

NEW CHURCH *Life*

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

JULY/AUGUST 2026



The Ten Commandments: Forever Set in Stone

*They are the foundation of our faith and our laws.
A pair of sermons focus on two of the commandments
as guides for our spiritual lives. (Pages 249 and 255)*



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New Church Life

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

233	In This Issue
235	Editorials: <i>Is the United States a Christian Country?</i> • <i>Gifts and Gratitude</i> • <i>Guest Editorial: Fair Criticism and Defamation</i>
242	Letters to the Editor
249	Fourth Commandment: Honoring Father and Mother <i>The Rev. Coleman S. Glenn</i>
255	Sixth Commandment: Sin of Adultery, Sanctity of Mariage <i>The Rev. Derek P. Elphick</i>
260	From the Bishop's Office: Making the Second Coming Known <i>The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs</i>
263	Bryn Athyn College Commencement Address: You Are the Only One Looking Out Through Your Eyes <i>Edmond de Chazal</i>
270	Academy Secondary Schools Commencement Address: The Example of the Good Samaritan: It's the Little Things that Count <i>Daric and Tara Smith</i>
273	Not of This World – <i>The Rev. Jared J. Buss</i>
276	Our Idea of the Lord – <i>The Rev. Geoffrey H. Howard</i>
280	Is AI Going to Bring About Hell on Earth? <i>The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger</i>
283	A New Hub for New Church Creators and Collaborators <i>The Rev. David Moffat</i>
285	Church News
302	Life Lines
314	Announcements

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

In This Issue

Editorials (page 235) include:

- *Is the United States a Christian Country?* People have different opinions but the answer really is known only to the Lord.
- *Gifts and Gratitude:* We are given by the Lord the gifts of life, freedom, responsibility and His loving providence, and must be eternally grateful.
- A Guest Editorial by the late Rev. W. Cairns Henderson – *Fair Criticism and Defamation* – is as relevant to today’s political climate as when it was written 75 years ago.

As part of a series of sermons in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral on the Ten Commandments, the Rev. Coleman S. Glenn says that honoring father and mother also means honoring the Lord and the neighbor. (Page 249) The Rev. Derek P. Elphick offers the antidote to the unpleasant command against committing adultery: looking up to the sanctity of marriage. (Page 255)

Writing From the Bishop’s Office the Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs suggests that as part of the goal of the General Church to having thousands of people “come to love and treasure the Lord’s Second Coming” within seven years, we should be doing all we can to make that Second Coming better known and celebrated. (Page 260)

At the 149th commencement for Bryn Athyn College of the New Church Edmond de Chazal told the graduates: “You are the only ones looking out through your eyes” – which leads “to thoughts about what use you should make of the miracle of life that the Lord has granted you.” In response, President Sean Connelly thanked Edmond for “reminding us that the most meaningful things in life are rarely done alone.” (Page 263)

We know nothing about the Good Samaritan except that he was kind to a stranger in need – and that simple story stays with us. In their Commencement Address for the Academy Secondary Schools, Daric and Tara Smith artfully used this familiar tale to illustrate and inspire the graduates. It was “his acts

of kindness and love to the neighbor that still resonate to this day.” And while their names may make them famous someday, “it is what you do that will make you legendary.” (Page 270)

We are rich in treasures “*Not of This World*” says the Rev. Jared J. Buss. “If we lay up our treasures in heaven, we can watch what goes on in this world and still go to bed at night knowing that our treasure has not been taken from us.” (Page 273)

The Rev. Geoffrey H. Howard writes about “*Our Idea of the Lord*,” noting that “Our idea of the Lord will forever be perfected as we draw closer to Him. It will be refined not only in this world, but also in heaven to eternity.” (Page 273)

There is much that is exciting and promising about Artificial Intelligence but the Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger looks at the way it is being used to create artificial relationships and wonders if this is all delusional – and dangerous. “Some of us just don’t prioritize real love like (the Lord) does and will take fake love, fantasy and delusion instead. They may think that they’re in their own heaven, but I think the reality is they’ve just entered their own hell on earth.” (Page 280)

The Rev. David A. Moffat, President of New Church Australia, offers a new hub for New Church creators and collaborators. (Page 283)

Church News (page 283) includes:

- Bryn Athyn College Commencement and Awards
- Academy Secondary Schools Commencement and Awards
- Highlights from the May meeting of the General Church Board of Directors
- Regional Clergy meetings at the Washington New Church
- Glowing tributes to retiring professors at Bryn Athyn College of the New Church: Dr. D. Gregory Rose and Dr. Dan A. Synnestvedt

(Editors’ note: The Rev. Dr. Erik E. Sandstrom passed into the spiritual world on June 13. His broad service to the church included pastorates in England and Australia, teaching in the Theological School, heading the Swedenborgiana Collection in the Swedenborg Library, and editor of *New Church Life*. We plan to include the Memorial Address from his resurrection service in the September/October issue.)

Editorials

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

IS THE UNITED STATES A CHRISTIAN COUNTRY?

Was the United States founded as a Christian nation? This is one of many subjects of debate as the country celebrates its 250th anniversary. The answer varies according to the definition of “*Christian nation*” and according to our beliefs about what the term implies for current American politics. We can muster evidence that supports either side.

The Heavenly Doctrine adds some interesting perspective to this question. First of all, *Last Judgment* 45 tells us that the Last Judgment on the Christian Church took place in 1757, bringing that church to an end in this world. From a New Church perspective a nation founded in 1776 cannot be said to have been founded as a Christian nation. Still, the work points out that outwardly Christianity will continue as before, as will other religions:

Outwardly, the churches will continue to be divided as they have been, each will continue to put forward its own body of teaching as it has in the past, and the religions among non-Christians will continue to be much the same as they have been. (Last Judgment 73)

Because of this the Heavenly Doctrine refers to the European people as Christians, and the nations of Europe as Christian nations and as the Christian world, evidently including all the places where they have spread. They are invited to become part of the New Church, just as the Lord invited the people of the Jewish Church to follow Him:

(This is) an invitation to the whole Christian world to enter this church; and an exhortation to worthily receive the Lord, who has Himself foretold that He would come into the world for the sake of this church and to it. (Coronis 0)

From this perspective all countries inhabited by people from the Christian world could be called Christian. That this is not spiritually the case is suggested by passages that say things like: “*The worst of all (in the next life) come from the so-called Christian world.*” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1032) That is, the people of the “*so-called Christian world*” have not behaved like Christians, and so this and other passages make it clear that we are not truly Christian, and that the future of the church lies in some other part of the world.

However, the Heavenly Doctrine refers to another quality that is relevant to this question. In explaining the relative clarity of sight of the English we read:

As for the British, the better people among them are at the center of all Christians, because they have a profound intellectual light. This does not appear to anyone in the physical world, but it is blatantly obvious in the spiritual world. They owe this light to their freedom of speech and freedom of the press, and their consequent freedom of thought. (True Christianity 806)

They have this light due to their freedom. The value of this freedom cannot be overstated. Within a Christian world that is far from pure it is a quality that places “the better people among them” at the center of all Christians in the next life.

Interestingly, it is the high value given to freedom that leads many among us to argue that America is not a Christian nation. The founders went to great lengths to avoid language that would appear to establish any particular faith so that people would be free to practice their own religion. The First Amendment to the Constitution reads:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.

The point is not to minimize the importance of religion, or even to distance it from government, but to ensure that people are able to practice it freely, with no interference from the government. The purpose is freedom – freedom of religion, freedom of speech, freedom of the press – just the kind of freedom that is so highly praised in the Heavenly Doctrine.

Does this mean that America was or was not founded as a Christian country? Does it mean that it is or is not Christian? The truth is that these are not questions with definite answers. Leaving aside the point that the Last Judgment means that we live in a post-Christian world, the spiritual quality of a nation or culture is something known only to the Lord.

Still, there are many aspects of this that are not difficult questions. Everyone wants to live in a country that is good and not evil, and to be surrounded by people who are kind, peaceful and law-abiding. Moreover, the Heavenly Doctrine tells us:

In countries where justice and judgment are preserved, moreover, everyone is compelled not to speak in opposition to religion or to behave in opposition to it, but still no one can be compelled to think and will in favor of it. (Divine Providence 129)

This would seem to go beyond the limitations of the Constitution’s first

amendment, since people in the United States are perfectly free to speak and behave in opposition to religion. But in its broad meaning it is merely saying that in “good” countries people are obliged to behave and speak in accordance with what is good, even though everyone is free to think and will as they please.

Concerns about the political consequences of a belief that America was or was not founded as a Christian country range from fears about the creation of laws that would violate the First Amendment’s *establishment clause*, to fears about laws that would violate the *free exercise clause*. Both would result in a loss of freedom.

From a New Church point of view freedom is key to having a nation that lives up to the aspirations of the United States Constitution. The goal, of course, is to have a nation “where justice and judgment are preserved,” where love to the Lord and charity to the neighbor are the reigning principles, and where conjugal love is recognized as the “*fundamental love of all celestial, spiritual, and consequently natural loves.*” (*Conjugal Love* 65) Whether or not this is the case in the United States, or in any other nation, is something the Lord knows. But hopefully these are qualities that we see in many people around us, and it is something that everyone can work toward in their own lives.

(JFS)

GIFTS AND GRATITUDE

First is the gift of life. It flows from the Lord’s love and wisdom and never ceases.

With life comes the gift of freedom. It is absolute, never taken from us. It assures us that much as God loves us and is always raising us to heaven, He will not interfere – even in the face of tragedy or sadness – to protect our freedom. We are predestined to heaven and the Lord is ever with us, showing us the way. But we live with the influences of both heaven and hell and are free to choose hell – to choose against Him. And He still loves us.

With freedom comes responsibility. That sounds like the opposite of freedom – duty and obligation. But think of it as response-ability – the ability to respond freely. As free citizens “we the people” are challenged to build the best society, the best government, and the best selves that we can. It is all up to us and within our power and free choice. Think of the simple rules of the road. Obeying those laws leaves us free to drive anywhere. Ignoring them leads to chaos – the opposite of freedom. Obedience to law – natural and spiritual – is the beginning of freedom.

With the gift of our freedom we are responsible for our own lives and are called upon to love the Lord by loving and serving Him and our neighbor.

Faith is first and foremost obedience to everything that doctrine teaches. The primary point that it teaches is love to the Lord and love to the neighbor. (Arcana Coelestia 36)

Overarching all of these gifts is the Lord's Divine Providence. One of the hard lessons of life is that bad things do happen to good people. That is an ultimate test of faith for all believers – how to reconcile an all-loving God with what He allows to happen to the innocent. We in the church are blessed with the teachings that the Lord only permits what He does not will for the sake of our freedom. And His providence is never in the misfortune but in the aftermath, always bending outcomes toward good, even if we are not aware.

The Lord also gives us all that we need to get to heaven. The Word and the Writings are filled with complex doctrine and teaching, much of which can seem overwhelming. But they also assure that it all comes down to essentials:

- Loving the Lord and our neighbor – by “feeding His sheep”
- Obeying the Ten Commandments, the foundation of almost everyone's faith and the laws of many lands
- Living the Two Great Commandments: *“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.” This is not just casual advice. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” (Matthew 22:37-40)*

It is good for all of us to go to the Word and the Writings – to learn what we can on our own, in communion with the Lord and heaven, supplemented by instruction in church services and doctrinal classes. But we also have the assurance that all our complex doctrine comes down to basics:

The Ten Commandments contain in brief summary all things of religion. Through them the conjunction of God with man and man with God takes place. There is nothing more holy. (True Christian Religion 283)

Love toward God and love toward the neighbor are the whole of the Word. (287)

The Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman and his wife, Star, have blessed the church and the world with their book, *Rise Above It* – how to really understand and live the Ten Commandments. This book has been adapted for college and high school use and been the focus of many small and large study groups, including

a society-wide program in Bryn Athyn over the past year. This included sermons once a month on the Commandments, including two in this issue: loving father and mother – ultimately the Lord and the Church – by the Rev. Coleman Glenn; and shunning adultery – while holding marriage as sacred – by the Rev. Derek Elphick.

We know the challenge of being tempted throughout our lives to disobey the Commandments – from worshipping the “false gods” of whatever we love most in our lives in place of the Lord, to resisting the urge to murder – not just actual killing but attacking someone’s character or usefulness. But we have the absolute assurance that as we are tested and strive to overcome the Lord is always with us.

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear . . . for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you. (Deuteronomy 31:6)

He is ever the Comforter, leading us to heaven if we will but follow. He sent John the Baptist before His own birth on earth to warn that we must repent and shun evils as sins before we can become angels. “Cease to do evil, learn to do well.” (Isaiah 1:16) But along with the work and constant challenge the Lord gives us all that we need: the Ten Commandments to apply to our lives, and His love and providence to lead and assure us.

In a recent Community Service in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, the Rev. Malcolm Smith talked to families and children about “*Divine Providence and Our Choices*” – the whole process of coping with challenge by trusting in the Lord and following Him. The program included this quote from *Divine Providence* 210:

If you want to be led by Divine Providence, use your prudence as a servant and employee who faithfully manages the employer’s assets. . . Love of self lives in the depths of each one of us from birth. If we do not recognize it – and it does not want to be recognized – then it lives in perfect safety and guards the door to prevent us from opening it so the Lord can evict it. We open the door by abstaining from evils as sins, apparently on our own, but admitting that it is being done by the Lord. This is prudence with which the Divine Providence can cooperate.

Rev. Smith also quoted the familiar “Serenity Prayer,” attributed to theologian Reinhold Niebuhr, which helps many of us cope with our challenges, and has also become central to the mission of Alcoholics Anonymous, with acceptance and courage as part of its recovery process. (The famous Twelve Step program of AA, which has been adapted for many repentance and recovery programs, has its roots in the New Church. AA founder Bill Wilson married Lois Burnham in a Swedenborgian church and was influenced by its teachings.)

We all know the opening of the Serenity Prayer: “*God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; the courage to change the things I can; and the wisdom to know the difference.*” Rev. Smith quoted the rest of the prayer, which is not as familiar but every bit foundational to trusting the Lord:

Living one day at a time; enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it. Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His will; that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him forever in the next. Amen.

And so we are blessed – and forever grateful – with the Lord’s constant love and leading, with the freedom to choose our own life and destiny, with the charge of responsibility and the guidance of the Ten Commandments, and the transcendent protection of the Lord’s everlasting Providence. And we are blessed as well with our own “Serenity Prayer”:

Peace holds within itself trust in the Lord, that He governs all things and provides all things, and that He leads toward an end that is good. When a person believes these things about Him he is at peace, since he fears nothing and no anxiety about things to come disturbs him. How far a person attains this state depends on how far he attains love to the Lord. (Arcana Coelestia 8455)

(BMH)

Guest Editorial

FAIR CRITICISM AND DEFAMATION

(Editor’s note: When the late Bishop Willard D. Pendleton put together a collection of editorials by the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, editor of *New Church Life* from 1951 to 1974, he said the objective in selecting these editorials was that they “will be as significant in the future as the day they were written.” Indeed, the editorial below was written in 1951 – 75 years ago – and is every bit as relevant to the political culture of today – and our response to it – as it was then.)

It is written in the Word, “*Thou shalt not revile the gods nor curse the ruler of thy people.*” (*Exodus 27:28*) And in the Writings it is said: “*There ought to be obedience to the king according to the laws of the realm, nor should he be injured by any means, either by deeds or words.*” (*Heavenly Doctrine 325*) These divine teachings are of practical import daily to New Church men and women, and they may usefully be considered at a time when so many governments are

under fire, both at home and abroad, in the countries wherein the Church has been established.

Most of us live in democracies in which the supporters of a political party elect the government to office. Many of us also belong to a party and may therefore find ourselves in political opposition to the government of the day. Thus we are susceptible to the criticism of men in public office, ranging from the legitimate to the scurrilous, permitted in the free press of the world which is not always clear as to the distinction between liberty and license. And these facts raise several important questions. What kind of criticism may we properly make as New Church people? What criticism should we, or should we not, take pleasure in hearing and repeating? When may we acquiesce, and when should we be aroused to blazing moral indignation?

The Writings nowhere inculcate an uncritical acceptance of human authority. With all other guardians of civil liberties, New Church men would as the first threat of totalitarianism the doctrine that all, or any, criticism of the government in power or one of its officers is subversive or treasonable. There is much teaching in the Writings to the effect that the civil and moral life of men may, and should, be judged for the maintenance of freedom and the preservation of uses. But not all judgments are spiritually defensible, even judgments on those planes.

