is only one aspect of intimacy, it is one of the best ways to draw a couple close and demonstrate each other's complete trust and commitment to their marriage. The Writings

discuss a deeper reason that a healthy sexual relationship is a great way to bond a marriage:

A wife is joined to her husband by her assimilation of the powers of his manhood, though this depends on the spiritual love they have for each other.

A wife thus receives into herself an image of her husband, and from it perceives, sees and feels his affection. (Ibid. 172, 173)

We know that hot, warm, cool and cold states exist in marriage. Physical touch, from a place of love, and sexual intimacy are the best ways to keep the marriage warm to hot or to pull a marriage out of a cool or cold state. (See *Conjugal/Married Love* 234) Intimate and sexual priorities within marriage will often be different, not only different levels of heat but also at different times of sexual attraction. Getting the priorities to align can be difficult. But consider the need for intimacy and sex as a tangible way to maintain and grow your marriage and something that is an essential element to continually draw a couple closer. There are times when sex within marriage needs to be intentional. Depending solely on spontaneity can pose its own set of challenges. Both the husband and the wife need to pay attention to the sexual intimacy between them.

Innocence and Peace are full of confidence in the Lord and your spouse. They are internal and close to your heart even if or when it is tumultuous on the external or outside of ourselves. We can look to the Lord for innocence and peace, but we can also look to our married partner to gain a sense of this within our own marriage.

Innocence and Peace are the innermost elements of heaven for the further reason that Innocence is the very essence of every good, and Peace is the serenity of every delight that is connected with good. (Ibid. 394)

The 10th block, **FIDELITY**, comes from the Latin word *Fidelitas*. It is absolute for any successful marriage. The need and expectation of each spouse for the other to be faithful and trustworthy is sealed in the marriage ceremony before the Lord. From that point, absolute commitment from each partner opens the door for all of the other pyramid blocks to take hold.

The Lord spoke about fidelity in the Ten Commandments: *Thou shalt not commit adultery*. Pat Williams, former General Manager of the Orlando Magic

and motivational speaker put it this way:

Sex, like many other gifts from God, is a wonderful thing when it is used properly - an expression of love between one man and woman who have given themselves to each other in marriage. But used carelessly and improperly, sex destroys lives. (Pat Williams: "Who Wants To Be A Champion?")

COMMUNICATION is in the geometric center of the pyramid. This isn't by accident. The key to everything in a healthy marriage is the ability of each spouse to communicate effectively with the other. Communication works in two directions. Not only must we be able to articulate our thoughts, frustrations, dreams, hopes and desires but we also must be able to listen and hear the same from our spouse. A one-sided conversation is not aligning a couple's priorities. It can quickly become one talking at the other instead of two talking with each other. If there is difficulty in sending or receiving information, couples need to try different pathways to open the door to understanding the message.

One of my favorite things about the pyramid is **SENSE OF ADVENTURE**. Life is an adventure, and our marriage should be as well, with husband and wife working as a team in a continuous state of discovery about themselves and the life around them. There are too many times in marriage where we fall into routines and quickly a marriage can have a life of its own and become stale. It doesn't have to be this way.

There are too many times in marriage where we fall into routines and quickly a marriage can have a life of its own and become stale. It doesn't have to be this way.

The good news is that it doesn't matter what your socio-economic status is. In its simplest form, having a sense of adventure can be just changing the routine. Meeting in the park for a picnic with or without children doesn't take additional money; it's just thinking things through and doing a little planning. Search for things online that you and your spouse would enjoy and make the adventure special in any way you can. Something more elaborate could be a scavenger hunt that leads into a weekend away. The element of surprise heightens that sense of adventure and adds a spark to marriage which will keep the relationship fresh.

Some resources to consider:

- *A Couples Bucket List: 101 Fun, Engaging Dating Ideas*: Dr. Carol Morgan
- *101 Creative Dates: From the Life of a Hopeless Romantic*: Matt Taylor
- *The Adventure Challenge; Couples Edition*: Multiple Authors

While **FORGIVENESS** may be one of the more obvious necessities in a high-functioning marriage, we all know that it can be incredibly difficult to forgive if we were the one that was hurt. And for marriages to move past a mistake made by our spouse, true forgiveness is required. We ask the Lord in His prayer: “*Forgive us our debts.*” For us to be forgiven, we have to open ourselves up to forgive. One is dependent on the other. This goes back to intimacy and our ability to open ourselves up and become vulnerable within our marriage and family.

To live your life with a set of principles and values is to live your life with **INTEGRITY**. It certainly doesn’t matter if you are alone, with your spouse or with others. Those principles and values need to be ingrained in your character and guide you every minute of every day with Honesty, Kindness, Caring and Courage – especially within your marriage relationship. Next to your conjunction with the Lord, your spouse is the most important relationship that you have.

The top block of the pyramid is **LOVE OF AND ZEAL FOR RELIGION**. In *Conjugal/Married Love 164*, Swedenborg makes it clear that moral and spiritual virtues open the door for:

A man’s love and Zeal for Religion, for the public good, for his country, for his fellow citizens, for his parents, for his wife, and for his children.

Yes, it is incumbent on the masculine continuously to learn and develop a high degree of moral and spiritual character in his life and lead in these areas in his marriage.

Male and female were created to be the very image of the marriage between good and truth. This is because the male was created to be an expression of the understanding of truth, thus a picture of truth, and the female was created to be an expression of the will of good, thus a picture of good, and implanted in both from their inmost beings is an inclination to conjunction into one (see above, no. 88). Thus the two together form a single image, which imitates the conjugal model of good and truth.

We say that it imitates this model, because it is not identical to it but similar. For the good that attaches itself to the truth in a man comes

directly from the Lord, whereas the wife's good that attaches itself to the truth in a man comes from the Lord indirectly through the wife. Consequently there are two kinds of good, one internal, one external, which attach themselves to the truth in a husband and cause the husband to remain constant in an understanding of truth and so in a state of wisdom through the agency of truly conjugal love. (Ibid. 100)

MORTAR: Clear distinctions exist between the masculine and the feminine, including:

- Good (f) and Truth (m)
- Love (f) and Wisdom (m)
- Will (f) and Understanding (m)

The “mortar” is placed on the upper level of the pyramid. Added to that upper level mortar are the following on the lower levels where one spouse may feel the need to lead the other:

- Protector/Defender (m) and Connector (f)
- Dependability (m) and Modesty (f)
- Intelligence (both M & F but are approached from different perspectives)

While each gender has a lifelong responsibility to pursue these characteristics in themselves, there is also a responsibility to attach oneself to the spouse. We also need these characteristics to remain in balance and concert with each other. The understanding should never work to dominate the will, and the will should never work to dominate the understanding. The Lord's design is that these need to be complementary, not in competition. Even the nature of the word competition means that one is dominant over the other.

Earlier I mentioned the need to align priorities in a marriage, which includes the alignment of these qualities. Recognizing that I write this from a male's point of view, truth, wisdom and understanding are all related to each other. We have to seek the truth (and not falsity) to develop true wisdom, and if we seek truth, developing wisdom will open our understanding.

Isn't the same true for the feminine? Looking for, seeking and doing good allows for the further development of love which then drives the will to do what is good.

It seems that in our ultra-sensitive society, either the masculine or the feminine will be upset reading these characteristics as either masculine or feminine, as though they each don't exist in the other. To me it is clear that while the masculine has characteristics of good, love and will, they are not nearly as well developed as with the feminine. And while the feminine clearly has characteristics of truth, wisdom and understanding, they are not nearly as

well developed as in the masculine. By the Lord’s design we are drawn toward and have a desire to attach ourselves to all aspects of the opposite sex. And while the initial attraction between the masculine and the feminine may be physical in nature, isn’t that underlying attraction the attachment that fills the need (or the void) that we each have in these character traits?



SHAWN O. SYNNESTVEDT grew up in Bryn Athyn and graduated from the Academy Boys School in 1977, then from Trenton State College in New Jersey with a BS in Health and Physical Education in 1982. In 1988 he began 28 years of service to the Academy as teacher, houseparent, coach, advisor and was athletic director for 12 years. During this period he received his Master of Arts degree in Health Education from Acadia University.

He served on five Middle States Association team visits for accreditation, helped start the Pennsylvania Independent Schools Athletic Association, and was instrumental in developing the independent boys ice hockey league and starting the first girls ice hockey team.

He married Aileen Horigan in 1980, and they have five sons, four daughters-in-law and seven grandchildren. Retired from the Academy, they live in Sunset Beach, North Carolina, where he works with a logistics firm. Contact: sosynnestvedt@gmail.com



FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Global Healthy Congregations

The Rt. Rev. David L. Lindrooth

Several years ago, the administration formed a new department which is called the Healthy Congregation Department. The purpose was to strengthen the General Church support of its congregations. We use planning, shared learning (lessons we learn in one congregation that can be applied in others), project management support and investment help.

Just over a year ago we hired Jane Enis, a former executive from Glenview, Illinois, to lead the project and help with project management. You can see from her report below that we are making exciting progress. I am only one of the many who are very grateful for the creative work Jane has brought to help our congregations.

Jane Enis

The Global Healthy Congregations (GHC) department, established by the General Church, has spent its first year helping congregations worldwide become more vibrant communities. In our inaugural year, we have made significant strides in both the development of our process and its deployment across diverse congregations. As we reflect on our progress, we are proud to share our work in supporting global congregational success. We are focused on a mission to develop repeatable processes for renewal that can be tailored to each congregation's unique needs.

Our Mission and Goals

Our primary mission is to create a scalable, repeatable process that empowers congregations to become healthier, more engaged and more sustainable. GHC provides a framework that includes the Vision/Hoshin Process, along with the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS), to support congregations in setting clear goals, developing project plans, and tracking progress toward their long-term vision.

The EOS process, developed by Gino Wickman in his book *Traction*, is a proven business framework that provides clear processes and tools to help organizations achieve their vision. We have adapted this system to meet the unique needs of our congregations, supporting them in setting clear goals, tracking progress and overcoming challenges.

This year, we set out with a goal of working with three pilot congregations. Today, we are working with four: New Church of Boulder Valley (NCBV); Sunrise Chapel in Tucson, Arizona; Kansas City New Church in Maysville, Missouri; and New Church of the United Kingdom. Through tailored processes, we are helping each congregation design its five-year goals and break them down into actionable 90-day priorities.

