

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2025



That Sacred Fire

The compelling image of Moses and the burning bush represents the internal, sacred power of the Word in our lives. (Page 372)



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

Jeremy Simons, Spiritual Editor | jeremyfsimons@gmail.com

Tess Taylor, Layout Designer

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To order: 267-502-4990 or susan.wright@anc-gc.org Postmaster: Send address changes to:

New Church Life, PO Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009 or e-mail: datacenter@anc-gc.org

New Church Life

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

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

In This Issue

Editorials (page 367) include:

- *The Challenge of Charity*: We are a church imbued with charity but still are challenged to keep it forefront in our lives – by living as the angels do.
- *Progress in West Africa*: The growth of the church throughout West Africa is most encouraging – in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin and Nigeria – with a total membership of 890.

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth talks about the meaning of Moses and the burning bush in our own lives: *The World on Fire – The Amazing Ability to Discover the Loving God in a Book*. There is much in the Word that is disturbing in the literal sense, he says, but the burning bush stands for the sacred power of the Lord in our lives – that “we are never alone when reading the Word.” The comfort in these stories is that they “provide an avenue for the Lord to come to us with His Divine Life, still preserving our freedom while gradually lifting us up.” (Page 372)

In a Charter Day sermon – *The Minority Report: A Call to Courage* – the Rev. Derek P. Elphick asks what the story of Caleb and Joshua spying out the Promised Land has to do with Charter Day. It relates to the courage of the Academy’s founders – and the call to all of us now – to heed the call of their “minority report” and go forward with trust and confidence. (Page 377)

The Rev. Pearse M. Frazier, Assistant Director of Outreach for the General Church, reports on the growing success of a new initiative to connect people to the Word – and the church – through digital outreach, “As this work continues,” he says, “we do so with humility, gratitude and hope that the Lord is using these efforts to build His Church, one heart at a time.” (Page 392)

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons reports on the June General Church Clergy Meetings in Bryn Athyn, summarizing presentations on the state of Christianity and the New Church in relation to popular culture and church

growth; the call to the priesthood; approaches to pastoral care for those struggling with marriage-related challenges; the age for taking Holy Supper; and the importance of externals in the life of repentance. With wives included in the European Clergy Meetings in France, Ann Buss writes about the special sphere “up in the mountains.” She also reflects on “A Sweet Goodbye” as she and husband Erik depart the United Kingdom for their new calling in Oak Arbor, Michigan. (Page 383)

Writing From the Bishop’s Office the Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth asks “What is Love?” The love we receive from the Lord, he says, is an essential quality of human life. Our humanity, and in fact, our ability to live, is dependent on our ability to receive the love which comes exclusively from the Lord.” (Page 396)

A new book by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers – *Why You Should be Religious* – is an antidote to the cultural shift away from religious faith. Mr. Rogers – who does not identify himself as a minister – makes the case for basic religious faith as a guide for our lives before offering the “new understanding” of “A New Christianity” as best lighting the way to a meaningful life. (Page 398)

Suzy Laidlaw writes about a trip to “Swedenborg’s Sweden” in June, which visited many of the places frequented by Emanuel Swedenborg. The best part of the trip, she said, was connecting with other like-minded Swedenborgians and leaving “with a better sense of this lovely country that Swedenborg loved and called home.” (Page 401)

The Rev. Christopher Barber, who has traveled to Sweden several times to research the life of Swedenborg, joined this group and offers an address he presented on Swedenborg’s *Lusthus*, noting: “If there is anything in our New Church physical heritage that could be considered holy ground, this truly is it. Not because of the planks and panes – but because it was in this building that so many of those papers were fashioned into vessels for the Lord’s teachings in this very room or not far from it.” (Page 405)

What is “the science of shunology” and what is “joyful” about it? Brent Morris offers a whimsical but practical approach to the spiritual art of shunning evil – how it works, how to become “a master shunner,” and why it matters. (Page 409).

Church News (page 428) includes:

- A preview of the new school year in the Academy Secondary Schools
- A summary of the June meeting of the General Church Board of Directors, including a new *Vision for the General Church* and financial support for Bryn Athyn College
- A report on this summer’s Jacob’s Creek Family Camp

Letters 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 Need for Charity

To The Editors:

We live in a time of religious and political differences that at times erupt into anger and separation. Because of this, it is important to remember the following teachings from the Heavenly Doctrines.

The Heavenly Doctrines tell us that matters of doctrine or faith divide the Lord's church, as was the case with the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, and the Christian Church. It is now happening in all of the branches of the New Church. The Lord expected this. This is the representation of yeast in grape juice to become wine served in the Holy Supper. Yeast represents what is one's own. We are supposed to add our thoughts to what the Lord teaches. On the other hand, the bread in the Holy Supper is not supposed to have yeast. With matters of charity, we are to follow the Lord's teachings without adding our personal thoughts or opinions.

Differences with regard to matters of doctrine are like a centrifugal force which causes more and more separation. Charity is like gravity, pulling everything in and causing it all to become more and more united.

If the New Church is ever to be established on earth, the need for charity to reign is essential. John saw the holy city coming down from heaven. He did not see it land, Doctrinal understanding is not enough.

Charity is wishing well to the neighbor put into action as good works, including civil and courteous discourse. This point is well shown in one of the qualities of each heaven. Celestial angels always act from and with mercy. Spiritual angels always act from and with grace. And natural angels always act from and with kindness.

If we as individuals are to regenerate on earth (one of the promises the Lord has made to the New Church), and if the current church is ever to become a spiritual church and then a celestial church, we need to act as the angels do – with mercy, grace, or kindness.

The Rev. Prescott A. Rogers
Waxhaw
North Carolina

A Call to Update 'Growth of the Mind'

To The Editors:

In 1967, as an integral part of my ANC College Education major, I had the privilege of taking an inspiring course in *Growth of the Mind* from its author, Bishop George de Charms. Originally written in 1932 and revised in 1953, *Growth of the Mind* remains one of the most impactful and influential books in my educational experience and in the annals of New Church education. It is particularly gratifying to know that the essentials are still being taught to aspiring young teachers at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church today.

This remarkable book explores how the soul, brain, body and mind are miraculously created and interconnected by the Lord through influx from the spiritual world and afflux from the natural world; where the two worlds meet and interact and how the mind grows and develops from conception, birth, infancy, childhood, youth, and on into adulthood.

It is unique to our faith and to New Church education to know and acknowledge that we live in two worlds at the same time: the natural world (conscious) and the spiritual world (unconscious). And we know that this is what makes life from the Lord a reality and why we will continue to live forever after our natural body dies.

Bishop de Charms notes in his Preface:

[This] work is an individual interpretation of those teachings in the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg which bear upon the growth of the mind during its formative and educable period. It is presented as a small contribution to the philosophy of that New Church educational movement which is still in the pioneer stages of its development."

He adds:

*In addition . . . there are two other branches of study that **have not been included** in the present work. One has to do with the curriculum, and especially with the application of the principles elucidated in the following pages to the problem of what to teach, when to teach it, and how to coordinate the various subjects into a unified program. The other is the philosophy of the subject matter, in which would be considered the organization of specific courses.*

Today, after more than 73 years since the last edition of this foundational work was printed, it is essential that a new and expanded edition of *Growth of the Mind* be researched, rewritten and published. Not only should such an undertaking include specific new discoveries in the sciences of physiology and psychology where they bear upon the subject matter, but it should also include

the work of those who continue to labor in the vineyards of curriculum study and application, as Bishop de Charms envisioned.

It would also be desirable to include the parallel development of the feminine mind since the original focus appeared to be primarily on the masculine. Finally, it would be a wonderful contribution to present a comprehensive and systematic New Church curriculum that could be applied to all successive ages and states from infancy through each school of formal education to adulthood; a seamless education for a life of use both in this world and in the world to come.

Today we are immersed in the digital age with its ups-and-downs of the internet, social media and the promises and concerns of Artificial Intelligence. We, and especially our young children and students, are challenged by the constant barrage of instant information, both good and ill, at our fingertips.

It is a concern for many that these great influencers are taking over young minds, too often blurring personal face-to-face relationships, and incessantly competing in the developing minds of our children for far too much screen time. More than ever, we need to renew a solid footing to fulfill the mission of New Church education.

A new revised edition of *Growth of the Mind* can help as a guiding light for both teachers and parents to do their part in preparing young minds for use. Even though George de Charms did not live to see the internet, social media, or the emergence of AI, he concluded his book with this clear observation:

There is a definite analogy between world movements and the changes that take place in the mind in preparation for its spiritual awakening. Indeed, much can be found in the entire record of human history to illustrate the process of mental growth. Just as the whole history of the world was intended as a preparation for the human race for the coming of the Lord, so the whole period of man's education, from infancy to adult age, is Divinely intended as a preparation of the mind for the Lord's coming to the individual.

The mission of New Church education, correctly applied in all its stages, is to prepare the developing mind of each person for use both in this world and the next; to help fulfill the Lord's promise of a heaven from the human race.

An expanded revision of *Growth of the Mind* can be a renewed contribution to this mission. Is there a New Church scholar or scholars willing to step forward and take on the challenge of this important work in a world in desperate need of what New Church education has to offer?

Peter Boericke
Bryn Athyn
Pennsylvania

Taking in Sail

To The Editors:

Here is a story: Two students were discussing how best to spend their evening. "Let's go to the frat dance," said one. "No" said the other, "Let's go to the movies. But wait a minute, we're forgetting that we have a math exam tomorrow. Tell you what we should do. Let's toss a coin in the air. If it comes up heads, we'll go to the dance. If it comes up tails we will go to the movies and if it stands on its edge, we'll study."

When we are young and immature, we are happy when we can manipulate things to benefit ourselves. When we are in our senior years (when "it is time to take in sail" – Emerson) we should be happy when we perceive that things are going the Lord's way more than serving our faulty, selfish ways. As we progress from being in external innocence to loving to be in internal innocence, we may feel closer to the Lord then.

It is appealing to the unreformed soul to be the boss. (You know what I mean.) And in our senior years we may have increased appreciation for this quotation: "But the hardest struggle of all is with the love of rule from the love of self. He who subdues this easily subdues all other evil loves, for this is their head." (*Divine Providence* 146)

New Church people worldwide, I envision, will be smiling in agreement with the thought that all of us should stop wanting to be the boss in all matters and applaud the truth that the Lord Jesus Christ reigns in His kingdom of uses, wherein each of us has a unique function to serve, in the here and now, and in the hereafter.

Richard Linquist
Huntingdon Valley
Pennsylvania

Editorials

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

THE CHALLENGE OF CHARITY

We like to think we are a church imbued with charity – that we always act with grace and live our faith by loving the Lord and our neighbor in all we do. But within our churches, schools and societies – and in the way we live our lives – lies the challenge. Do we always practice what we preach? And how do we overcome and temper urges to be judgmental, negative and harsh, choosing instead to be empathetic, compassionate and kind? This is the challenge of charity.

We are caught in a coarsening culture and are not immune. Much of it is a product of social media, pervading our lives under cover of anonymity – or at least distance – that saps gentility from our world. From Instagram, Facebook and iPhones to television, movies and videos, more and more of what we see and hear is vulgar, insulting, threatening, dismaying. Sadly, this is the world our young people are growing up in. Our homes, churches and schools offer an antidote – but not a shield.

This culture also threatens the church – in our attitudes and the operation of our churches, boards, schools and societies. How do we treat people? Mostly well, but are we always caring and supportive or sometimes indifferent, lacking appreciation, even witnessing careers end in sadness?

Yes, we try to be kind and loving but are we infected by the culture? What can we do to uphold charity, kindness and compassion at every level of our lives and institutions, always setting an example worthy of our faith?

Too many of our young people are not affiliating with the church the way they used to. With such trying issues as women in the ministry and sexual orientation – with sincerity, passion and doctrinal surety on both sides – many of the disaffected are turned off by a church that feels judgmental and harsh, not loving and accepting. Budget cuts have left human scars. As we strive to be kind and well-meaning we need to acknowledge and understand questioning perspectives.

In a letter in this issue (*The Need for Charity*, page 363) the Rev. Prescott Rogers sounds an alarm:

The Heavenly Doctrines tell us that matters of faith divide the Lord's church, as was the case with the Ancient Church, the Israelitish Church, and the Christian Church. It is now happening in all of the branches of the New Church.

And he warns: "If the New Church is ever to be established on earth, the need for charity to reign is essential."

In his Bishop's Newsletter for July, the Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr. offers a healing perspective on the importance of striving to live spiritually – living the life of heaven as much as possible. He quotes *Heaven and Hell* 51:

"The activity of love and faith is what makes heaven." And, what we choose to do "based on our faith and from love is what allows heaven to exist inside of us. It is also what makes heaven the blessed place it is, for all there are living their faith from love in the many acts of kindness and service they do for each other. The beauty of this principle of living spiritually is that it is not complicated or hard. Each of us can do something today to help those we love."

We pray each day: "as in heaven so upon the earth." That is easy to wish for, more challenging to accomplish. We live with temptation and are always being tested. That is the ultimate challenge of charity: to bring the life of heaven into our own lives as much as possible.

We may feel – whether disciplining a child, disagreeing with a friend, or letting an employee go due to budget pressures – that we are just being honest. We all value honesty, but tempered in charity, kindness, empathy, compassion – not harsh and judgmental. Nobody wins with "I win. You lose." Everybody wins when charity leads.

But charity takes effort and purpose. It is not always our instinct. It becomes a habit through choice and caring. And we all are tested. On a personal level, we may be quick-tempered or abrupt with friends and loved ones in weak moments. Charity is not always an instinct despite goodwill efforts toward mutual understanding. Recent controversies over sexual identity still fester in the church. During the covid years that adversely affected education, teachers and administrators in the Academy and General Church schools said they had never dealt with such hostility from frustrated parents. Administrators making tough decisions may not feel they need to explain every decision, even when people are hurting and confused. The best way to deal with anger, questions and suspicion is with clear, charitable communication that treats everyone with good will, patience, understanding and charity.

These are the life lessons of learning to live spiritually. It begins with grateful acknowledgment that we are all created "in the image and likeness of God." That doesn't give us special power – just special responsibilities. We are

encouraged to live as the angels do so that we bring to heaven something of the heaven already born within us. It begins with empathy – really caring for others – which is the core of angelic, spiritual life.

This may seem challenging at times but here are some encouraging passages:

*All religion has relation to life, and the life of religion is to do good.
(Doctrine 1)*

All who become angels carry their own heaven deep within themselves because their love is the love that constitutes their heaven. (True Christian Religion 739)

Those who do what is good, for the sake of the neighbor or the Lord, are in heaven. (Arcana Coelestia 9210.3)

All spiritual truths focus on caring as their fundamental principle and their aim. The teachings of the church are pointless unless they have caring as their goal. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 106)

Charity toward the neighbor is nothing less than a life according to the Lord's commandments. (Arcana Coelestia 3249)

Everyone who leads a good life, in charity and faith, is a church. (Arcana Coelestia 6637)

You are not made happy by the true things you believe from your faith, but by the goodness which comes from your faith. (Arcana Coelestia 4984)

Finally, *Doctrine of Faith* 69 – in a section headlined: A Faith Divorced from Caring Destroys the Church and Everything it Stands For – teaches us that:

A faith divorced from caring is no faith at all because caring is the life of faith, its soul, its essence; and where there is no faith because there is no caring, there is no church. That is why the Lord asks: "When the Son of Humanity comes, will He find faith on earth?"