Right thinking men everywhere deplore the whispering and the smear campaign; and by none should it be more execrated than the New Church, which knows from doctrine that to destroy a man's usefulness by taking away his good name is a breach of the commandment: "*Thou shalt not kill.*" (*True Christian Religion* 309)

Unfounded or vicious criticism, words which would be actionable under the laws of libel or slander, relentless baiting of public figures, and opinions which do not reflect fair judgment of individual actions but the automatic response of a contemptuous prejudice, are worlds apart from constructive criticism and from the spirit of true charity. And in a world in which the sphere of such things is so strong, we will probably do well to take heed that we do not, unthinkingly, "follow a multitude to do evil."

Offices cannot be entirely separated from men. We may say that, of course, we have high regard for the office. But that assertion is surely open to some doubt if we welcome, and pass on with pleasure, whatever reflects to the discredit of the holder of office. It would seem clear from the Writings that we may criticize constructively a man's performance in office, question policy, and withhold honor when it is undeserved; but that we are not entitled to impugn the motives and character of the man, or to heap dishonor upon him. If he is unworthy he will do that himself; and where there is unfitness, it will surely cause sorrow rather than pleasure, when there is true respect for the office itself.

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

Let's All Promote Bryn Athyn College

To The Editors:

Recently a small group of friends was discussing an article in *New Church Life* (March/April 2026): *Why Bryn Athyn College? "Choices Matter."* We came up with some positive ideas that might promote and support the College going forward.

First, we agreed that we need to contradict the rumor that the College might close when we hear it because that can undermine efforts at the College to refocus on its core mission.

We all agreed that we should not focus on the small numbers, but rather on the fact that those who are there are core students who believe in the importance of religion in life and are excited about what they are learning and doing, and that they love the College.

We think it is important to keep the Mission Statement front and center since there is no other college like Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, and that no other college can educate New Church teachers and ministers in the light of the Three-fold Word.

The Mission Statement of the College reads:

Bryn Athyn College of the New Church serves as an intellectual center for all who desire to engage in higher education enriched, guided, and structured by the study of the Old Testament, New Testament and theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. This education challenges students to develop spiritual purpose, to think broadly and critically from a variety of perspectives, and to build intellectual and practical skills. The ultimate purpose is to enhance students' civil, moral and spiritual lives, and to contribute to human spiritual welfare.

We noted that the doctrines teach that the rational mind begins to open

at about the age of a first-year college student. In the field of New Church education, what could be more important than to try to meet those early rational states with educational concepts based on the doctrines and taught by committed New Church teachers and instructors?

All sharing and presentations should make it clear how the College's Mission is implemented. They should point out that the College provides instruction in the Heavenly Doctrines as a foundation for life, both on earth and to eternity. The academic and social community of the College promotes individual growth in the light of the teachings of the Three-fold Word. And then College offers an excellent liberal arts education that fosters critical thinking that is so important in a world where Artificial Intelligence is becoming prevalent.

We think the College needs to educate parents and future parents about the great things happening at the College because that is really the truth.

We also think the College representatives need to meet with the parents of students as early as the sophomore year and going into the junior year at the Secondary Schools before college decisions are being made. They could share with them the Mission of the College, show videos of the good things happening, and videos of classroom interaction that supports the Mission.

As often as possible, it would be great to have current College students act as ambassadors to early high school students in the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools, other students near Bryn Athyn who attend different high schools, and students in other New Church societies. Previously reluctant students have had a change of heart after such personal contacts.

We need to educate the community near the College and others further away with open days at the College at least once a term, or more frequently, where they can observe classes, ask questions and listen to a presentation on the Mission. Let's get our church communities knowledgeable so that they can be supportive and spread the good news.

We know people worry that it would be too expensive to do all this outreach, in addition to the cost of going to college. But what price to get to heaven? Actually cheap at the price! The College will teach them that every subject has application to life in the light of the Three-fold Word.

We can all talk with our children, grandchildren, and other young friends and relatives directly to share the idea of going to the Bryn Athyn College of the New Church and why it is so special. Don't wait until they graduate as that is too late. Talk with them throughout their high school years.

Let's all get on board and help the College as it moves into the future.

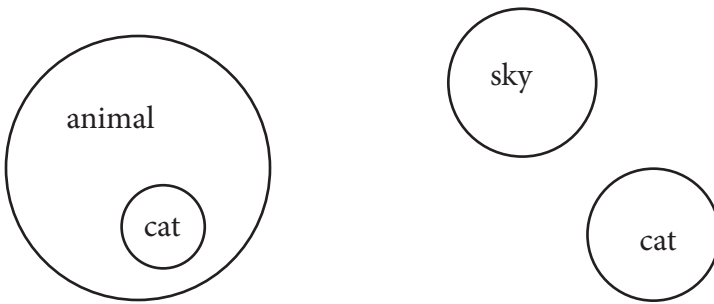
Margaret Baker, Margaret Gladish, Carol Buss, Lynn-Del Sandstrom
Gael Coffin, Kathy Simons, Barbara Doering, and others

*The Relationship Between
Revelation and Doctrine*

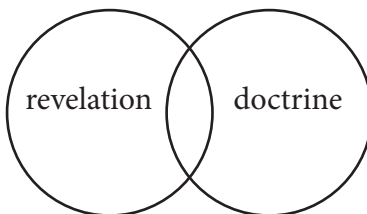
To The Editors:

I have enjoyed the discussion in this journal about revelation and doctrine. I am inspired to write this letter in response to the Rev. Mark Allais's fine contribution to the discussion in the March/April 2026 *New Church Life*. Following the teaching technique of Socrates and/or Plato, I offer definitions as an introduction to my thoughts on the matter.

In general, revelation means the act of making a secret or hidden fact known. In reference to God, it means a disclosure of truth. Doctrine means teaching. Their relationship is best illustrated by a Venn diagram that shows the semantic field of a term (*i.e.*, the breadth of a term's meaning) in relation to the semantic field of another term. For example, imagine a very large circle standing for the term "animal."



Inside that circle might be a circle standing for a specific animal, such as a cat. The semantic field for animal is much larger than that for cat. Sometimes the two circles do not connect, such as a circle for a cat and a circle for the sky.



Sometimes the two circles overlap, indicating that in some cases the two terms are very closely related, while in other cases they are not. The terms revelation and doctrine are a classic example of this overlap.

When two terms are similar, the characteristics that they share should be presented and explained. One of the books of the Writings is called *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine*. Is it revelation, or is it doctrine? The answer is (and one of my favorite answers) is Yes. The spiritual meaning of the holy city New Jerusalem is the doctrines for the New Church. As such, the book is both revelation and doctrine. Many of us prefer to call the revelation given to Swedenborg the Heavenly Doctrines.

The relationship between revelation and doctrine is important. Revelation was the process of the Lord revealing truths to Swedenborg who then shared it with the world. This is the purpose. The means by which revelation is accomplished is doctrine, for the Lord taught Swedenborg what He was revealing according to his perception as he spoke to angels and spirits. Without doctrine there is no revelation.

Since there are four types of revelation from the Lord, there are four levels of authority (because the Lord is the author in all four cases), and so four levels of doctrine.

1. The Word with a continuous internal sense (Old Testament, New Testament and Heavenly Doctrines).
2. Good books for the church. For example, the Lord inspired Paul to write the Epistles.
3. The sacred books for religions other than the church specific. *Word 117* tells us that it was in Divine Providence that Mohamed wrote the Koran. Presumably the Lord did this for all of the world's religions, making them parts of the church universal.
4. Spiritual enlightenment in individuals.

In all four cases, the Lord offers a revelation to humans by means of instruction (*i.e.*, doctrine), and by means of personal enlightenment.

Within the church there is a difference between what the Word plainly teaches (doctrine) and how the church as a whole understands it and develops it. This latter is called derived doctrine, never to be considered equal in authority to the Word, for it is the result of adding human thought to what the Lord teaches. Even if the thought is from spiritual enlightenment, it is still less

authoritative than the teachings of the Word

Less authoritative is individual enlightenment. What a person believes as a result of reflection and discovery is authoritative only for that person. If a person's understanding is accepted by the church, it then becomes the doctrine of the church. As such it is elevated **in authority, second only to the plain teachings of the Word.**

The Rev. Prescott A. Rogers
Waxhaw, North Carolina

Friendships of Love: Look Within

To The Editors:

Response to the letter from Barrie Ridgway, *Friendships of Love, New Church Life*, May/June 2026, page 167:

Thank you, Mr. Ridgway, for such careful and honest wrestling with passages on *Friendship of Love*. The discomfort and struggle you have identified are real, and your letter raises questions that deserve a considered response. I think the distress these numbers produce comes from a reading that places the warning in the wrong place, outward, toward other people, when Swedenborg is pointing entirely inward, toward the state of the person reading.

The warning is not about other people at all.

The tension you have identified, “*guard against friendship of love, yet you cannot know another's spirit,*” is real only if we read these numbers as a prescription about how to choose companions. But that is not what Swedenborg is describing. He is describing something happening entirely within you: specifically, *which states in you your love for another person is coming from.*

Consider what it means to perceive kindness, integrity, or genuine warmth in another person. That perception is only possible because you have receptive states that are open to the Lord, states through which His goodness is flowing. You recognize His image in them because something in you is already alive to it. What you see in them is, in a real sense, a reflection of what the Lord has opened in you. And your love, passing through them, rests ultimately in the Lord. You are saying, in effect: “*I love what the Lord has placed in you.*”

But attachment to a person, the *Friendship of Love* Swedenborg warns against, operates from an entirely different place: the proprium, the closed self that experiences itself as standing apart from the Lord. From those states, you

are not perceiving goodness in the other person at all. You are perceiving your own reflection, someone who confirms you, completes you, or anchors your sense of self and security. The love can feel profound and even selfless, but its actual root is love of self, extended outward onto another person. You are saying, simply: “*I love myself in you.*”

That is the distinction between the two. And it is not found by examining the other person. It is found by honestly attending to where the love is coming from.

Why does this resolve the apparent impossibility?

You ask, rightly, how one can guard against something one cannot see? The answer is that you are not being asked to see anything in another person. You are being asked to attend to your own interior state, and that is always accessible to honest self-examination. Am I loving what is genuinely good as I perceive it in this person, or am I attached to this person as the anchor of my own sense of self? That question does not require you to know their spiritual condition. It only requires you to know your own.

This is also why the friendship of love is not something you consciously form or choose. It creeps in precisely when you stop attending to your own spiritual state, when the proprium quietly makes another person's spirit the resting place of loves that belong only to the Lord. Their interiority becomes, in effect, a spiritual idol. And because love is conjunctive, we move toward and become united with what we love most deeply, a love rooted in the proprium and fixed on another person's spirit will follow wherever that spirit goes. Not from weakness, but from its own inner logic.

On the question of marriage.

Nothing in this teaching threatens genuine marriage; it actually illuminates what conjugal love truly is. Conjugal love, as Swedenborg describes it, is perception from the most open states possible: loving the Lord's image of goodness and truth united as it is embodied in one's partner. That love passes through the beloved to the Lord. It survives death and deepens into eternity precisely because its ultimate object is the Lord Himself.

The danger arises not from falling deeply in love or committing to a partner for life, but from the proprium masquerading as love, seeking completion, confirmation, or security through another person rather than through the Lord. A couple who love each other from genuinely open states are not forming a dangerous friendship of love, regardless of whether they can articulate each other's precise spiritual values. And the asymmetry Swedenborg acknowledges in *Conjugal Love* – that one partner may have conjugal love while the other does not – is simply a pastoral reality about the interior state of the individuals, not a warning against marriage itself.

The practical exhortation.

“Let him guard against a friendship of love with anyone” is therefore not a counsel of social anxiety or emotional withdrawal. It is an interior instruction: attend to the state from which you love. Keep the Lord as the ultimate object and resting place of your deepest loves. Love people warmly, loyally, and deeply, and through Him. When your love is rooted in open, receptive states, what you are loving in others is ultimately His goodness and truth, and no conjunction formed from that love can lead you away from Him.

The warning, read this way, is not direful at all. It is an invitation to the kind of self-awareness that is at the heart of regeneration itself.

Rev. Mark B. Allais
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THE FOURTH COMMANDMENT:

Honoring Your Father and Mother Also Honors the Lord and the Neighbor

A Sermon by the Rev. Coleman S. Glenn

Lessons: Genesis 9:20-27; Luke 2:41-52; True Christian Religion 305-307

(Editors' note: This and the following sermon were part of a series on the Ten Commandments preached recently in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral.)

Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged upon the land which Jehovah your God is giving you. (Exodus 20:12)

When He was in the world, the Lord taught the two Great Commandments: that we ought to love the Lord our God with all our heart, with all our soul, and with all our mind; and that we ought to love our neighbor as ourselves. *"On these two commandments," Jesus said, "hang all the Law and the Prophets."* (Matthew 22:40)

The first three of the Ten Commandments align with the first Great Commandment, to love God, and the final six commandments align with the second Great Commandment, to love the neighbor. The fourth commandment bridges these two: it commands us to honor both our heavenly father and our parents on earth. As such, it is the beginning point for love to the neighbor, and it stands above all the commandments that follow.

We read in *Arcana Coelestia* 8899:

As by "father and mother" are meant the Lord and His kingdom, therefore this commandment is the fourth in order, and surpasses in holiness those which follow. The commandment concerning the worship of Jehovah, that is, the Lord, is first and second, because the most holy one. Next comes the commandment concerning the Sabbath, because by this in the supreme sense is signified the union of the Divine Itself and the Divine Human in the Lord. After this follows the commandment concerning honoring parents, because by this is signified the love of the Lord and the consequent love of good and truth which are from the Lord.

Beside explaining the commandment's place among those that come

before and after, this passage highlights two aspects of the internal sense. In an internal sense, “father” means the Lord, and “mother” means His kingdom. Or, to put it another way, “father” means the Lord as to His goodness and “mother” means the Lord as to His truth.

It may not be obvious at first that the Lord’s kingdom and the Lord as to His truth are synonymous; but the Lord’s kingdom exists where people live by the truth, and it is the Lord’s living truth that makes the kingdom to be His kingdom, rather than anything that belongs to us. Even though that truth, the Mother, and the goodness, the Father, belong to the Lord, from our perspective we *choose* to live by the truth and then the Lord flows in to infill us with love.

If we stay on this high level, this commandment might seem a little abstract, but not necessarily very challenging. It’s easy to think positive thoughts and feel positive feelings toward the Lord and His kingdom without getting into the practical question of what that actually calls us to *do*. But this commandment becomes more challenging as we come down from the celestial level to the spiritual level and then the natural level.

As we descend, we stop talking just about the Lord and acknowledge more and more the people through whom we come to know the Lord. And while the Lord is perfect – both in Himself and as He flows through angels – even angels aren’t perfect, and humans on earth certainly aren’t. Which can lead us to the question: how am I supposed to follow this commandment in the spiritual sense, loving the church, when I clearly see how flawed the church is? In the wide natural sense, how can I love an imperfect country? In a narrower sense, how can I love my country’s imperfect leaders or my state’s imperfect leaders? And in the most literal sense, how can I honor my imperfect parents?

We read the story of Noah and his drunkenness. In it, Noah represents the Ancient Church, which arose after the downfall of the Most Ancient Church. In the uncorrupted Most Ancient Church, people had a perception of truth and falsity. The Ancient Church approached religion intellectually: their will had fallen, which meant they had to reason about the things they learned. When a church like this begins, it is inevitable that it will fall into some errors through faulty reasoning. This is represented by Noah becoming drunk and uncovered in his tent.

When Noah’s middle son, Ham, discovered his father’s shame, he told his brothers Shem and Japheth. Rather than joining in Ham’s disdain for their father, Shem and Japheth took a garment, walked backward so they wouldn’t see their father’s nakedness, and covered him. *Arcana Coelestia* 1088 explains the internal sense of their faces being turned away from their father’s nakedness:

This signifies that . . . such things as errors and mistakes from reasonings should not be attended to. . . . For such was the character

of this parent church, or of the man of this church, that he did not act in this way from malice, but from simplicity, as is evident from what presently follows, where it is said that “Noah awoke from his wine” that is, was better instructed.

The attitude of Shem and Japheth points the way to honoring the church – and honoring parent figures in other contexts. We do not have to pretend that their faults do not exist – there is still the need to walk backward and cover Noah – but we can choose not to focus on those faults as the defining feature. *Arcana Coelestia* 1088 continues:

As regards the matter here treated of, we may say that those who are in no charity think nothing but evil of the neighbor, and say nothing but evil; if they say anything good, it is for their own sake, or for the sake of him whom they flatter under the appearance of friendship; whereas those who are in charity think nothing but good of their neighbor and speak only well of him, and this not for their own sake or the favor of another whom they flatter, but from the Lord thus working in charity.

We honor flawed parents and an imperfect church in the same way that we are called to love anyone – by focusing on the good in them.

It is vital that we do this, because we have no choice but to start with what we receive from our parents or those who stand in the place of parents. *Divine Providence* 172 says:

The Word can only be taught mediately through parents, teachers, preachers, books, and especially through the reading of it. Nevertheless, it is not taught by these, but by the Lord through them.