Early Successes and Progress

NCBV is the first congregation to actively implement the EOS system, with promising results. The Rev. David Roth and our hard-working Project Team have been careful not to imply that all their challenges have been resolved, but early progress has been positive. Among their first 90-day priorities were fundraising efforts, rolling out communication and engagement strategies, and implementing activities for kids and teens. They have successfully achieved two of their first three priorities, and over a 12-week period, their Sunday attendance increased by eight people compared to last year. Team leaders have shared positive feedback, including feeling more focused and energized. However, NCBV remains cautious, recognizing that ongoing work and effort are needed.

Just recently, NCBV conducted a thorough review of their progress over the last 90 days, assessing their achievements and identifying areas for improvement. They then planned the next set of 90-day priorities, setting new priorities that continue to guide them toward their long-term five-year goals. This review and planning process is a key component of the EOS model, providing regular course correction and keeping the team focused on their long-term five-year goals.

In West Africa, we have continued to support congregations through the addition of Richard Narh as the part-time project manager. Richard, based in Ghana, joined the team in November 2024 and has already conducted two

project site visits. His work includes improving reporting and collaborating with regional, national and local pastors to ensure progress is being made. Richard's support is crucial in managing ongoing projects and facilitating leadership transitions in the region.

I have been fortunate to receive strong support from key individuals in the General Church. The Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth, Assistant Bishop and Director of Outreach, John Berridge, Global Healthy Congregations Committee (GHCC) Chair, David Frazier, Executive Director, and Karen Stoeller, Director of Human Resources, have been unwavering sources of support. Their collaboration, along with the expertise of Ned Uber and Ian Carswell, both having served on the Board of Directors and now instrumental members of the GHCC. Ned and Ian have many years of experience consulting on the Hoshin and EOS process tools with other organizations, their help has been invaluable in moving this department forward.

Collaboration with the entire General Church Central Office Management team has also been essential to our success. Their proactive engagement in supporting our initiatives, from Outreach/Marketing, the Controller's Office, Donor Relations and Communications, have enabled us to effectively expand our reach and resources for congregational renewal.

For other pilot congregations, the journey has just begun. I have been working with the Sunrise Chapel in Tucson for five months now, where we have established a building/facility project team and have been addressing concerns related to their property. They are now ready to move into the Vision/Hoshin process and begin implementing the EOS system. Sunrise Chapel was preparing to begin the EOS process in February, while Kansas City New Church is getting ready to start soon. New Church of the United Kingdom is still in the early stages of their renewal process, planning their five-year goals and moving into the EOS process.

Congregational Uses Journal and Future Focus

A key initiative moving into FY26 is the optimization of our Congregational Uses Journal (CUJ). This will help track congregational vibrancy, providing a clearer picture of where support is needed to drive positive change. We are in the process of adding Treasurer Reporting to the CUJ. By incorporating it into this tool, we hope to create a comprehensive resource for all congregations. We aim to begin testing the full package in six U.S. congregations in the first quarter of FY26, with plans for a broader rollout by the end of FY26.

Looking ahead, our focus for FY26 will continue to refine and expand the systems and processes we've built. Key areas of focus include:

- **Marketing and Social Media Package:** This package will help

congregations strengthen their outreach efforts and build stronger connections with their communities.

- **Treasurer Support Package:** Tailored tools and resources to help congregations manage their finances more effectively, ensuring long-term sustainability.
- **Continued EOS Implementation:** Expanding the use of the EOS system to the other pilot congregations, ensuring it meets their unique needs.
- **Developing Lay Leadership Training:** Providing resources to strengthen the capacity of lay leaders within congregations, allowing pastors to focus more on their ministry.

As we move into FY26, we remain committed to the mission of supporting congregations worldwide. With the successful implementation of EOS in NCBV and ongoing work in other pilot sites, we are optimistic about the impact of our efforts. The tools, processes and support we are developing are laying the foundation for vibrant congregations globally, and we look forward to sharing these resources with the broader New Church community in the coming year. Together, we are striving to build a vibrant, sustainable future for New Church/General Church of the New Jerusalem congregations worldwide.

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I'm Right, You're Wrong

Managing Dissent in the Church

The Rev. Daniel Fitzpatrick

Everyone in the church hall turned to look at the two gentlemen standing just inside the doorway.

"I don't think that is right!" Edward's words were loud enough to quiet all conversations in the crowded room.

"But don't you see the need for doing it?" Kevin's words were equally loud.

No one knew the topic of their conversation. But everyone wanted to know what it was.

"That's invading people's privacy!" Edward again, a little louder.

"How is the pastor to measure the group's performance and whether he is reaching everyone?"

"I don't know, but taking attendance every Sunday seems too intrusive for me."

The pastor, standing in the middle of the now-silent audience, smiled. He thought to himself: I can work with this.

As long as there have been human organizations, there have been disagreements. I'm sure the original design of the wheel and the uses of fire were disputed. Governments, churches, companies, schools, friendships, marriages – any human organization experiences philosophical friction. Most people interpret this as a negative feature of these complexes of relationships, as this is most often how we experience them. But this friction is a feature of every human relationship. It's not going away. People are created as individuals, and individuals by definition are unique. Expecting them to all think alike is irrational.

So let's turn this idea around and look at this friction as a good feature of being human.

As a comparison, imagine a world without friction. You would not be able to stand, walk or even sit. The very minimal resistance that we count on to make our actions predictable would become impossible. You would not be able to grasp anything, hold anything, or move. You could lie on the ground, but if that ground were tilted at all, you would soon be moving toward a lower point. Life as we know it would be impossible.

So, we need friction to live effectively in this world.

The same is true in the intellectual realm. Without some friction between us in regard to how we think, we would have nothing to grasp as our own. Ideas would simply slip from one mind to another, and none would have any sense of possessing any specific idea as our own. It's the intellectual rubbing against each other that allows us to see an idea as unique, distinct from other ideas, and as our own, and to compare it to ideas that others possess.

But to make proper use of this internal friction, we must become conscious of how to use it effectively.

Two Paths

I see two separate pathways for using this friction. One leads to intellectual growth and potential progress in our lives; the other leads to division, setting people against each other and hindering the possible benefits of different ideas. I believe we rarely spend all our time on one path, but regularly hop back and forth between them as we struggle to listen and respond to ideas with which we disagree. But only one of these paths consistently leads to an improved life for everyone involved.

I call this the path of the Professional Dissenter. To understand what I mean, let's look first at the opposite.

The beginning or amateur dissenter focuses on being right, on winning every argument. He uses ideas as weapons to beat others into agreeing with him, and he is very impatient with anyone who expresses an opposing idea. The quality of his relationships with others is secondary to his "rightness." He'd rather be right than be connected. So, he becomes known as someone with very strong opinions who prefers tackling others intellectually rather than building a relationship with them. He works alone and prefers that. His mode of acting excludes him from any collaborative effort. And usually no one wants to work with him anyway.

The Professional Dissenter operates very differently.

He sees others' ideas as different perspectives on larger issues. He is curious about why someone thinks differently than he does. He works hard to

restrain himself and listen to ideas that contradict his own conclusions. He is comfortable with the friction that comes with every human relationship. His goal is not to win but to build some relationship with everyone whom he meets so that he can learn from them.

This does not mean that he compromises his own values to keep others happy. It does mean that in stating his ideas he gives no offense. He encourages others in their thinking, nudging them toward his ideas when it is appropriate, and listening to them when all they want is another win.

He knows that without a relationship with another who disagrees with him, there will be no chance to maintain contact and perhaps influence their thinking. And he is willing to live with the friction within the relationship so that he can maintain the relationship and perhaps learn from his dissenters. He knows he might be wrong in his thinking and is willing to change when new ideas lead him to see more clearly how to think effectively and how to act honorably.

He encourages rational dissent.

Dissent in the Church

People tend to hold their religious beliefs tightly. They will frequently defend them in ways that damage their relationships with others, especially when it comes to how to live by what they believe. And we should expect this. A life based on loosely held beliefs is easily derailed. We want people to be committed to living by what they believe.

We also want to avoid the damage that comes from using personal beliefs as weapons against others.

When we come to doctrinal beliefs and their application, we enter the realm of maximum possible friction between individuals – a realm of personal application, where judgment of others' choices becomes an easy but often damaging choice. This infects every organization to some degree, but its damage in religious settings can be very serious.

When we come to doctrinal beliefs and their application, we enter the realm of maximum possible friction between individuals – a realm of personal application, where judgment of others' choices becomes an easy but often damaging choice. This infects every organization to some degree, but its damage in religious settings can be very serious.

Along these lines, read this passage carefully:

When He opened the second seal, I heard the second living creature saying, "Come and see." Another horse, fiery red, went out. And it was granted to the one who sat on it to take peace from the earth, and that people should kill one another; and there was given to him a great sword. (Revelation 6: 3,4)

Now read this one:

Before it is explained what "peace" signifies, let something be said about dissensions arising in the church when the understanding of the Word is destroyed. By good, the good of love to the Lord and the good of love toward the neighbor are meant, since all good is of love. When these goods do not exist with the man of the church, the Word is not understood; for the conjunction of the Lord and the conjunction of heaven with the man of the church is by means of good; therefore, if there is no good with him no illustration can be given; for all illustration when the Word is being read is out of heaven from the Lord; and when there is no illustration the truths that are in the Word are in obscurity, thence dissensions spring up. That the Word is not understood if man is not in good can also be seen from this, that in the particulars of the Word there is a heavenly marriage, that is, a conjunction of good and truth; therefore if good is not present with man when he is reading the Word, truth does not appear, for truth is seen from good, and good by means of truth. (Apocalypse Explained 365:2)

In regard to the current states of dissent in the church, these passages should scare us. For once the genuine understanding of the Word is lost, dissent kills. Not the body, but the spirit. It divides. It sets people against one another and removes peace. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 5963)

The only internal cause of dissent is lack of charity. It's not differing ideas. It's a lack of care for another and their ideas. It's trying to "win" too much.

Having strong opinions based on doctrine is important; equally important is respecting others' viewpoints and being curious enough about them to listen without judging. Restraining our own ego and admitting that others' ideas might offer something we need to know requires constant restraint. The risk is that we will continue to disagree. The potential reward is two-fold: we might learn something new, and we can strengthen our relationship with someone who might not otherwise be included in our circle of friends. We can use the very friction that might otherwise divide us to strengthen the relationship. We grow through these connections and by shunning the influences that divide us.