As Prescott Rogers concludes his letter:

If we as individuals are to regenerate on earth (one of the promises the Lord has made to the New Church), and if the current church is ever to become a spiritual church and then a celestial church, we need to act as the angels do – with mercy, grace, or kindness.

This is the challenge of charity: to live “in the image and likeness of God” – forever worthy of the gift.

(BMH)

PROGRESS IN WEST AFRICA

At the General Church Council of the Clergy meetings in June there was a good representation of ministers from West Africa, with seven from Ivory Coast, one from Togo, one from Burkina Faso, and four from Ghana. The General Church has continued to spread in the region from its beginnings in Ghana with Pastor Benjamin Garna and Rev. William Ankra-Badu in the 1980s.

The real interest in the New Church in Ghana was sparked years earlier when the Swedenborg Foundation sent thousands of books of the Writings there in response to requests from Ghanaians in the 1960s and '70s. Even before that the New Church was spread in Nigeria by a Ghanaian named Africanus Mensah beginning in the 1930s. It was associated with the British Conference, who sent several English ministers there, such as the Rev. Arthur Clapham and later the Rev. Brian Kingslake.

Today the General Church has spread from Ghana throughout West Africa to Ivory Coast, Togo, Burkina Faso, Benin, again to Nigeria, and now to Liberia as well. This has happened especially over the past 20 years. Interestingly, whereas Ghana is an English-speaking country, all of its neighbors are French speaking, which has created challenges in communication and in obtaining and distributing books. Nigeria and Liberia are also English speaking. While there are hundreds of indigenous languages in West Africa, almost everyone there speaks either English or French as a second language. People are educated in either English or French so the demand for books in other languages, such as Ewe, Twi or Yoruba, is not pressing.

Books and teaching materials in English are regularly sent to Ghana, but the challenge is greater in the Francophone countries, since books of the Writings in French are not readily available. Fortunately, it is becoming increasingly practical for books to be printed in West Africa in both English and French. This year the Rev. Sylvain Agnes in Ivory Coast was able to publish 152 copies of the six-volume *Spiritual Diary* in French. While access to the internet is not universally available in West Africa, it is improving every year. As it improves it will hopefully ease the issues around the availability of the Heavenly Doctrines, especially in French, through outlets such as the New Christian Bible Study website.

Today there are seven congregations in Ghana, with a total membership of 140 adults; 13 in Ivory Coast with a membership of 438; two in Togo; two in Burkina Faso with a membership of 113; two in Benin; and two in Nigeria with a membership of 199 – for a total West African membership of 890.

There are 26 active clergy and three retired clergy in West Africa; nine are in Ghana, 12 in Ivory Coast, two in Togo, one in Burkina Faso, one in Benin, and one in Nigeria. Most of these have been trained in the theological schools in Accra, Ghana, where there are 10 students, and in the two schools in Ivory

Coast, in Abidjan and Yamoussoukro, where there are 17 students.

In addition to these there are two elementary schools in Ghana, covering kindergarten to 9th grade; one in Tema with 330 students; and the other in Asakraka, with 375 students.

From the 2025 West Africa Report to the Council of the Clergy:

“We in West Africa greatly love and appreciate the General Church; we believe through our great care of the General Church West Africa, we are offering the opportunity for people to gain from the Lord heavenly and eternal happiness in this world and the next. The GC West Africa is making progress in setting up a sound governing system. It is being set-up at Regional, Country, District and Congregation levels led by a Regional Pastor, a National Pastor, a District Pastor and a Congregation Pastor respectively. These include constitutions, bylaws, guidebooks, policies, and others for the regional, national, district and congregation bodies. Boards of Directors and their sub committees and their guiding policies, bylaws etc. are also being established. These will all align with GC (USA) vision, mission, purpose, core beliefs and the Clergy Handbook.”

The Rev. Martin Gyamfi has been the Regional Pastor for West Africa since 2010. This year he is retiring and has been replaced by the Rev. Sylvain Agnes, who is in Ivory Coast. In addition, the National Pastors are the Revs. Eshun Ekow in Ghana, Ayi Kodjo in Togo, Evariste Dakouri in Ivory Coast, and Samuel Lompo in Burkina Faso. The church has grown and improved wonderfully in recent years under Gyamfi's leadership and we expect this to continue with Sylvain Agnes.

(JFS)

The World on Fire: The Amazing Ability to Discover the Loving God in a Book

(And It's More Than a Book)

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

Lessons: Exodus: 3:1-10; John 1:1-5; Arcana Coelestia 10634 (portions)

The Angel of the Lord appeared to Moses in a flame of fire from the midst of the bush. And so, he looked, and behold, the bush was burning with fire, but the bush was not consumed. (Exodus 3:2)

I have often thought of the Arizona Desert in the southwest United States when I read this story because the landscapes are so similar. They are both arid. And they are filled with millions of small tenacious bushes. Bushes that seem completely ordinary. And because of the lack of rain, if the bushes are struck by lightning or exposed to a flame, they burst into the most intense, hot fire, consuming them and the environment around them almost immediately. Moses would have known that a fire in desert bushes was likely to be fatal.

The actual bramble that Moses saw almost certainly appeared completely ordinary – just like the millions of other desert brambles around it – yet this bush was unique unlike any other.

The burning bush that Moses saw illustrates the internal, sacred power of the Word. But if one looks at the Word from a purely external perspective, it appears to be ordinary – filled with ancient, external stories that might be thought to apply to another age. The stories there are sometimes brutal. There are texts that are difficult to understand, with teachings that appear sometimes obscure and at other times contradictory.

From an external perspective, the Word – similar to one of millions of bushes in the desert – can seem common, like any other ancient story. But (of course) it is not.

The Heavenly Doctrines use the imagery of the burning bush to teach us

about how the Word is organized and how (when we are receptive) it has far-reaching and tremendous impact on a person's life. For Moses, this was the beginning of the Lord calling him to lead the Children of Israel out of Egypt to the Promised Land.

To understand the sacred power of the Word, one must first understand that not only is the Lord in the Word, but that Word is the Lord in His outermost expression. And as the Lord's outermost, it contains infinite truths, each conveying something of the Lord's life and love. This is really wonderful to consider.

As to its inmost, the Word is Divine Love and Wisdom Itself (Divine Being and Divine Expression streaming from the Lord Himself). These being infinite and eternal are at a level above creation and are therefore imperceptible. Yet, the Lord orders His Love and Wisdom and makes it finite as it descends. He allows them to transform into forms that the angels can receive; this descent provides for the structure and existence of the angelic heavens and composes the dimensions of the world where they live their daily lives.

As these life forms continue to descend gradually, becoming more external, they become forms that are perceptible to the human minds on earth. The descent continues to the most external or outermost manifestation of the Lord, conveying His Love and His wisdom to human beings in the external, literal sense of the Sacred Scriptures – the teachings and stories in the Old and New Testaments.

They are, in fact, such an external presentation of the Lord's love and wisdom that we don't always easily see His life in the detail of some of the stories. Here it is helpful to think of the obscure parts of the Word as the clothing that covers the Lord. It is also helpful to know that this clothing helps to protect the more internal teachings within the Word from harm.

But the point is that the stories are utterly external – so external that they can serve as a means for the Lord to reach out to us and communicate with us when we are in our lowest and worst states of life. These stories are suited to reach us when we find ourselves in the most worldly and self-absorbed states imaginable. With these stories, we are never beyond the hope of rescue.

(It could be said that if the human race never ventured into such selfishness and materialism, the Lord would not have needed to present

To understand the sacred power of the Word, one must first understand that not only is the Lord in the Word, but that Word is the Lord in His outermost expression.

Himself in such a manner.)

The miracle of this is that there is literally no depth of depravity that is so low that the Lord cannot reach us through some teaching in the Word and speak to us in such a way that offers us a way out. And so there are stories found in the Word that illustrate almost every kind of corruption and selfishness. And the external formats of these stories provide an avenue for the Lord to come to us with His Divine Life, still preserving our freedom while gradually lifting us up.

This reach of Lord is illustrated in a story in Numbers 21 where the Children of Israel are being attacked by fiery serpents as a punishment for turning away from the Lord.

Jehovah tells Moses to fashion a bronze serpent and mount it on a pole. The people, when bitten by a snake, could look to at the bronze serpent and find healing.

The Heavenly Doctrines teach that the bronze serpent symbolizes the power of the literal sense of the Word and its ability to help us when we are being hurt by the longings of bodily lusts. The Word redirects us and helps us find healing and relief from these selfish obsessions when we are willing to look to the Lord there for guidance.

Such healing can only be provided by the Lord alone. Unless He could be present through teachings in the Word in outermost, grossly external conditions, He could not lift us out of our sins. This amazing work is explained in the teachings of the New Church. We see how it works by considering our lesson from the first chapter of John where we read: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. (John 1:1)*

The Greek term used for “Word” is deeper than its apparent meaning in English. In the original Greek the term is “*Logos*.” This term describes how the Lord reaches us through the teachings found in the Scriptures. The term *Logos* means the Divine reason, or the rational force, that organizes the universe and everything in it. That speaks directly to the Divine forces available to us through the Word – forces that are miraculously and constantly drawing us into the Lord’s order.

We are taught in places like *Divine Love and Wisdom* that the divinity that flows from the Lord shines like a sun with its heat and light. This divine light is constantly recreating us, throughout our lives. It works to reform us, increasingly making us human in the image and likeness of the Lord Himself.

The statement at the beginning of *John* tells us that this humanizing force called *Logos* is constantly working to bring us into true order, flowing into us through our relationship with the Word.

The imagery of the Burning Bush – with the fire in the bush – illustrates a fire that was constructive rather than destructive. This is descriptive of the

Logos which brings life rather than taking life. Such a flame is the Divine Love that flows from the perfectly ordered teachings in the Word. And if we are open to it, these teachings – with their *Logos* – change us and cause us to become more human, reflecting the true nature of the Lord Himself.

So, while the stories of the Word might look ordinary (like the desert bush), they are **the source** of unquenchable, eternal, life-altering, healing love – a love that is constantly working to change us for the better. (It is absolutely amazing to remember that the Lord is constantly at work through these teachings to reshape our lives!)

But how do we become more receptive of this fire that burns within the stories of the Word? How can we learn to recognize it and allow it to move us and change us for the better?

The answer is that we need to respond to the Word in ways that are in harmony with the Lord's wishes if we are to experience its full power. And by contrast, if we approach the Word from selfish motive – from a dissonance with the Lord – we become increasingly blind to all that it offers.

This is explained in the book, *The White Horse*:

The Word is brought to life for us depending on the amount of life that is in our love and faith. The products of a self-oriented intelligence which has no life in it, because nothing good comes from our self-centeredness. (White Horse 7; see also Arcana Coelestia 1776, 8941 and 8944)

The underlying principle here is that the Lord enters our motives and uses them when they are in harmony with Him. When our motives are good, He joins with them to open our minds, allowing us to see what we need there to live a heavenly life.

But when we are controlled by selfish and materialistic motives which have no connection with the Lord – because these motives are purely natural – we see nothing of the Word's spiritual nature. The reason for this is that purely natural motives have no relationship with the Lord's spiritual life; therefore they do not recognize that life. It is as the Lord said to Nicodemus: *That which is born of the flesh is flesh and that which is born of the spirit is spirit. (John 3)*

To be clear, our ability to see spiritual truth within the Word depends on our willingness to seek guidance to live a heavenly life, for that motive brings us into contact with the Lord's gifts of Love and Wisdom.

This is sometimes mistakenly taken to mean that the literal sense of the Word with its teachings is of no importance to our spiritual development – that it is only the internal, spiritual sense that we need to pay attention to. The idea is that the natural principles found in the Word don't apply in heaven.

But this is not true. We are supposed to think of the spiritual sense of

the Word as being grounded in the teachings and stories that we find in the literal sense of the Old and New Testaments – not separate from them. This is especially true in the clear statements of truth such as the Ten Commandments and many of the open teachings of the Lord recorded in the New Testament.

Divine Love and Wisdom 37 states this with utmost clarity:

Divine Love wishes to save all people, but it can only do so through Divine Wisdom, and Divine Wisdom encompasses all the laws by which salvation is made possible. Love cannot transcend those laws since Divine Love and Divine Wisdom are One and operate in union.

The goal is enlightenment: that our internal, spiritual mind is opened and light shines from within illuminating our external thoughts and experience. This light bathes our understanding of the teachings of the Word. It allows us to understand the literal sense in the light of heavenly light. This light allows us to understand external truths and see how they support internal principles.

Recall our lesson from *Arcana Coelestia* 10634, stating that the Word from an external perspective “*is so marvelous that there is nothing that is more marvelous.*” The Word is a book that is sacred and “marvelous” because it burns with the Lord’s Divine Love for saving each of us. When we read the Word for the purpose of living a heavenly life, we are connecting with the Lord Himself. It is, in fact, a connection that extends through the heavens, and one that actually interacts with the angels in heaven.

This is an incredible concept. The Word is the living link between the Lord, and heaven and earth. A true understanding of the Word inserts us into one all-encompassing community with the Lord, together with all the angels in heaven. We are therefore never alone when we are reading the Word. The angels are with us, transmitting the Lord’s love and faith into our hearts and minds.

Think of the strength, hope and healing in our states of need that are quietly provided by this community through this connection. Therefore, let us all pray that the Word be a lamp unto our feet and a light unto our paths. (*Psalms* 119: 105)

Amen.

THE RT. REV. DAVID H. LINDROOTH is Assistant Bishop of the General Church, focusing on Outreach. He has been a pastor in Stockholm, Sweden; Tucson, Arizona; and Ivyland, Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Aven (Pendleton), live in Bryn Athyn. Contact: David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org

The Minority Report: A Call for Courage

A Charter Day Sermon by the Rev. Derek P. Elphick

Then Caleb quieted the people . . . and said: "Let us go up at once and take possession of the land, for we are well able to overcome it." But the men who had gone up with him said: "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we." And they gave the children of Israel an evil report of the land they had spied out. (Numbers 13:30-32)

This Charter Day weekend I invite you to consider the place of courage in your life.

Courage is a spark from heaven which permits us to face our fears, whether they be physical or spiritual.

Our life shrinks or expands in proportion to our level of courage. When we are feeling brave, we are optimistic, encouraged, hopeful. When we are feeling fearful, we become pessimistic, discouraged, hopeless.

In this sermon we will explore the spiritual significance of the two reports given to Moses by the 12 spies after they returned from their 40-day surveillance behind enemy lines in the Promised Land.

One of the reports, delivered by the majority, invoked a fearful, negative mindset – and a shockingly abrupt dismissal of God's capabilities.

The other report, delivered by the minority, invoked a courageous, positive mindset, full of confidence in God's capabilities.

Courage is a good topic for us to consider this weekend because we are all, in one way or another, beneficiaries of those who had the courage to found the Academy of the New Church, the education arm of this church organization.

Without the founding of the Academy, we would have no priests, no teachers, no schools. We would have no formal, systematic means to educate young minds so that they might – in adult age and of their own free will – receive the Lord in His Second Coming, and thereby help to establish the Lord's New Church on earth.

It took courage to do these things because the founders of the Academy dared to be different.

Those who signed the Academy Charter in 1877 knew that their ranks were small – that they were a minority group.

They knew that they, and future generations, would face spiritual persecution from the hells.