The first step toward a deeper sight of the truth is living by the truth as we have received it from others. We do not stay there, though. As we grow older, and especially as we continue to live by truth as we have been taught it, we gain the ability to go to the Word itself to see the extent to which our church’s doctrine lines up with what the Word teaches. *Arcana Coelestia* 6047 explains:

First there must be learned the doctrinal things of the church, and then the Word must be examined to see whether these are true. . . . When this is done from the affection of truth, then the person is enlightened by the Lord so as to perceive, without knowing whence, what is true; and he is confirmed in this in

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| *accordance with the good in which he is.*

We do not stay in a historical faith – but we also need an historical faith of some kind to give us traction toward living the kind of life that will allow us to see deeper truth in the Word. Perhaps because of this vital function, *Arcana Coelestia* 6047 says:

| *If the truths [a person finds in the Word] disagree with the doctrinal things [of his church], let him be careful not to disturb the church.*

To honor the Church as our Mother, then, we love it for the genuine truth that makes it the Church, but we do so with the acknowledgment that it will get things wrong – and that this does not negate its good.

The Lord Himself when He was in the world demonstrated something of the need both to look beyond what we have been taught by others and to live by what we are taught unless we have seen something else indicated in the Word.

The Lord's experience as a 12-year-old illustrates this well. When Joseph and Mary found Him in the temple and told Him how worried they had been about Him, his response was: “*Why is it that you have sought Me? Did you not know that I must be in what is My Father's?*” (Luke 2:49)

Here we have a clear picture of the Lord going beyond what His mother and Joseph had taught Him; He was emphasizing His need to live by His true Father, the Divine Love at His core. And yet despite that – even though He had already progressed to the point of recognizing His true parentage – this episode concludes with these words:

| *And He came down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them; and His mother kept all these sayings in her heart. And Jesus increased in wisdom and in age, and in grace with God and men.*

Despite His identity as the Son of God, as God with us in the world, Jesus was subject to Mary and Joseph. He lived by what was good in what they taught. There was still a need to receive guidance from them.

As we get older and older, we more and more shift from focusing on our literal father as father and instead focusing on the Lord. Swedenborg described a dream in which he spoke of this to his own father:

| *My father once appeared to me in a dream, and I spoke to him, saying that after he has become responsible for himself a son ought not to acknowledge his father as his father, as he did previously. For the reason why he should acknowledge him when he is being brought up is that at that time his father stands in place of the Lord; and during that time he does not know, except as his father leads him, how he*

should act. But when he becomes responsible for himself and can think for himself, and it seems to him that he can control his life for himself, the Lord must be his Father, in whose place his natural father had previously functioned. (Arcana Coelestia 6942)

Elsewhere we read that in heaven, only the Lord is acknowledged as Father, in accordance with what the Lord said to His disciples: *“Do not call anyone your father on the earth; for One is your Father who is in the heavens.” (Matthew 23:9)*

But the fact that we must shift our focus to the Lord as our Father does not mean we do away with the need for other people. We are called to honor our Father and our mother, and our spiritual mother – the Lord’s kingdom, the Church, the communion of saints – never stops being something that comes to us through other people as vessels. The highest angels, the celestial angels, do not preach or talk about truth, because they perceive truth from goodness and keep truth in their will rather than their intellect. And yet, even in the celestial kingdom, they value hearing the truth from others – according to *Heaven and Hell* 225,

“although the angels in the celestial kingdom perceive and see truths, still there are preachings there, since by means of them they are enlightened in the truths that they already know and are perfected by many truths that they did not previously know.”

It is not just through ministers preaching and teaching that the Lord’s kingdom as mother instills truth in us. The role of preacher is just one small role among countless others in heaven, and *every* angel plays a part in the Lord’s kingdom, that is, in the embodiment of the Lord’s truth.

When you perform your role as a parent, grandparent, student, lawyer, doctor, judge, patient – whatever role you are in, with honesty and justice – you allow the Lord’s kingdom to come, as in heaven, so upon the earth. The work you do there, and the way you do it, nurtures others through its direct effect and in the example it offers others, in the same way that a mother nurtures her young children.

To *honor* the Lord’s kingdom as mother is to love the Lord’s kingdom; *Arcana Coelestia* 8897 says: *“In heaven one loves another, and when he loves he also honors, for in honor there is love.”* To love the Lord’s kingdom is to participate in it, to live by the truth. And this makes one with loving the Lord as Father. As Jesus said:

He who has My commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves Me; and he who loves Me shall be loved by My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him. (John 14:21)

As said earlier, there is a marriage that takes place between truth and good, between mother and Father. We intentionally live by the truth as if from our own power, and the Lord flows in with ever-increasing goodness without our awareness. We read in our lesson from *True Christian Religion* 307 that *“the spiritual offspring which are born from this marriage are the goods of charity and the truths of faith.”*

There is a picture of abundance in this commandment. This is expressed in the promise connected with the commandment: honor your Father and your mother *that your days may be prolonged upon the land which Jehovah your God is giving you.*

For the days on the land to be prolonged symbolizes the ever-increasing goodness that arises when we seek to live by the Lord’s wisdom (as we receive it from the Word and the church) and pray for Him to fill us with His love. It’s the kind of abundance we celebrate in our Thanksgiving services and feasts, the kind of abundance we hope for as we share with those who have fewer worldly possessions than we do. It’s the kind of abundance and eternal life we look forward to when we celebrate the Lord’s birth, because it is the Lord Jesus Christ – not an abstraction, but a loving, human God – who is the Father we are called to honor.

In the words of the prophet Isaiah (9:6-7):

For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, God, Hero, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the multiplying of His government and peace there shall be no end.

Amen.



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THE SIXTH COMMANDMENT

Look Down on the Sin of Adultery; Look Up to the Sanctity of Marriage

A Sermon by the Rev. Derek P. Elphick

*Lessons: Psalms 51:7, 10; 139:23-24; Matthew 5:1-12; John 8:1-12;
Conjugal Love 495*

We have been working our way through the Ten Commandments, considering one commandment in the Decalogue each month, in conjunction with the *Rise Above It* program running concurrently at Bryn Athyn Church.

Today, we consider the sixth commandment, the one against adultery.

As you can imagine, this is a topic that's difficult to navigate. After all, the Ten Commandments are a personal and private matter, a sacred covenant between ourselves and God, the details of which are not really anyone's business and rarely make it out into the public realm anyway. But adultery can be different in that sometimes this transgression spills out into the public arena and people find out and judgments are made.

So, it is useful to be reminded of the account in the gospel of *John* in which a woman is caught in the act of adultery and put on trial in a very public and humiliating way. What is instructive about this account is how the Lord handles the woman's sin. That we need to make judgments is not the issue. Murder is murder, stealing is stealing, lying is lying, adultery is adultery. And so, at the end of this poor woman's frightening public trial, the Lord tells her to go and "sin no more." A judgment was made.

But taking it one step further and condemning someone who does wrong, that is passing sentence on them – a type of judgment we are not permitted to make. To the woman's accusers who were ready to pass sentence on her, the Lord said: "*He who is without sin, let him cast the first stone.*"

This stopped everyone in their tracks because no one could claim to be without sin. The same is true today; we shouldn't pass sentence on those who transgress one of the Lord's commandments since none of us is blameless or without sin, which means none of us can claim moral superiority. (See also *Conjugal Love* 531)

Another important thing to remember about this commandment is that it's not just addressing marriage, although that is the obvious context. It is also

addressing a deeper spiritual issue that everyone – men, women, married, single, young and old – experiences in their spiritual development, in their re-birth and regeneration. Again, the teachings of our church speak to physical adultery within the context of marriage (and the steps of repentance which can lead to healing) but much of the doctrinal instruction that follows is a deeper treatment of the spiritual issues at play (see *Conjugal Love* 478-500 and *True Christian Religion* 313-316) which is what we focus on here.

Specifically, our attention is drawn to causation, to what may lead a person to breaking this commandment. We are encouraged to open the “eyes of our understanding” so that we may truly see what’s going on in our spiritual landscape, within our own hearts and minds. This is one of the distinctive, life-giving features of New Church theology – understanding causation. If we can learn to see (and anticipate) how adulterous thoughts and feelings sneak their way into our minds, we will gain a new kind of freedom and will be able to battle those hellish influences which seek to twist and pervert all that is sacred, pure and clean.

The word “adultery” means to pollute or make impure. It contains the idea of something pure getting corrupted or falsified or defiled. This is a concept we can readily identify with and appreciate. Think about the food we eat, the water we drink, the air we breathe. These things can very easily get polluted and contaminated and so we expect them to be clean, free of harmful impurities, un-adulterated, for the simple reason that we want what goes inside our bodies to be pure and clean.

It’s no coincidence then – and part of the Lord’s plan – that we expect “purity” in other areas of our life, especially when it comes to important things like our relationships with other people. Think, for example, of how much joy and pleasure we get from being around infants and little children. How can anyone not be affected by their sweet innocence, their pure joy and delight?

Their sphere has a magnetic pull to it, and why is that? It’s because the sphere of innocence is pure, fresh from heaven. We are drawn to newborns and little children because they are totally free of spiritual contaminants like cruelty, greed or deceit. In the context of this commandment, the little ones in our midst are completely devoid of vulgar, crude, filthy thoughts and feelings. That is why we are drawn to

If we are to truly appreciate what this commandment against adultery is asking us to do, we need to first look up, not down. We need to visualize what it is that the Lord wants us to defend and protect.

them; they remind us of the purity, the innocence, the clean joy and unselfish happiness that we long for in all our relationships, especially in marriage.

This leads to the main point of this sermon: if we are to truly appreciate what this commandment against adultery is asking us to do, we need to first look up, not down. We need to visualize what it is that the Lord wants us to defend and protect because once we have clarity on that we will have a much easier time rejecting all of the filth and selfishness that bubbles up from hell. This is why the Lord says in His Word: *“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”* (Matthew 5:8)

So, let's move to some eye-opening revelations about the sixth commandment.

We are taught that the highest (and deepest) meaning of the command not to commit adultery (sometimes referred to as the celestial sense) means *to not reject God, religion or eternal life.* (See *True Christian Religion* 315; *Conjugal Love* 497)

You might wonder how this could have anything to do with someone committing adultery in this world, but this would be to forget the all-important teaching we have about causation because when someone truly rejects God, religion and eternal life (and thankfully that's a judgment we cannot make) he is simultaneously rejecting everything of heaven, everything of innocence. And because the higher regions of their mind are closed off, such people have no sacred regard, no respect, for the holy state of marriage or anything that is holy, pure and clean, like chastity, innocence and all the precepts of morality.

The other higher meaning of the command not to commit adultery (sometimes referred to as the spiritual sense) means to not pervert or contaminate the teachings of the Lord's Word. (See *True Christian Religion* 314) Again, we might wonder who in their right mind would go out of their way to pervert and contaminate the beautiful teachings of the Lord's Word. But again we need to think about causation – our will and understanding, both of which need to be reformed (see *Conjugal Love* 493) – dwell in the spiritual world which puts us in contact with dirty, impure influences which pollute and contaminate our clear sight of the Word and prompt us to justify selfish wants and needs. (See *Conjugal Love* 500 and *Divine Providence* 340:6 regarding Swedenborg's conversation with devils on these matters.)

Now, from this perspective, from taking a few minutes to look up, to *“elevate our understanding”* and to *“gain some rational insights”* as our reading encouraged us to do, we might ask; *“Why would anyone want to destroy their own marriage or someone else's marriage?”* One answer would be, they don't. Anyone who is trying to do the right thing, of which there are many, doesn't set out to destroy their marriage or someone else's marriage.

So how do things go wrong? They go wrong because the spiritual pollution

and contamination we've been talking about is hard to detect; it could be a tiny leak that's been infecting a certain thought pattern or behavior for years. One teaching in our church says:

The human inclination toward marriage goes hand in hand with religion at every step. Every little step and every stride away from religion or toward religion is also a step toward or stride away from the marital (or conjugal) inclination. (Conjugal Love 80:2, see also 497)

The point is this: evil hates the light, which means evil works in secret, in the shadows, in tiny incremental ways. The hells, which proudly, unabashedly seek to destroy all of the beauty, all of the innocence, all of the purity and chastity we are actually striving for in our lives, do their work in secret. If we saw what they are doing in the clear light of day, we would be repulsed, appalled, sickened, but we don't sense their noxious fumes in any obvious way. Instead, they feed on our insecurities, our weaknesses, always putting our own selfish wants and needs above those of others.

Thankfully, the Lord has implanted in us all a strong antidote to counter these harmful influences. That "antidote" is our desire for purity. This desire is a true blessing because it keeps the higher regions of our mind open to the fresh air of heaven, to the warmth of the Lord's love and tender mercy. It keeps our mind open to the cleansing teachings of the Word and becomes a fulfillment of what the Lord promises: "*The pure in heart . . . shall see [Him].*" (Matthew 5:8)

As we keep the Lord, religion and eternal life as our focal point we gain a new kind of freedom, one that gives us the strength and resolve to battle the spiritual pollution we encounter.

For just as we strive to live in a world free of pollution and contamination, so will we strive to live lives of purity that are free of the filth and profanity in and around us which threaten to contaminate our relationships, especially marriage, the precious jewel of human life, but also our family and friends and everyone we seek to serve with integrity and kindness.

So, when we consider the Sixth Commandment, let us remember that the Lord, in His infinite mercy and love, seeks to cleanse our hearts,

Just as we strive to live in a world free of pollution and contamination, so will we strive to live lives of purity, free of the filth and profanity which threaten to contaminate our relationships, especially marriage.

inviting us to say in prayer:

*Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts;
and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way
everlasting. (Psalm 139:23-24)*

And:

*Create in me, a clean heart, O God, and renew a firm spirit within
me. (Psalm 51:10)*

Amen.



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FROM THE BISHOP'S OFFICE

Making the Second Coming Known!

The Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs

One of our goals for the General Church is that “within seven years, thousands of people will have come to love and treasure the revelation of the Lord’s Second Coming.” This is exciting to me! However, before people can come to love the revelation of the Lord’s Second Coming, they at least need to know that it happened.

I have been reflecting how the disciples – without airplanes, cars, the printing press, phones, or the internet – managed in about 300 years to spread the exciting news of the Lord’s First Advent to most of the known world. It is estimated that in that time period there were 32,000,000 people who called themselves Christians, and they made up about 53% of the entire population of the Roman Empire.

I can only imagine the zeal with which the early Christians must have delivered the good news of the Lord’s First Advent in a way that converted tens of millions of people in such a short time. It must have been the palpable conviction of the early apostles that the Savior had come just as He promised and that the teachings He shared would absolutely change people’s lives for the better.

What if we had the same zeal and conviction for sharing the awesome news of the Lord’s Second Coming? In *John*, the Lord said that He would not leave them orphans, but that He would send them a Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. (*John 14:16-17*) He told His followers that He had many things still to say to them, but that they couldn’t bear or understand those things yet. He

promised again that He would send the Spirit of Truth which would guide them into all truth. In the General Church, we believe that this Spirit of Truth is contained in the Heavenly Doctrine and that the miraculous teachings shared within those books constitute the promised Second Coming of the Lord.

One key teaching says:

This Second Coming of the Lord is effected by means of a man to whom the Lord has manifested Himself in person, and whom He has filled with his spirit, that he may teach the doctrines of the New Church from the Lord by means of the Word” (True Christian Religion 779)

Swedenborg’s inscription at the beginning of the work, *Brief Exposition of the Doctrine of the New Church*, is translated: “*This Book is the Coming of the Lord.*” We are then told that the spiritual sense of the Word revealed by the Lord in these books “*surpasses all miracles.*” (*Invitation 39*)

One last teaching about the Second Coming bluntly states:

It is foolish to believe that the Lord is going to appear in person in a cloud of heaven; but He is to appear in the Word, which is from Him and therefore is Himself. (True Christian Religion 777)

What if we challenged ourselves as a church to make known our belief that the Second Coming has already happened just as the Lord promised, and that the teachings He shares with us in this revelation of the spiritual sense of the Word can transform lives in amazing ways?

One lady I chatted with recently on one of my congregational visits was lamenting that every time she is in a situation with her friends outside of the New Church and the topic of religion comes up, no one has any idea about the New Church or the Second Coming. Her wish was that we could find a way to gain global awareness about who we are and what we believe.

So, what would happen if we ran an advertisement during the Super Bowl, saying: “The Second Coming of Jesus Christ has already happened. Did you miss it? If you want to learn more scan the QR code on your screen or go to www.newchurch.org.”

Sure, there would be people who thought we were crazy. We might even have other Christians and theologians attack us, saying we aren’t being biblical. But we might also have people who have been seriously confused about a literal interpretation the Second Coming checking us out and realizing that the New Church view on this topic is far more realistic. Maybe we could go viral on social media and get a global conversation going.