Practices That Drive Dissention

Some of the ways we present and debate doctrine and doctrinal applications aggravate our disagreements. Here are a few of the more obvious examples. Please note that I am not accusing any person or group of using these; we are all likely to fall into using these at some time.

Slinging passages that support our position without context.

It's easy to find one or two passages that support your ideas and then use them to try to win others over. However, this isn't how genuine doctrine should be acquired:

The case being so with the spiritual church, it is not to be wondered at that with most persons faith is the essential of the church, and not charity, and also that they have no doctrine of charity. Their doctrinal things being from the Word does not make them Divine truths, for from the sense of the letter of the Word any doctrinal thing whatever can be hatched, and that which favors the concupiscences can be readily learned; thus also what is false can be taken for what is true, as is the case with the doctrinal things of the Jews, of the Socinians, and of many others; but not so if doctrine is formed from the internal sense. The internal sense is not only that sense which lies concealed in the external sense, as has heretofore been shown, but is also that which results from a number of passages of the sense of the letter rightly collated, and which is discerned by those who are enlightened by the Lord in respect to their intellectual. For the enlightened intellectual discriminates between apparent truths and real truths, especially between falsities and truths, although it does not judge about real truths in themselves. But the intellectual cannot be enlightened unless it is believed that love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor are the principal and essential things of the church. He who proceeds from the acknowledgment of these, provided he himself is in them, sees innumerable truths; nay, he sees very many secrets disclosed to him, and this from interior acknowledgment, according to the degree of the enlightenment from the Lord. (Arcana Coelestia 7233:3 – emphasis mine)

The genuine doctrine of the church appears to an enlightened mind when it sees how several teachings align and confirm one another. (See *Sacred Scripture* 26ff) And this can occur only with those who are – to some degree – living a life of charity. Basing our arguments only on the passages that support our position is an abuse of the truths now revealed.

Relying on derived doctrines without admitting they are derived.

Every church has teachings that are accepted as true due to tradition or through ongoing practice. These derived doctrines serve to support policies and procedures within the organization. But this doesn't make them true. They are perhaps better called practical truths, since they are used to explain and support common organizational practices. The danger here is that we accept them and don't take the time to examine whether they align with other key teachings.

Repeating positions we have adopted but not examined.

The historical faith that everyone derives from parents and teachers is not meant to be the genuine faith that guides a person's later life. This faith is often tainted by parental or generational misunderstandings and is usually adopted based on parental or others' human authority. It is not a freely chosen, rational faith. And while it may feel familiar, this does not make it true.

In addition, taking up a position that is currently popular among a certain peer group without examining whether it aligns with key teachings can lead us to defend positions and ideas that contradict other teachings. The strength of our belief in an idea contributes nothing to its truthfulness.

Building positions and agendas and using the doctrines to support our preconceived ideas.

Anyone can take an idea and find passages in the Writings that appear to confirm an idea. And the emphasis of one teaching over all others is the essence of heresy. In addition, setting oneself up as a teacher of doctrine without the proper authority and preparation has the potential to tear the church apart. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 6822)

Acting on teachings where the Writings are not clear and defending them using the Writings themselves.

A good example here is the non-eternity of the hells. How could a God that is pure Love allow anyone to suffer forever? Surely, He provides a way for everyone to overcome evil tendencies and ultimately live in the heavenly kingdom. Such a position invalidates all the teachings on how man is created in a natural, finite world so that he can choose his own place in the world to come, and how his freedom of choice has real consequences based on those choices. As one earlier New Church scholar said: "If the hells are not eternal, then neither are the heavens." Spiritual freedom is essential to our spiritual

perfection; but without the permanence that the death of the body provides, these choices mean nothing.

Fear of “losing” an argument.

No one likes to look foolish, and some of us will go pretty far to avoid it. We may even take positions that we interiorly don't agree with, just to have some ammunition to fend off another's argument. When we feel that we have to “win,” we open ourselves to using any idea, any approach to avoid losing.

Refusing to debate at all while maintaining a controversial position and regarding any who disagree with contempt

Insisting that one's position is correct but being unwilling to debate the merits of that position clearly signals both dissent and also a certain contempt for all other ideas.

The contempt from hatred exists when someone desires to take away anyone's respect, goods, and life; and to despise others in comparison with oneself is to look upon them as nothing in comparison with oneself. This is contempt from the love of self. (Spiritual Diary 4347)

Kevin tried to sit comfortably in the worn, overstuffed chair in the corner of Pastor Ben's small office. Pastor Ben had greeted him as he entered the church that morning and asked him to come to his office during the half-hour between the Sunday School and the adult service. He had no idea why he was here. He was even more surprised when Edward appeared in the doorway a few minutes later, revealing that he, too, had been called to this meeting. While the two men were not close friends, they had known each other for well over a decade. Both were serious Biblical scholars, and neither was afraid of an argument. Little did they know that this was why they were now sitting in the pastor's office.

Pastor Ben swept into the office, the momentum of the tight Sunday morning schedule literally pushing him into this next meeting. He greeted both of his guests and said: “I want to make it clear why I called you here. I want to talk about the conversation you had in the church hall after the service last Sunday.”

Both men sat up. Both knew exactly what he meant. Both expected a reprimand. Pastor Ben had another idea.

“I like what I saw. You are both well-read and thoughtful. You both have valid

viewpoints. But I wonder if you really like each other?"

Neither Kevin nor Edward saw this coming. It seemed irrelevant. They didn't need to be friends.

"We get along OK," Kevin offered in a hardly convincing tone.

Edward remained silent.

"Well, I'd like you both to consider something," Pastor Ben continued. "I'd like you to think of each other as best friends who are both trying to solve the same problem. Think about how close friends would help each other understand each other and share perspectives respectfully. I think you both have a lot to offer each other and the group here in terms of helping us all be better problem-solvers."

At that moment Grace, the group's always-reliable pastoral assistant, appeared at the office doorway and signaled that Pastor Ben was needed in the auditorium to help sort out the music for the coming service, scheduled to start in less than 20 minutes.

As he breezed out the door, Pastor Ben called out to the silent pair, "Think as a team."

The Writings on Dissent

The Heavenly Doctrines have much to say on this topic. They reveal the spiritual cost of disagreements that stem from selfishness. They also reveal that due to the nature of revelation, disagreements are inevitable but within the scope of the Divine Providence:

(As) there is no immediate influx from heaven, but only mediate influx through the Word, doctrines, and preaching; . . . for the Word to be Divine it must needs be written wholly by correspondences; it follows that discussions and heresies are inevitable, and that permissions of these are also in accord with the laws of the Divine providence. (Divine Providence 259:2)

We take in the ideas from the Word in freedom, each according to our own understanding. This means that there will be differences. Approaching others with a personal agenda of ideas that we want them to approve or accept without allowing them to challenge these ideas is contrary to the idea that we should only accept the ideas that govern our lives in freedom according to our

own reason.

But our differences don't have to divide us:

Anyone who has charity loves the neighbor, and when the latter differs from him in matters of belief, he thinks nothing of it provided he leads a life that is good and true. Neither also does he condemn upright gentiles, in spite of the fact that they have no knowledge of the Lord and do not know any truth of faith. For the person who has charity, that is, who leads a good life, receives such truths from the Lord as agree with his good, and gentiles receive such things as can be turned in the next life into the truths of faith.” (Arcana Coelestia 3267:3)

We cannot know the internal states of others. Their reception of truths will be unique and needs to be respected.

On the other hand, where there are differences of understanding, there will also be distance between us. In the spiritual world such differences cause people to be separate from each other. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 9213, 9261) We see this mirrored here on earth, as people tend to avoid speaking to or associating with those with whom they disagree. Their spiritual separation is mirrored in their behavior here.

And for those who think they are smart enough to resolve the doctrinal differences among those in the church, the Writings offer this warning:

The internal sense the subject treated of now is the progress of Divine truth with the man who is being regenerated. This progress is such that the man is for the first time enabled to discriminate between falsity and truth; for from the truth in which he is he can see falsity, because it is opposite; but he cannot at this first time settle differences between the truths of faith within the church; in order to be able to do this he must make further progress, for man is enlightened successively. This is very evident from youths and young men, who believe the doctrinal things of their church to be truth itself, and from these judge of falsities, but as yet are not able to settle differences between matters of faith within the church. This ability comes by degrees; and therefore, a man to whom this is possible must be of a more advanced age and must have the interiors of his understanding enlightened. (Arcana Coelestia 6766)

The challenge here is how do we identify such people. The only key indicator here is “a man to whom this is possible must be of a more advanced age and must have the interiors of his understanding enlightened.” Obviously, this excludes young people, but where is the cutoff?

I believe such people will be loath to claim this status. We have to seek them

out and listen to their counsel and perspective. They will be patient, thoughtful and kind, reluctant to take “positions.” Their curiosity and apparently tentative approach to stating their ideas can teach us much. They won’t seek attention or claim unusual enlightenment. But seek them we must. They offer a much-needed counterweight to temper the enthusiasm and boldness of a younger generation.

The Risk of Escalation

I believe there are degrees of disagreement. Simple differences of opinion can actually be healthy if they are exchanged in an atmosphere of respect, as our ideas are challenged and we are forced to re-examine them in a new light, based on new evidence. But there is always a risk that simple differences can escalate into more heated and potentially damaging disagreements. I think the key to avoiding this escalation is becoming aware of what happens at each level of disagreement, and how to manage these exchanges. Recognizing when disagreements become harmful is key to allowing dissent to serve our personal growth and draw us together rather than driving us apart. Escalation is not inevitable, and no one “wins” in an ongoing disagreement when emotions overpower rational discussion.

Differences of Opinion

There are often as many opinions on an issue as there are people participating in its discussion. This can be healthy and should be encouraged when based on mutual respect and thoughtful consideration and responses. In healthy interactions everyone remains open to new ideas and can freely choose to update or change their perspective. Everyone is focused on how various ideas relate to and enlarge their own understanding. No one is trying to “win” an argument, staking out and defending a specific position or agenda, and everyone leaves the conversation with something new to think over. No one feels attacked. And when there is another opportunity to participate in similar exchanges, no one hesitates to jump in. Conversation flows smoothly, and everyone feels an equal right to jump in and offer an idea in at any time. People leave these conversations feeling energized and inspired. (Cf. *Spiritual Diary* 158)

| “As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (Proverbs 27: 17)

Dissention

In the course of some disagreements, it becomes apparent that there are

significant differences between the participants. This is a dangerous inflection point, and if these differences are not managed well, the differences can lead to division instead of unity and growth. Often the differences appear more significant than they actually are, and sometimes taking a mutually agreed break from the discussion allows the personal affections to cool and the discussion to return to a healthy level and avoid the socially corrosive effects of an ongoing disagreement.