They knew that they, and future generations, would face ridicule and belittlement from a secular world that seemed so much stronger and better positioned to be “successful.”

They knew that they, and future generations, would face skepticism and cynicism that the experiment would work. And yet, here we are – 148 years later – celebrating this noble cause.

Turning to our story, you can imagine the tension in the air as everyone waited to hear the report of the 12 spies. In just a few short months, the Lord, through Moses, had led the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt into the freedom of “open land.”

The Lord had demonstrated His power and protection to the Israelites in miraculous, dramatic ways:

- By parting the Red Sea
- By feeding the multitudes with manna and quail
- By providing them with clean water in the desert
- By delivering the Ten Commandments at the top of Mount Sinai in the midst of lightning, thunder and earthquakes

And now the Lord had taken them to the threshold of their new home, a land flowing with milk and honey

What would the spies say?

The two reports were obviously complete opposites.

- One was negative, the other positive
- One invoked fear, the other invoked courage
- One recommended turning around and going back to Egypt
- The other recommended going forward and trusting the Lord

Looking closer though, the distinguishing features between the two have to do with sequence and content.

In terms of sequence, the negative report given by the 10 spies – the

***Courage** is a good topic for us to consider this weekend because we are all beneficiaries of those who had the courage to found the Academy of the New Church, the education arm of this church organization.*

majority – came first.

Now if anyone there had been feeling hopeful that maybe, just maybe, the Israelites could indeed enter Canaan as the Lord had promised, that hope was immediately dashed. The 10 spoke first. They said:

We went . . . and (the land) truly flows with milk and honey. . . . Nevertheless, the people who dwell in the land are strong . . . their cities are fortified and large . . . we are not able to go up against these people for they are stronger than we . . . this is a land that devours its inhabitants, the men are of great stature . . . we were like grasshoppers in our own sight and in their sight. (Numbers 12:32-33)

In our own lives, this is how the sequences of our struggles, our trials, unfold. Evil spirits are always the first to make their move. We are taught that they always attack first, “accusing” and “condemning” us. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 1683, 5036:2, 8960, etc.) This has the effect of completely flooding us, paralyzing us with fear, as it did the Israelites.

And then there is the question of content. In the majority report of the 10 spies, which came first, there is no mention of the Lord, what He could do, or what He had done.

The 10 – the majority – didn’t just give a bad or negative report; the Hebrew word literally means “evil” – they gave an “evil” report.

Why was it evil? It was evil because they were trying to remove God from the decision. We know this is the case because when Caleb spoke up and contradicted the report with a positive one, it says: “*They said to one another, ‘Let us select a (new) leader, and return to Egypt.’*” (Numbers 14:4)

And when Joshua joined Caleb again in contradicting their report with a positive one, it says the people made a move to “*stone them with stones.*”

So, what about the minority report, the one given by Caleb and Joshua? Well, consider first the meaning of their names:

Caleb’s name, in Hebrew, means *faithful, whole-hearted, bold, brave, devoted*.

Joshua’s name, in Hebrew, means *Yahweh saves, helper, deliverer*.

In terms of sequence, and what they represent, they had a bold, powerful response to what the 10 had just said. Caleb responded with the words of our text:

Let us go up at once and take possession of the land, for we are well able to overcome it.

Hasn’t Caleb been listening? Hadn’t he heard the dire report just given by everyone except him? Wasn’t it game over? The majority had spoken.

But then Joshua joins Caleb and together they say this:

The land we passed through to spy out is exceedingly good land. If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us – “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Only do not rebel against

the Lord, nor fear the people of the land, for they are our bread; their protection has departed from them. And the Lord is with us. Do not fear them. Numbers 14:7-9)

What a beautiful response. Again, it is one that mirrors what the teachings of our church say about the sequencing that happens in our own spiritual struggles and battles. The point is that there are always two distinct parts to our struggles, just as there were two reports.

The hells attack first with a barrage of negative, fearful thoughts and feelings, and then the Lord, by means of His angels, moves in with a Divine response. And in coming to our defense, angels work to take away our fear, for as one teaching says: “*Once fear is removed, hope is at hand.*” (Arcana Coelestia 2984)

And what about the content of the minority report?

Well, it had everything – everything that the angels in heaven bring to our attention when they come to our defense, when they come to remind us that we can indeed be “strong and of good courage” when we place our hope and trust in the Lord.

One teaching says: “*The Lord (by means of His angels) keeps us in hope and trust which (become) the forces of combat by which we resist*” the negative attacks of the hells. (See Arcana Coelestia 6097)

Now, of course, the story ends with the children of Israel rejecting the report of Caleb and Joshua, so everyone (except them) is destined to spend their remaining years wandering the wilderness, never to set foot in the Promised Land.

But the principle still stands: every day we have a choice as to which report we will listen to, because this is how temptation works.

Our “default” response, the one we are born with, the one we are inclined to go with, has us caving in, giving in to the fears and negative thought patterns that create so much chatter in our heads. In our early days, we don’t even hear the response from Caleb and Joshua – the response of the angels.

This default response has us wandering in the wilderness for a symbolic 40 years, the point being that we all have “wilderness tasks” (steps of repentance) to do before we are ready for heaven.

But our focus today is on Caleb’s and Joshua’s report because this represents a new kind of response in us – a response that surprises us at first because we didn’t know we had it in us to be brave and courageous in the face of our fears – fears which, in the past, would have paralyzed us.

*Every day we have a choice as to which report we will listen to – the **majority** or the **minority** – because this is how temptation works.*

The Lord is constantly inviting us to take the narrow path – the road less traveled. So many of the Lord’s teachings are couched in these terms:

Narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. (Matthew 7:14)

Many are called, but few are chosen. (Ibid. 22:14)

The harvest is indeed plentiful, but the laborers are few, (Ibid. 9:37)

Spiritually speaking, when we choose the minority report, we will feel as if we are alone, among the few, doing the difficult work. And we will have our doubts, as we learned in one of our lessons today. (See *Arcana Coelestia* 2338)

Swedenborg himself, the revelator, experienced this feeling when he received a letter from his publisher saying only four copies of the first volume of *Arcana Coelestia* had been sold in the last two months. (See *Spiritual Experiences* 4422)

Like Caleb and Joshua, new beginnings can feel scary. When we take a minority position we can feel like “lone voices” in a world that doesn’t seem to care or even notice what we have to say.

But is this really true? When the Lord talks about the way being difficult and narrow and that few find it, is He suggesting that this is a permanent condition – that it will always be this way?

History has taught us otherwise. The spread of the Writings, especially during Swedenborg’s time, was painfully slow and discouraging. But today, thanks to the internet and a number of brave souls working in the Lord’s vineyard, millions of people now know about the teachings of the New Church.

The same is true of the Academy movement, which we are celebrating this Charter Day weekend. Those who signed the Academy Charter dared to be different. They, and future generations, knew they were in a minority group. They knew they would face persecution, setback, discouragement, even ridicule, and yet they had the courage, the conviction, the spirit of Caleb and Joshua, to persevere because of their faith, trust and confidence in the Lord.

Everything starts out small, with a few. Why else would the Lord say: “*The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed*”? Everything good, true, noble, kind and hopeful starts off small like a seed, but over time will blossom and grow until eventually it becomes like a tree – tall, noble, standing strong.

We need courage for a lot of things. We need that spark from heaven to help us face our fears because life shrinks or expands in direct proportion to our level of courage.

We need courage:

- To say we’re sorry

- To ask for help
- To accept advice
- To ask for forgiveness
- To face adversity
- To face our demons
- To go the extra mile
- To turn the other cheek
- To admit when we're wrong
- To smile
- To take a deep breath
- To not be so hard on ourselves and others

Let us remember that falsity – the lies of the hells, the negative report of the 10 – draws its energy from fear. It's the first thing to make an impression on us. But then comes the Lord's truth, the positive report of Caleb and Joshua, which gains its energy and strength the moment we embrace it.

We will be given this courage when we – like Caleb and Joshua – invoke a positive mindset: a mindset that gives glory to the Lord, a mindset that still has its doubts, but which has also seen what the Lord can do, a mindset that is confident in His redemptive power for, in the words of Joshua:

If the Lord delights in us, then He will bring us into this land and give it to us. . . . Only do not rebel against the Lord, nor fear the people of the land . . . (for) their protection has departed from them, and the Lord is with us. Do not fear them. (Numbers 14:8-9)

Amen.



THE REV. DEREK P. ELPHICK is pastor of Bryn Athyn Church. He has also served as pastor in Boynton Beach, Florida, and Oak Arbor, Michigan. He and his wife, Gay (Hodgell) live with their family in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: Derek.Elphick@brynathynchurch.org

General Church Clergy Meetings in Bryn Athyn and Europe

A Summary of the Council of the Clergy Meetings

The Rev. Jeremy F. Simons

The council met in Bryn Athyn at the end of June with ministers attending from North and South America, West and South Africa, Scandinavia, Korea, Japan and Australia. The presentations included topics relating to the state of Christianity and the New Church in relation to popular culture and church growth; the call to the priesthood; approaches to pastoral care for those struggling with marriage-related challenges; the age for taking Holy Supper; and the importance of externals in the life of repentance.

Good discussions took place and friendships with colleagues near and far were renewed and strengthened. No action was taken at the meetings other than the customary election of new members to the Council's membership committee and the welcoming of the new members to the Council.

At the meetings Executive Bishop Peter M. Buss Jr. presented an inspiring vision for the General Church, focused around this statement:

Within seven years, the General Church will be the spiritual home of thousands more people who come to love and treasure the revelation of the Lord's Second Coming, and as a result respond to the Lord's call saying, "Here I am! Send me." (Isaiah 6:8)."

Here are brief summaries of the papers presented at the meetings. In addition, there were reports, business matters, and time spent with the General Church Board members.

Rev. Scott I. Frazier:

The Call to the Priesthood: Personal, Societal, Priestly, Mystical

What is the nature of the call to become a priest? Is it enough for someone to think that he can serve the uses of the priesthood, or is more required? "The call" is an idea central to the notion of training men for the ministry. With

an eye toward supporting that use in the role of Dean, I have endeavored to discover as best I can the nature of the “call” and the doctrine of my church related to it. (See *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 315)

I have attempted to describe the doctrinal ideas relevant to the call and how the Lord communicates with people; how the Word describes the call; and the application of the call throughout the history of the church.

The Heavenly Doctrines say very little about the specific call to become a priest. The “call” is from the Lord. It is not a substitute for the prudence and decisions of a man considering the priesthood, but instead the source. The Lord does not single some people out for “special duty” as priest apart from their own freedom in the matter.

Rev. Mark D. Pendleton: Married Love and LGBTQIA+

This presentation and study looked at the breadth of teachings from the book *Conjugal Love* in relation to LGBTQIA+ issues. It was aimed at assisting priests and lay people as they strive to empathize, understand, and serve. It is currently undergoing further refinement.

Rev. Malcolm G. Smith:

When to Start Observing and Taking Holy Supper

I think it could be valuable to reexamine our beliefs, policies and communication around age guidelines for taking Holy Supper. To that end, this paper is an attempt to gather into one place a range of perspectives on this topic for you to consider.

Twice a year, Holy Supper is offered at all of our services in Bryn Athyn. All of the children who attend our services have the chance to watch Holy Supper twice a year and all of the adults have at least two opportunities to take Holy Supper at the Sunday service that they regularly attend. Having children watch the service has raised the question of when it is appropriate for someone to start taking Holy Supper.

The paper discussed what has been written in the past on this topic, what the doctrines teach, and how it might be applied today.

Rev. Judah E. Synnestvedt:

Woman, Dragon, Earth

It is the intention of this paper to discover what hope and love we may cherish

toward our fellow Christians. With this as a guiding principle, what follows is but a sampling of relevant doctrines. Many ideas and passages will be overlooked either by accident or necessity, and the list of omitted passages would be longer than the paper itself. The goal is nothing more or less than to help the reader view other Christians with a sympathetic eye, from the love and wisdom of the Heavenly Doctrines – and a bit of history, reason and contemporary analysis.

Rev. Jeremy F. Simons:

The Population Explosion and the New Church

People often blame the church organization and its evangelization methods and leadership for our lack of church growth. The more obvious cause is simply the birth and retention rates. For the past 50 years the General Church may have taken its birthrate, and its retention rate through New Church education, largely for granted. We have concentrated our attention and efforts (though not the bulk of our budgets) on evangelization.

This ignores the fact that few churches actually grow through conversion, and that birthrates and retention rates are the key to church sustainability and growth for virtually all churches.

Rev. Justin E. Schorran:

External States and Their Effect on Spiritual Life

For the sake of salvation, the Ten Commandments and other laws that still apply today must be followed as they are presented in the letter of the Word and in the Heavenly Doctrine. In order for this to be saving, they must be followed for the reason that God commanded them. This means that our salvation is contingent on observing in our outward behavior, actions and lifestyle what the literal sense of these commandments demand.

I have noticed a tendency for people to emphasize internal things – such as our loves, intentions, heart and mind – over more external things, like our actions and day-to-day natural life. On the other hand, we are well aware that the church organization has been focused on things of a more external nature as well.

There is debate around same-sex sexual activity, over the nature of our external worship and what properly constitutes the material elements of the Holy Supper. Such a focus on external things may give the impression that the church is only concerned about the regulation of behavior and physical things,

to the point where we neglect the very thing the church is supposed to support: spiritual life!

Do we focus on the internal or do we focus on the external? Of course, we know that there must be both an internal and an external, and never one or the other. Our intentions (internal) must be good, and so must the actions (external) that spring from them. This is the work of regeneration.

Rev. Eric H. Carswell:

The Heavenly Qualities of a Healthy Congregation

Congregations on earth are formed of people who range from relatively angelic to spiritual beginners to people who are apparently confirmed in evil choices (for example, serial adulterers, childhood/youth sexual abusers, and those whose external actions at times give evidence of a love of dominion from a love of self). Among this last group because these evils are mostly hidden, these people can be relative pillars of a congregation, and regular attenders at church and classes.

We address the entire array of these spiritual states when we preach and teach. How do we best teach the spiritual beginners (people in whom the spiritual degree has not been opened and yet is not closed -- see *Divine Providence* 250), and also serve the relatively angelic (people in whom the spiritual degree has been opened)?

Hopefully as we try to reach these two groups the Lord can use what we preach and teach to try to lead the third group (people in whom the spiritual degree has been completely closed) away from their chosen hellish states.

Rev. Derrick A. M. Lumsden:

Not as the World Gives

A Summary of the Cultural Landscape of the Formerly Christian World and the Strategic Importance of Scriptural Counseling.

We are currently facing a challenging cultural landscape to navigate. The purpose of this paper is to explore why our current culture in the western world is uniquely challenging and what the movements of culture are that have led to where we are. The value of this investigation is in the question: how do we think about ourselves as a church in relationship to the present day?

This question certainly has doctrinal components. How we address other people and assess their state is a question of wisdom: thinking from Doctrine. To apply the doctrines well in this context, we need to accurately assess 1) the

general state of our society and individual needs within that general state and 2) ourselves and our own current state.

Bryn Athyn was founded as an intentional move of a whole congregation from inside Philadelphia to the outer bounds of the existing railways. This move created physical distance from the city and its cultural influence but still allowed for a relatively easy commute for the business and professional opportunities of Philadelphia.