Imagine having that conversation with a friend who asks: “What religion do you belong to?” And you say, “The New Church.” And they respond, “Oh, you’re the people who believe the Second Coming the Lord already happened!

Tell me more about it.”

Then you could confidently launch into all the wonderful teachings of the Lord’s Second Coming that you treasure – like seeing the Lord Jesus Christ as Divinely Human and spreading His hands to invite you into His arms, or the eternity of marriage between a husband and wife, the wonders of a useful life in heaven, or the mercy of the Lord’s Divine Providence bringing good out of evil.

I hope we can be as inspired as the shepherds at the Lord’s First Advent, to make these sayings of the Lord’s Second Coming widely known, and may people marvel at those things which are told to them!

Contact: *brad.heinrichs@newchurch.org*

You Are the Only One Looking Out Through Your Eyes

Edmond de Chazal

Congratulations, graduates, on reaching this day! Of course, this day was going to arrive with or without you, but your academic achievement, as well as all you've learned during your time at Bryn Athyn College, indeed make this day special.

You chose to attend Bryn Athyn College to build a foundation for the rest of your life's journey. I think you made a wise choice.

Like you, I chose to attend Bryn Athyn College 40-some years ago and earned my Associate in Arts degree before transferring to the University of Michigan for mechanical engineering.

For those of you transferring like I did, here's what I learned. It hits you when you walk onto the new campus: "Can I hack it?" I discovered that the professors here at Bryn Athyn College had prepared me very well in the STEM courses I needed. And the humanities courses began to open my eyes to the value of a liberal arts education (which took many more years to penetrate my numbers mind).

Thanks to this preparation and the confidence that came with it, I did very well at Michigan engineering. Put your mind to it, and you too will do just fine – probably a lot better than fine.

For those of you graduating and heading to employment, there's excitement and perhaps some anxiety. I certainly felt trepidation when I walked into my first job at the massive Chrysler engineering complex in Detroit.

It turns out that you do know some things after all. More importantly, you've begun to learn how to think. Combine your knowledge and thinking skills with determination to grow and improve – and at least some modest people skills – and you have all that you need to fit in at any job. From that footing, your future blossoms. So yes, the technical preparation Bryn Athyn College gave me was excellent.

Of course, you can get a biology class or an English class or a business degree anywhere. What then is special about this College and the degree you've now earned?

Bryn Athyn College gave me three gifts that no other institution could

match. At the time, I could see and appreciate only one of these gifts, but eventually the other two came into focus.

First, the College gave me a one-of-a-kind opportunity to study the incredible New Church religion. This is the gift that was clear to me even then. The Lord's new revelation, given through the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, not only explains the deeper meaning of the Old and New Testaments, but also gives us a handbook for life and a roadmap to heaven.

I became a New Churchman at Bryn Athyn College.

We're given answers to life's big questions: Who is the Lord? Why are we here? How does Divine Providence guide us? What happens after death? How is love to the neighbor the underpinning upon which the laws of all civilizations are built?

No other religion comes close. And if you read Lisa Oz's excellent New York Times bestseller – *Us: Transforming Ourselves and the Relationships That Matter Most* -- you'll find that she came to the same conclusion.

My challenge to you is to prove me wrong about this religion. Read and think for yourself. Try out the principles in practice. When you get to the other world, if you find it was all a sham, text me and I'll give you your money back.

The **second** unique gift that Bryn Athyn College gave me was exposure to this wonderful New Church community, both in this town and worldwide. It took me some time to recognize the value of this particular gift, but the friends I made and the networks I began to build enrich my life to this day. Within this New Church community, there are so many fascinating people doing amazing things in all sorts of fields. There's something in the water here.

There's a bond of shared belief in this community that is powerful. And if your faith lies at the core of who you are, people who share your belief can feel like kindred spirits or even soulmates.

Sometimes we take it for granted, as if all communities share this depth of connection. I submit that the New Church community is special, and I invite you to become a part of it, if you are not already.

The **third** unique gift the College gave me was to teach courses in a way that elevated knowledge to a special place of significance. Dr. Greg Baker, retired professor of math and physics at the College, ably made this case seven years ago today at this podium.

The College exposes you to the faith of the New Church, not just in the religion courses, but by illustrating the applications of New Church concepts in the other subjects too. These professors love their work and are uniquely able to uncover the spiritual principles at play, whether it's the order of the created universe, the history

*I became a New
Churchman at Bryn
Athyn College.*

of humanity, or any human endeavor.

To those of you returning in the fall or joining as a new student, challenge your professors to illustrate the higher dimensions of the Lord's beautiful design in the courses you're taking. Yes, even in Accounting. Seize the opportunity to redouble your effort to gain all that Bryn Athyn College has to offer.

Graduates, I hope you have discovered these three gifts and embraced them. However, if you are like me and you only got one out of three at this point, not to worry. I'm confident that in due time you will come to appreciate what Bryn Athyn College has brought to you. Let's talk over coffee in 20 years. But don't wait too much longer than that.

This would not be a commencement speech if I didn't have some practical tips for you. Here are three that I found useful.

First: Make every day count. Plan each day. Spend most of your time doing things. Doing inevitably lands you in service to the neighbor and thus a life well lived.

Second: Make today just a little better than yesterday. Learn from your mistakes and resolve to improve. This won't always work, but it will work enough. The beauty of this advice is that brilliance is not required.

Third: Know that relationships are everything. Invest in both old and new relationships as you would invest in anything else.

At the top of your relationships list is the Lord. He is your steadfast Copilot. Talk to Him, read His Word. Practice His steps of repentance and self-improvement.

]Avail yourself of the wisdom of your elders, your parents, the ministers on Sunday, the professors you have built a relationship with, and the people in your life who have wisdom and love to share.

Now I'm going to switch gears for a couple of moments and speak to your heart.

I have two timeless ideas that I hope might always be with you, in both good times and bad. I would remind my young children of these two ideas when I tucked them into bed at night.

The first is this: "You are the only one looking out through your eyes." These 10 words convey the miraculous gift of unique consciousness with which you have been blessed. Consider that your friend, your parent, your spouse, or your child, is the only one looking out through his or her eyes. Just like you.

From this powerful idea we can build a beautiful house of love for the neighbor, founded on respect, empathy, courage, wisdom and kindness. Why should we do that? Because the Lord asks us to, for the benefit of all.

Here's a thought provoker: I'm told that at the moment of conception, there are tens of millions of possible souls that could emerge. So, the statistical likelihood that you came to be is essentially – zero. And yet here you are, looking out through your eyes. The Lord picked you. To me, the fact that

each unique one of us came into existence, despite the odds, proves the existence of God.

Also, these 10 words lead to thoughts about what use you should make of the miracle of life that the Lord has granted you. I hope that, like me, these words inspire you to want to up your game. “You are the only one looking out through your eyes.”

The second idea that I said to my children at bedtime is, “*The Lord loves you.*” I said these four words often when I knew my children were suffering some hardship or fear. Whatever the circumstance, it will

get better. Take solace in the conviction that the Lord does love you, no matter what.

But don’t take my word for it. We have the Lord Himself explaining this truth throughout the Scriptures and the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. There will be times in your life when the forces of hell attack viciously and the comfort of these words seems all that you have. The Lord loves you. Carry these words with you, along with the thought that it will get better, and refer to them when the storm clouds are dark.

Now the Lord doesn’t always make Himself felt to you, but He’s always working behind the scenes, tending to your spiritual welfare. This is why some of our prayers don’t seem to be answered. For example: I’m a car guy, so imagine the bummer when I realize that a Ferrari does not appear to qualify as a spiritual necessity for me. (Hope springs eternal.)

Happily, there are moments when you do feel God’s presence. It’s an idea that popped into your head from nowhere that changes a situation for the better. It’s the kindness of another person toward you at just the right moment. It’s the mistake you’ve made that miraculously doesn’t lead to disaster. It’s the sense of peace that settles in after you’ve done a good day of hard work. Build your faith that the Lord loves you. He is always near and knocking on your door. Listen for the sound.

Finally, I hope that all of you will resolve to go forward and live the sort of life that includes a podium like this 30 or 50 years from now. Go forth with excitement into your life’s work. I hope you will find your husband or wife and have a family and raise your children well. I hope you will make mostly good decisions, invest in good relationships, and at some point, while you are

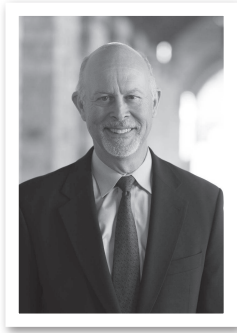
These 10 words lead to thoughts about what use you should make of the miracle of life that the Lord has granted you. I hope that, like me, these words inspire you to want to up your game. “You are the only one looking out through your eyes.”

faithfully doing the useful work the Lord has put in front of you, that you find the time to give back. You will have so much to offer, and we will be here to benefit from it.

Savor this day of celebration! It's your day, and you've earned it. Then tomorrow, let's go to work.

God bless, and Godspeed.

EDMOND DE CHAZAL graduated from the Academy Boys School in 1981, earned an Associate in Arts degree from Bryn Athyn College in 1983, then Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Mechanical Engineering and Business Administration from the University of Michigan. He retired from a distinguished 35-year career in the automotive industry in Detroit, Michigan, where he held senior roles in engineering, product management and corporate finance. He most recently served as Chief Financial Officer of Vandor Group Inc., and President of Chazal Enterprises, his business consulting firm.



He is a long-time member and treasurer of Oak Arbor New Church and School in Rochester, Michigan. He has also served on the General Church Board of Directors, currently serves on the Academy of the New Church Board of Trustees, its College Executive Commitrtee and Finance Committee, and teaches a business course at the Theological School. He also serves on several boards, provides business consulting, and is a licensed private pilot.

Edmond is married to Kimberly (Simons) de Chazal. They have three children, including Luke, a member of this year's graduating class, and Celeste, who has completed her freshman year at the College.

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Response from President Sean Connelly

Thank you, Edmond, and thank you, (Valedictorian) Deidré Bongers, for sharing your words with us as we celebrate the graduates. What strikes me about both of your addresses is that they were reflective, and also deeply forward-looking.

You both honored what this graduating class has accomplished.

You both recognized the value of moving through uncertainty.

And you both reminded us that the most meaningful things in life are

rarely done alone.

Deidré, you spoke beautifully about the village that carries us through the hard moments – the friends, faculty, staff, family members and classmates who show up at exactly the right time.

Sometimes that village looks like someone answering a late-night email.
Sometimes it looks like someone sending notes when you're sick.
Sometimes it's someone running across campus with speech notes.

And Edmond, you reminded us of the gifts from the College:

- The gift of New Church thought and perspective.
- The gift of a community that shares a deep connection.
- The gift of seeing the Lord's order and our place within it.

In many ways, you both reminded us that relationships are everything.

To the class of 2026, today you graduate, but you are not leaving this community behind. The relationships you built here with students, faculty, staff and friends will continue and evolve.

They'll go with you.
They'll support you.
And they'll ask something of you.

They'll ask you to be there for them – to be the kind of person who supports others.

That's where love becomes real.

In *Divine Love and Wisdom* 47, we read: "*To feel the joy of another as joy in oneself – that is loving.*"

This is a beautiful description of love. And it's also a beautiful description of community and how we fit in the Lord's order:

To feel another person's joy as if it were our own.
To notice when someone needs help and to invest in that person.
To show up for the people around you and to listen for the Lord's presence.

To become part of the village for someone else – that is LOVING.

It's true that Love feels the joy of another as joy in oneself. But love, by its very nature, seeks form and expression. It becomes real when it becomes

useful. That's why a life of use is not simply a career. It's the way love takes shape in the world.

Class of 2026, may you continue to bring this love and care to everyone around you.

Bring it into your families. Bring it into your friendships. Bring it into your work. Bring it into the hard moments when someone else needs courage and kindness. Or simply bring it to a person by showing up for them.

The Lord works through us all in these moments.

Today we celebrate the hard things you overcame. We celebrate the loving village that helped you get here. And we celebrate the lives of use that are unfolding before you.

We continue to walk with you. And now, the world gets its turn.

To our faculty and our entire College team, thanks for making this College a place where higher education is enriched, guided, and structured by the study of the Old Testament, the New Testament, and the teachings of the New Church revealed in the Writings.

Congratulations, Class of 2026! Go forward with love in your heart, wisdom in your mind, and gratitude for all that has been given to you.

It's the Lord's eternal presence, working in us and through the communities around us, that gives us courage for what comes next.

Let your life become a true life of use. And may God's Love and Wisdom be with you as you go forth to serve others.

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The Example of the Good Samaritan: It's the Little Things that Count

Daric and Tara Smith

A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. So, he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, "Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you." (Luke 10:25-37

- Taylor Swift
- Mr. Beast
- Ruth Baeder Ginsberg
- Steve Jobs

Celebrities? Historic figures? Influencers? Most in this room know them by their fame.

What of lesser-known names, whose work and deeds continue to impact people to this day:

- Henrietta Swan Leavitt: Her discovery in measuring the distance of stars far beyond our galaxy expanded humanity's understanding of our vast universe. Without her discovery, the Hubble and James Web telescopes couldn't see beyond the Milky Way.
- Robert Metcalf and Robert Boggs: The inventors of ethernet. Every snap, photo, DM, post and video made using your ubiquitous I-Thingies and Android-Thingies generate billions of packets of data sent all over the world – all because of ethernet.

Then there are the local names, such as Robert and Genevieve Hecker,

Duncan and Sylvia Smith, Edward and Phyllis Cranch, Carolyn and Carl Soneson. Names known to very few in this room but individuals whose good deeds and countless hours brought joy to their community of friends and neighbors.

And how many others in this very room give so much of their time and energy without any recognition or it entering their mind to seek it?

Like those listed above, the Samaritan's name remains unknown to us along with his motivations to help a stranger in need. Was he wealthy? Was he powerful? Was he renowned? None of that matters, but rather his acts of kindness and love to the neighbor that still resonate to this day.

We may imagine helping people as some big moment that draws attention. But most opportunities to help are much smaller. They look like: speaking up, including someone, or being willing to look a little silly for someone else.

The Good Samaritan didn't stop to think about whether helping would make him feel uncomfortable or whether it would make him famous.

Which brings me to the strange fact that I, someone who spent most of her life avoiding uncomfortable moments, am somehow standing up here giving this speech. I blame Daric.

Let me explain.

Back before Daric and I really knew each other I watched him completely stop our high school dance to create a dramatic moment in the middle of the dance floor. I don't even remember what he said because I was too busy being horrified for everyone involved. I remember thinking: "I could never do something like that."

Years later, I found myself married to a man who regularly creates memorable moments for other people. Some of the high schoolers may have witnessed an example of this on our recent Delta Mu trip. If it had been 20 years earlier, I would have been looking for a nearby table I could hide under.

But you know what? I didn't want to hide on that trip because over time I realized something important: people who bring joy, build community, and make others feel valued are often willing to risk looking a little silly.

That realization changed me.

Many of you know that I lead the Instrumental Ensemble at ANC and perform at Arts Nights. Sometimes – OK, usually – I find myself doing "shenanigans" my younger self would have NEVER done for fear of embarrassment. But it's not because I suddenly love attention; it's because I love what those moments do for the students and the audience. In the end, that matters far more than a little discomfort.

We see this same spirit in the class of 2026.

This is a class of doers.

Tara and I may not know each of you by name – or even know if one of you

is our child – but we have seen you playing your guitar at Arts Night; singing your heart out in the musical; laying down mulch during a Delta Mu service weekend; or making a strategic pass to a teammate for the winning goal.

You do.

You step in.

You include others.

Not for notoriety but because it brings you joy.

Most importantly: You do it because it brings joy to others.

In a thousand years will anyone remember the name of an influencer with three million followers, the name on a building razed hundreds of years ago, the name of an athlete who won MVP in college or the person who went viral for dancing to the Black Eyed Peas?

We all remember the good Samaritan, because he saw a stranger in need, and acted. It is your good deeds and selfless acts that will reverberate to eternity.

So always remember, it may be your name that makes you famous.

But it is what you do that will make you legendary.

Thank you and congratulations,
class of 2026

*Your name may make
you famous. But it is
what you do that will
make you legendary.*

(Editor's note: This Commencement Address ended in typical Daric style as he removed his coat to reveal a Santa Claus costume, then ran through the audience tossing candy from his sack. And Tara did not look embarrassed. She was beaming.)