As the various sides take time to reflect on their apparent differences, they also need to make a choice as to how to move forward. In healthy discussions the participants will place more weight on maintaining their mutual relationship instead of withdrawing and refusing to participate further. They will place more value on being able to disagree without resorting to disagreeable behavior – name-calling, attacking other’s ideas or appealing to others to help undermine a position they oppose. They understand that this is a temporary state, and that healthy debate remains possible.

Disturbance

When disagreements become chronic and involve personal attacks, name-calling, contempt, trying to force others to accept an agenda, and gossip that attacks another’s character, there is the potential for a disturbance that divides people and undermines further discussion. Openly and aggressively challenging the commonly accepted authority and publicly challenging all who hold different opinions discourages freedom of discussion and shuts down any potential growth. Openly trying to “win” and force others to accept one’s own agenda removes any chance for healthy discussion and reflection. The focus here is “I’m right, you’re wrong.” And while we may disagree about how to manage such behavior, there is no doubt that it is damaging both to the individuals involved and the church as a whole.

One school of thought claims there are times when the only way to bring about change in the church is to cause a large enough disruption that change becomes inevitable. The question we need to ask here is what is the authority that justifies this behavior? While there may be times when this is truly the case – that change will only come through force – I believe we need to be very careful in claiming this authority, as the potential for division and destruction on all sides is high.

It feels good to be in a position that allows us to undermine those who oppose us. It feels good to “win.” But the price of this victory can be quite high, as the very people we oppose may also be the people we need to keep the church healthy in the future, and to keep our own ideas in balance. In one sense, the opposition is indispensable, and eliminating the opposition all

together removes everyone's freedom.

Rational Dissent: Be Curious, Not Judgmental

Rational dissent is a conscious process. It avoids the habitual and often instinctive reaction of "I'm right, you're wrong." It requires effort initially, as most of us do not instinctively grant others an open intellectual audience. It focuses on how ideas can be useful and enlightening in comparison with one another.

In time – and with consistent practice – it can allow us to calmly hear varying and dissenting ideas without becoming aroused and moving toward a fight/flight/freeze reaction. We can remain present with the conversation and allow it to occur without retreating ourselves and preparing our rebuttal.

To paraphrase Walt Whitman: we can be curious, not judgmental.

When does dissent become "disturbance?"

If we are to accept that there will be differences of understanding among us, how do we know the difference between holding dissenting viewpoints and "causing a disturbance"? While there is no generally accepted definition of this difference, let me offer some perspectives that might help make the distinction clearer.

Rational dissenting ideas are open to change. A belief that is held and proclaimed without considering opposing ideas or which regards these ideas with contempt will offend others and close down any further debate. Others' freedom to think differently is limited.

Rational dissenting ideas avoid personal attacks. Someone who holds a strong position and personally demeans those who disagree, who calls them names and speaks to undermine their ideas causes a disturbance and offends others. Such an approach again shuts down open debate and removes freedom of thought.

Rational dissenting ideas respect authority even though they may disagree with the authority. Positions that openly attack or undermine commonly accepted authorities disturb the church by dividing the group into factions, with each claiming the higher ground. The resulting polarization increases the odds of ongoing division.

Rational dissenting ideas seek to add clarity to an issue by directing people to the relevant teachings and asking them to examine them for themselves. Someone with an agenda he wants to promote often picks and chooses what teachings to emphasize in order to support his position and doesn't invite further inquiry.

If we are going to disagree or dissent, let's do it properly

We will not always agree on doctrinal matters and their application. But we can disagree well. It will require a conscious effort. It will require that we show up in every discussion as a mature adult, ready to listen first and speak second. It will require that we respectfully state our opinions and allow others to state theirs without hindrance.

As he entered the social hall after the service, Pastor Ben noticed that the room was unusually quiet. It normally hummed with multiple conversations, as the members greeted each other and talked about their lives. Not today. The room was eerily quiet, and nearly everyone was gathered in one corner of the room. As he approached the group, he was stunned at what he heard. Kevin was quietly asking individual members of the group what they thought of the idea of keeping attendance at services. As each person volunteered an opinion, Kevin asked the remaining members to remain quiet so they could hear each person's ideas.

Jill, the leader of the children's program, said: "I feel like this invades my privacy. I don't want anyone keeping score on my attendance."

Kevin thanked her and admitted that keeping attendance certainly could seem invasive. Then he asked: "Can you think of another way for the pastor to measure how effective his services are for us?"

Sean offered: "What about keeping attendance but making sure that this information is never shared? It would be for the pastor's use only."

Jill thought this might be OK, but still felt hesitant to having her attendance tracked.

Edward – Kevin's former nemesis – piped up: "I think we could allow the pastoral team to track the total attendance without tracking individual names. After all, if a service is showing falling attendance, the pastor needs to know this so he can think about what might need to change."

Several members spoke up in favor of trying this idea on a trial basis.

"How about we ask the pastor to try this for six months?"

Nearly everyone agreed with this plan.

Kevin, spotting the pastor standing at the outer edge of the group, asked him: "What do you think?"

Pastor Ben smiled inside, and said to himself: "This is going to be fun."

Participating in church life should be inspiring. Yes, there will be times when attending and participating will seem like a chore, when our lives are full of too many activities and we feel overwhelmed and tired. But this should be the exception. We can all make "church" a place where we want to spend more time, where we feel that we are growing spiritually and connecting more deeply with each other. Where our ideas are accepted and where we can rationally and calmly consider alternate views.

Will we always agree? No. And this is not the goal. The goal is to grow through the connections that church life provides. To support each other as we enter into the mysteries of faith and search for the ideas and principles that should guide our lives. And to practice among ourselves the behaviors and choices that a heavenly life requires.

So, What Do We Do?

Rational dissent is vital for the church. The ongoing exchange of ideas and opportunities for sharing different viewpoints on our doctrines and their application to our lives is key to both our own individual growth as well as the growth of the church overall.

This practice of rational dissent is not something that comes naturally to most of us. It's something we must learn and practice. Without it, we will be condemned to suffer ongoing and negative experiences when we try to share our ideas with others. And the Devil and his crew are always seeking new ways to drive us apart. They will even use the truths we share to divide us.

The first step is to become aware of the factors and behaviors that undermine rational dissent and choose to stop using them. Some of these are:

Rational dissent is vital for the church. The ongoing exchange of ideas and opportunities for sharing different viewpoints on our doctrines and their application to our lives is key to both our own individual growth as well as the growth of the church overall.

- Being aware of the tendency to try to “win” arguments; being “right” often alienates others.
- Avoiding approaching conversations with an agenda of ideas that you want to impress on others.
- Delaying responding when your response might undermine another’s position and consider if your response moves the conversation forward or not.
- Removing yourself from conversations that upset you and giving yourself time to consider what you heard in a calmer environment.
- Being aware of when a disagreement challenges or undermines your connection to another.
- Being aware that your strong, outspoken opinions may offend the very people who would like to connect with you. (Those in leadership positions in the church also need to be aware that their publicly stated strong opinions on a controversial issue may offend the vary people who will later need their help.)
- Worrying less about others’ motives in a conversation and more about your own motives.
- Avoiding demonizing others and picking fights.
- Remembering that disagreements are often a sign that both sides need to go deeper into their own ideas and see if there are areas of agreement with opposing views.
- Avoiding telling others why their ideas won’t work or making destructive comments.
- Avoiding the temptation to show others just how smart you are.
- Avoiding the desire to add your two cents to every argument.
- Avoiding speaking when angry.

- Avoiding listening only to gather information to rebut another.

These are just a few suggestions that can help make our conversations and debates more enjoyable and inspiring, and help make our church a place where we want to participate because then we can grow closer to each other and strengthen each other in our ongoing efforts to obey our Heavenly Father.



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What Should We Call Our Parents as Adults?

The Rev. Calvin B. Heinrichs

I was innocently doing my devotional reading and stumbled across this passage from the *Diary of Spiritual Experiences 2821*:

*In a dream my father in bodily life appeared to me, and in the dream I was speaking, saying that **a son need not recognize his father as father after he has come into his own rights**. When he is being brought up by him and so is in his home, **then he should recognize the father as father**, because he is in the Lord's place, and the son does not know what he must do except through the education and guidance of his father. But when he leaves his father's house and comes into his own rights, so as to be able to guide himself through his own mind and find out what he must do, then his Father is the Lord.*

Did you catch the earth-shattering implications? Well, that might be overselling it a little. Nevertheless, it struck me in an interesting way. I grew up referring to my father as “Dad.” I liked doing that and still do. But this passage made me wonder if I should still be doing that as an adult. While I was in my parents’ home, it was important to recognize my Dad as “Father.”

Call No One Your Father

You may be familiar with the Lord's statement in *Matthew 23:9*: “*Call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven.*” I was aware of this passage and blithely ignored it because I was also aware of passages in the Heavenly Doctrine about the spiritual meaning of the passage: “It is plain that no one is forbidden to call his father on the earth ‘father,’ nor is this here forbidden by the Lord; but this was said because ‘Father’ means the Divine good.” (*Apocalypse Explained 254:4*; see also *Apocalypse Revealed 170*)

Furthermore, in *Doctrine of the Sacred Scripture*, the Lord even uses this passage as a comparison of how we need doctrine to understand the Word.

“Without doctrine it would seem that it is not lawful to call any person teacher, father, or master; but from doctrine it is known that in the natural sense it is lawful to do this, but not in the spiritual sense.” (*Sacred Scripture* 51:6 = *True Christian Religion* 226:6; see also *De Verbo* 5:3) There you have it; it sounds like we are all clear to call our parents by the title “Dad” and “Mom.”

Honor Father and Mother

The rabbit hole only goes deeper from here. There is another class of passages to look at, having to do with the Fourth Commandment: Honor Father and Mother. *True Christian Religion* 305-306 treat of the natural and spiritual sense of the commandment.

In 305, we are told that we are to be obedient to our parents and thank them for the good things they do. But it notes: “All this parents do from a love which they have from the Lord, in whose stead they act.” (*True Christian Religion* 305) Parents are actually filling a representative office. As has been danced around in the earlier passages, the Lord is the only Father. Our natural parents are only filling that role temporarily.