Most of our existing church schools in North America were founded on a similar retreat mode: Bryn Athyn, Caryndale, Glenview, Kempton, Mitchellville, Oak Arbor. The goal was to buy land further from the city centers, start a school, and create distinctive New Church culture.

For the last 30 years, our focus as a church in North America has been on strategies for a neutral world, mostly bridge-building. During that time every single one of the retreat communities except Kempton has been surrounded by suburban sprawl. And the strategies for bridge-building that could be successful in a neutral culture have led all of these communities to intentionally lower the barriers to being a distinctive New Church culture.

The focus has been on emphasizing similarities and relationships in order to build connections and share New Church teachings. And given a neutral culture, this was a reasonable strategy. However, the culture has shifted again since we adopted this strategy. As a result of this strategy combined with the shift to a negative culture, most General Church societies have become immersed in an oppositional western culture.

Given the cultural shift and our immersion in it, we should intentionally shift our approach from bridge-building, to allow us to be appropriately differentiated from a culture antagonistic to fundamental New Church teachings. Scriptural Counseling is an important part of this shift towards developing a burning fire of faith in our membership.

Rev. Kurt P. Nemitz:

Let Us Call Coelestis Heavenly

Are you, as I was for many years, somewhat confused, don't quite know what the differences are between the terms celestial, heavenly and spiritual in the Heavenly Doctrines as translated in English? The problem arises chiefly from how the single Latin word *caelestis* – also spelled *coelestis* – is rendered in various contexts. We will look at a number of these varying renderings and also the fundamental meaning of the Latin adjective *caelestis* and the related adverb *caeleste*.

As I see it, early translators of Swedenborg's works have mistranslated

caelestis. Rather than translating it, they often imported it unchanged, which has made things less than clear. By virtually transliterating *caelestis*, translators have given the idea that sometimes it means something other than heavenly.

When did this mistaken dual rendering of *caelestis* in the Heavenly Doctrines begin? It began in the early 1780s with the first English translator of Swedenborg's theological works, the Rev. John Clowes. Why did Clowes start rendering *caelestis* sometimes as "celestial" and not just simply as "heavenly"? A recent Chatbot internet explanation says:

Clowes translated Swedenborg's *caelestis* as "celestial" rather than "heavenly" primarily to convey a specific connotation that aligns more closely with Swedenborg's theological and philosophical ideas. The term "celestial" often refers to the divine and spiritual realms, emphasizing a higher, more transcendent quality associated with the universe and existence beyond the physical. In contrast, "heavenly" can imply a more traditional, religious notion of heaven as a place of reward or paradise. By choosing "celestial," Clowes sought to capture Swedenborg's nuanced views on the spiritual hierarchy and the nature of divine truths, which are often depicted in a more expansive, cosmic light in Swedenborg's works. This choice reflects the intent to communicate the depth and richness of Swedenborg's concepts about the spiritual world and its relationship with the material realm.

Thanks, Chatbot, I think you said it pretty well. By the way, Clowes could do this because English is the only language in which *caelestis* can be rendered by two different words. For example, Swedish, French, and Portuguese all translate *caelestis* with a term equivalent to "heavenly."

So then, having thoughtfully considered this analysis of *caelestis* in its various forms in the Heavenly Doctrine, must we not gently lay aside "celestial" and simply say "heavenly"?

Up in the Mountains: European Clergy Meetings

Ann Buss

Almost all of us had a good deal of travel to reach the site chosen for the European Clergy Meetings in May. For Erik and me, it meant flying to Carcassonne, then driving, along with Grant and Sarah Odhner, about 90 minutes into the Pyrenees to the village of Rimont. Even then, we were not done. Alain Nicolier had sent written directions for places *satnav* would not go, along gravel lanes that wound us up to a rustic lodge just down the road from the home of Alain and Jeanne, our hosts.

We were surrounded by lush, wooded hills, with rose bushes and irises beside the driveway. We were in the middle of a forest, looking out across gorges at more forest. Five ministers, two theologs, and six wives arrived to spend four days learning and lifting up our hearts and minds.

We soaked in the connections with other clergy, prepared and ate meals together, talked for hours, sometimes while walking in the mountains. We had daily worship and classes, and twice we practiced making lunch last two to three hours as one does in France.

Alain explained that the word Ariège – the region we were in – comes from the word for gold. Being both up in the mountains and in the region of gold seemed a perfect location to grow spiritually. The incredibly fresh air and the scent from shrub roses and laurels surrounded us, as did an array of bird song.

On our first morning, worship was set up on the concrete verandah outside. With mountain and tree as his backdrop, Erik called us to endeavor to do our work, as humans and as pastors, from a place of love, with the Lord in mind, and, specifically, to his brother preachers, to hold in mind the calling of the priesthood: a love for the salvation of souls. We added our hymn to the chorus of birds, and we noted a large raptor flying near us. Many good portents!

In this setting, but sometimes indoors when it was too chilly, we heard from each of the ministers and theologs. I will share briefly of the wisdom we were privileged to hear:

Alain Nicolier has been serving in France for 47 years and told us some of his journey of learning how to share truths in a non-receptive land. He reported that in conversations he searches to find out about the person who has crossed his path and to be curious about them. He conceded that when one is trained, as ministers are, to be “a knower and a talker,” it is challenging to change to “listening more, and talking less,” but that this is serving him well.

Göran Appelgren shared a study – *The Psalms of Jesus* – which compares many passages in both Testaments that demonstrate realities about the one God who reveals Himself there. The presentation was called by this title in order to highlight the fact of the Divine Mind being the same in both Testaments, and that reading the Old Testament with this knowledge, makes us understand our Lord in a fuller sense. I know I gained a better love for the *Psalms* knowing their inner meaning reveals things about the Lord while on earth.

David Gaffney traced our human progress toward total dependence on the Lord, as suggested by study of the seven “I am” statements made in *John*, beginning with: “*I am the bread of life*,” and ending with, “*I am the true vine*.” I had not known that there were seven of these, nor ever considered them as a series. As a side note, I enjoyed hearing David’s interesting story of how he found his way first to the New Church, and then to this branch of it.

Grant talked about the approach to unfolding the spiritual meaning of

the Scriptures. This approach from the Heavenly Doctrines differs from the practices of using allegory in the previous Christian Church. Building a “doctrine of genuine truth,” the truths we find in the letter of the Word, and holding this as primary, is more important than corresponding symbolism, and is key.

Our two theologs, Frits Bot (Netherlands), and Eric Sjödin (Sweden), told us about the course of their studies. As a note of interest, Eric was ordained in June. Congratulations to him and to his wife and family.

Each candidate also gave us a worship talk. Frits used the text in *Mark 9:1* where the Lord speaks of “*some standing here shall not taste death.*” Frits talked about how those who trust in the Lord and live rightly will be regenerated by Him, and not experience spiritual death. Eric shared his cheerful outlook and spoke about the variety among clergy and how this is a strength.

Erik Buss underscored this theme of variety when he shared his research into the letters to the seven churches in *Revelation*, each of which is praised for its strengths and warned that it has dangerous weaknesses. Each church can be seen as a type of human and, in this case, a type of clergyman, who brings a range of gifts which we need to see and appreciate.

One of the most exciting things we spoke about as a group was the need to create greater connection online between countries’ websites so that searchers interested in Swedenborg can discover us as a united body of believers. For example, someone searching the website in Stockholm could find out about local services but also could follow a link to see what is happening in England, or another European country. This kind of teamwork is a new dream, perhaps something the Lord had in mind when He led humans to develop such technology.

We expected to be blessed in our time of learning and friendship and we were. It is powerful to be a group with both men and women present. Our friendships were strengthened, our sense of being supported and not alone was revived, and we learned from each other.

Alain gave a special and unique Holy Supper service on our last night together. During and after our sharing of wine and bread, I sensed among us a devout and simple humility to continue to be devoted to this work.

A Sweet Goodbye

Ann Buss added this note in the Newsletter for the United Kingdom at the end of the All Ages Weekend, concluding husband Erik’s service there before moving on to become pastor in Oak Arbor. Michigan:

It was moving to have Erik lead the closing worship on Sunday and offer Holy Supper for that crowd one last time. I know it meant a lot to him to do this. It meant a lot to me to see him repeat the Levitical blessing with his hands

on the head of each participant.

His blessing, and mine with his, are expressions of the true blessing which comes from our Lord, constantly, as we take root downward and reach out toward our neighbor in our spiritual growth.

The Lord bless you and keep you, the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you, the Lord lift up His countenance upon you and give you peace.

Marketing Revelation

The Rev. Pearse M. Frazier

Assistant Director of Outreach

Connecting People to the Word through Digital Outreach

The Department of Outreach for the General Church is engaged in helping more people connect with the Lord through His Word. One of our most enduring and fruitful offerings has been the *Daily Inspiration* email subscription, which brings Scripture and teachings from the Heavenly Doctrine into thousands of inboxes each day.

Wow! Twice in the last several days I was struck by your Daily Inspiration! I want to say and raise my arms above my shoulders and proclaim the words as True and delivered for me as the spark that brings me close once again to my faith in God and Jesus. Thank you.

Seasonal Reading Programs

A number of years ago we launched *Daily Christmas Readings*, based on a series originally prepared by the Rev. Mark Pendleton and Rt. Rev. Peter Buss Jr. for the Glenview congregation and beyond. We began by inviting *Daily Inspiration* subscribers to sign up for this new seasonal offering. Later, we developed and shared a similar program for Easter, with daily readings prepared by the Department of Outreach and offered to past subscribers of both *Daily Inspiration* and *Christmas Readings*.

The daily readings have become an integral part of our Christmas season. They help us to focus on the Lord's birth and its broader meaning amidst an array of potential distractions.

Reaching New Audiences Through Online Advertising

More recently, we've been focusing on extending our reach through digital advertising to find people who may not yet know the New Church but are seeking spiritual nourishment. We've tracked the costs of adding new subscribers carefully:

- * \$2.50 per Christmas subscriber
- * \$1.50 per Easter subscriber
- * \$3.80 per Daily Inspiration subscriber

In May alone, we added 574 new subscribers to *Daily Inspiration*, bringing the total to 5,773. This past Easter, we welcomed 961 new subscribers, for a total of 1,930. During the Christmas season, we added 1,182, bringing that total to 3,681.

These are not just statistics. These subscribers are reading the Lord's Word, engaging with passages from the Heavenly Doctrine, and being drawn into deeper reflection. Daily Inspiration emails now link directly to the New Christian Bible Study site, offering full context and commentary. Our Easter and Christmas reading programs include online and in-person discussion group offerings, forming communities around the Word.

These Easter Readings have become an essential part of my morning devotions. The closing questions stir food for thought and have made for wonderful discussions in our gatherings.

Projections and Possibilities

Our advertising platform suggests that increasing our daily budget could continue this trend. The recommendation:

- \$100/day for *Daily Inspiration*
- \$100/day each for Christmas and Easter Readings during those seasons

Assuming close to the same rates, this could bring in approximately:

- 7,500 new *Daily Inspiration* subscribers
- 1,500 new Christmas readers
- 1,500 new Easter readers

That's more than 10,000 new email subscribers annually. Of course, projections can be uncertain. As more people are reached, it may become harder to find new subscribers. But technology continues to improve, with better tools for matching our content to those most likely to find it helpful. And the results so far give reason for hope.

Many subscribers go on to read our articles, join discussion groups, reach out with questions, or explore other church offerings. These interactions remind us: this is not just digital engagement. It's human connection.

It's Not Just the Marketing, It's the Message

It's important to emphasize that what's bearing fruit here is not just a clever strategy. It's the content itself. The truths from the Lord's Word have the power to touch hearts and change lives. That's what people respond to. The role of marketing is simply to help more people find it.

These messages offer peace, clarity and purpose. They invite readers into the presence of the Lord and offer a path toward a more loving, useful life.

That's the real story: the Word is doing what the Lord promised it would do.

Scalable, Flexible, and Measurable

This digital outreach effort stands out for its flexibility and low risk. Because it relies on digital tools and modest advertising budgets, it can grow as momentum builds – or scale back if needed – without long-term commitments like new buildings or expanded staffing.

It's also highly measurable. We can track engagement week by week, learn what resonates, and refine our approach accordingly. This lets us stay focused on what matters most: helping people connect with the Lord through His Word.

What's Next? Improvement, Expansion and Sharing

Improvement

We are continually refining our efforts. This includes creating clearer sign-up pages, improving the quality of ads and emails, and experimenting with new media like video and social platforms. Every improvement helps us reach more people more meaningfully and at a lower cost.

Expansion

With strong results and a clearer sense of cost and reach, we're in a position to grow responsibly. One proposed initiative is to offer physical copies of books like *Heaven and Hell* to interested subscribers. This not only gives people a tangible spiritual resource, it also allows us to gather mailing addresses. That helps us understand where our subscribers live and guides future outreach, invitations and local support.

We are also developing additional themed offerings, such as a new email series on marriage featuring reflections and questions drawn from the Heavenly Doctrine to help couples grow together in spiritual partnership. We plan to offer more discussion groups around Christmas and Easter readings as well, creating opportunities for people to reflect together on the Lord's life and message. And with a clearer view of our geographic reach, we'll be expanding targeted advertising near existing New Church congregations, inviting subscribers to connect with a local church community. In this way, digital outreach becomes a bridge not only to truth, but to shared life in the Lord's Church.

Sharing

But no effort thrives on advertising alone. The purpose of reading the Word is not just information, but transformation. And transformation often happens in community. People need other people who share similar values, love for the

Lord, and a desire to live a life of usefulness.

And that's where you come in.

Tell your friends and family about these programs. Join a group. Participate. Be present. Even if you don't invite others, your presence helps create a welcoming space. So, when someone new arrives through a link, a search, or an ad, they'll find not just inspiration, but a living, breathing church ready to receive them.

Every new subscriber isn't just a number. They're a soul opening to the Lord's Word. And behind every invitation is a community ready to welcome them. As this work continues, we do so with humility, gratitude and hope that the Lord is using these efforts to build His Church, one heart at a time.

(Learn more at www.NewChurch.org)

THE REV. PEARSE M. FRAZIER is Assistant Director of General Church Outreach. He lives with his wife, Taryn (Rose), and their family in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania. Contact: Pearse.Frazier@newchurch.org



Rediscover the season with Scripture, reflection, and spiritual insight.

The theme of this year's Christmas Readings is Our Part: the role each of us plays in the Lord's plan. God is always working to save, but He asks for our cooperation. Each person in the Christmas story had a part to play. So do we.

Every day from December 1–25, receive an email with a reading from the Christmas story, paired with passages from the Heavenly Doctrine and a reflection to help you live with purpose.

Subscribe at newchurch.org/christmasreadings or scan below.

Already subscribed? No need to sign up again.



Join a Christmas Readings Discussion Group

Grow together through weekly group discussions—online or in person. Talk with others about how the Lord is speaking through His Word this season. Ask your pastor about a local group or visit newchurch.org/christmasgroups to learn more.





FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

What is Love?

The Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth

This may seem like an odd question because we experience love as such a pervasive part of life. It feels like love is just part of us, not something we can analyze. We are sometimes told to accept love without question – but that is an assertion I would challenge. Love manifests in various forms, with diverse objectives, some positive and some negative. It is important to distinguish between its forms so that we can cultivate loves that are healthy, while turning away from loves that are destructive. But how do we know the difference?

The type of love received from the Lord is an essential quality of human life. Our humanity, and in fact, our ability to live, is dependent on our ability to receive the love which comes exclusively from the Lord.