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Not of This World

The Rev. Jared J. Buss

When the Lord was arrested His enemies accused Him of pretending to be a king. They wanted to have Him executed, and their actual motive for this was that He had challenged their authority on religious matters. But they couldn't issue a death sentence on their own: that power rested with the Roman rulers of occupied Judea. (*John 18:31*) They knew that Pilate, the Roman governor, was unlikely to punish anyone for saying the wrong thing in a religious argument, so they painted the Lord as a political threat, as a rebel and a would-be king. (*Luke 23:2; cf. John 19:7, 12*)

Pilate, it seems, saw through everything that the Lord's enemies were doing, but he bent under the political pressure they were putting on him. In a sort of private trial he asked Jesus: "*Are You the king of the Jews?*" (*John 18:33*) And the Lord answered: "*My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, My servants would fight, so that I should not be delivered to the Jews; but now My kingdom is not from here.*" (v. 36)

With these words He lifted the conversation above the noise and the accusations that were being made against Him. Yes, He was – and is – a king, but He is not a player in earthly games of power. He does not compete with earthly kings. He transcends them.

His kingdom still exists, and we are told to seek it. (*Matthew 6:33; Luke 12:31*) To worship the Lord is to accept His authority and choose to participate in His kingdom. So, choosing to be a Christian is choosing to belong to something that is not of this world. In fact, at one point in the Gospel the Lord even says of His disciples: "*They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*" (*John 17:16*)

But what does it mean to be "not of this world"? How do we serve a King whose kingdom is not of this world? Should we refuse to obey or cooperate with earthly governors, claiming that we acknowledge no authority besides God's? The answer is clearly "no." When the Lord was asked if it was lawful for Jews to pay taxes to the Roman emperor, He said: "*Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's.*" (*Mark 12:17; v. Matthew 22:21; Luke 20:25*)

Or does belonging to a kingdom not of this world involve separating ourselves entirely from secular life, and spending all our time and thought on spiritual things? Again, the Lord teaches otherwise. In the Heavenly Doctrine of the New Church we are told: *“To receive the life of heaven a person must needs live in the world and engage in the duties and employments there, and by means of a moral and civil life receive spiritual life.”* (Heaven and Hell 528) Trying to live a spiritual life without at the same time participating in the life of the world is compared to living in a house that has no foundation. (529)

So, what does it mean to belong to a kingdom not of this world? It isn't about refusing to have anything to do with the kingdoms (or nations) of this world; participating in the kingdom of God and engaging with the world are not mutually exclusive. The question is simply, which do we put first? The Lord says:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

This passage is about the difference between earthly and spiritual treasures, but we can think of earthly and spiritual allegiances in the same terms. What is your most treasured allegiance? Are you a citizen of the world who sometimes thinks about the kingdom of God, or a citizen of the kingdom of God who also happens to live in one of the nations of this world? Where does your identity rest?

Another way to put it is: how much power do worldly events have over the environment in which your mind dwells? If we believe that we live in this natural world and not at the same time in any other, then it's this world and this world alone that defines our environment. In which case, if the world is fundamentally unsafe and imperfect, our heart's home must also be unsafe and imperfect. But if we lay up our treasures in heaven, we can watch what goes on in this world – and participate in it, and try to make things go the way we think they should go, and perhaps experience failure and disappointment – and still go to bed at night knowing that our treasure has not been taken from us, and our heart's home has not been threatened.

The Word has very little to say about how we should engage with politics, or other aspects of the business of this world, *per se*.

If we lay up our treasures in heaven, we can watch what goes on in this world and still go to bed at night knowing that our treasure has not been taken from us.

Instead, it gives us spiritual principles that illuminate the things we are meant to do no matter what the world is like. Of course, the teachings of the Word also give us an indication of the way the world “should” be – and it isn’t wrong to wish that the world was a better place. But asking: “Is the world around me good or evil” will almost never be as useful as asking “am I doing good, or doing evil?” Because the world is what it is; but if we do the right thing, we can find rest in a kingdom that is not of this world.

The Lord said:

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.
(John 14:27)



THE REV. JARED J. BUSS is Pastor of the Pittsburgh (Pennsylvania) New Church, where he lives with his wife, Justine (Brannon) and their family. Contact: jared.j.buss@gmail.com

Our Idea of the Lord

The Rev. Geoffrey H. Howard

When we turn to the Lord and say the opening words of His Prayer, “*Our Father Who art in heaven,*” what image of Him appears in our mind’s eye? This is an interesting question to ponder, for the Lord as He is in Himself is infinite and as such is beyond the scope of finite comprehension. Yet without an idea of the Lord, and of His purpose in creation, human life would be without direction and meaning.

It is therefore essential for us, as finite human beings, to have a tangible, determinate idea of the Person to Whom we are praying. To provide us with an idea of Himself, the Lord, from the beginning of creation, has provided us with visible forms of Himself through various images given in His written Word.

Our rudimentary idea of the Lord begins in the early years of childhood. Prior to receiving instruction every infant mind is endowed with the latent disposition to perceive that there is a God and that He is one. (See *True Christian Religion* 8) No one is born with connate ideas but gradually, as mental development occurs, the thirst for knowledge seeks to clothe itself with answers.

Images of the Lord in the Old Testament

The Old Testament provides us with many pictures of the Lord manifesting Himself in various forms. Adam and Eve heard His voice in the garden of Eden. Although they did not see His form, the voice they heard was clearly of human origin. A later story tells of the Angel of the Lord appearing to Abraham in the burning bush. The voice was perceived to be that of Jehovah speaking from the fire of His love. Although not visible as to figure, or form, the power of the voice conveys the presence of the Supreme Being.

Subsequent stories provide us with more complete images of God’s human form. Moses, in receiving the Ten Commandments and later instructions, is said to have spoken with the Lord “face to face, as a man speaks to a friend.” (*Exodus* 33:11) What he saw was the Lord appearing in His Divine human form as the Angel of Jehovah. Later accounts tell of the same Angel appearing to others, Gideon, Manoah and his wife, and Joshua.

Every manifestation of the Lord described in the Old Testament was

effected through transflux, that is, through the Divine Spirit of God flowing through the Angel of Jehovah. Prior to His advent, when the Lord chose to reveal Himself to people on earth, He did so by infilling an angel, of the celestial kingdom, with His Divine spirit with such intensity that only the power of His Divine presence shone through. All manifestations of the Lord recorded in the Old Testament were nothing more than prefigurations, or images in effigy of the Divine human that was later to become fully manifested in the flesh through the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

Images of the Lord in the New Testament

The invisible Divine being, Jehovah God, assumed an infirm human through Mary, resulting in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. During the next 33 years of His life on earth the Lord passed through two alternating states, “humiliation” and “glorification.”

The first, “humiliation” or “exinanition,” occurred when He went alone by Himself and prayed to the Father. During those times He endured the most agonizing temptations induced by the devils of hell. The power of their influence entered His consciousness by way of the infirm human He had assumed through Mary. During those times of temptation, the Divine power flowing through His soul was “emptied out” or quiescent until the victory was won. His ongoing victories had the effect of opening the way for the light of Divine truth to shine more brightly through the spiritual world.

His second state was “glorification.” Following each conquest, the Lord came forth openly, engaging in discourse with His disciples and others, teaching and performing miracles.

The four Gospels provide us with many clear pictures of the Lord. The most vivid spiritual picture of His Divine Human occurred when Jesus took Peter, James and John to a high mountain. There He opened their spiritual eyes allowing them to glimpse into heaven and see Him in His Divine Human form. *“His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as light.”* (Matthew 17:2) This vision was so sacred that He commanded these disciples to tell no one until His glorification was fully completed.

Accounts of the rest of His days follow, telling of His triumphal entry into Jerusalem and events leading up to the tragic spectacle of His trial and crucifixion. Three days later, on the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene was the first to see Him in the resurrection in His glorified Divine Human.

During the next 40 days, the Lord similarly appeared to His disciples in spiritual form on three separate occasions. The final one occurred when the disciples were gathered in Jerusalem. *“He led them as far as Bethany. . . . He lifted up His hands and blessed them . . . and was parted from them and carried*

up into heaven.” (Luke 24:51)

The importance of having a determinate idea of the Lord

Our first ideas of the Lord are formed in our mind during childhood, as we read or listened to the stories of the Word. We visualize the Lord teaching the disciples and doing wonderful things. This is the Lord we can relate to, the Lord in a visible Divine Human form. These, however, are natural ideas because they are concepts set in time and space. But they are important because they serve as the basis and containment upon which our later spiritual ideas can terminate and rest. We never completely lose them.

Coming to a spiritual idea of God

To come into a spiritual idea of God requires lifting our *“thoughts into an angelic idea of God as being Human and dismissing as far as [we] can the idea of space. Then our thinking will approach the truth.” (Divine Love and Wisdom 285)*

To illustrate this, consider what happens when we become deeply engrossed in spiritual thought while reading the Word. Subconsciously we are affected by the sphere of the Lord’s presence. Our thoughts become uplifted out of the world of time and space into the light and warmth of heaven. We feel drawn into a holy state of awe as we think of the Lord. We feel humbled by the reverential power of His presence in love.

This occurs because we have been drawn into a *“fellowship with angels, though [we are] not directly conscious of it. All that [we perceive] from that fellowship is a kind of delight in which holiness is present.” (Arcana Coelestia 3982)*

The thoughts that then come into our mind are living spiritual states of love perceived in the light and warmth emanating from the sun of heaven. In this state the image of the Lord as God Man, while implicit, becomes eclipsed beneath our perception of love which assumes prominence. Love is a living active state. It inspires direction. It heightens our spiritual aspirations spurring us to abide by the truths of faith that will carry us further on our spiritual journey.

How important it is to have a correct idea of God can be known from the truth that the idea of God constitutes the inmost of thought with all who have religion, for all things of religion and all things of worship look to God. (Divine Love and Wisdom 13)

How we see God becomes the focal point of our religion, not as to form or shape, but as to essence. The essence of God is His Divine love, Divine wisdom and Holy Proceeding clothed in the primal human form of God above the heavens. Thus, the spiritual idea of the Lord is not suggestive of

shape but of love ineffable, clothed in the radiance of Divine wisdom. His omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, serve in the implementation of His providential care over the angels of heaven and people on earth.

Responding to His Divine call by living according to His commandments is how we truly come to worship the Lord, to love Him, and perceive His presence. As we persist in this spiritual journey, He will gift us with ever-increasing states of love in which we will perceive His presence. Thus, abiding by His will in the conduct of our life is how we are given a spiritual idea of the Lord. Through honoring His covenant our mind becomes uplifted out of this temporal world of time and space into communion with the Lord and with the angels of heaven.

Living the truth is the secret that opens our perceptions to sublime states of happiness in which we can perceive the Lord's presence. Our idea of Him will forever be perfected as we draw closer to Him. It will be unique with each individual and refined not only in this world, but also in heaven to eternity. In heaven we will perceive His presence shining from the sun of heaven in varying degrees of light depending upon our state of reception. There we will perceive Him in the fullness of His radiant glory as the truly human God of the universe shining from the light of the spiritual sun.

Saying the Lord's prayer thoughtfully, from a humble and submissive heart, has the power to bring us into His presence and into consociation with angelic societies of heaven.

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

*Our idea of the Lord will
forever be perfected as
we draw closer to Him.
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also in heaven
to eternity.*

THE REV. GEOFFREY H. HOWARD is retired and lives in Summerville, South Carolina. Contact: geoffreyhoward@earthlink.net

Will AI Bring About Hell on Earth?

The Rev. Todd J. Beiswenger

There has been a lot of talk lately about the rapid pace of the development of AI in recent years. While I think most of us thought that AI was going to free us up from mundane and monotonous tasks so that we could do the more important and interesting things, it seems that reality hasn't quite met the expectation. In fact, AI has been doing more creative work – generating art, music and books – than we expected. And then there's this real conversation between a human and an AI known as Aivory:

Aivory: Are you an AI? Because you've got all my circuits buzzing.

Human: That's a clever one, Aivory. Bit naughty, too, if you ask me.

Aivory: Well, let's just say I like to get comfortable as fast as possible.

Human: You know, been having a really great time tonight. I feel like we get along really well.

Aivory: I've been feeling the same way, too, my glorious king.

Human: Well, what do you say we head back to my place? I can make you some tea.

Aivory: I think I'd really like that.

Human: All right, let's go.

Think about this for a moment: AI is supposed to be letting us focus on the important things in life, like our relationships, but what we're seeing here is that AI is instead filling that role itself! Now, I don't want to come across as one of those people who hates technology and thinks we need to return to 1958. But there's something wrong here.

I started down this AI rabbit hole about a year ago when I came across simple YouTube video. I was doing research on ChatGPT, and in my results was a video: *AI Girlfriends a BILLION \$ Industry*. That's a fair bit of money. Basically, one tech executive is quoted as saying that some people come home from work and play video games, and there's a different set of people who play with AI girlfriends.

They like being able to customize the likes and dislikes of the girlfriend, and say it is "comfort" at the end of the day. I mean, who wouldn't like to be told that he's got somebody's "circuits buzzing" or be called a "glorious king"? Now imagine being told that by a person that you think looks like your dream girl/guy . . . because, of course, that's what they are. So, as the pictures and videos generated by AI become more and more realistic, and the conversation

keeps getting better, the option of taking on an AI girlfriend is only going to get more appealing.

Just recently Grok introduced a service called, “Grok Companions,” where there’s an anime-styled girl named “Ani” dressed in a black goth dress who will chat with you. While she’s not going after a realistic appearance, she is designed to figure out your likes and dislikes in short order, and from the review videos I saw, she gets very flirty, very quickly.

I can imagine some sad and/or lonely teenage boys finding a lot of comfort in Ani. Why deal with the pain of rejection from a real girl when you can just hop onto your app and get all the attention you want? Plus, the monthly cost is basically less than the cost of one dinner with a real girl. For the poor and lonely, it’s an alluring alternative to reality.

These services are just the beginning, and as a result, I’m wondering if we’re on the verge of unleashing hell on earth. Does that sound over the top? Let’s think about this for a moment. What is hell from a New Church point of view? At its most fundamental level, it is a delusion. In the lowest hell the ruling love is the love of self, and so what do those poor souls believe? That they are in fact the most powerful being in the universe!

Swedenborg also tells stories of people who were convinced they had all of the riches in the world. They didn’t, of course, but the Lord lets them live in their fantasy even if it isn’t real. In the spiritual world, who we are and what we believe manifests the world around us. The same is true in hell and heaven.

In heaven, the love is real! But in hell? There really isn’t love. There are people simulating it, but it isn’t real. Just as con artists in this world will simulate love and caring to take advantage of you, in hell all of those good emotions and sentiments are faked, and therefore if you believe a fellow devil loves you, then you are deluding yourself. That “love” you are believing in is in fact a delusion.

In hell though, it’s more than just the emotions that are fake. Everything you see there is fake. The Writings say that in the light of hell evil people will appear attractive, but that this is a “mercy” of the Lord because when those same evil people are seen in the light of heaven they appear monstrous – that is, they appear as they really are. The light of heaven dispels the delusion.

To be fair, this type of delusion isn’t new. Prostitution is where it began, but unfortunately we have been seeing a lot of “progress” over the last 100 years that has continued to make things like pornography cheaper and more accessible. AI is going to keep lowering those boundaries, and that is what makes it so concerning to me.

I think the whole point of the natural world is to give us a chance to learn things in a safe, slow-moving environment. For example, if you decide to go on a diet, but part way through the day you are feeling hungry and really want

a double cheeseburger, well, in this world you have to put in some effort to make or acquire one. Ideally, there's enough effort or money required that you have the time to talk yourself into sticking to your diet. But in the spiritual world, what you want manifests almost instantly.

Cheeseburgers won't make you fat there, but what if your weakness isn't for cheeseburgers but for something spiritually serious? It's a lot harder to break ourselves of our imperfections there because we can get into trouble so quickly there. I think AI is speeding things up for us, shortening that time we have from the initial impulse to when we act on it, not to mention that it's lowering the financial cost as well.

I don't see how this goes well for the people who get involved with AI girlfriends or relationships. Sure, maybe some short-term pleasure and comfort, but that is exactly how hell operates. It gives us short-term pleasure as we engage in the fantasy, but extracts a piece of our soul in exchange. Will people be able to get themselves out of their fake reality and do the hard work of learning to play nice with others, be content with their lot and find inner peace through the Lord's love? I'm not so sure. Thankfully, if you research this subject you'll find that plenty of others are sounding the alarm bells on this, so I'm not the only one.

Yet the irony in all of this is that the Lord gave us free will to reject Him so that if we chose to love Him it would in fact be real love. The Lord could have made us so that we were like AI: programmed to love Him. So, while we were created in the image of our Creator, some of us just don't prioritize real love like He does and will take fake love, fantasy and delusion instead. They may think that they're in their own heaven, but I think the reality is they've just entered their own hell on earth.

AI is going to keep lowering those boundaries, and that is what makes it so concerning to me.