In 306, we explore the spiritual meaning. What should we find in the explanation? Another reference to *Matthew* 23:9 states: “This was said with reference to children and angels in heaven, and not of children and men on earth.” (*True Christian Religion* 306) The commandments to honor Father and Mother, though spiritually about the Lord and the Church, really put emphasis on our need to pay respect to our natural parents in the office as “father” and “mother.” One way we can do this, is to call them by an honorable title, like Dad or Mom. In fact, *Apocalypse Explained* 631 says that in spite of *Matthew* 23:9, parents “ought to be so called.”

Throughout history, every new generation wishes to be out from under the control of the previous generation. I think the Lord knew what He was doing when He cemented the principle of honoring parents as a commandment. We have an inborn desire to be our own master, and if someday we want the Lord to be that Master, we first need to learn how to obey our parents and respect their wisdom. Don’t lose sight of the importance of respect for parents.

No Longer Representing the Lord

As important as the representation is in early childhood, at some point, our parents step out of the representative role, and we no longer should view them as representation of the Lord. That passage from the *Diary* that began this whole article is not alone:

| *In a dream my father appeared to me, and I spoke with him, saying*

that after a son becomes his own master he ought not to acknowledge his father as father, as before; for the reason why the father is to be acknowledged during the bringing up of the son, is that the father is then in the Lord's stead, nor does a son know at that time what he ought to do except by the direction of his father. But when a son becomes his own master, and competent to think for himself, and seems to himself to be able to direct himself from himself, then the Lord must be his Father. (Arcana Coelestia 6492)

After we become our own master, we “ought not” to acknowledge our father as a father, like before. Is the Lord only the Father of adults who can direct themselves? Of course not. The Lord is the Father of all. The difference is that before we are in our own right and reason, our natural father is still filling the representative role; afterward, he isn't.

I think that when we view these passages together, we start to see that we should grow out of calling our parents by titles like Mom and Dad as we become our own master. I'll be the first to admit that it makes me uncomfortable. The very idea feels disrespectful, but perhaps my idea of respect needs to be adjusted.

However, I would be derelict in my duty if didn't bring forward this passage from *Arcana Coelestia* 3703:7):

*In all these passages, in the sense of the letter, by “father and mother” are meant father and mother; but in the internal sense good and truth; and in the supreme sense the Lord as to Divine good and Divine truth. “Be not ye called Master; for one is your Master, Christ; but all ye are brethren. And call ye not your father on earth; for one is your Father, who is in the heavens” (Matthew 23:8-9) It is not here forbidden to be called master, and to be called father on earth; but **what is forbidden is to acknowledge at heart any other father than the Lord; that is, when mention is made of “master” and “father,” the Lord is to be understood, who in the supreme sense is represented by them; according to what was said above (n. 3702) concerning the most ancient people who were celestial men, that whatever they perceived on earth was to them a means of thinking concerning the Lord.***

At this point I really start to believe that you can continue to call your parents by endearing titles like “Dad” or “Mom.” The passage nicely highlights a distinction between *calling* and *acknowledging*.

However, it does lead into the final section on why I am still chewing on whether to move away from calling my parents by those honorific titles. It seems to me that the thrust of the passage is not endorsing parents being called “Father” or “Mother,” but rather, when we use those terms, we think of the

Lord. It then ends with Most Ancients, or Celestial people, on earth, when they perceived something, it was a means to bring them to think of the Lord. If they called people father, it was because it helped them think of the Lord.

When you call your Dad, “Dad,” do you think of the Lord? It then seems to me that if using the terms is not helping you think of your real Father, then perhaps we should find different terms. Eventually, in heaven, we will drop those terms, so getting a start on a heavenly principle now might expedite our process in the World of Spirits.

You Have to let go of “Father” Eventually

The timing of this change is interesting. In *Divine Providence* 330, we are told that because of the spiritual meaning of *Matthew* 23:9, “therefore in heaven no father is mentioned except the Lord.” If we make it to heaven, we won’t be calling our natural father, “Father” anymore. The honorific title is a temporary thing, not eternal. In fact, when contrasting natural fathers vs. spiritual fathers, we see a disappointing fact of the spiritual world:

*The nature of the love of little children and love of older children found in spiritual people, and the nature of it in natural ones, is clearly apparent from such people after death. For on arriving in the other world, most fathers remember their children who have passed on before them; and these are also presented to them, and they recognize each other. **Spiritual fathers** simply look them over and ask them in what state they are, rejoicing if all is well with them, and grieving if it is not. Then, following some conversation, instruction and counsel **regarding a heavenly moral life**, they part from them, telling them before parting that **they are no longer to be remembered as their fathers**, because the Lord is the only Father of all who are in heaven (according to His words in *Matthew* 23:9), and that they will never remember them as being their children. (*Conjugal Love* 406)*

Though any parent can probably attest to the desire to live next to their children in heaven (probably earth, too!), natural kinship is not the point. The Lord says “*He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me.*” (*Matthew* 10:37) Or in *Luke* 14:26: “*If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple.*” The Lord frequently uses examples of us choosing our family over Him. I believe there is a warning and reminder to us that *real* family has nothing to do with who you’re related to.

The passage in *Conjugal Love* 406 about parents instructing their children that they won’t remember them is kind of sad. However, that is thinking from

a natural parental love for our children. The Lord while on earth very clearly said when told His mother and brothers were outside: “*Who is My mother and who are My brothers?*” And He stretched out His hand toward His disciples and said: “*Here are My mother and My brothers.*” (*Matthew. 12:48-49*; see also *Mark 3:34*) Or in *Luke 8:21* when He said: “*My mother and My brothers are these who hear the word of God and do it.*”

We can choose our spiritual family. We should want our brothers to be those who hear the Word of God and do it. However, we can sometime be trapped in the natural mode of being stuck on blood relations, even if they are going down a different path. I think one of the reasons the Lord may have chosen to present these various teachings on not calling anyone father but the Lord, may have been because we struggle to let go of the familial bonds in preference to spiritual ones.

This is why very recently I have come to think that I should change how I address my earthly father, based on what I think the doctrine is saying. That said, there are a lot more passages out there and they might shed more light than I have done here. So what do you think? Do you think the Lord wants us to let go of calling our parents by titles on earth? Or does that only apply in heaven?



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History and Memories of the Glendale Parish of the Church of the New Jerusalem

Editors' note: This history of the Glendale Parish in Cincinnati, Ohio, is taken from the church's website. Below that is a personal reminiscence from former member Gillian S. Mayer.

A small group of Swedenborgians, connected by family and business ties, found themselves living close enough together that, on Christmas Day, 1860, they formed a congregation – the Parish of the New Jerusalem Church – in Glendale, Ohio. The patriarch, Charles H. Allen (1820-1889), was a wealthy chemist – that is a wholesale drug supplier – in Cincinnati. He and his adult sons and their families were the core of the congregation.

This Christian denomination is distinguished by its adherence to the interpretation of the Bible by Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who wrote the books that he said were revealed to him by God. The Glendale New Church was founded after Swedenborg's death by people who wanted to mold their lives according to this religion, which emphasizes individual responsibility for salvation by the combination of good works and faith.

Swedenborg wrote about the spiritual meaning of the Bible, details about the life after death, the eternity of marriage, and the accomplishment of the Second Coming, among many other religious subjects.

While Swedenborg is considered the father of the modern new age movement, he is very much a proponent of salvation through a belief in Jesus Christ as the Son of God. He says that it is the goodness of a person that determines whether a person is saved. One's faith is a product of inner goodness, not the other way around.

By the early 1800s, enough Swedenborgians lived in Cincinnati that they formed the First New Jerusalem Church, and called a pastor. In 1855 a new passenger railroad and the excellent Glendale community made it possible for wealthy business owners such as Allen to live in the country and commute to work. They, of course, established churches for themselves and their families near their homes. The small band in Glendale, led by Charles Allen and his

family, was one of these, and was a daughter church to the much larger church in Cincinnati.

On March 10, 1861, Mr. Allen chaired a meeting of the congregation's Council that included himself, George F. Foote and Jacob Purinton. A motion to accept a donation of land from Allen was passed. He then proposed "a further donation to the Parish: a sum of money sufficient to build the proposed Temple so far as to enclose the same, and secure it from damage with paint." This motion was also passed.

Three days later, the Council met at the site where they "fixed the southeast corner" of the building. One month later, on April 12, 1861, the Council met with a well-regarded and later famous architect, Mr. Alfred B. Mullet, and approved his plan. By modern standards this project was moving very quickly. One wonders how detailed the sketches were. A visit to the attic will delight any engineer with its complicated yet marvelous structure that supports the ceiling and the sanctuary, the steep roof and the steeple!

The project's pace did not slow down. Sixteen days later, official records note, the foundation was finished with the laying of the cornerstone, the top stone on the southeast corner. This stone is larger than the rest and is hollowed out to allow a box of mementos. The box was opened in 1961, but, alas, it had not been airtight and the documents inside were dust. A new airtight container was put in the stone. Perhaps some of us will be here in 2061 when it will be opened!

Cincinnati Farewell

Gillian S. Mayer

Many know the time-worn story of Johnny Appleseed for his love of nature and his connection to the works of Emanuel Swedenborg. His work was in the Midwest and eventually his seeds grew into apple trees, and his offerings torn from the book *Heaven and Hell* grew readers of Swedenborg. Churches in southern Ohio came and went, and the last one in Cincinnati, Ohio, is about to be sold

The New Church Chapel on Congress Avenue in Glendale was built during the Civil War and dedicated before the battle at Fort Sumter. Many members were abolitionists who had underground tunnels in their homes and helped slaves who crossed the Ohio River heading north. It seems that there are no records of some of these activities and it may be that it was not openly spoken of. But eventually some of the black people stayed and made homes in Glendale. In 1915 a caring Swedenborgian, Eleanor Eckstein, opened a

black school which carries her name. There the black students in Glendale were educated until 1958, eight years before the Civil Rights Act in 1966 when actual desegregation took place.

In the 1970s Don Gladish, an engineer, came to Cincinnati and started a damper business (a damper cleaned the air from power plants). He was a dreamer and hired many New Churchmen who were willing to move to Cincinnati. While there, they wanted a New Church Society for worship.