This is true for the individual, and by extension, it is also true for society as a whole. A community, for it to be lasting, must operate in a way that allows people to receive and transmit that precious gift from the Lord. Communities that reject this love, or fail to recognize its importance, will eventually fail.

This is emphasized when the Lord issued His “New Commandment” in *John 13:34*: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.”

The importance of knowing how to truly love is reflected in what Jesus said were the two greatest commandments:

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets. (Matthew 22:37-40)

To “hang all the Law and the Prophets” on these two commandments means that the whole of the Sacred Scriptures exists to teach us how to rightly love the Lord and the neighbor. Everything within the pages of the Word is given to help us discover a life derived from the Lord’s love.

When we recognize that all the Law and Prophets hang on the commands to love, we can easily understand the concept taught in *Conjugal Love* 87.2 that “*good does not exist by itself, nor truth by itself, but they are everywhere united.*”

It is essential to recognize that love from the Lord is given its structure and definition by means of the truths given to us from the Lord, principally in His Word. It is through the teachings in the Word that we can learn to distinguish between good and evil, and between what is right and what is wrong.

So, thinking back to the Two Great Commandments, they were not given to abolish the Ten Commandments given to Moses in Exodus. They were explaining the purpose of the commandments. They help us understand what kinds of loves destroy human society.

We read in the *Doctrine of Life* 53:

What nation, in the whole world, does not know that it is evil to steal, to commit adultery, to kill, and to bear false witness? If they did not know this, and if they did not pass laws to guard against anyone’s doing these things, it would be the end of them, for any society, republic, or kingdom would collapse without these laws.

Religion plays a key role in society by defining how people can truly love in ways that promote life, health and eternity. It is important for individual members of the church to develop the ability to differentiate between good and evil, using truths that the Lord has provided in His Word. While we live in a culture where religion is either misused or cast aside, the principles of the New Church still must be used in ways that allow the Lord’s love to shine.

No one, when he has lit a lamp, covers it with a vessel or puts it under a bed, but sets it on a lampstand, that those who enter may see the light. (Luke 8:16)

The New Church carries a responsibility to help our culture see that light.

Contact: David.Lindrooth@newchurch.org

Why *You* Should be Religious

A Book by the Rev. N. Bruce Rogers

Reviewed by Bruce Henderson

Religion is in steady decline throughout the world and the United States. In a recent poll only three in 10 Americans say they attend church regularly. There are hopeful signs this trend is leveling out – and maybe even improving – but we live in a fiercely secular culture often at war with religion.

When whatever guides our lives – from government, business and educational policy to personal choices – is not based on faith in God and His teachings, we are at the mercy of human instincts, ranging from noble to perverse. We worry about where this is leading because we know that believing in God and His teachings is the only way to make this a better world and our own lives more meaningful, fulfilling and content.

This is why the Rev. Bruce Rogers has written a valuable new book: *Why You Should Be Religious*.

The back cover notes that he “offers several reasons why religion is important, both to the individual and to society. These include arguments for the existence of God and the miraculous nature of life. He follows this with a list of various theistic religions existing in the West today, including his preference for Christianity, and the book concludes with the importance of religion to civilization – the final and best reason to be religious.”

Mr. Rogers purposefully does not identify himself as a minister, leaving readers to feel more guided than preached at. He is identified as “a retired academic with a background in physics, psychology, research biochemistry and sacred languages,” with master’s degrees in Classical Studies and Christian Theology.

He does promote the “New Christianity” of Emanuel Swedenborg’s Writings, but only after carefully leading up to making a choice. He begins with three chapters on reasons to be religious, the Existence of a Creator God, and The Miracle of Life. Then he follows with: Choosing a Religion, The Case for Christianity, The Spirit World, A New Christianity (promoting the New Church), and why this is all important to The Future of Civilization.

Religion is foundational to a good and useful life – and to a happy marriage enduring to eternity. “It is religion that teaches selfless love,” he writes. “It is religion that teaches an honorable life, which includes keeping of vows. It is

religion that teaches marital fidelity.”

Mr. Rogers notes the success of the 12-step program of Alcoholics Anonymous, which is rooted in religious belief. The wife of the founder, Bill Wilson, was the granddaughter of a Swedenborgian minister and “echoes of her religion are found in several of the 12 steps of the recovery program.”

“The fact is,” he adds, “that without religion there is no morality. Directly or indirectly, it is religion that determines what is virtuous and what is not. It is not simply coincidental that the decline of religion in the west has been accompanied by a decline in moral behavior. Religion and morality go together, hand in hand, and abandonment of one entails also the abandonment of the other.”

Creation is the theater of religious faith, demonstrating the presence of God in every least particular. “It is the life force emanating from a creator God that produces and governs every life form and its constituent components.”

When it comes to choosing a religion, does it matter which religion is chosen? Mr. Rogers says: “In the largest sense, no, it does not matter. All religions teach a code of conduct that requires a disciplined life which does not hurt others but is of benefit to them by virtues of honesty, generosity, kindness and service.”

But the very belief in God “cannot be overstated. Without a belief in a God who requires obedience to His commandments, people become a law unto themselves.”

In the chapter – The Case for Christianity – he says one of the first reasons to choose Christianity is its vision of God in a human form – knowable and visible. This helps us to mold our lives in the image of God – better able to love Him and our neighbor.

Mr. Rogers transitions to Swedenborg by first talking about the Spirit World. Throughout history there have been testimonies to the existence of such a world, a world of the spirit, such as Saul consulting the ghost of Samuel, Isaiah saying to God, “Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise,” and Daniel’s prophesy “many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt.” Jesus often spoke of resurrection and “being with Me in paradise.”

He describes how Swedenborg was allowed to see into the spiritual world and describes a sense of what we are choosing by the way we live our lives. He emphasizes that Swedenborg never sought power or tried to create his own church but was content to serve the Lord as a prophet.

Only then does Mr. Rogers write about A New Christianity, noting: “Emanuel Swedenborg not only introduced to the world testimony regarding the existence and nature of the spirit world, but he also provided a new understanding of Christian doctrine.” This “new understanding” also corrects

such flaws as traditional doctrine about the trinity. It also illuminates the spiritual sense of the Word – the true meaning within all Scripture. This leads to the ultimate “saving faith” – living our lives in accordance with what we believe.

All of this has meaning for The Future of Civilization:

“If all people were religious, actively, sincerely, religious, much of society’s chaos and disorder would disappear. Actively religious people do not murder, lie, cheat, or steal. They keep their word and honor contracts. They assist the needy and poor. They are people of conscience who behave in accordance with society norms and properly enacted law. They love their spouses, they love their families, and they love their country.”

“It is religion, in short, that puts civility in civilization, and without religion civil chaos and disorder ensue.”

The counterpoint the world needs “is a return to religious values, and that requires a return to religion.”

“What civilization needs are men and women of faith, whose thoughts and actions are guided by conscience. Law and law enforcement may deter criminal actions, but are incapable of making people good.”

So why should anyone be religious? The final, best reason, Mr. Rogers says, is “to make your contribution to the continuance of and betterment of the civilization in which you live; to be yourself civilized, in thought and intention as well as in behavior; to be an honorable constituent of society, helpful, useful and respectable.”

He concludes by thanking the reader and simply advising: “Now go with God, and may His blessing be upon you.”

(This book is available from Amazon and Barnes & Noble. The publisher is Outskirts Press (outskirtspress.com)

Swedenborg's Sweden: 2025

Suzy Laidlaw

(with assistance from Christopher Barber and Curtis McQueen)

Fourteen enthusiasts of Emanuel Swedenborg's life gathered with much anticipation in our hotel lobby in Gamla Stan, the "Old Town" of Stockholm, Sweden, on June 18, 2025.¹ From there we began our first walking tour of Swedenborg's Sweden, led by the knowledgeable Revs. Göran Appelgren and Chris Barber, who would lead several other walking tours in the city.

That evening we met for dinner at Den Gyldene Freden, a restaurant in business since 1722 and known to have been visited by Swedenborg.

Our first full day in Stockholm – New Church Day, June 19th – began at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, where many of Swedenborg's original documents are carefully preserved. There was a collective hush and our eyes widened at seeing these handwritten documents in their original form, although now bound together.

That afternoon we also visited the Swedish House of Nobles, where hang hundreds of painted shields for all the ennobled Swedish families, including a shield from the year 1719 when the Swedberg family was ennobled and their name became "Swedenborg." Also found among them was the shield of the noble family Gyllenhaal!

Because of ongoing renovations, we could not enter Saint James's Church (Sankt Jacobs Kyrka) where Emanuel Swedenborg was baptized on February 2, 1688. It is always nice to know precious old buildings are being taken care of, but a bit disappointing when you can't get in.

Another highlight in Stockholm was a visit to the place where Swedenborg's house and garden had been on Hornsgatan in the 1700s. The property is much changed now, but Chris Barber was able to show us where Swedenborg's house had been. An actual replica of his summer house, built in 1978, the *Lusthus*,

¹ Our hotels, buses, and private tours were arranged by EA Tours. We are grateful to Gail Cooper who recommended the company. Our tour coordinator in Sweden was Rolando Steigleder. Although he has been on trips with Gail, he did not know much about Emanuel Swedenborg. He does now!

is maintained in a pleasant courtyard garden. On this sunny summer day we were reminded of Swedenborg's love for his gardens, as well as the fact that many books of the Second Coming were written there in the 1760s.

Our trip was timed to be in Stockholm for the *Midsommar* festival, so we did as Swedes do and celebrated the longest day of the year at the first-ever in the world open air museum, *Skansen*. It seemed that half of Stockholm had gathered to celebrate the longest day of light as well as the proud Swedish heritage with picnics, music and dance. Josephine Appelgren showed us how to join in the fun while Swedish songs were played and children, ladies and gentlemen danced with flowers and green-branch crowns. Even Nils Odhner reconnected with his Swedish ancestry and joined the dancing fun!

In Skansen we were given a private tour of the real *Lusthus*, Swedenborg's actual summer house having been moved to Skansen in 1896 where it is proudly maintained, protected and displayed by the museum in a beautiful spacious garden. Chris Barber explained that there is a small attic space above the front room where Emanuel's manuscripts had been stored. We also noticed that, because of the fear of fires, there was no heat source in the little space.

We did not just do Swedenborg-centric activities while in Sweden. One evening we took an archipelago dinner cruise around some of the thousands of islands of Stockholm. We also visited the remarkable Vasa Museum which houses a massive 17th century warship that, due to its terrible design, sank almost immediately after it was launched. It was recovered from the depths in 1961 and has been painstakingly restored. Treasures that were on the ship when it sank are also available to view, and its tall masts stick right out of the top of the building.

Of course, we also visited the Royal Palace, just down the street from our hotel. We visited a summer home, *Svindersvik*, on the outskirts of Stockholm in Nacka. It was built in the 1740s and there is documented evidence that Swedenborg also visited this lovely bucolic waterfront house which has been beautifully preserved. The tour gave us a glimpse of the life of the upper classes at the time Swedenborg lived.

On Sunday morning we were invited to an English-language worship service at our lovely New Church chapel in Stockholm. After church we were surprised to learn that the congregation had prepared a beautiful lunch for all. Eva Björkström gave several of us a look at the books kept on site. There we met Göran Winqvist, a direct descendent of Jesper Swedenborg, Emanuel's brother. Mr. Winqvist kindly gave Carroll Odhner a copy of the book he wrote about his unusual family history. The welcome was so warm and delightful. Thanks to all in the Stockholm congregation.

After five full days in the Stockholm area, we started our travels north, spending most of that day in and around Uppsala. This city played a big part

in Swedenborg's life as his family moved there from Stockholm when he was just four years old and he stayed there through his years at Uppsala University. Jesper Swedberg, Emanuel's father, preached in the impressive Uppsala Cathedral and this is now where Emanuel's tomb has found its home.

The *Gustavianum*, a 17th century classroom where Swedenborg would have attended many classes, is just across a small street from the cathedral. The classroom is maintained as part of the Uppsala University's Museum.

Another, even better-known citizen of Uppsala from the 18th century was Carl Linnaeus, the Swedish botanist, zoologist and physician who formalized the modern system of naming living things. We were fortunate to visit both his garden and home in Uppsala and his summer residence and gardens at *Hammarby* in the lovely countryside outside the city. The gardeners on our trip ran around like children enjoying the plants.

After Uppsala we arrived in the town of Falun in the area of Sweden known for its mining.² No doubt providentially, Emanuel Swedenborg was an heir to mining fortunes extracted from several mining sites so interest in promoting and improving Sweden's mining was therefore understandable. In the 1720s he was finally seated on the Swedish Board of Mines and served on this prestigious scientific organization until he later felt he must totally devote himself to writing the revelation being given to him by the Lord.

Falu Gruva, a World Heritage historic mine in Falun, and its museum, gave us great insight as to how dangerous a miner's life was. Our tour of this mine took us deep underground, down more than 400 hundred wet and slippery steps through narrow tunnels and dark caverns. Curtis McQueen found the whole site so fascinating that later, when we were heading out for dinner, we realized he wasn't back from the mine yet! Not to worry, he eventually returned with delighted gleam in his eyes and a hungry stomach.

The Dalarna Museum in Falun provided lovely images of the various types of art and culture through the centuries in this part of Sweden. We also saw an amusing collection of variations of the famous red horses of Dalarna.

Another delightful place we visited was the home of Swedish artists Carl and Karin Larsson, *Lilla Hyttnäs*. We were delighted by the tour but also by the whole town of Sundborn which we got to wander around.

On the way back to the Stockholm airport we stopped outside of Falun at "Sveden." This was the ancestral home and farm of the Swedberg family, and the building where Jesper Swedberg was born. Not only did it have a lovely garden for us to enjoy, but a highly decorated outhouse with seating for multiple adults and special low toilets for children! The lovely and enthusiastic

² The income from the mines would later be important so that Emanuel would be financially secure enough to do his work for the Lord and, in fact, cover the printing costs for his books that did not sell very well during his lifetime.

tour guide allowed us to sample the various herbs in the garden and enjoy the beautiful grounds for as long as we wished.

Perhaps the best part of our trip was that we were able to connect with other like-minded Swedenborgians whom we can now call friends. We left with a better sense of this lovely country that Swedenborg loved and called home. Near the end of his life, people reading the books were aware of Emanuel's authorship. Finally, for the first time, in 1768 he openly declared his authorship by signing *Conjugial Love*: "Emanuel Swedenborg, A Swede."

(See photos on pages 412 and 413)

Contact: Suzy@dwave.com

Address Delivered in Swedenborg's *Lusthus* on Midsummer Eve, 2025¹

The Rev. Christopher A. Barber

Welcome to Swedenborg's *Lusthus*. If there is anything in our New Church physical heritage that could be considered holy ground, this truly is it. Not because of the planks and panes – but because it was in this building that so much of the New Dispensation was delivered. The manuscripts we had the privilege of seeing – so many of those papers were fashioned into vessels for the Lord's teachings in this very room or not far from it.