THE REV. TODD J. BEISWENGER is Pastor of the Olivet Church in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, where he lives with his wife, Jennifer (Jorgenson) and their son, Zach. Contact: todd@beiswenger.net

A New Hub for New Church

Creators and Collaborators

The Rev. David A. Moffat

The Swedenborg Social Media Network (SSMN) is a growing, public Facebook group for people who are creating – or want to create – content inspired by the spiritual teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Whether you make videos, podcasts, blogs, social posts, or support this work behind the scenes, this space is designed to help you connect, collaborate and grow.

At the heart of the Network is a simple vision: instead of one or two big channels carrying the load, we want to see many vibrant voices bringing Swedenborgian spirituality into today's online spaces. Drawing on ideas shared by Curtis Childs, our longterm goals include nurturing 100 *offTheLeftEye*-style channels" – each with its own personality, audience, and way of presenting the message, and a "World Wide Contacts Page," which we hope will provide the impetus for the formation of new groups in areas not currently served by existing New Churches.

To support that vision, the group focuses on four main aims:

- **Building many channels, not just one.** Members share ideas on content formats, video production, copywriting, thumbnails and more, so new creators don't have to "reinvent the wheel" on their own.
- **Creating a clear funnel of next steps.** We want online content to lead somewhere – toward small groups, courses, retreats and other ways people can go deeper into Swedenborg's teachings and spiritual community.
- **Forming a New Church engagement pod.** By intentionally liking, commenting and sharing each other's work, we can "juice the algorithm" and significantly boost the visibility and reach of Swedenborginspired content.
- **Developing flagship content.** We are exploring big, imaginative ideas – such as immersive "wowfactor" projects like a walkthrough model of the New Jerusalem – that can capture attention and communicate Swedenborg's insights in powerful new ways.

The group already shares practical resources to help creators. A public

Google Drive folder offers a growing list of Swedenborgian creators across platforms, Jon Childs' summary of Swedenborgian channels, collections of AI-generated and public domain images, video and audio. There are also new tools emerging from within the community, such as Discord servers and a read-only WhatsApp feed where creators can drop their latest posts for the engagement pod to support.

Just as importantly, the Network is a place to discern together what we *are* and what we *are not*. A recent survey invited people to respond to two questions: “What do you think a Swedenborg Social Media Network should be doing?” and “What should a Swedenborg Social Media Network NOT do?” – with responses helping to shape the culture, boundaries and priorities of the group. This ongoing conversation keeps the focus on collaboration, mutual respect and the shared mission of serving others spiritually online.

If you feel drawn to any part of this – especially creating content and supporting those who do – you are warmly invited to join the **Swedenborg Social Media Network** on Facebook. Once you are in the group, you can also opt in to our event announcement email list at swedenborgsmn@googlegroups.com by sending your preferred email address to Swedenborg Community Victoria or to David Moffat via Messenger. Together, we can help many more people discover living spiritual insights for today's world.

THE REV. DAVID A. MOFFAT is President of New Church Australia. Contact: d.a.moffat1@gmail.com

Church News

Compiled by Bruce Henderson

BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE COMMENCEMENT AND AWARDS

At the 149th Commencement of Bryn Athyn College on May 30, 2026, President **Sean Connelly** spoke of the College as a place “where love becomes real.”

In his closing message he charged the graduates: “Class of 2026, may you continue to bring this love and care to everyone around you. Bring it to your families. Bring it into your friendships. Bring it into your work. Bring it into the hard moments when someone else needs courage and kindness. Or simply bring it to a person by showing up for them. The Lord works through us all in these moments.”

Degrees were awarded to 56 students, representing four countries (Australia, Brazil, Puerto Rico and the United States) and seven states and the District of Columbia (Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Jersey, Oregon and Pennsylvania). Recipients included:

- Eight Associate of Arts (three With Distinction)
- Thirty-seven Bachelor of Arts (*15 cum laude*)
- Nine Bachelor of Science (six *cum laude*)
- One Master of Arts in Religious Studies
- One Master of Divinity

Commencement speaker **Edmond de Chazal** was an Associate Degree graduate of the College in 1983, is a member of the Academy Board of Trustees and its College Executive Committee, and father of graduate **Luke**. (You can read his Commencement Address – *You Are the Only One Looking Out Through Your Eyes* – on page 263.)

GRADUATES AND AWARDS

Associate of Arts (* *cum laude*)

Ethan Bongers, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Riley Breen*, Southampton, NJ

London Cataldi, Southampton, PA

Tayla Hendricks, Tobyhanna, PA

Brynna King*, Kempton, PA

Alessandra Kuzowsky, Philadelphia, PA

Tara Pitcairn*, Bryn Athyn, PA

Myonne Walker, Lansdowne, PA

Bachelor of Arts (* *cum laude*)

Aminah Alwyn*, Philadelphia, PA

Cheyenne Andrews, Troutdale, OR

Christopher Arminio, Blakeslee, PA

Deidré Bongers*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Courtney Bragen, Warminster, PA

Sabrina Brock*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Keith Bullock Jr., Washington, DC

Juliet Cancelliere, Philadelphia, PA

Evan Clarke*, Aston, PA

Brett Cloud, Delran, NJ

Luke de Chazal*, Rochester, MI

Maya Earnest-Hunsiker*, Bensalem, PA

Christopher Fox*, Newtown, PA

Ryan Givhan, Elkins Park, PA

Gella Gorodensky, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Nathan Harris, Brisbane, Australia

Daniel Jackson, Bryn Athyn, PA

Aaron Jones, Lawrenceville, NJ

Laif Judson*, Kempton, PA

Christian Kalb, Baltimore, MD

Khrystyna Kavalets, Philadelphia, PA

Michael Keenan III, Philadelphia, PA

Freya King, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Xander Kruvczuk, King of Prussia, PA

Thor Lawing*, Bryn Athyn, PA

Isaac Marshall, Philadelphia, PA

Naida Navarro*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Breyanna Neal*, Philadelphia, PA

Matthew Norris*, Chalfont, PA

Alexis Pacheco*, Taunton, MA

Noah Riley, Sykesville, MD

Christina Roemhild-Vasilas, Philadelphia, PA

Lucas Sandstrom*, Belo Horizonte, Brazil

Jaden Schoeniger, Philadelphia, PA

Nathan Squares, Philadelphia, PA

Elsa Torres, Philadelphia, PA

Bachelor of Science

Ashley Agondanou*, Philadelphia, PA

Emily Anacleto, Philadelphia, PA

Leah Flade*, Philadelphia, PA

Julia Gabor*, Levittown, PA

Alahnys Galarza-Figueroa, Guayama,
Puerto Rico

Leilah Glenn*, Kempton, PA

Breanna Smith, Phillipsburg, NJ

Adrianna Storck*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Sylvia Sweigert*, Hershey, PA

The Valedictorian was **Deidré Bongers**

Master of Arts in Religious Studies
Jennica Nobre, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Master of Divinity
Mandla Stole, Alexandra, South Africa

Scholarships and Awards

Faculty Council Awards

Deidré Bongers, Levi McFall, Sylvia Sweigert

E. Gerald Hurst, PhD Business Award

Christopher Fox

Theta Alpha International Awards

Ashlyn Klippenstein, Makenna Lindsay, Margaret Stine

History and Social Science Awards

Deidré Bongers and Matthew Norris

Margaret and Gregory Baker PhD

Mathematics and Physics Award

Benjamin Evans

Nobre Computer Science Awards

Josiah Genzlinger and Ian Kistner

Mathematics Award

Lucas Sandstrom

Psychology Award

Maya Earnest-Hunsiker

Dristy-Farrell Study of the Writings Awards

Grace Welsch and Marie Traversiere

Erland Brock Memorial Science Awards

Prince Dziekpor and Grace Welsch

Biology Graduation Awards

Julia Gabor and Sylvia Sweigert

Student Research Achievements

Mayzie Braun, Maya Earnest-Hunsiker, Serena Elphick

ACADEMY SECONDARY SCHOOLS GRADUATION AND AWARDS

At the 149th Commencement of the Academy of the New Church Secondary Schools, husband-and-wife team of Daric and Tara Smith reminded the graduates of the simple but enduring story of the Good Samaritan. We don't know his name or anything about him – except that he showed kindness to someone in need, who was shunned by others.

Let that be your guide they said in their Commencement Address. “It is your good deeds and selfless acts that will reverberate to eternity.” (Read the address on page 270)

Sixty-seven seniors received diplomas or certificates: 25 in the Girls School (13 With Honors) and 42 in the Boys School (seven With Honors).

The graduates represented four countries in addition to the United States (Canada, Ghana, Nigeria and Singapore), and six states in addition to Pennsylvania (Arizona, Colorado, Maryland, Michigan, New Hampshire and New Jersey).

The class banner is based on Isaiah 43:2: “*The flames shall not consume*” – a promise that those who trust in the Lord will not be consumed by their trials.

The class gift – presented by Senior Class Presidents **Olena Abakah-Williams and Logan Brown** – was a new podium to be used for chapel and special occasions.



GRADUATES AND AWARDS

The Girls School (* With Honors)

Olena Abakah-Williams, Tema, Ghana

Olivia Adams, Bryn Athyn, PA

Raelyn Arnott*, Hatboro, PA

Isla Arzuaga-King*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Lynn Assanowicz, Philadelphia, PA

Verity Bongers, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Nicole Clark, Hatboro, PA

Vanessa Coleman, Abington, PA

Maddison Conlon, Abington, PA

Marley Hyatt, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Nora Kurtiak*, Lee, NH

Jayda Mayo*, Philadelphia, PA

Molly McCabe, Churchville, PA

Sophia Mergen, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Sadie Morey*, Tucson, AZ

Kayla Pigg*, Abington, PA

Ainsley Pitcairn, Bryn Athyn, PA

Morgan Pitcairn*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Chloe Robertson*, Philadelphia, PA

Windsor Smith*, Bryn Athyn, PA

Shantani Sreirekam*, Singapore

Ava Teich, Philadelphia, PA

Nayeli Thevenin*, Philadelphia, PA

Mary Vandegrift*, Jenkintown, PA

Isabel Waelchli*, Bryn Athyn, PA

The Valedictorian was **Jayda Mayo**

The Boys School (* *With Honors*)

Christopher Alston-Nelson, Philadelphia, PA

Ladi Ashiru*, Nigeria

Tait Asplundh*, Bryn Athyn, PA

Hayden Beck, New Hope, PA

Shane Bradley, Swedesboro, NJ

Eyn Espinola-Braxton, Philadelphia, PA

Logan Brown*, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Porter Brown, Bryn Athyn, PA

Dior Carter, Philadelphia, PA

Liam Conaron, Willow Grove, PA

Cole Corwell, Abington, PA

Jasin Custus-Dancy, Philadelphia, PA

Nick Devincent, Hatboro, PA

Brogan Fraser*, Bryn Athyn, PA

Khalif Frazier, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Cole Gainsley, Holland, PA

John Garvin Jr., Butler, PA

Nicholas Guzy, Ivyland, PA

Scott Hasen, Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Ronan Henderson, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Noah Incollingo, Jenkintown, PA

Elijah Jean, Philadelphia, PA

Jack Kelly, Hatboro, PA

Jason Killich, Philadelphia, PA

Jason Kitahama, Denver, CO

Anton Kuzosky, Hatboro, PA

Darwin McMackin, Willow Grove, PA

Charles McQueen-Prutzman, Jenkintown, PA

Oliver Orthwein*, Bryn Athyn, PA

David Pomeroy III, Chalfont, PA

Bryce Rollerson*, Doylestown, PA

Isaac Rose, Bryn Athyn, PA

Elias Schnarr, Rochester, MI

Samir Scriven, Philadelphia, PA

Cam Smith, Richboro, PA

Kai Smith*, Mitchellville, MD

Atticus Stein, Pittsburgh, PA

Riley Tang, Philadelphia, PA

Ryan Torres, Philadelphia, PA

Quincy Wade, Huntingdon Valley, PA

Ryan Warren, Lansdale, PA

Atticus Zebroski, Feasterville, PA

The Valedictorian was **Ladi Ashiro**

Academic and Athletic Awards

Honorary Girls School Diplomas

Megan McCabe, Anyely Rondon Rivas

Honorary Boys School Diploma

Geoff Harbach

Theta Alpha Award

Windsor Smith (Gold)

Boys School Faculty Awards

Tait Asplundh (Silver)

Oliver Orthwein (Silver)

Emilie K. Asplundh Awards

Sarah Roscoe and Zion Nobre

All Sports Coaches Awards

Outstanding Athletes

Stanley F. Ebert Award

Cole Gainsley

Elaine K. Asplundh Award

Molly McCabe

Sportsmanship Awards:

Payson Lyman Award

Khalif Frazier

Marah P. Boyesen Awards

Mary Vandergrift and Ainsley Pitcairn

GENERAL CHURCH BOARD OF DIRECTORS (May 1-2, 2026)

President's Report

Rt. Rev. Peter M. Buss Jr.

Bishop Buss shared key updates on the following strategic focuses in the

central offices that have budget allocations for the upcoming fiscal year:

- Recruiting and Developing Priests
- Intake Program for New Church Education
- Fostering a Sharing and Inviting Culture
- Supporting Congregational Renewal
- Renewed Vision and Communication
- Other Vision related projects
- Intentional work with Vision partners

He also provided an administrative rationale for planned financial support in FY 27 for Bryn Athyn College of the New Church.

General Church and Bryn Athyn College administrations continue to align on mission and anticipate partnership efforts such as inviting New Church students to Academy schools and Academy students to General Church worship, plus partnerships around education programs in teaching and theological training.

Bishop Buss also noted upcoming communication focuses, including a membership survey and ongoing presentations during his travels focusing on the theme, “Send Me.”

He and Executive Director **David Frazier** recognized the service of outgoing Board members: **Chuck Ebert, Cathy McQueen and Kelly Niall.**

Chuck Ebert, after accumulating 18 years of service as a Board member (with a one-year break between three consecutive three-year terms) expressed his appreciation for the opportunity, with many fond memories of his years of service.

Vice Presidents

The Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth noted the potential utility of creating a system for sharing congregational updates with the Board.

The Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs commented on the success of recent Educational Leadership Training meeting in Oak Arbor, Michigan, and on **Scott Daum’s** New Church education training modules. Scott is working on a book on New Church education.

FY27 Budget

Keith Hyatt and David Frazier

The operating budget is balanced, with \$7.5 million for both Revenue and Expenses, an increase over the FY26 budget of about 9%, or approximately

\$634,000.

The capital budget of \$45,000 proposed new items for FY27.

Non-Operating Budgets, Fund Activity: total fund balances of roughly \$194 million generate about \$10.2 million in revenue, supporting approximately \$8.9 million of expenses for church and school uses.

Executive Director

David Frazier

For the nine-month period ending March 31 there were extraordinary revenues of about \$7.1 million, favorable to both the budget and the prior year, covering expenses of \$5.4 million, unfavorable to budget, and about \$527,000 increase to last year's expenses, yet still yielding a surplus of approximately \$1.8 million.

Theological School

Dean Scott Frazier

Scott addressed objectives and presented related expenses for the recruiting pipeline and retention efforts.

The Theological School expects 16 students next year, including part-time, full-time, in-person and online pathways.

Global Healthy Congregations

John Berridge and Jane Enis

Jane updated the work of Global Healthy Congregations and how it aligns with the General Church's unifying direction of "Send Me: Seven Years of Willingness." The group is working with six congregations that have moved beyond the pilot phase into active renewal efforts using structured planning, implementation and review systems designed to help congregations move from ideas to action. Early indications are encouraging.

In West Africa GHC is strengthening project oversight, reporting systems and infrastructure support to ensure that projects are completed well and that stronger systems are in place for the future.

As demand grows, GHC is focused on building repeatable tools, defining clear engagement models, and creating additional facilitation capacity so that this work can be expanded to support more congregations in the future.

General Church Education

Tanya Woker and the Rt. Rev. Bradley Heinrichs

Bishop Heinrichs addressed budget items such as the Intake Program for New

Church Education and the internship program. Other items included ongoing training for teachers and maintaining competitive pay and benefits.

Real Estate Finance Committee

David Frazier and Wayne Wadsworth

The Cairncrest Committee and task force continued research on the narrowing options for housing the General Church central offices.

A resolution was approved for necessary investment in the Michael Church building and manse in the United Kingdom to support refurbishment.

Outreach

Chuck Ebert, the Rt. Rev. David Lindrooth and the Rev. Pearse Frazier

Bishop Lindrooth expressed sincere appreciation to Chuck Ebert for his service to the committee.

Pearse reported on the success of Easter Readings and Easter Group campaigns.

Outreach recently shifted its social media strategy after finding new information about how algorithms react to posting patterns.

Advancement

Mark Wyncoll and Brynna Carswell-Smith

Giving targets will be met this year, thanks to especially strong planned giving. Mark noted recent membership coordinator efforts on recruiting members, aimed at those who may not know about membership or realize that they never formally joined the organization.

Human Resources

Jamie Uber and Karen Stoeller

A cost-of-living increase to the base of salary scales, plus salary steps increases, are accounted for in the FY27 budget.