Because we had a place to meet in the middle of Cincinnati; because we had a place of worship in the small town of Glendale in Appleseed territory; because we had a job offer; because most of us went to the Academy of the New Church; and because we had truths we wanted to share with the world, we reached out to the General Church and we were given a succession of talented, knowledgeable ministers and their families in order to establish a center of worship in the light of the new truths given to us through the Second Coming of the Lord.

We had happy times at the Glendale Church. We had tableaux, 19th of June plays, Johnny Appleseed Days, rebuilt the organ, had paint crews, gardeners, a Wedding Chapel Ministry, a Ten Commandments small group, pancake breakfasts, square dancing, concerts, and of course, Sunday school and church services. In the fall we raked leaves together and in the winter we shoveled snow. But one by one we all left for new jobs, retirement, and whatever else causes people to move.

So over the years 10 ministers worked at building the Glendale Society and it thrived for a while, but eventually most people moved away, and the church building is now about to go up for sale.



Life Lines

Bruce M. Henderson and the Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

A QUIET MAN

When former American President James Earl (Jimmy) Carter died earlier this year at age 100, the eulogies focused on what people remembered most: not an effective president but a good man.

No doubt when he arrived in the spiritual world no one asked about his presidency, and everyone welcomed him as a good man.

He came into the White House in 1977 as a humble peanut farmer, former governor from Georgia, and a refreshing outsider – the perfect antidote to the lingering sleaze of Watergate.

He was brimming with good intentions, the integrity of a lifelong Sunday School teacher, and a welcome humility in a culture of oversized egos.

He is the only president ever to lead a regular Bible Study in the White House. But he was overwhelmed by the demands of the job and is remembered more for dwelling on “a national malaise” than hope and inspiration.

Through all his trials he was a man of bedrock faith living what he believed, remembered – and honored – more for his life as a past-president than a leader in the White House. He returned to his humble roots in Georgia, inspired by the fact that Jesus was a carpenter, and served all over the world with Habitat for Humanity and other causes. He did not retire to a life of ease but – with his wife Rosalynn – committed himself to serving others well into his 90s.

I met Jimmy Carter in the White House during my journalism career, and it was notable that he quietly slipped into the room – no fanfare of “Hail to the Chief” – just a humble and gracious presence, shaking everyone’s hand.

He may be a footnote in the robust history of American presidents, but he rests under the ultimate epithet we all can strive for: Here lies a good man.

(BMH)

BRYN ATHYN MISSIONARY SERVICES IN 1925

One hundred years ago Fred J. Cooper, the notable Philadelphia jeweler and enthusiastic church member, contributed the following to *New Church Life*:

Eleven years ago – June 19, 1914 – the members of the Bryn Athyn Society were assembled in the Chapel of Benade Hall to prepare for

an event of deep significance. After a brief service, the congregation formed in procession, two by two, with Bishop W. F. Pendleton at the head, and marched to the site of the church that was to be built on the hilltop nearby. Here a simple but soul-stirring ceremony deeply affected the little band of New Church men and women, as the foundation stone was placed in position.

We venture to say that no one present had a thought as to what the world would say about our House of Worship. Our one thought was that it was to be a temple dedicated to the worship of the one only God of heaven and earth.

In the course of several years the church was constructed, and in a wondrous manner that attracted our attention and stirred our affections. And on October 5, 1919, during a General Assembly, this cathedral was dedicated. Although not sought after, and, indeed, very far from our expectation, we soon found that the unusual architectural beauty, and the many original features of church construction, attracted a great many visitors, and we assumed that mere curiosity was the motive. Doubtless this was, for the most part, true; but every year saw the stream of visitors increased, so that hundreds, and even thousands, would visit in a day.

It was also observed that some returned year after year, bringing their friends, and remarking that they found something new every time they came. And here and there among the merely curious were people who attended services, coming Sunday after Sunday, with the result that today, only six years after the dedication, more than 30 persons – men, women and children – originally attracted by this building, have been baptized into the New Church.

These results, in the Providence of the Lord, have come without any special effort on the part of the society to make converts, although, whenever possible, the ushers and attendants have talked to those who have shown any real interest. And, in addition, thousands of copies of the Writings and collateral works have been sold. Who can tell how many are reading the New Evangel?

During the past year it became evident that many of the visitors were interested in something besides the building, as they were asking questions about the Faith of the New Church. Gradually the idea crystallized that it was our duty to proclaim the Doctrines of the New Church to the world, seeing that men were coming to us of their own accord. Finally, the Bishop appointed a Missionary Committee, with the Rev. George de Charms as Chairman, and this committee decided to hold eight Sunday afternoon services, advertised in the local and

Philadelphia newspapers, at which the Rev. Karl Alden would preach the first four sermons, and the Rev. William Whitehead the remaining four, on the following subjects:

1. The Unity of God
2. The Second Coming
3. Swedenborg and Marriage
4. Swedenborg and the Bible
5. Swedenborg and the Future Life
6. Swedenborg and the Neighbor
7. Swedenborg and Evolution
8. Swedenborg's Idea of the Church

The ritual of these special services was made as simple as possible, with well-known hymns, but care was taken to preserve our customs and traditions, to the end that the Doctrines of the New Church might be presented in the distinctive sphere of our own worship. The attendance was beyond all anticipation, never being less than 200, on several occasions over 400; and at some services the seats were filled, and numbers were unable to gain admittance.

Every service was marked by a very devout sphere, and the sermons of more than 40 minutes' duration were followed with keenest attention. The world has seldom heard the New Church Doctrine more fearlessly preached. The discourses were delivered with much affection and were convincing and lucid in style. Those of our own people who were privileged to hear them were stirred with a fervor to do all they can, each in his humble way, to spread the knowledge of the Lord in His Second Coming.

It may be years before we shall see tangible results of these services, but we feel and believe that the undertaking was thoroughly worthwhile. Let us hope and pray that something of a spiritual affection touched the hearts of some in those congregations who were hearing the truth for the first time.

These missionary services continued for seven years. Although few joined the church directly as a result, they happened during a decade that saw a 40 percent increase in church membership. If nothing else they helped increase the understanding of what this new community of Bryn Athyn was about in the area, and a great deal of literature was sold. But attendance at these services declined over time, and church leaders felt that the many new members coming into the church were almost all a result of personal connections or else

were young people who had come through the Academy.

They had no more of these services after 1931, but this did not mean the end of missionary efforts in Bryn Athyn or elsewhere in the General Church. It did, however, seem to confirm them in the idea that the growth of the church was more likely to come from personal contacts, large families, and New Church education, than from an organizational focus on evangelization.

(JFS)

LIVING THE PARABLE OF THE SOWER

The preceding Life Line by the Rev. Jeremy Simons on a series of missionary services 100 years ago in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral is a cautionary tale about our zeal to grow the church – and a reality check as well. Those services were well planned, well presented, well attended and well appreciated. But they produced few new church members.

So it has been through diligent efforts in the 100 years since – from the Epsilon Society to books, pamphlets and organized outreach at society and General Church levels. We keep trying – and occasionally connect – but our numbers hover between stagnant and dwindling.

Still, many of us feel something of the call in the Lord's Great Commission to His disciples at the end of the book of *Matthew*: to “go out and preach to all nations . . . teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.”

We may not be ministers, and may not feel like disciples, actually preaching to and leading congregations. But committed members want to do whatever they can to help spread and grow the church. And there are many ways we can do that – welcoming visitors and answering their questions, getting involved with outreach projects, and just in the ways we live our faith. We rarely know when we are making a connection but never stop trying.

Whether we realize it or not, we all connect with the Parable of the Sower – planting seeds for the stabilization and growth of the church. Some seeds fall among brambles and some in good ground – and we may never know when a seed is planted and takes on life.

I have had that humbling experience of trying to serve the church, the Lord, and the greater neighbor with several books – written as introductions to our doctrines – that are at the heart of people's faith, doubts and questions:

- *Window to Eternity* – the life after death
- *Why Does God Let It Happen?* – the Lord's Providence and how it works
- *A New Key to the Bible* – the spiritual sense of the Word that adds depth and meaning to the literal words

These books have sold thousands of copies all over the world – thanks to the Swedenborg Foundation. Many people give them to friends – especially those who have experienced loss or a crisis of faith – as an introduction to our church and as a source of comfort from the Lord. Many other books, videos and memorial services are shared with similar intent. I rarely hear how people are affected – and trust completely in the Lord for nurturing those seeds that fall into good ground.

But I also have my angels. One is my wife, who has guided at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral for years and always ends tours in the bookroom, where she shamelessly promotes my books – along with the *Bryn Athyn Cookbook* that she helped to edit. Spiritual and natural food.

My all-time Johnny Appleseed is Jamie Uber of Pittsburgh, who carries copies of my books in his car – something I do not do – and has given out hundreds over the years, including everyone who attended his mother’s memorial service. The latest came last November when a friend’s mother passed away. He went to the funeral home and gave her a sympathy card along with a copy of *Window to Eternity*. She sent him a thank-you note, which included:

Thank you so much for the love and comfort you gave Arnie (her husband) and me at the passing of my Mom. I started reading the book right away. I really needed this. It is written in a very accessible language from an honest wise man. Grief is very hard. And you have helped that journey with this road map to faith and belief. Thank you for your kindness and thoughtfulness.

Yes, it is gratifying to hear: “This book changed my life!” Yes, it is nice to know that at least a few people have joined the church as a result of reading one of these books. Curtis Childs, with his captivating *offTheLeftEye* YouTube videos, and Steve David, with his New Christian Bible Study website, get rave reviews from people they are reaching all over the world. And it is all humbling because we are all laborers in the Lord’s vineyard. We are just sowing seeds – with hope and trust – knowing that He cannot benefit people directly but works through us to connect and lead them to Him. And we all can do that.

(BMH)

CURSE OR BLESSING?

One of the small blessings of the curse of covid was the way churches quickly adapted to offering services online. People may have been discouraged from congregating in pews but were able to “attend” services in the comfort – and

safety – of their homes. But post-covid, is that comfort option turning into a curse as many pews remain empty?

We are commanded by the Lord not only to go to church for our own spiritual good, but to attend as part of an essential community of worshippers. That community is the life of any congregation and it is discouraging to see attendance dwindling in many of our churches from the robust levels of years ago.

Not all of this can be blamed on Zoom. Church attendance is declining all over. And that is sadly reflected in the general decline of faith and morality throughout this conflicted world.

The Rev. Derek Elphick is making an admirable effort with monthly services in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral emphasizing family and community, which have been an encouraging success. People are enjoying going to church – as families and as a community – and this is a blessing.