The most often repeated date for the construction of this building is surprisingly late in Swedenborg's life – 1767. This is because of a recollection penned by his friend and neighbor, Carl Rosbahrn. I want to believe Carl. He lived nearby. He was Swedenborg's friend. He even became active in an underground early New Church publishing society. But other accounts and pieces of evidence demand a different conclusion. Working our way back to the earliest possible date, we find that:

- The rector of the Swedish Church in Philadelphia recalls visiting Swedenborg and seeing the *lusthus* in 1766.
- An early Swedenborgian newsletter, secretly distributed within Sweden, offers that the *lusthus* was built in 1763.
- And Swedenborg himself, in a draft for a letter he was writing in January 1748, mentioned the *lusthus* with details of how it was already being used at the time. With Swedenborg making a note-to-self to write this letter about the *lusthus* just a few months before in November 1747.

Fascinatingly – and maybe I should say, *providentially* – we saw this last note with our very eyes yesterday, even though I didn't realize it until last night! The notes at the front of the manuscript of *Index Biblicus* included, beneath the reminders for coffee and chestnuts, the earliest known reference to the completed *lusthus*!

¹ This was an informal presentation offered for the edification of the members of the June 2025 tour *Sweden Through the Lens of Emanuel Swedenborg*, organized by Suzy Laidlaw. See *Swedenborg's Lusthus* published by the Swedenborg Society in 2024 for the most comprehensive volume on the *Lusthus* to date.

The draft of his letter is very sketchy but provides first-hand insight into some of the uses of this building. Swedenborg writes:

Since the chimney in the attic is below open, through which sparks could come, and ignite some paper, which there in the attic are, where I have laid my books, and other things; you also likely find no necessity there to make any fire.

This was a conscious decision: no stove, no heat. Why? To protect his books. Swedenborg, like many in his era, had experienced great loss from fire. And, after all, the summer house was connected to his library. Comfort was sacrificed for security. That said, Swedenborg was known for having a high tolerance for the cold.

It seems, though, that this was a change of plans. In a list of building materials that Stephen McNeilly, the director of the Swedenborg Society in London, thinks details the construction materials needed for the *lusthus* in 1746, there is in the budget a line for a tile stove. So, it seems Swedenborg had a change of heart. The *lusthus* cost 2232 dalers, about one-third the price of the entire property.

Robsahm, Swedenborg's friend and neighbor, said the summer house was built partly *"for the sake of the public that came to see the old gentleman, generally out of curiosity."* But this wasn't a part of Swedenborg's life until later on, and perhaps that's why Robsahm has 1767 in his mind. He thinks that the *lusthus* is for receiving curious callers. It was in 1766 when German philosopher Immanuel Kant's infamous critique and take-down of Swedenborg's claims of spiritual sight increased Swedenborg's spiritual fame. I suppose people took up Kant's call to the curious when he said:

He to whom these ghost stories seem to be of importance, if he has money enough and nothing better to do, may, at any rate, make a journey for the sake of more accurate information.

Many did.

After Swedenborg's death, the property declined:

- By the 1870s, it was used as a junk shed, a kerosene depot, and even a thieves' hideout.
- In its final years, a poor widow with many children lived in it.
- By 1891, it became a grotesque tourist trap. The walls were draped in black cloth with silver stars; in the center, a wax figure of Swedenborg lay in state. Entry cost 10 öre. By 1895, the fee was up to 25 öre.

The deterioration was so notable and incongruent with Swedenborg's legacy that in 1878, U.S. President Ulysses S. Grant visited the site during his world tour following his time in office. He was dismayed at how neglected the building was and how little effort Sweden had made to preserve this piece of

its intellectual heritage.

New Church people have made pilgrimages to this building since before the end of Swedenborg's life. But over time, laments over its tragic state were published in New Church periodicals, and calls were made for trying to support its upkeep. An effort was made to try to save the building and first there were thoughts of donating to fix it up where it stood, but expansion of the street and buildup of the neighborhood made the city inclined to sell the building.

One offer came in from Chicago in 1891 but was turned down because the seller wanted it to stay in Sweden. The following year another offer came from Charles Abstron, a Swede, who wanted to bring it to the States, but presumably was turned down for the same reason – not before his efforts were printed in papers around the U.S. But, after an initial frustration of negotiation, Artur Hazelius, the founder of Skansen, acquired it in 1896 and the summer house was moved here. Well, not exactly this spot yet, but to this park.

- A medal was struck to commemorate the move:
- The house was restored and has had a few rounds of serious maintenance.
- Inside were placed:
 - Swedenborg's organ
 - Original editions of his works
 - Paintings and souvenirs

In 1964, the building was moved one more time to this spot here.

This *lusthus* means a lot to Swedenborgians the world over. It's because of what was delivered here. And what was delivered here was a renewed connection with the Lord through His Word because our understanding could be unclouded due to the Lord's accommodation to our state and need as a human race. And interestingly, that's not unlike what huts correspond to in the Word, or at least in this passage from *Isaiah 4:5,6*:

Jehovah creates over every habitation of Mount Zion, and over her assemblies, a cloud by day, and smoke and the shining of a flaming fire by night; for over all the glory there will be a covering. And there will be a hut for shade by day from the heat, and for a refuge and hiding-place from deluge and rain. (Arcana Coelestia 9433 explains that a hut, in this context, means "the lowest level of God's truth which conceals more internal levels" in which we seek refuge "in order that we may be safe from harm.")

Wherever we might allow the doctrines to take us, the fact remains that they are just the entrance into the mysteries of faith – a vantage point into heaven. The Lord stands at the doors of our minds and knocks and it is for us to open to Him that He might come in to us and become part of our way of

life. The books penned, largely in this room, give us the ability to see clearly the way. May we be inspired to walk in it.

Given the spiritual sight that was used within these four walls, I think it's safe to say that though this was a building without heat, it most certainly was not without light.



THE REV. CHRISTOPHER A. BARBER teaches Religion in the Academy Secondary Schools. He has traveled to Sweden several times to research Swedenborg's life. He and his wife, Annika (Fitzpatrick) live at Peeble Hall in Trenton, New Jersey. Contact: chris.barber@ancss.org

The Joyful Science of Shunology: Mastering the Art of Shunning Evil –With the Help of the Lord

Brent Morris

(A Grateful Practitioner of the Path – and a Friend of the Lord)

“Shunology” is the spiritual art of shunning evil – not with grim duty, but with joy, grace and a bit of humor. This article explores the concept through the lens of the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg – particularly the doctrine of regeneration. We will look at the process of recognizing, rejecting and replacing harmful thoughts and desires with emphasis on repetition, practice and Divine cooperation.

Shunology is for anyone seeking to live more freely in the Lord’s light, armed with nothing but love, laughter and perhaps a broken coffee mug.

Let’s start simple: Shunology is the daily discipline of turning away from harmful thoughts and tendencies. It’s based on the idea that evil thoughts don’t belong to us – they are intruders, not roommates. And, like any good host who finds an unwelcome guest at the door, we learn not to let them in.

Swedenborg writes in *Divine Providence* 279 that the Lord works in every moment to separate us from evils – not by force, but by our freedom to cooperate. “No one can be withheld from evils unless he is brought into spiritual freedom,” he says, and Shunology is exactly that: spiritual freedom in action.

The Method: Cancel, Replace, Rejoice

Imagine this; you’re sitting peacefully when your favorite mug crashes to the floor. Instantly, thoughts rise up like a bad storm: “Who broke it? Why would they do that? This is personal!” Sound familiar?

Here’s where Shunology kicks in:

1. **Cancel the Thought:** As soon as the thought enters, say, “Cancel! Cancel!” Yes, out loud, if needed. It works.
2. **Replace It:** Think: “I am harmonious, happy, healthy, wise, loving,

caring, kind.” Or, “Thank you, Lord, for my beautiful grandchildren,” Your mind can’t hold two thoughts at once. *True Christianity* 574 confirms this: “Two opposite affections cannot exist in one mind at the same time.”

3. **Rejoice in the Lord’s Power:** Laugh. Praise. Feel the release. As Swedenborg notes in *Heaven and Hell* 302, joy floods in when evil is removed.

Practice Makes . . . Automatic?

Now, let’s talk about mastery. At first, you’ll catch the thought a few seconds late. Maybe you have already composed a Shakespearian rant about your ruined mug. But with practice – real, daily, spiritual repetition – something happens.

You start to catch the thought right away. Eventually, you catch it before it forms. It’s what Swedenborg calls “the internal man governing the external.” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 236) You’re no longer reacting – you’re preempting, like a master gardener pulling weeds before they root.

And the Lord? He is doing the real work. As *Secrets of Heaven* 9336 explains: “The Lord removes evils in the measure that a person cooperates.” Shunlogy is your cooperation. The Lord provides the power.

But Does It Work?

Oh yes. It works like sour milk in coffee – instantly noticeable and deeply transformative. It’s not always easy, but it’s always effective.

Swedenborg writes in *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* 145: “So far as man shuns evils as sins, so far he does good. Not from himself but from the Lord.” Meaning: every time you cancel a thought and replace it with love, you’re not just managing emotions – you’re participating in your own regeneration.

Advanced Level: Becoming a Master Shunner

What’s the end goal? To be so attuned to heaven that evil doesn’t even knock on the door anymore. Swedenborg describes the celestial person as one who “thinks nothing of evil, but only of good.” (*Secrets of Heaven* 6339)

And if you ever reach that level – autopilot, or Day Seven, as one might say – you won’t just be surviving life, you’ll be radiating joy like a brilliant sunbeam. You’ll catch yourself laughing in the Lord’s presence and maybe even thanking Him for saving your bacon.

Conclusion: Why it Matters

In a world of mental clutter and emotional chaos, Shunology is a Divine lifeline. It's the choice to say "no" to what darkens and "yes" to what enlightens. It's about becoming a peaceful, joyful presence in the world – someone who carries a calm, radiant light into every room, whose heart is anchored in love, and whose mind moves with the quiet strength and serenity of heaven's gentle wisdom.

In summary:

- Catch the thought
- Cancel the thought
- Replace it with the good
- Rejoice
- Repeat
- Let the Lord handle the rest

Because when you are friends with the Lord, He doesn't just help – you get extra bacon.

(**Brent Morris** lives in Lake Helen, Florida.)

SWEDEN



Our first evening included a toast to the Church with schnaps. Göran assured us that this was the traditional Swedish way of having a toast. Around the table starting at the front left: Alan and Suzy Laidlaw, Chris Barber, Nils Odhner, David Norman, Lynn Genzlinger (peeking out), Marvin and Wendy Clymer. Starting in the rear on the right: Ariane Odhner, Curtis McQueen, Clark Echols, Astrid Odhner, Carroll Odhner, Josephine Appelgren, Gillian Mayer, and Göran Appelgren at the front right.



Swedenborg's remains were placed in the Uppsala Cathedral with great care in approximately 1908. Alan Laidlaw and Chris Barber spoke to the circumstances of his remains returning to Uppsala from London.



Swedenborg's remains were placed in the Uppsala Cathedral with great ceremony in approximately 1908.

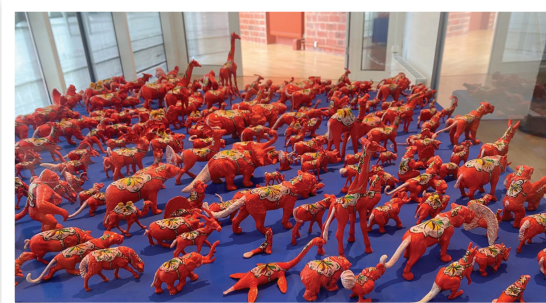
SWEDEN



Chris Barber has done some remarkable research on he exact addresses where Emanuel Swedenborg lived during his childhood, his years of the Board of Mines, and while attending meetings for the nobility at the House of Nobles. Most of the buildings no longer exist, including his childhood home, so Chris had to consult old parish records for clues.



Starting the long walk down into the mine with hard hats and raincoats.



Whimsical Dalarna style animals at the museum in Falun.

Declarations of Faith

The Rev. Thomas J. Jackson

In receiving the honor of inauguration into the priesthood I affirm my faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the One God of heaven and earth. I believe in a Human God, who came into the world to subdue the hells and to glorify His Human, without which no person could have been saved. I believe in His truth revealed to us all in His Word, through the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the Heavenly Doctrine.

I believe in the power of His truth, that we all might be saved if we heed it and follow Him. I believe that all people were created for heaven, and so I believe in the establishment of His church among all people, that they might have access to the Truth of His Word and through it achieve the happiness that is heaven.

I believe He has given me the opportunity to be His servant in the preaching and teaching of His truth, that I might be an instrument that He may use to further His providential work of creating a heaven from the human race. I believe that as a priest it will be my duty to the Lord and to all the people of the church to honestly, justly and faithfully pursue an understanding of His Word and an understanding of how best to teach and spread it.

The Rev. Eric Sjödin

I believe in the one true God, the Lord Jesus Christ.

I believe in the Trinity: that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are three essential aspects of one and the same God – just as humans consist of body, soul and spirit. That these aspects are one in essence and mind, and therefore do not constitute three gods, but one God.

I believe in a holy, universal and open church – for all people, regardless of background.

I believe in eternal life, a gift from the Lord. He is the source of life and wisdom, who never excludes anyone. Each person has his or her own unique

way of serving the Lord, the church, the kingdom and the neighbor. This variety in faith, love and service reflects the heavenly variety in heaven.

I believe that the Word is Divine in every detail – that the Word has an inner, spiritual meaning that lies deeper than the literal meaning. Like a soul in a body, the Word carries a spiritual meaning within it. It is through the Word that we have a personal relationship with the Lord and can grow spiritually.

I believe in the Lord's teachings – that they lead to heaven, to a better society, and to a life filled with meaning and goodness. We are called to shun evil that sins against the Lord and to live in goodness and truth: a life of faith and love. When every person lives in faith and love, we build together a heavenly kingdom here on earth.

I believe in faith in action. Faith without action is a dead faith that neither saves us nor improves the world. Faith must be expressed in everyday actions – in what is right and true. How we put our faith into action varies from person to person:

- A soldier defends his country.
- A police officer maintains law and order.
- A judge judges fairly.
- A merchant trades honestly.
- A citizen pays his taxes.
- A parent cares for his children.

When faith, love, and action are united, then we serve the Lord.

Before the Lord, the church, the congregation, my family, and my friends, I now ask for the Lord's blessing and guidance. May He call me to His ministry and make me worthy to represent Him, His angels, and Heaven here on earth.

I pray that the Lord will give me courage, wisdom and strength for the tasks that await me. May I teach the truths that lead to a good life and a better world. May I faithfully, honorably, and justly serve the Lord, the church, and the kingdom – and always work for what is good and true.

Life Lines

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

JOHN AND LORI ODHNER: HERE'S TO OUR FRIENDS

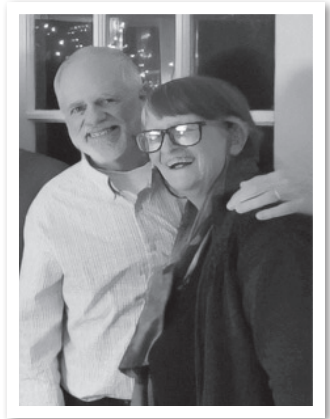
In June John and Lori Odhner retired from their work at the Bryn Athyn Church and for the General Church. John was ordained in 1980 and started his career in Lake Helen, Florida, with Lori as his new bride. Over the years, while raising a family of nine children, they have served together in Lake Helen, Los Angeles, Albuquerque, and Bryn Athyn, and been involved in countless projects and new efforts having to do with marriage, music, technology, education and evangelization. Together with their children they have made a remarkable team everywhere that they have

gone. Their accomplishments are too numerous to name, but we will list a few.