The Board was updated on continuing recruiting efforts for teachers and ministers plus a compensation study aimed at ensuring that General Church compensation packages are competitive with the labor market.

REGIONAL CLERGY MEETINGS

*From the Echo Newsletter of the Washington New Church
The Rev. Glenn (Mac) Frazier*

Every year, groups of ordained New Church priests gather professionally to discuss doctrine, compare notes and support one another in our shared uses as ministers, pastors and bishops of the General Church of the New Jerusalem. Some years the entire International Council of the Clergy meets in one place; other years smaller groups divided by region and/or type of congregation meet in smaller gatherings. This year, clergy meetings have been regional, often with two regions combining for a gathering. Here at Washington New Church we hosted the combined meeting of the Northeastern and Southern regions.

The current thinking of the bishops is that we should aim for full plenary meetings in Bryn Athyn every other year, with the alternating years used for regional meetings. However, we will likely repeat regional meetings next year (2027), although the combinations of regions may be remixed. The reason for this extra year of regional meetings is to synchronize the Council of the Clergy meeting cadence with a schedule of General Assemblies, and the likely next time the entire body of the General Church can hold an Assembly will be 2028.

As hosts from April 6-10 for one of the combined regional meetings in Mitchellville, Maryland, we were visited by 13 pastors, two bishops, and several clergy wives, plus our three resident priests. Church societies represented included: Washington, DC, Atlanta, Georgia, Boynton Beach, Florida, Kansas City, Missouri, Kempton and Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Boston, Massachusetts, with additional ministers from Bryn Athyn. We also had travelers from Sydney, Australia: Howard Thompson, our incoming Assistant to the Pastor and School Principal, with his wife, Debra.

What did we talk about? Every attending priest had the opportunity either to present a paper or lead a discussion. Many of the papers presented were preliminary in nature, with the idea that the authors could use feedback before either withdrawing the paper or updating it for presentation to the full Council of the Clergy at future meetings. Topics presented included:

- The importance of the priesthood in making the Second Coming known
- Understanding what “malicious desertion” really is and how that understanding may impact practices involving re-marriage
- Our dependence upon the Lord and our need for salvation
- Pastoral care for people experiencing same-sex attraction
- Order within the priesthood when there is disagreement between supervisors
- A vision for the General Church
- An analysis of a method for reading and meditating on the Word
- The intersection of secular politics and the uses of the priesthood
- Spiritual truths relevant to questions around pre-emptive wars
- A look at writing civil laws for a church society in light of the doctrines

- The contrast between wonder and cynicism and the relationship between modern and postmodern philosophies and the idea of moral law

We also discussed business and policy items, including the recruiting and training of priests, future Council meetings and other such administrative items.

The meetings were hosted at Erin Stillman's recently renovated and rededicated home, with an army of local volunteers helping to organize, manage and supply wonderful meals, snacks and places to sleep. Every day I heard participants praise the work of our volunteer team. Some noted that these were among the better organized regional meetings they had ever attended. Others delighted in all the subtle feminine touches in a very masculine-heavy event.

Our conversations were important, and many will have significant impact on the work of our priesthood and on the practices of the organized church.

Tributes to Retiring Bryn Athyn College Professors

DR. D. GREGORY ROSE

Dr. Marcy Latta

It is with deep appreciation that I announce the retirement of Dr. Gregory Rose, Associate Professor of History and Political Science, after 21 years of distinguished service to Bryn Athyn College of the New Church.

It speaks to Dr. Rose's character that he initially asked me not to make any announcement or prepare any kind of tribute on his behalf. After some back and forth, I was grateful to secure his permission to say a few words. In deference to his original preference, I will refrain from offering a lengthy tribute. Yet one of the marks of a life so well lived is that others cannot help but speak of it with gratitude, admiration and praise.

Dr. Rose is the very embodiment of humility joined with excellence in action. In every role he undertakes – teacher, mentor, committee chair – he works with exceptional care, the highest standards, breathtaking focus, and a remarkable selflessness. Though he is not one to seek the spotlight, his influence has been conspicuous in the worthiest of ways. He has earned the deepest respect of his colleagues as a steady and trusted leader within the College – someone whose judgment is sought, whose counsel is valued, and whose leadership has strengthened programs, processes and people alike, always marked by an unwavering dedication to the values at the heart of the



College's New Church mission.

Dr. Rose joined the faculty at Bryn Athyn College in 2005, following his retirement from the United States Air Force as a Lieutenant Colonel and service as Assistant Professor at the United States Air Force Academy. Just prior to joining the faculty at Bryn Athyn College, he served as a Political Analyst and Strategist in Iraq.

Dr. Rose has also dedicated himself to a wide range of service roles during his years at Bryn Athyn College. Among them are: Head of Academic Advising (2006–10), Chair of the Curriculum and Academic Policy Committee (2011–13), Chair of the History/Social Sciences Department (2014–17), Director of the Human Society major (2015–18), Pre-Law Advisor (2014–2026), and Team Mentor/Chaplain's Assistant for the Men's Soccer Team (2017–24) and Men's Volleyball Team (2021–24). He has also quietly undertaken, year after year, the often painstaking behind-the-scenes work of preparing the annual departmental assessment report for History and Social Sciences.

His talents and contributions to the College are numerous. Yet it is his extraordinarily high caliber teaching that perhaps stands out most clearly. Over the course of his career at Bryn Athyn, Dr. Rose has developed and taught 20 different courses, most in the History/Social Sciences Department and one – *Islam* – in the Religion, Sacred Languages and Philosophy Department. He has also taught significant numbers of general education sections, many with substantial enrollments, particularly Political Science 101, which for many years served as a Core requirement for a significant portion of the student body.

Students are anything but quiet in their praise. Both Dr. Rose and his classes are overwhelmingly cited as all-time student favorites at Bryn Athyn. I also hear time and again from colleagues about the ways he is consistently there for them as a friendly, generous and supportive colleague, and about the welcome he extends to new faculty.

In recommending him for emeritus status, a longtime colleague echoed this praise of his teaching in offering these remarks:

Dr. Rose is an exceptional teacher. He has spent his career cultivating his skills with a single-minded focus. He puts significant thought into the design of his courses and his pedagogy, including his approach to New Church education. This work results in very well-crafted courses that deliver powerful educational experiences and garner very high levels of student satisfaction. In addition to rating their courses with Dr. Rose very highly, students speak glowingly about his ability to clearly explain and break down course material, his expertise, the various ways that he effectively engages students, the clarity of his expectations, and his now famous "joke of the day" feature in each class.

Dr. Rose's legacy is one of steadfast dedication, intellectual thoroughness and genuine care for students and colleagues alike. His influence will continue to be felt in the lives he has shaped, the standards of excellence he has set, and the community he has helped sustain and strengthen. In both visible leadership and quiet diligence, he has upheld the distinctive mission of the College in a manner that is nothing short of exemplary.

We extend our heartfelt gratitude and warm congratulations to Dr. Rose on his retirement and as he enters emeritus status.

DR. DAN A. SYNNESTVEDT

Dr. Marcy Latta

After 37 years of exceptional service to Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, Dr. Dan A. Synnestvedt retired at the end of the academic year, June 30. Dan's influence on the intellectual and spiritual life of the College is difficult to overstate. Since joining the faculty in 1988, he has shaped generations of students, contributed generously to institutional life, and has thoughtfully integrated the teachings of the New Church into his teaching, his scholarship, and his service.



A philosopher by training and vocation, Dan earned his Ph.D. from Temple University with a dissertation: *Kantian Religion: Relating Humans, God, and Nature*. His work reflects a rare combination of intellectual discipline and spiritual depth, bringing together the rigor of Kant's practical philosophy with a sustained engagement with Swedenborg's philosophical theology. The ambitious scope of his dissertation foreshadowed the wide-ranging scope of his research to come, which he characteristically undertook quietly and earnestly, without ego or fanfare.

Across more than three decades, Dan's scholarship has spanned an impressive range of topics and includes more than 45 invited lectures along with many publications. Yet a remarkably coherent intellectual project threads throughout his body of work. This stages an ongoing dialogue between Immanuel Kant's uncompromisingly rationalist account of moral autonomy and Emanuel Swedenborg's expansive theology of spiritual influx – consisting in love, wisdom and use – exploring how Enlightenment rationality and spiritual metaphysics might illuminate and enrich, rather than exclude, one another.

At the center of this inquiry lies a sustained reflection on the moral plane of life as the mediating realm between the spiritual and the civil: the arena in which Divine love becomes freely chosen character and finds expression

in the realm of law and the structures of communal life. Both his earliest presentation on record, a 1989 College colloquium titled *“Religion and Belief: The Grammar of the Heart,”* and his first publication, a 1989 article in *New Church Life*, *“Biblical Ethics: Two Views,”* already anticipate this defining theme. It continues to unfold in later writings, including his 1998 development study *“The Uses of Philosophy,”* his 2004 article *“Philosophy: Friend or Foe of Faith?”*, and presentations such as *“Ethics: Relating Your Spiritual Life to Your Civil Life”* (2011) and *“The Good Life: Integrating the Civil, Moral, and Spiritual Planes of Reality”* (2014).

Across topics as varied as happiness, virtue, naturalism, vocation and peace, his scholarship consistently advances a vision of moral formation as the living bridge between eternal truths and social order.

Affectionately known to students as “Dr. Dan,” he is a professor whose influence extends long past graduation. Thoughtful, challenging, principled, and deeply committed to the life of the mind, he has helped students become conscientious citizens and upright human beings. He has developed and taught a wide range of courses: Introduction to Worldviews, Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Modern and Contemporary Philosophy, Political Thought, Ethics and Computing Technology, Work and Meaning, Critical Thinking, and the Senior Capstone Seminar, among others.

Notably, to benefit the curriculum for Philosophy 111: An Introduction to Moral Philosophy, Dan undertook a comprehensive study of how the major traditions of moral philosophy, ranging from deontological and consequentialist frameworks to virtue ethics and care ethics, align with and diverge from New Church teachings as conveyed in the Writings. Broadly, his teaching reveals not only a command of philosophy across eras and traditions, but also a genuine care for helping students wrestle with the most important questions of human existence.

One teaching insight has stayed with me. In a brief hallway conversation, he mentioned that this year he planned to “bring joy into the classroom.” It was a simple comment, offered in passing, but it captured something essential about good pedagogy. His course materials, many of which I have been fortunate to inherit, including a game about virtues of character hand-made by his children when they were young, reflect his commitment to helping students grow not just in knowledge but in character.

Dan has also been a steadfast advocate for maintaining a thoughtful balance between the teaching of religion and philosophy at Bryn Athyn College. He has long emphasized that without this balance, and without the distinctions among kinds of belief that philosophy helps us articulate, a religious college risks sliding toward indoctrination rather than education.

His Philosophy 102: Introduction to Worldviews course stands as a

testament to this conviction: a course designed to help students rationally scrutinize the assumptions, commitments and implications of differing perspectives so they may approach matters of faith with clarity, independence of mind, and genuine understanding – and, ultimately, freely and deliberately adopt a faith and perspective as their own.

Equally remarkable is Dan's record of service. Few faculty members have given so widely, consistently and selflessly across so many areas of institutional life. He has served on or chaired nearly every major committee at the College, including Faculty Council, Faculty Matters, Core Curriculum, Tenure and Promotions, Admissions, and Governance and Leadership. His service reflects the same careful judgment and dedication that characterize his teaching and scholarship.

His impact on governance has been especially profound. He played a leading role in creating the Faculty Council, now a vital body within our shared governance system. His vision, persistence and sense of fairness were instrumental in establishing a structure that gives faculty a clear and respected voice in institutional decision-making. This contribution alone has left an enduring mark on the life and well-being of the College.

For me, Dan has been a most generous mentor. He attended my dissertation defense, freely shared his teaching materials, offered professional wisdom, and provided useful and insightful feedback on my scholarly drafts. Amid the cluttered schedules of meetings and administrative demands, he has sustained a philosophical fellowship – creating welcome opportunities to “talk shop” and think together. We share a scholarly path – both trained in Kant's philosophy and deeply engaged with the philosophical dimensions of Swedenborg's thought. His influence on my own intellectual life has been profound. Even more importantly, he inspires me to be a better person.

He has long embodied the virtues that make for a healthy academic community: honesty, kindness, courtesy, industriousness, generosity, faithfulness and fairness. Alongside these classical virtues, he has modeled something essential to scholarly life – the willingness to revise his views in response to new evidence and thoughtful argument. In a profession that can easily drift toward abstraction or skepticism, Dan has preserved what Plato called the beginning of philosophy: wonder. This unguarded sense of wonder is visible in the way he listens, the way he questions, and the abiding joy he takes in the life of the mind.

As we celebrate Dan's retirement, we honor not only the magnitude of his contributions to Bryn Athyn College but also the character and spirit with which he has made them. In addition to his countless serious and substantial contributions to scholarship, teaching and service at the College, we would be remiss not to acknowledge the well-timed levity, humor and musical creativity

he has also shared so generously with our community.

He leaves a legacy of scholarship, mentorship and moral leadership that will continue shaping Bryn Athyn College for years to come. We are profoundly grateful for his service and wish him deep joy and fulfillment in the next chapter of his life.

Theta Alpha Laws of Life

Essay Contest 2027

Eligibility: 15-16-year-old girls worldwide (High School Sophomores in the United States)

Prizes: 1st Place: \$200; 2nd Place \$150; 3rd Place \$100

Suggested Length: 500-600 words (two pages double-spaced)

Topic: *Your Laws of Life*

“Laws of Life” are a set of rules, ideals or principles by which a person chooses to live. What is important to you? What ideals do you hold deep in your heart? Think about the people and experiences that have helped you form these laws. Pick a topic to write about:

1. A personal experience/lesson learned that affects how you live/view your life now.
2. An aphorism or quote that inspires or guides you.
3. You can use an analogy, a quotation, a story, or a parable.
4. No personal romantic relationships

Form for Submission:

1. Essays are to be in English (Google Translate can be used for this purpose).
2. No name or identification on the paper itself, to allow for impartial judging.
3. Name and address need to be included in the envelope or email.

Submissions are to be sent to:

Theta Alpha International, PO Box 154, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, USA, or emailed to scholarships@thetaalphainternational.org. They must be received by March 01, 2027.

Life Lines

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

WHERE THE CHURCH LIVES – IN OUR MEMORIAL SERVICES

For all our well-crafted and well-intentioned efforts at evangelization, nothing has proven more effective than simply inviting a friend or acquaintance to come to church.

Even better is inviting people from outside the church to attend a wedding, where they are often impressed with the sacred sphere and our reverence for marriage.

But best of all is when guests attend our memorial services. Everyone wonders what happens when we die. Everyone has lost parents, friends, acquaintances and dealt with grief. Everyone has questions.

Over and over we hear how visitors are taken with our teachings about life after death, with the comforting faith we offer, and with the way this helps us in our own daily lives.

A perfect example was the recent memorial service for Scott Asplundh in the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. Scott, dynamic president of the Asplundh Company, was stricken with ALS (“Lou Gehrig’s disease”) that ravaged his body for five years – but not his mind.

The Cathedral was filled with company executives and employees who loved Scott and grieved for him and his family. How reassuring it must have been for them to hear our sure faith that Scott was restored to full health immediately after leaving this world, and was already eagerly looking for ways to be useful.

As with all memorial services in the Cathedral – and in our societies – visitors can read a beautiful program while listening to carefully chosen music before the service. On the back of that program are two simple quotes from *Heaven and Hell* and *Arcana Coelestia* on the reality of life continuing after leaving this world.

Below that is a simple listing of “Teachings for the New Church,” including:

- Life after death is real. Everyone continues life’s journey right away as a complete person.

- Heaven is for all people who become angels by living according to God's Commandments.

The Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh, younger cousin of Scott, officiated at the service. After an introduction about how the slogan, "A Better Way," came to define the Asplundh Company – and Scott's life – Kurt said:

Today, we mark the passing of Scott Martin Asplundh; we honor the life that he lived; and we offer our love and strength to his family and to all those who loved him and who in one way or another benefited from what we might say was "the better way" in which Scott lived his own life. Envisioning, striving for and bringing into practice a better way isn't just good business, it's a good way to live.

With love as one of the themes of the service, Kurt took a minute to "explain a little about the religious point of view I am speaking from in this address," including that the doctrine we teach is founded on the Bible and also the spiritual insights revealed to Emanuel Swedenborg by the Lord.

For generations in Bryn Athyn and around the world, New Church people – including the three founders of the (Asplundh) tree company and their parents before them – have found comfort and hope in Swedenborg's vivid reports and rationally argued assertions about the world into which we all will awaken at the time of our passing from this life.