We are not immune to the challenges facing churches all over the world. We get reminders in the December reports in *New Church Life* each year: the paltry growth statistics, which reflect a steady spurt of potential through baptisms, but an alarming decline in betrothals and confirmations – personal commitments, especially from young people. But there is evidence as well of emerging youth groups and activities all over the church, which give us all hope.

Curses are temporary challenges. Blessings are forever.

(BMH)

THE ROAD MAP

Daniel Henninger, a longtime advocate of thoughtful discourse and wise perspective, recently retired as a columnist for *The Wall Street Journal*. He wistfully called his column Wonder Land – a weekly attempt to make sense of the world with its own cast of Cheshire Cats, Red Queens and Mad Hatters. He did it with grace, wisdom and a steady sense of hope.

One of his last columns was: *Merry Bomb-Free Christmas – Some in the world are fighting for their religion while others are fleeing from it.* As usual, he was trying to make sense of a backdrop of bombs and cynicism amid a season of faith and hope.

He began: “Among the many childhood memories of midnight Mass on Christmas was the pastor welcoming all the people present who came to the overflowing church just once a year. These thoughts are occasioned not merely by the arrival of the Christian and Jewish holy days, but the reality in recent years that Christmas often brings with it not only Nativity scenes but news of bombings, killings and persecutions of worshippers around the world.”

He found it hard not to notice “that people living in the least-free countries persist against all odds to practice their religion, while those in the freest parts

of the world are in a steady flight from religious practice.”

He gave several examples, including Nicaragua, where dictator Daniel Ortega had just expelled all remaining Catholic nuns, after banning the Jesuit order last year,

This is what happens in countries yearning to be free – and to believe. He mentioned China, where the government has “disappeared, detained, sentenced to prison, subjected to forced indoctrination of communist ideology, and harassed people and groups for religious beliefs and practices.” The New Church is making small inroads in China, against this harsh opposition, with one brave minister we identify only as Timothy to protect his life.

Henninger reminds us that in the 17th century, “a new land called America became the primary refuge for Protestants and Catholics fleeing persecution in England and Continental Europe.” Indeed, the states of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Maryland were conceived and established as “plantations of religion.”

“Today, not so much. Centuries of religious freedom in the U.S. have led, ironically, to a loss of interest in religious practice.”

A recent Gallup Poll found that 56% of Americans seldom or never attend religious services and only 21% go weekly. This is true across the religious spectrum – except for Mormons. “There was a time,” Henninger says, “when families went to church and then to their kids’ sporting events. Now, it appears, Sunday is just game day.”

There are encouraging signs that the pendulum is swinging back, especially with young people. Despite so many college campuses given over to vile antisemitism in the past year or so, religiously affiliated groups also are taking hold.

We need this. As Henninger observes: “The world’s great religions, for all their deficiencies and abuses, constitute a road map to living an orderly personal life. American voters, it seems, also want a more orderly society. What the countries persecuting religious practice have in common is that the mere mortals running their government believe they know better how to define, order, and, if necessary, coerce people’s daily lives. The phrase standing against that impulse for centuries is ‘freedom of religion.’ Anything kept alive that long must have its uses.”

One reader commented: “The answer to our problems can be found in the temples and churches. Yet we look to government for solutions.”

The answers can be found in that old “road map” in our churches – and not being distracted by the siren song of Google searches for the way to live our lives.

(BMH)

TRIVIAL PURSUIT

From the time we begin school our brains are filled with information. Much of it is important to our lives and careers. More is essential to our everlasting spiritual lives. Some of what we are taught we think we will never need to remember. And a lot of what we learn helps us in unknown ways, forming our character and our destiny. And then there is trivia.

Trivia – all those little bits of information we store up that may never be useful but impress our friends when we remember what movie won the Oscar in 1997; what are the northernmost and southernmost capitals in the world; who lived on Asteroid B-612; and what was Joe DiMaggio's record consecutive game hitting streak? (Answers below for those playing along.)

Trivia became popular with TV shows like *Information Please*, *The College Bowl* and *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?* Suddenly nerds became celebrities, from the infamous Charles van Doren in *The \$64,000 Question* scandal, to Ken Jennings, who became a national hero as a 75-time winner on *Jeopardy!* Trivia became a global fad with the *Trivial Pursuit* board game in 1984. Now there are Trivia Nights in pubs and on college campuses every week.

But even Jennings wonders what it's really all about. It can impress your friends – and even make you famous – but it's still largely useless information.

That's especially true when we consider that in the spiritual world our natural memory fades away – and all those facts we've stored up become irrelevant and disappear. I'm not sure what angels talk about in heaven, where there is no history, no news, no Super Bowl. But we are told that angels can convey more in a word than we can in whole paragraphs on earth, so we have much to look forward to.

And while trivia may still be fun in this life, even Ken Jennings concedes that that's all it is: trivial.

(Answers: *Titanic*; Reykjavik, Iceland, and Wellington, New Zealand; *The Little Prince*; 56)

(BMH)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

PASTORAL CHANGES

The Rev. Erik J. Buss has been affirmed as the next pastor for Oak Arbor Church in Rochester, Michigan, beginning July 1, 2025. Erik has been National Pastor for the United Kingdom and Pastor for Colchester New Church for the past several years. Previously he had been Assistant Pastor of Bryn Athyn Church.

The Rev. Derek P. Elphick, Pastor of Bryn Athyn Church, announced that the **Rev. Steven P. Gunther** will be Assistant to the Pastor beginning July 1, 2025. Steven is Pastor of the Oak Arbor Church and School in Rochester, Michigan, and comes home to the Bryn Athyn Church and School where he did his candidacy. He is welcomed with his wife, **Aaliya**, and family.

This assignment is due to the upcoming retirement of the **Rev. John L. Odhner** and the **Rev. Coleman S. Glenn's** reduction in hours at his request.

As part of a message to the Bryn Athyn Society, Steven said: "Having grown up in Bryn Athyn, I have such a deep love and appreciation for this community, the ways that you worship together, and the wonderful school that provides students with the foundation of New Church education. I cannot wait to jump in and work with the incredible staff and pastoral team at the church. My whole family is looking forward to joining into the community, growing in faith together, and supporting the life of the church."

The Rev. Sylvain A. Agnes will assume the role of Regional Pastor for West Africa (Ghana, Ivory Coast, Benin, Togo, Burkina Faso and Nigeria) as of July 1, 2025. He succeeds the **Rev. Martin K. Gyamfi**, who has held this role full time since 2021.

ACADEMY LEADERSHIP

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr., Chancellor

It is with gratitude that I announce that we have extended the term of Jim Adams as Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools for up to an additional two years. This extension was discussed and unanimously recommended by the Academy Secondary Schools Committee, then unanimously approved by

the Board of Trustees at its February 7, 2025, meeting. The Academy typically engages in three-year contracts with its executives, and this extension brings us back into alignment with this protocol.

Jim had come out of retirement to resume his role as Managing Director that he had held for many years. The health issues that led to his decision to step down in January of 2023 are thankfully behind him. Since his return, July 1, 2024, he has energetically engaged in supporting the schools with significant fund raising, budgeting and management processes.

SALE OF THE COLCHESTER CHURCH

The Rev Erik J. Buss

These are times of big changes for the church in the United Kingdom. A little more than 100 years after the cornerstone was laid in 1924, Colchester New Church has been sold to a Buddhist organization. Maintaining the building and weekly worship services have become too difficult for our aging group. Our hearts love the church very much, but we must find new ways to be a community and to share the teachings we have with the world.

We are sad for the ending. But we also hope and believe that the Lord's concern for His Church runs deeper than whether we have a building or not. We will continue to be involved in activities in the UK and in bringing the church into our lives and into our community. The Lord has said that His New Church will continue and will not end (*Coronis 24*). So, we work to be a part of that church and to serve her the best that we can.

Selling our church building moves the UK church toward being one entity, with a focal point of worship at Michael Church in London. The whole UK church will be taking part in the Global Healthy Congregation program that the General Church has implemented. (See page 171) May the Lord bless our church with peace and a hopeful future.

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highlights from the February 1, 2025, meeting

President

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. introduced proposed organizational objectives for FY26, starting with the strategic planning process from which the meeting's reports are derived. The identified objectives are focused, short-term steps toward achieving the General Church mission of fostering purpose and peace

in people's lives through the Lord's Second Coming.

Recruiting and Developing Priests Project

The Rev. Dr. Andrew M.T. Dibb updated the project's goals of enhanced recruiting practices, proactive efforts at retention and increased professional development opportunities for ministers. Immediate objectives involve specific enrollment goals, determination about pay from a compensation study, and new financial support for students.

General Church Education: Intake Program for New Church Education

Rebekah Russell, Greg Henderson and Baird Kistner

GCED reviewed long-term goals, which include establishing a New Church teacher pipeline through recruiting efforts, working with Bryn Athyn College as a current and future source for potential New Church teachers, and removing or minimizing potential barriers to making a career within the General Church system an attractive possibility.

Objectives for FY26 focus on developing recruiting tools, working with the College on developing a post-graduate New Church education certificate, and reviewing tuition reimbursement and salary adjustment policies.

Baird Kistner described the Ministry and Teacher Pipeline projects, which relates to both initiatives. In FY26 recruitment efforts will focus on creating video marketing materials, implementing tools and further developing a talent network.

Global Healthy Congregations

Jane Enis

The mission of the Global Healthy Congregations Department focuses on developing a repeatable system of process improvement aimed at fostering global congregational success. The aim is to create a scalable model that can be applied worldwide, tracking and evaluating progress as it expands.

In FY26 the department will focus on three key pilot projects in the United States (The New Church of Boulder Valley, Colorado; the Midwest New Church, Maysville, Missouri; Sunrise Chapel, Tucson, Arizona), and one in the United Kingdom. These projects will concentrate on refining the Entrepreneurial Operating Systems tailored to each congregation's needs.

Other objectives include optimizing the health assessment tool

(Congregation Uses Journal), aligning grant disbursement practices, and developing cross-departmental tools and resources such as treasurers' support materials for aiding pilot projects and to scale them across all congregations.

General Church Outreach

The Rev. Pearse M. Frazier

Current goals are fostering online groups and cultivating new in-person groups. Outreach hopes its baseline work with promising leads, expanding Outreach media and fine-tuning advertising strategy will contribute indirectly to goals related to church circles.