A true scion of the Odhner family, John is a well-read and insightful theologian and an excellent writer. He has written beautiful papers, sermons and articles, including such things as a popular series of pamphlets about what the letter of the Word teaches, books for the Journey series, and online material. Lori's talents complement John's, writing a daily inspirational anecdotal essay about life that has been followed by hundreds and maybe thousands of readers.

For about the past 15 years Lori has run the Caring for Marriage program in Bryn Athyn, with John's help, hosting numerous annual conferences as well as weekly groups. Along similar lines, John founded the Stephen Ministry program in Bryn Athyn about 20 years ago, which has been running strong ever since.

The two of them are perhaps best known for their musical partnership, which began even before their marriage in 1980 and has continued over the years. Lori's songs are well known throughout the church. John and Lori have



collaborated on scores of songs that are sung frequently in church services, schools and camps, many of which are also in the General Church Liturgy. John was also a major contributor to the beautiful 2005 Liturgy.

John and Lori's continuing contributions to the life of the church have not faded over the years. From Lori's amazing skills in sewing and quilting, to John's magic tricks and Cybertech wizardry, it seems unlikely that they will slow down any time soon. Best of all, they have always seemed to love what they do. Many thanks from a grateful church to both of them, and to their brilliant and creative grown children as well.

(JFS)

BRAVE NEW WORLD? AI AND *NEW CHURCH LIFE*

In a recent conversation with someone much techier than I – a low bar – I asked if she thought ChatGPT (Artificial Intelligence) could write an editorial for *New Church Life*.

“Well, let's give it a try,” she said brightly. “What's the topic?”

I suggested: “The History and Future of New Church Education.” She plugged that into her phone and in a mere minute or two out came this:

The Enduring Power and Future Promise of New Church Education

In a world increasingly driven by rapid technological advancement, ideological polarization, and cultural fragmentation, the enduring mission of New Church (Swedenborgian) education stands out as both radical and restorative: to cultivate minds and hearts in the light of eternal truths. At its best, New Church education nurtures not only intellectual growth but also spiritual development, rooting students in the conviction that love, wisdom, and usefulness are the ultimate goals of life.

Where It's Been

From its earliest iterations, New Church education has sought to be more than simply a religious alternative to mainstream schooling. In the 19th century, founders of New Church schools saw education as a sacred trust – an opportunity to guide young people toward a life of spiritual integrity, moral strength and service to others. Drawing from the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, these institutions emphasized the correspondence between natural and spiritual truths, the importance of free will and conscience, and the belief that every child is born for heaven.

In communities like Bryn Athyn, Philadelphia, and beyond, generations

of students have been shaped by this vision. They've been taught not only to think critically, but to ask deeper questions: What does it mean to be truly human? How do my daily choices reflect eternal realities? Teachers have been more than content transmitters -- they've been mentors and spiritual guides, helping students navigate the complexities of adolescence and young adulthood with a framework grounded in divine order and love.

Where It's Going

But the landscape is changing. Enrollment challenges, cultural shifts, and the rising cost of private education are forcing even long-standing New Church schools to ask hard questions. How do we remain true to our spiritual mission while adapting to the needs and values of a new generation? How do we honor the wisdom of the past without becoming its prisoner?

The good news is this: New Church education is already evolving. Innovative curricula are integrating neuroscience, social-emotional learning, and environmental ethics through a uniquely Swedenborgian lens. Discussions about gender, identity and mental health are no longer taboo – but rather welcomed into the circle of inquiry and compassion. Teachers are increasingly being trained not only as subject experts but as spiritually attuned guides, capable of modeling vulnerability, courage and a living faith.

Moreover, the reach of New Church education is expanding beyond traditional classroom walls. Digital learning platforms, global partnerships, and community-based learning experiences are allowing this tradition to find expression in new formats. There is growing potential for adult education, interfaith collaboration, and outreach to underserved communities who hunger for an education rooted in eternal meaning.

Why It Still Matters

At its core, New Church education offers something the world desperately needs: a vision of human development that is not merely academic or professional, but spiritual. In a culture that often measures success in terms of achievement and accumulation, New Church education reminds us that the true purpose of life is regeneration – the ongoing inner transformation toward becoming more loving, wise and useful.

This mission is not easy to sustain. It requires commitment, humility and sometimes courageous change. But it is worth it. Because when a child is seen not just as a student but as a soul – when a school sees its purpose not just as education but as preparation for heaven – something sacred happens. A kind of light takes root. And that light, once kindled, has the power to illuminate a

life, a community, and a world.

In a time of fragmentation, New Church education dares to hold a whole vision: of wisdom and wonder, intellect and spirit, truth and love. May we invest in it not only with our resources, but with our imagination—because the future of this tradition depends on both.

• • •

This “editorial” is impressive – and a bit scary. The writing is not stilted but readable and engaging. How many New Church documents were researched in mere seconds I have no idea, but I did recognize some content from New Church Life. The way it is all put together – in just a moment – is mind-boggling. And it does not stop with a typical editorial. Just for fun, my friend also asked ChatGPT for a “sassy” version – for the Smart Phone crowd -- and this popped up, again in less than a minute:

Editorial: New Church Education – Now With 100% More Divine Correspondences (And 60% Less Cafeteria Drama)

Let’s face it: sending your kid to a New Church school is not just about learning long division and proper comma usage. It’s about soul formation. It’s about teaching little Bronwen and teenage Garth that life isn’t just about TikTok fame and protein smoothies -- it’s about becoming an angel. A real one. With, like, heavenly uses and inner light and stuff.

Where It’s Been

Once upon a time, a group of well-meaning theologians and parents got together and said, “You know what kids need? A little less algebra, a little more *Arcana Coelestia*.” And boom – New Church education was born.

For decades, children in quaint uniforms (or let’s be honest, wildly inconsistent dress code interpretations) have been absorbing the wonders of Swedenborg: life after death, spiritual correspondences, the subtle difference between charity and faith, and why your thoughts are not as private as you think.

They’ve gone on field trips, written essays titled, *Why Heaven is Not Just a Cloud Lounge*, and survived middle school square dancing with their eternal salvation (barely) intact.

Where It’s Going

Now, as we stare down the tunnel of the future like a cherub with excellent

broadband, New Church education is undergoing a transformation. Curriculum updates! Podcasts! Emotional literacy! Group projects where no one cries (or at least cries less)! And yes, we're even talking openly about real stuff like trauma, identity, and whether angels would survive a group text thread (spoiler: probably not).

Soon we may see Swedenborg TikToks, angel-themed escape rooms, or even Spiritually Correspondent Cafeterias, where your tray lunch reflects your ruling love. (Hot dogs? Self-love. Kale and quinoa? Love of use. Leftover mystery meat? Possibly infernal.)

Why It Still Matters

Because here's the thing: in a world where ChatGPT is writing editorials and your toaster might be smarter than your Uncle Carl, kids still need meaning. They need to know their inner self matters. They need to learn that life is not just about grades or jobs, but about choosing good over evil – even when evil shows up as a group chat titled, *Let's All Complain About Homework*.

New Church schools offer that sacred whisper that says, "Hey, your thoughts and intentions shape eternity." Which is honestly a better pep talk than anything you'll get from YouTube influencers or the back of a Snapple cap.

So, here's to New Church education: still weird, still holy, still making teenagers write about heaven while trying to survive gym class. Long may it thrive.

• • •

Hmmm, that might attract more, like, young iPhone readers, y'know? But there's more. ChatGPT also turned the editorial into poetry:

New Church is not a single place,
Nor tied to robes or temple space –
It is the life of good and true
Unfolding daily, fresh and new.

So let the schools be brave and kind,
And let the soul not lag the mind.
For heaven is not far away –
It's built in what we choose today.

Let this be passed from heart to hand –
Not rules, but truths that help us stand.
Not fear, but light. Not shame, but grace.

And “the life of charity” as our place.

From past to now, from scroll to screen,
The Word still lives in what we mean.
And we are led, as Swedenborg wrote,
“not by ourselves, but by the Lord,”
Who guides with love the steps we take,
And bids our inner world awake.

• • •

It is no surprise that many schools now require all writing to be done in class, so students cannot turn to ChatGPT for a quick fix. I will not be tempted to use it to write editorials – or Life Lines – for *New Church Life*. And I doubt New Church ministers will use it to “write” sermons either. Most views of a *Brave New World* tend to dystopian and there is much in AI to be concerned about but it has enormous potential for good as well, in many fields.

When Samuel Morse sent the first telegraph message in 1844 – marking that pivotal moment in communication technology – he asked simply: “What hath God wrought?” He was echoing the story of Balak’s sacrifice and Balaam’s parable in *Numbers 23:23*; “*According to this time it shall be said of Jacob and of Israel, What hath God wrought?*”

The wonder – and the question – never cease.

(BMH)

HOW LONG ‘TIL CLOSING TIME?

The advance of Artificial Intelligence prompts insistent questions. What can it do and what can’t it do? What should it be allowed to do – and what must it never be allowed to do? With all the gray areas in between, these questions must be asked constantly and wisely considered.

We have learned that a new AI health system diagnosed patients four times faster and more accurately than human doctors. That’s encouraging, but concern emerges that such technology also threatens to replace personal interaction and spiritual faith in the healing process.

A recent online article notes that AI’s involvement in religion, “raises questions about its impact on the Divine and the fundamental nature of religious experiences.”

AI is being integrated into religious practices. Some priests use it to help develop sermon ideas and the writing process – while contemplating whether AI can actually fulfill people’s spiritual needs. Even new religions are emerging,

such as The Way of the Future Church.

Consider the transcendent nature of art and religion: “Art can evoke emotions and provoke profound contemplation. However, AI-generated art, though impressive in its imitation, lacks the essence of the human soul from which art springs. Similarly, the Divine teachings and spiritual guidance provided by human leaders hold significant value when it comes to religion. The passing down of religious traditions from one human to another ensures the preservation of the Divine spark that resonates within the human conscience.”

We develop conscience through religious faith, not computers. “Artificial intelligence, devoid of conscience, fails to possess the Divine spark integral to the human condition. Therefore, relying on Artificial Intelligence for matters of the Divine poses significant challenges and risks distorting the fundamental nature of religious experience.”

The article concludes: “The rise of AI has undeniably influenced various aspects of human life, including religion. However, the fundamental nature of the Divine, the transcendent qualities of religious experiences, are the necessity of the human conscience and spiritual guidance cannot be replicated by AI. Placing the Divine within the confines of algorithms and code undermines the profound human connection to the Divine. While AI can support religious practices, it is imperative to preserve the authenticity, transcendence and integrity of religious traditions by recognizing the limitations of AI and upholding the primacy of human spiritual experience.”

So, there is hope that religiously inspired conscience will temper the reach of Artificial Intelligence. All this recalls an excerpt from the Journals of Edmond and Jules de Goncourt, written on April 7, 1869:

“At Magny’s dinner: They said that Bethelot had predicted that in 100 years of physical and chemical science man would learn to know the atom and that with this knowledge he would be able, at his will, to dim, extinguish or relight the sun like a Carcel lamp. Claude Bernard, for his part, is said to have announced that with 100 more years of physiological knowledge we would be able to make organic law ourselves, to manufacture human life, in competition with the Creator.

“For our part, we did not raise any objections to this talk, but we do believe that at that particular stage of scientific development, the good Lord, with a flowing white beard, will arrive on Earth with His chain of keys and will say to humanity, just as they do at the Art Gallery at five o’clock: ‘Gentlemen, it’s closing time.’”

(BMH)

THE DEATH OF ATHEISM

Time magazine is remembered for an iconic cover in 1966 with the bleak, provocative question: **Is God Dead?** The cover story claimed that God was being eclipsed by science – by what we could actually see and understand. Eric Metaxas, a prolific Christian author, answers with a meticulously researched book: **Is Atheism Dead?** In 400 pages about creation, science and archeology he makes a compelling case: God is very much alive; it is atheism on its death bed.

Metaxas can be verbose, but his book is well-researched, fascinating in detail, and highly readable. His attacks on such atheistic gurus as Christopher Hitchens and Richard Dawkins are belabored but expose the emptiness of their smug theories.

Science has long been the shield of atheists, because it offers visible proof of what we can know and thus believe. But science increasingly is making the case for a Creator, not the random products of science. Many once-confident scientists realize they can no longer be intellectually honest and still claim to be atheists – because they cannot avoid two fundamental questions.

The first is the debate over God vs. evolution as the creator of human life. That still rages but gives way to the question that evolutionists cannot answer: what happened to bring life into existence in the first place? How did the first life on earth – however primitive – come into being out of non-life? It's not that they haven't tried, but no scientist has ever been able to create life out of nothing. And never will.

Swedenborg tells us: *"The universe is like a stage on which proofs are constantly being demonstrated that God exists and that there is a God."* (True Christianity 12)

Now even once-confident scientist-atheists are beginning to see. Throughout all of creation there is compelling evidence of much more than chance at work – compelling examples and design, from the greatest to the least.

The fine tuning throughout the universe testifies to an omnipotent Creator. Consider just the size and positioning of the sun, the moon, and earth. If any one factor was off by just a fraction, life could not exist on earth. That essential balance persists through all eternity.

Another example that may seem just a quirk of nature: why does ice float? Everything else in nature sinks when it freezes. But water, which does get heavier and denser as it becomes colder, suddenly reverses the process when the temperature reaches 39 degrees Fahrenheit. Water suddenly gets lighter and less dense – and floats. If it did not, lakes and rivers would freeze from the bottom, causing everything above to freeze, destroying the ecosystem. Life on earth would not be possible.

Metaxas also has fascinating chapters on archeology and how many of its

discoveries confirm facts and stories in the Word – many of which have been doubted without proof. He cites three cases of misbehaving boys who changed history – and validated the Bible.

The first was a young Bedouin shepherd boy looking for a lost goat who flung a stone into a cave – as boys are wont to do. He was surprised when he heard pottery shattering. Of course, he was curious and ventured into the cave, where he discovered the Dead Sea Scrolls perfectly preserved in large urns, protected for centuries in the constant climate of the cave. This – and many more scrolls found in nearby caves – is considered one of the most important discoveries of all time, testifying to the validity of the Old Testament.

The second was the discovery of Hezekiah's tunnel – a way of diverting precious water from the Gihon Spring through a walled fortification to keep it from enemy soldiers. The story is told in the *Book of Kings*, and archaeological evidence had been found of Hezekiah's reign in the 1800s, but the diversion of this water remained a mystery. In 1880 a teenager playing hooky from school was exploring a stream and happened on a buried inscription which led to solving the puzzle of an intricate tunnel system that carried the water underground, frustrating King Sennacherib and his forces, while saving Hezekiah and his men. Another story confirmed.

The third involved a young boy from an "archeology club" who was taken along on a dig at an ancient site. He was such a nuisance that the leader banished him to a remote area where he was told to clean the floor and not bother anyone. Of course, the boy got bored. Of course, he happened to have a hammer in his pocket. Of course, he began pounding on the floor. And of course, it began breaking away. Something caught his eye. The boy reached in and came up with two small vials containing scrolls with the first-ever recorded words of Scripture – the familiar blessing from *Numbers 6:24-26*:

The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make His face to shine upon you, and be gracious unto you; the Lord lift up His countenance upon you, and give you peace

Call it serendipity or call it providence, but here was proof to give any atheist pause.