Objectives for the year include partnering with other departments to help them improve contact management processes and advising when asked about coordinating with clergy to meet the pastoral needs of small groups.

Communications

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss and Marijke Bau-Madsen

Bishop Buss described high-level goals of the vision-casting project: amplifying the voice of the Bishop's Office, increasing awareness of and engagement with central office uses, and obtaining metrics of messaging efficiency.

Marijke described steps toward accomplishing these goals, including cross-departmental messaging, developing the bishops' messaging, and a communications data survey.

NEW CHRISTIAN BIBLE STUDY

Steve David

What's the latest from the New Christian Bible Study Project? Let's run down through three of the hot projects we're in the thick of:

- **The New Christian Chatbot:** We just deployed a new version of the Chatbot! It's smoother, faster, smarter, better looking, and more multilingual. It's not perfect, but it's better than its predecessor, and I think we've laid solid groundwork for more batches of further improvements. Here are some specifics:
 - o It will have whole conversations with you based on its knowledge of the Word and the Writings.

- o It can look up references for you that relate to your question, and then references, and more references – all linked up nicely for your convenience!
- o If you're logged in, it can save your conversations, so your research doesn't just disappear.
- o If English isn't your first language, no worries. We probably support the language you'd most like to use.
- o Things we're working on:
 - Rechunking and embedding the texts of the Word and the Writings, based on some things we've learned, and with some new technologies.
 - Fine-tuning the system so that it knows the posthumous works of the Writings better.
 - Getting ready to add collateral literature to the knowledge base that it's fine-tuned on.
- o It's built to be able to evolve quickly, so we're adding cool New Church things, and the world's evolving cool AI things; you'll get the benefits of both.

•The Swedenborg Reader App:

- o I hope that, by now, you will have downloaded and installed the Swedenborg Reader app (from NCBS) on your smartphone or iPad. If you have, then even if you're stranded with no internet connection in the depths of the Amazon or in Kempton, you can still read the Writings! Follow cross references, share interesting passages, search for things you can only dimly recall – in 26 languages.
- o One really nice thing we added in fall 2024 was a Windows Desktop version of the Swedenborg Reader. So, you can have it on your main computer, too. Its search function is pretty good, so it's a handy thing to have installed.
- o Two main features in the queue:

- We've just built a MacOS version so it will work natively on Apple computers, too, which will be nice for folks who have Mac laptops and slow or unstable web connections.
- As soon as we can allocate the money and manpower, we'll add Bible text to the Swedenborg Reader app, too. Then it will have a little bit more of the "both" capability that has made the main NCBS site so popular.

Using Potts Concordance

- o You've probably heard us talking about the massive project of cleaning and prepping the scanned text of JF Potts's massive Swedenborg Concordance from the 1800s. Not unlike the original work, it was a huge labor. It was carried to fruition by around 25 New Church people, and it's taken us something like three years. (It's felt like a very long tunnel!) The good news is that it's on its way into our database. We just did our first test import of a few articles. We need to tweak a few things, then run another test and see how that goes. And iterate until it's all as we want it to be. When you read this, it will be built into the main NCBS site, and for the first time, it will be readily useable for the whole wide world.
- o We don't fully know what all we'll be able to do with it. It's been a staple tool for New Church researchers for five or six generations, in its static, alphabetical form, in English. Now, who knows? Dynamic, multi-lingual, maybe responding to highlighted words in the text of the Writings. It's going to be interesting.

Those are some of the things that we've got going on. We'll add some more notes next time and talk about what we think the future should hold.

JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY CAMP

This year's Jacob's Creek Family Camp will be held July 24-27, 2025, in Western Pennsylvania with the theme: *Faith – An Internal Acknowledgment of Truth*.

Retreat Pastor, the **Rev. Matthew L. Genzlinger**, says in an open letter of invitation:

According to the Heavenly Doctrine, many people don't even know what real faith is. Faith is **not** a blind belief or acceptance of

something that you cannot understand. Rather faith is *'an internal acknowledgment of truth.'* (Faith 1)

“How do we obtain this kind of real truth? For starters we need to understand that genuine faith can only be had by someone who is in charity. When we choose to approach the Lord, shun evils as sins, and receive charity from the Lord, only then can we receive the gift of genuine faith as well. Some aspects of faith we will be exploring:

- Blind faith vs faith alone
- The fact that spiritual things can be understood just as well as natural things
- Why faith cannot exist apart from charity
- Does faith lead to charity or does charity lead to faith? Or is it both?
- Childhood faith vs. adult faith
- Faith as enlightenment
- Faith as confidence in the Lord
- Faith during hard times and temptations
- How do we come to receive genuine faith?

This year's pastoral staff will include the **Revs. Calvin B. Heinrichs** and **Jared J. Buss**, and others. Directors will be **Jamie and Julie Uber**, with the help of many volunteers. Early registration is urged because camp attendance will be capped at 150. For information, contact:

matthewgenzlinger@gmail.com

james.g.uber@gmail.com

Julie.Uber@gmail.com

ACADEMY SUMMER CAMPS

The Academy Summer Camp for current eighth and ninth graders is scheduled for July 6-11 at the Academy of the New Church in Bryn Athyn.

For information contact the directors, Sarah Waelchli and Jena Frey, (*sarah.waelchli@ancss.org* and *jena.frey@ancss.org*), and check the website: *www.ancss.org/summercamp*.

The Performing Arts Camp for sixth, seventh and eighth graders, will be held June 18-27. Featured will be a performance of Madagascar Jr. on June 28 at 11 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. For information, email *sarah.waelchli@ancss.org* or call her at 267-502-2678.

Tools4Life: This popular camp for rising juniors and seniors will be run out of Bryn Athyn College this year, June 20-25. The camp focuses on career and life skills and is designed to help teenagers gain the tools and confidence.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

BAPTISMS

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord. (Psalm 127:3)

Armitage, Ella Louise

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, November 24, 2024, daughter of Shane Armitage and Angelique Lourens, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

Armitage, Shane Sale

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, November 24, 2024, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

Atta, Joy Emily

At Scottsdale, Arizona, December 8, 2024, daughter of Jean and Mary Edwige Atta, Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth officiating.

Dziekpor, Chris Atsu

At Abelemkpe, Accra, Greater Accra, Ghana, January 5, 2025, Rev. George G. Dziekpor officiating.

Gordon, Calix Andrew

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, November 24, 2024, son of Jonathan Gordon and Angelique Lourens, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

Goulehi, Grace-Sarah Gnonsea

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 23, 2020, daughter of Guy Goulehi and Viviane Doua, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Hoglund-Lopez, Joshua Michael

At Scottsdale, Arizona, January 5, 2025, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

Kako, Rayan Elisee

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 23, 2020, son of David Kako and Carine Houely, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Kako, Ruth Emeraude

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 23, 2020, daughter of David Kako and Carine Houely, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Legre, Syntiche Elielle Ozoua

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 23, 2020, daughter of Serge Legre and Nadege Braffo, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Lourens, Angelique

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, November 24, 2024, Rev. Joel C. Glenn officiating.

Molefe, Segomotso Mmathabo

At Buccleuch, Gautang, South Africa, January 25, 2025, daughter of Lesego Molefe, Rev. Glenn G. Alden officiating.

Moffat, Karabo Bontle Gladys

At Buccleuch, Gautang, South Africa, October 20, 2024, daughter of Daniel Meyers and Tsholofelo Moffat, Rev. Mandla Sitole officiating.

Niamien, Beranger

At Scottsdale, Arizona, December 22, 2024, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

Niamien, Divine Deborah

At Scottsdale, Arizona, December 22, 2024, daughter of Beranger Niamien and Adjo Anzian, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

Schepner, Mallory Fazio

At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 28, 2024, daughter of Eric and Emma Fazio Schepner, Rev. Jared J. Buss officiating.

Schepner, Rory Leanne

At Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, November 28, 2024, daughter of Eric and Emma Fazio Schepner, Rev. Jared J. Buss officiating.

Seri, Priscillia Kiliane

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 8, 2020, daughter of Rodrigue Seri and Benedicte Baye, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Seri, Yohan Gbami

At Yopougon, Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, December 8, 2020, son of Rodrigue Seri and Benedicte Baye, Rev. Moise G. Doukourou officiating. Delayed report.

Takeya, Seira

At Kyoto City, Kyoto Pref., Japan, November 24, 2024, Rev. Sachio Nakato officiating.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

MARRIAGE

Truly conjugal love is not possible except between two; neither is it possible between two except from the Lord alone. Engraved in this love is heaven withal its blessings. (Conjugal Love 332)

McCleaft-Varney, Clyde Wayne
McCleaft and Margaret (Peggy)
Mary Varney, At Mesa, Arizona,
November 30, 2024, Rev. Jean A.
Atta officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

In order that a person may live to eternity, it is necessary that what is mortal, or the material body, should be taken away from him by death. When this is done, that which is immortal is uncovered, and the person becomes a spirit, still in the human form. (Divine Providence 324)

Alden, David T.
January 20, 2025, of Pittsburgh,
Pennsylvania. 73

Echols, Emmy Lou Soderberg
January 24, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 90

Armitage, Louise Erica
September 9, 2024, of Durban,
KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. 62

Fornander, S.M. Rune
November 30, 2024, of Jönköping,
Sweden. 92

Closterman, Doris Evans
November 25, 2024, of Huntingdon
Valley, Pennsylvania. 81

Gurney, Marjorie Anne
Synnestvedt
February 14, 2025, of Rochester,
Michigan. 93

Cooper, Leesa Violet Kloc
February 15, 2025, of New Tripoli,
Pennsylvania. 63

Harris, Laura Hill
December 22, 2024, of Kitchener,
Ontario, Canada. 71

Doering, Sonia Synnestvedt
December 23, 2024, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 90

Heinrichs, Carina Nicole
December 24, 2024, of Lake Worth,
Florida. 38

McDonough, Michael Croft

January 9, 2025, of Hatboro,
Pennsylvania. 65

Odhner, Brenda Kathleen

January 19, 2025, of Ambler,
Pennsylvania. 59

Odhner, Hugo Valdemar

December 21, 2024, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 91

Schnarr, Gretchen Williams

January 21, 2025, of Wheeling,
Illinois. 73

Smith, Rev. Christopher

Ronald Jack

February 11, 2025, of Kempton,
Pennsylvania. 83

Walker, Cynthia Hyatt

February 17, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 83

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