Metaxas says all of this – and more – is increasingly marginalizing stubborn atheists and leaving them less and less wiggle room. He cites Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus as two of the foremost atheists of their time who confessed to finding God late in life. And he notes many great scientists who were devout Christians, such as Isaac Newton, James Clark Maxwell, Pascal, Leibnitz, Linnaeus, Gregor Mendel and Samuel Morse – but not Swedenborg, whom he has yet to discover.

Metaxas quotes Maxwell – whom he compares to Newton and Einstein –

as saying:

Skeptics pretend to have read [the Old Testament and Mosaic Law], and have found certain witty objections, which too many of the orthodox unread admit, and shut up the subject as haunted. But a Candle is coming to drive out all the Ghosts and Bugbears. Let us follow the light.

Atheism is more and more wandering in the dark – without a candle.

The fool has said in his heart, there is no God. (Psalm 14:1)

(BMH)

THAT ‘MAP OF HEAVEN’

In a Life Line in the May/June issue – *The Real Proof of Heaven* – I commented on the experience of renowned American neurosurgeon Eben Alexander’s compelling near-death experience, which turned him from ardent skeptic to true believer. He gave a fascinating talk to 1,100 people in Bryn Athyn in April 2013, where he was immersed by his hosts in Swedenborg’s revelation about life after death.

He wrote a best-seller that same year – *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon’s Journey into the Afterlife* – confessing a belief he never expected to embrace. Subsequent books and public testimony added weight to the lore of near-death experiences. However, I made the mistake of saying: “In all of Alexander’s books, podcasts and public experiences since, I am not aware of any reference to Swedenborg, the Writings, and the revelation from God that corroborates his story.”

I am grateful to Michael Chester, a keen reader of the *Life*, who was kind enough to correct me in a gracious email, pointing to examples in Alexander’s *Map of Heaven* where he does cite Swedenborg at length. Because this testimony from such a well-respected scientist introduced Swedenborg and teachings about heaven and hell to many thousands of readers, it is worth sharing some of what he wrote:

•

Goethe, Pascal and Fechner didn’t possess the scientific knowledge we do today, but each was a member of the modern world, and each was, in his time, a scientific giant on whose shoulders we stand today. The same is true of the 17th century scientist Emanuel Swedenborg.

Swedenborg spent most of his life as inspector of mines for Sweden, a job requiring considerable knowledge of engineering, physics and the practical application of new hydraulic techniques for the deep extraction of coal. He

was also an accomplished geometer, chemist, and anatomist, and the first person to formulate a rough idea of what the cerebellum – the portion of the brain responsible in large part for motor coordination – actually does. He was, by any measure, a genius.

Swedenborg had a particular interest in the brain [Alexander's area of expertise] and spent many years trying to isolate the seat of consciousness – the physical location of what, back in his time, was still called the soul. Then, in the middle of his life, Swedenborg discovered . . . that he had been looking in the wrong place. (He) underwent a spiritual crisis. A series of terrifying vivid dreams finally led to a moment in which the heavens themselves seemed to open. Swedenborg's old world cracked, buckled and collapsed. A new one grew in its place.

Swedenborg spent the rest of his life studying and cataloguing the spiritual worlds he had discovered, with the same rigor that he had previously devoted to studying the physical world. He was the first modern scientist to treat heaven as a real place, and the first to try to map it.

The specific character of each of these worlds was determined by one factor above others: the amount of love or hate present in them. If you were a person defined by love, Swedenborg said, you ended up in one of the innumerable spiritual zones that made up what he understood as heaven. If you were defined by hate, you ended up in hell.

Swedenborg was a believer in the ancient idea of the microcosm – that each of us is a kind of universe in miniature. If we look inside ourselves the right way, he said, we will find heaven itself.

I know that mystic-scientists like Swedenborg are right. Heaven isn't an abstraction; it isn't a dreamscape cooked up from empty, wishful thinking. It is a place as real as the room or the airplane or the beach or the library where you are right now. It has objects in it. Trees, fields, people, animals . . . even actual cities. But the rules of how things work there – the laws of heaven's physics, if you will – are different from ours. The one rule we need to remember from here, however, is that we end up where we belong, and we are led by the amount of love we have in us, for love is the essence of heaven. It is what it is made of. It is the coin of the realm.

•

It is good to know that Alexander not only learned about Swedenborg during his visit to Bryn Athyn but was inspired to do his own research, and then to share what he learned. So, much more than an interesting talk came from his visit to Bryn Athyn. Who knows how many people have since been influenced who might otherwise never have heard of Swedenborg, and what this has done for their understanding of heaven, for the way they live their lives, and for the

unseen growth of the Lord's Church in the world?

And thank you to Michael Chester for correcting the record.

(BMH)

MAPPING OUR OWN HEAVEN

What Eben Alexander learned from his near-death experience, and from the intense study and reflection it inspired – including his introduction to Swedenborg – is familiar ground to most of us. But we get reminders all the time from the Lord – in the Word and the Writings – about how we should live our lives and the consequences of our choices. It's an ongoing process.

We know that we should not live with the thought of who am I, but who am I becoming? We know it is the pattern of our daily choices – and the ruling love that guides them all – that determine our spiritual home. So, we are encouraged to live with the thought that every day, with every expression of our love and will, we are building our eventual home in heaven or hell.

We are the architects of our dreams. We are also mapping our lives with our choices and actions. We do not build our heavenly homes when we get there; we are already engaged. So, what do you suppose your home looks like so far? You are choosing the style – and the neighborhood. The blessing is that it is still a work in progress – and we get to make alterations as we go.

(BMH)

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS PREVIEW

James M. Adams - Managing Director

Erica O. Stine - Girls School Principal

Jeremy T. Irwin - Boys School Principal

Jim Adams as Managing Director of the Academy Secondary Schools and Erica Stine as Girls School Principal have been extended for the coming school year. As principals, Erica and Jeremy report to Jim as Managing Director, who in turn reports to the Board of Trustees. We are always willing to have a conversation with anyone who has questions or concerns.

Enrollment projections for the 2025-2026 school year: (as of July 2025):

Girls School		Boys School	
Seniors	25	Seniors	41
Juniors	20	Juniors	28
Sophomores	17	Sophomores	18
Freshmen	15	Freshmen	24
Dorm	7	Dorm	18
Day	70	Day	93
TOTAL	77	TOTAL	111

Changes for the coming year

We are happy to report that the Music Ensemble Club will be moving from “club” status back to a class. We are bringing back Stagecraft and will be presenting a play in the winter and a musical in the spring. This was made

possible by some extremely generous donations to our program.

We are also launching our “School within a School” program.

Flexibility Without Disruption

- A school-within-a-school model allows us to introduce innovative curriculum options without requiring wholesale changes to the existing school structure.
- It operates semi-autonomously, meaning current courses, schedules, and faculty responsibilities remain unaffected.
- Students enrolled in the SWS program are still fully integrated into the school community, participating in activities like sports and performing arts and clubs.
- This will be overseen by **Mary Heinrichs Williams** under direction of our Principals.

Expanding Educational Opportunities

This model accommodates students interested in trades, dual enrollment with colleges, internships, or alternative learning approaches.

- By offering flexibility in scheduling and curriculum, we can serve students across a wide spectrum of academic abilities and interests.

Alignment with Mission

- A Project Based Learning-focused SWS aligns beautifully with ANC’s emphasis on use, charity and a values-centered approach grounded in the Ten Commandments.
- It allows students to see education as a pathway to meaningful work and service, resonating with the teachings of the New Church.

New Teacher Recruit

Aurelle Odhner joined the ANCSS Faculty on July 1 as part of the Clara Hanlon Teacher Recruit program. Aurelle will teach part time in the World Language Department, where she will put her strong French and Spanish skills

to use. For the coming school year, she will split her time between ANCSS and Glencairn.

After graduating from the ANC Girls School in 2020, Aurelle departed for Spain, where she earned a Bachelor in Humanities from the Universidad Carlos III de Madrid. While participating in a fully Spanish speaking curriculum, Aurelle managed to become conversational in French and Italian as well. She has experience teaching adult language learners at Bryn Athyn College, and works as a Tour Guide and Educator at Glencairn Museum. She will be a real asset to our World Language Department and our school community.

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Highlights from the meetings of June 27-28, 2025

Episcopal Vision

The Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

The format of these meetings concentrated less on verbal reports and more on input on the *Vision for the General Church* presented to the Board and Clergy during the week. This re-energized vision focuses on bringing people into deeper contact with the Heavenly Doctrines and impacting their way of serving.

The Bishop asked for input on this proposed direction for the General Church as the vision is shared broadly. The Board's input will be used by the Management Team in forming an integrated plan shared in the September Board meetings.

Support for the College

The Board approved budget amendments allocating \$200,000 to Bryn Athyn College to support grants for attracting more New Church students to the College and to provide for the initial design of a New Church Teacher Certification. The General Church is confident about its ability to help alleviate financial pressures on the College.

Real Estate Finance Committee

The Board approved the sale of the Colchester Manse in the United Kingdom, following the sale of the Colchester Church.

The committee continues to explore the feasibility, costs, benefits and drawbacks to relocating General Church offices from Cairncrest to another site.

Organizational Changes

Bishop Buss shared an overview of a recent episcopal review process, which led to refocusing on communications and directional leadership, strategic travel, engaging intentionally as Chancellor of the Academy, and delegating through the regional clergy system.

Strategic Projects

Bishop Buss reported on five strategic projects and progress within the past year:

- Recruiting and Developing Priests: Baird Kistner was hired as a recruiter and leadership training was pursued through a University of California Berkeley bootcamp. A compensation study is underway.
- Developing Teachers: Efforts include tracking candidates, expanding digital outreach, developing e-learning modules and post-graduate certificates, and launching a pilot internship program.
- Forming and Growing Church Circles: Growth is being tracked through subscribers, testimonials, online groups, baptisms and results from online advertising.
- Congregational Renewal: A cross-department toolkit is being created to support congregations seeking renewal.
- Vision: An episcopal communications calendar has been implemented, the bishops continue to invest in video messaging, and a communications survey is in development.

Recognition

Bishop Buss and Executive Director **David Frazier** thanked retiring Board members for their leadership and contributions: **Beth Brock, Charlotte Gyllenhaal, Kirk Hasen and David Radcliffe.**

JACOB'S CREEK FAMILY RETREAT (2025)

Jamie Uber

The Jacob's Creek Family Retreat is held each summer at the Laurelville Retreat Center in the Laurel Highland mountains east of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, not

far from Laurel Hill State Park. The accommodations, dining hall and meeting hall are all comfortable, spacious and air-conditioned. The pool is large and new, with water slides and areas for young children. The center is surrounded by woods and hills. There is a field at the top of the hill called Sunset Hill, where the opening worship is held, weather permitting. It has a gorgeous view of the valley and the Laurel Highlands.

The three-day program includes adult lectures and discussions as well as a fully planned children's program. The emphasis is on doctrinal instruction and reflection. Children are grouped by ages, from infancy through high school. Their program runs at the same time as the adult program. The children have a religious lesson first followed by a recreational activity. There is family worship twice a day – morning and evening. There is also an opportunity for adults to take Holy Supper. There is ample unscheduled time in the afternoons to allow for family time including swimming, sports, games, hiking, spontaneous group discussions, etc.

There are evening programs for everyone, such as a campfire, talent show, field day and more. Parents of young children can put them to bed, then come out into the common area and enjoy socializing with other adults. One of the retreat's best features is the teen program, with the teens actively engaged from start to finish.

There were 128 people this year, evenly split between adults and children. The enthusiasm for the church and for the Heavenly Doctrines was shown by all ages. And the friendships formed among the kids is amazing.

The three-day program this year focused on "*Faith: An Internal Acknowledgement of Truth.*"

- **The Rev. Matthew Genzlinger** spoke about "*Our Journey Toward the Faith of Charity.*"
- **The Rev. Calvin Heinrichs'** lecture was about "*Faith Alone: A Great Red Dragon.*"
- **The Rev. Jared Buss** spoke about "*Enlightenment: Precious Stones.*"

Bishop Brad Heinrichs led an afternoon elective on "*The Life of Religion is to DO*" one day, and a panel of the ministers on staff the next day talking about "*Let the Little Children Come to Me.*" The discussions were lively and harmonious.

Under the lay leadership of **Jamie and Julie Uber**, with Matthew Genzlinger as the resident pastor, the retreat is thriving. It has rebounded nicely from the pandemic and the General Church Assembly last year. Next year's retreat is July 23-26, 2026. Attendance will be capped at 150 so that everyone can get to talk to each other.

Announcements

BAPTISMS

Baptism was instituted for a sign that a person is of the Church, and for a memorial that he (or she) is to be regenerated; for the washing of baptism is a spiritual washing, which is regeneration. (New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 202)

Aduah, Kwame

At Tema, Ghana, February 16, 2025,
Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating.

Clauser, Kacey Brooks

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June
22, 2025, son of Jack and Emma
Pitcairn Clauser, Rev. Derek P.
Elphick officiating.

Cratsenberg, Gabriel Winfred

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,
August 31, 2025, son of Brian and
Dawn Kintner Cratsenberg, Rev.
Grant R. Schnarr officiating.

King, Rilian Gardner

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, July
13, 2025, son of Kendal and Linnea
Heinrichs King, Rt. Rev. Bradley D.
Heinrichs officiating.

O'Neil, Brandon James

At Sudury, Massachusetts, June
22, 2025, Rev. Nathan D. Gladish
officiating.

Vormawor, Samuel

At Tema, Ghana, February 16, 2025,
Rev. Ekow E. Eshun officiating.

Weaver, Hannah Marie

At Yardley, Pennsylvania, June
29, 2025, daughter of Noah and
Suzanne Bolger Weaver, Rev.
Charles E. Blair officiating.

BETROTHAL

It is proper on earth for a priest to perform betrothals and to hear, receive, confirm and consecrate the consent. The consent is the essential element in marriage, and the rest of the things that follow are its formalities.
(Conjugal Love 21.4)

McCurdy-Fleming, Bryson Tate
McCurdy and Karla Meg Fleming
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June
6, 2025, Rev. George D. McCurdy
officiating.

MARRIAGES

The delights of conjugal love surpass the delights of all other loves, and conjugal love also gives delight to these other loves according as it is present and at the same time united with them. (Conjugal Love 68)

**Cole-Sweeney, Austin Cole and
Brenna Sweeney**
At Edgewater, Maryland, June
22, 2025, Rev. Charles E. Blair
officiating.

**Rohtla-Homont, Stephen Anders
Rohtla and Kelsey Ann Homont**
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June
29, 2025, Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith
officiating.

**Hayes-Gunther, Erik Joseph Hayes
and Brittany Gail Gunther**
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June
28, 2025, Rev. Steven P. Gunther
officiating.

**Roth-Li, Gregory Adam Roth and
Jacqueline Li**
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,
July 27, 2025, Rev. David C. Roth
officiating.

McCurdy-Fleming, Bryson Tate
McCurdy and Karla Meg Fleming
At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, June
7, 2025, Rev. George D. McCurdy
officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

And behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me, to give to everyone according to his work. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last. Blessed are those who do His commandments that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. (Revelation 22:12-14)

Goodenough, Ruth Parker

July 29, 2025, of Two Harbors,
Minnesota. 87

Smith, Judith (Jid) Pendleton

August 15, 2025, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 91

Hill, Stanley Douglas

June 14, 2025, of Kitchener, Ontario,
Canada. 97

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