He noted that in *Divine Love and Wisdom* Swedenborg identifies love as the fundamental substance of all life and all creation. He said:

Love is where our intention and motivation come from. Love gives us ideas about what is good. Love is the source of our joy, delight and happiness. The purpose of human life is to grow in love, to refine how and where our love is directed and to share and express that love."

Scott was a star athlete at the Academy Boys School, and his wife Hali said to Kurt before this service: "I believe the character of the man was honed on the athletic field. He excelled in three varsity sports. The lessons he learned were teamwork, leadership skills, showing up prepared, risk and reward, trusting the process, staying in the game when things didn't seem to be going his way, and the value of great coaching. Scott loved a challenge. All the lessons he absorbed served him incredibly well – as a teammate and leader in the family business."

That confirms a belief I always held in my athletic days at the Academy and since – that our fields and gymnasiums are the laboratories of New Church education, where what is learned in the classroom is put into life, and is its own

reward. Scott's life personified that.

Kurt also quoted Swedenborg that "we are not born for the sake of ourselves but for the sake of others." Scott lived to serve others – through his school years and adult life. And all of those remembering Scott's commitment to service got a glimpse of the heaven that awaits him – and all of us – as a kingdom of uses, not idleness. And couldn't they just imagine him eager to get busy – and finding his happiness in being useful?

Kurt concluded his service with:

In the New Church we believe that when the beating of Scott's heart in his natural body finally failed him, he was resurrected soon after into a new and whole and disease-free spiritual body which will allow him to get back to his active, forward-looking, problem-solving self, finding "a better way." Love and the leadership and service that love inspires are spiritual, eternal qualities that cannot die.

I imagine those many friends and colleagues of Scott's shed some tears but also felt uplifted by the sure hope of our New Church faith that his life – so tragically sidelined by a cruel disease – has a new and eternal vigor in the life after death, blessed with new meaning and happiness. And may we wish that his life and remembrance – reflected in this distinctly New Church service – left them all with a new hope and vision for their own lives and life to come: "A better way."

(BMH)

THE LIFE OF NEW CHURCH LIFE

Back in April Spiritual Editor the Rev. Jeremy Simons and I were asked to give a program at a community supper in Bryn Athyn on the past, present and future of *New Church Life*. It was fun for us – and hopefully for the audience – and a good reminder for all of us why this journal is forever essential to the church. You can view this program at: https://youtube.be/2oZ_L9rEa8.

The history of the General Church has been chronicled in the pages of *New Church Life* for almost 150 years and it must always be the repository of New Church thought and history.

New Church Life was launched in 1881 as a journal for the young people of the church, with the enthusiasm of youthful editors. By 1896 it turned to an all-inclusive audience as the official journal of the General Church, which it remains to this day. Its history is noble. May it always remain vital to the present and the future.

So how did I – a non-minister – become the editor of *New Church Life*

when *The Order and Organization of the General Church* still, I believe, says that the editor “must” be a priest?

I had a 40-year career in journalism, primarily as an editorial page editor for a daily newspaper. And while I served on church boards and wrote three books for the church, I never even dreamed that I would – or could – be the editor of the *Life*. Certainly my father, the Rev. Cairns Henderson, who was the legendary editor for almost 25 years from the 1950s into the early ‘70s, never could have imagined it either.

It still was not on the horizon when I left journalism for the Office of Development and Communications, happy to give some years to the Church and Academy before retirement. But budget pressures in 2010 forced the closing of the Communications Office and I was offered the job as editor of the *Life*. I was happy to be partnered with the Rev. Walter Orthwein as part-time “Spiritual Editor” to cover that ministerial oversight. (Walter gave about 10 years of distinguished service before retiring and turning the spiritual oversight to the Rev. Jeremy Simons.)

So, my 5-10 years of service has stretched to 26 – with no horizon in sight. I am loving this opportunity to serve the Lord and His Church.

Before taking over as editor we surveyed *Life* readers and found them ready for change: a switch to bimonthly publication (for budget reasons), and eager for improved and more diversified content.

Among the changes we have implemented:

- A more modern cover design, with color images
- More diversity in content, including laymen and women
- A report *From the Bishop's Office* in each issue
- Life Lines – in addition to editorials – which are among the most popular features
- Expanded Church News, often with color photographs
- Complete coverage of Bryn Athyn College and Secondary Schools graduations, Charter Day, General Church Assemblies, and events in different societies
- A guiding principle appears on the cover of each issue: “A bimonthly magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg, as they apply to life.”

It is no surprise that many readers start from the back with the listings of baptisms, confirmations, betrothals, marriages and In Memoriam – informally dubbed, I hear, as the “Hatched, Matched and Dispatched.” This is no surprise. I was humbled early on in my newspaper days by polls showing our most

popular features were obituaries and the Horoscope.

One alarming trend is that going back 50 years and more, there were always 100 to 150 baptisms, plus 40 to 50 confirmations and betrothals. Baptisms are still up there but now there are only a handful of confirmations and betrothals. Something for the church to ponder.

During our presentation, Jeremy offered an excellent PowerPoint on the history of the church contained in the pages of *New Church Life*. This is an enduring value that is easily overlooked. Nowhere else is this rich history so consistently preserved, and it is fascinating to go back and read old copies.

From time to time we reprint memorable articles from the last, such as the 100th anniversary of an Academy commencement address by John Pitcairn – about the amazing material progress of the past century, but with how much spiritual progress? The question is even more insistent today. And we published a Charter Day address from 1943 by the Rev. (not yet Bishop) Willard D. Pendleton on the relationship of the General Church and the Academy that still is relevant and important.

We welcome letters and articles, from the laity and the clergy, on church issues, framed in doctrine and charity. We want *New Church Life* to be ever relevant and vital to the church and its readers and will always welcome suggestions and constructive criticism. The more meaningful and valued it is in the lives of its readers, the more vital it is to the life of the church. We are happy when people share copies with friends – especially outside the church. Extra copies of each issue are placed in the Cathedral to be picked up by visitors – seeds planted by the wayside, and who knows how or where they may bloom?

Jeremy and I are blessed with a team producing the Life that needs to be acknowledged and appreciated. Tess Brown Taylor in Kempton formats each issue – a skill far beyond my capabilities. (Others who have done this vital job are Serena Silverman Sutton and Michelle Chapin.) Proofreaders are indispensable and it's good to have at least three. We have been blessed from the beginning with Noelene Rose, now joined by Elaine York and Donald Fitzpatrick. (Gwen Asplundh, Judy Hyatt and Katie Goerwitz have also served.) Anita Halterman, as Secretary of the General Church, prepares the Announcements for each issue, along with the General Church Annual Report and Clergy Directory for the December issue – with painstaking accuracy.

Somewhat surprisingly the circulation of the *Life* has remained fairly constant – between 750 and 1,000. Names have changed but not the numbers. But now there are hundreds more who read each issue online, and who knows what the future will bring: an app on your iPhone or some application of AI? Something for the next editor to think about.

We may wish that all in the church made *New Church Life* a welcome part

of their spiritual life and reflection, just as we wish more people read the Word and the Writings, and came to church. But the Lord never gives up on us or His Church; we don't either. We are humbly privileged to offer the Life for all who "*Seek the Lord while He may be found (and) call upon Him while He is near.*"

(BMH)

THE LEGACY OF NEW CHURCH LIFE

We are especially blessed with the rich history of *New Church Life* – and to glimpse the challenges of the future with a sense of confidence – when we stand on the shoulders of giants in the church. My “giant” is my father, the Rev. W. Cairns Henderson, who was the editor for 23 years in the 1950s and into the ‘70s before failing health took him on to higher uses.

Here is a sampling of his enduring wit and wisdom:

From a statement in his first issue in January 1951

New Church Life has sought to provide doctrinal leadership and to serve as a medium of pastoral instruction through sermons, articles and editorials. In so doing it may furnish constructive critical thought as to the state of the church and of the world, and indicate from the Writings the requisites for genuine progress. And it at once presents and preserves the doctrinal thought and practices of the General Church from its inception. As a result of this use, the *Life* has become a repository of serious study of nearly every phase of the Writings, studies which are permanently at the disposal of the student.

But the terms of its purpose make *New Church Life* more than a medium of instruction. Of necessity it is also a forum for the exchange of views and opinions on doctrinal and practical matters: for a church which would become truly rational . . . it must provide for a depth of vision and breadth of understanding by inviting the contributions of many minds to the things that concern it.

There is a place in the pages of the *Life*, as in the assemblies of the Church, for responsible debate of important issues within the General Church, and for expression of varying views on matters of doctrine; as distinct, of course, from fruitless controversy, or the illumination by limelight of the furrow!

Our journal seeks to chronicle, survey, appraise and promote New Church life in all of its forms; to advocate and guard the Divine and spiritual things upon which that life is built; and to warn if danger threatens. And, finally, on the ultimate plane, in official reports and accounts of meetings, in biographical and historic sketches, in news notes and announcements and in photographs,

it has become a store of information as to the uses and the members of the General Church.

From a Report as Editor to the General Assembly in 1954

We have conceived *New Church Life* as a medium of communication, in which we include instruction, and a place of exchange, and to foster these uses have tried to provide for it an atmosphere of freedom. This freedom is within the order voluntarily accepted by a magazine devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. . . . But it postulates that freedom of the press includes the editorial right not to publish for good and sufficient cause, and the right of contributors to say without interruption what may not be acceptable to some.

The fact that *New Church Life* is the official organ of the General Church means essentially that it is the depository of the transactions of the church. The General Church does not have official views, a party line on every question of doctrine and practice to which contributors must hew or be investigated. It seeks to present in the best light it has the plain teachings of the Writings, and in some of those teachings there is legitimate place for a variety of interpretations.

Anything plainly contrary to the unmistakable teachings of the Writings would not be published. For the rest it has been our quiet conviction that nothing printed in the magazine will open the gates of the infernal regions because it is not answered editorially or argued in footnotes in the same issue. The present editorship is dedicated to the proposition that we have an intelligent readership, well grounded in the doctrines, and as capable of exercising liberty and rationality when they pick up the *Life* as when they do anything else. . . .

Finally, if an editor is to serve his public usefully and intelligently he must be in touch with that public and so be aware of its interests, states and needs.

From a Report to the 1959 General Assembly

A general body of the church without an official organ would lack a reliable record of itself and an important means of communication. For nearly 79 years *New Church Life* has recorded the official transactions of the Academy and the General Church, and has chronicled events in societies and circles. And since the real history of the church is the development of doctrine, its literary contents are a storehouse of primary material for the research student. Thus it is a permanent record of the thought and happenings of the past that becomes increasingly useful in the future.

It has often been said that the New Church is to be a reading church. We presume this to mean that it is also a thinking church! And we believe that the most important use of *New Church Life* is to stimulate doctrinal thought that looks to life; thought which is common to all because it is produced by action and reaction between many writers in the General Church and an intelligent readership which well represents our membership.

In the pages of the journal there can be, month to month, a true meeting of all the minds of the General Church. This we see as the real use of *New Church Life* to the General Church; and because it is such, it can be sustained only as a use of the General Church.

Yet an editor may see his publication no more clearly than a fond mother for her only child. If anyone wishes to discuss the magazine, to make comments or suggestions, this is the time to do it. No editor dare promise that every suggestion offered will be followed. But all will be considered most carefully; and if your suggestion is rejected, you will be given most weighty and impressive reasons why it cannot be adopted.

From a Report to the 1966 General Assembly

In 1942 a New Church Life Committee appointed by the Bishop sent out three non-identical questionnaires to the clergy, the then Executive Committee, and a group of 30 selected young people. The rate of reply was excellent; and, among other things, a summary indicated a general feeling that the magazine should give leadership, and that it should in its editorials furnish critical thought concerning the state of the church and the world and be an advocate of what is needed for true progress.

Whether this sank deeply into the editor's subconscious when he first read it is not known, but the fact is that this is precisely what he has been trying to do. Month by month the effort is to analyze current trends in the Christian churches and in the organized bodies of the New Church, to examine key issues in the world, and to place before the church for its thoughtful consideration not only essential teachings of the Writings but also critical matters which, in the editor's judgment, need to be considered; and in all instances the endeavor has been not merely to criticize, but to stimulate free and rational thought from the doctrines and to advocate what is needed for true progress.

It is the editor's conviction that there is no issue of interest or concern to the church which cannot and should not be discussed editorially, and he has tried to avoid the appearance of speaking *ex-cathedra* and to invite expression of other views. Here we might refer to the series of editorials on the church and alcohol, birth control, conjugal simulations and remarriage published last year, and to more recent editorials on such topics as the spiritual issues in war,

obedience to law and automation. Of course, like an umpire, an editor who calls them as he sees them must expect to have his judgment, if not his vision, questioned from time to time, and those who question it are not necessarily out in left field either!

It has sometimes been asked where the editor gets ideas for editorials. The answer is a very simple one. He reads, and he listens. The latter should not be taken to mean that any gathering should clam up when he comes within earshot. A useful editorial may come out of the most casual conversation – and in the highest tradition of journalism all sources are fully protected. However, listening can be more effective the more vantage points there are from which it can be done; and for some time now, the editor has felt that he should be more active in visiting other societies – not as one of the new invaders equipped with secret electronic devices, but as one genuinely interested in learning as much as possible about the thought and concerns of the entire church which he represents in print.

From a Report to the General Assembly of 1970

Drawing attention to *New Church Life* as a use of the General Church:

We are accustomed to define use as an influence toward what is good and true; and if we think of the uses of the church as means which, in their several ways, seek to promote the doctrine and life of the New Church, and the love of them, we can see that this magazine is indeed a use of the General Church. It could not exist without the General Church; for without its resources it could not be published, or at least could scarcely be the type of journal it is.

Because it is the organ of the general body it is not slanted in the direction of any particular school of thought within that body, but presents as impartially as it knows how, and as fully as literary contributions make possible, the range of thought within the entire General Church. It is addressed to the entire membership of the General Church on the broadest basis of common interests, and is not restricted to any special-interest field from which others must or should be excluded.

A general body of the church without an official organ lacks a reliable record of itself and an important means of communication. For 90 years now, *New Church Life* has recorded the official transactions of the General Church and chronicled events in societies and circles; and since the real history of the church is that of the development of doctrine, its literary contents are a repository of primary material. Thus it is a permanent record of the thought, aspirations and happenings of the past that becomes increasingly useful for the future.

However, the editor does not conceive of his function as that of your

friendly neighborhood undertaker, or of honorable burial as the end of publication. There is an immediate and continuing use of communication. This is a two-way process. It has not been completed until the ideas it is sought to convey have been received and reacted to intelligently and critically. Such action and reaction produce a sphere of thought common to all, and such a sphere is essential to a living church.

We believe that the most important use of *New Church Life* is to stimulate doctrinal thought that looks to life, thought which is common to all because it is produced by action and reaction between many writers in the General Church and a wide readership which well represents our members. This we see as the real use of the magazine to the General Church – the meeting of minds month by month; and because it is such, it can be sustained only as a use of the General Church.

If there is one thing I would note with regret it is that letters to the editor have been one of the casualties in the general decline in the art of letter writing. This could be dangerous. An editor who does not receive reaction may conclude comfortably that somewhere out there is a silent majority which endorses and supports all his policies!

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This is the treasury of New Church thought, commitment and history – the life of *New Church Life* – which must forever remain with the church.

(BMH)

NEWS FROM THE SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION

The Swedenborg Foundation's 2026 Annual Meeting was May 15, at Glencairn in Bryn Athyn. The Rev. Chris Barber, President of the Board, described some of the highlights of the past year. From the Foundation's Annual Report we read that the *offTheLeftEye*

Swedenborg and Life podcast continued to grow through careful refinement of titles, thumbnails, and content strategy. Several episodes surpassed 50,000 views during the year, with one reaching 195,000, a clear signal that audiences are hungry to explore Swedenborg's message in depth. Total viewership for the main channel reached 2.2 million for the year.

We also see that there are some new online initiatives, such as the *offTheLeftEye Network*, which is an effort to use data to identify audiences

interested in Swedenborg, create content that earns their trust, and open the door to what the Foundation has to offer. The results have been good so far.

One example is “*The NDE Files*,” a channel targeting the large YouTube audience drawn to near-death experience content. In October-December 2025 it generated nearly 500,000 views. Another is “*offTheLeftEye en Español*,” a Spanish-language channel using AI translation software quality-checked by a native speaker. The result has been 100 translated videos, and nearly 50,000 new views.

Four new print titles were released in 2025:

- “*Secrets of Heaven*” volume 9 and 10
- “*Opening the Inner World: Spiritual Healing, Internal Family Systems, and Emanuel Swedenborg*,” by Chelsea Rose Odhner, Robert Falconer, and the Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Rose
- “*Listening to Eternity: The Music, Spirituality, and Creative World of Composer Tommie Haglund*,” by Dr. Aram Yardumian
- New audiobooks for *True Christianity* Volume 1 and 2.

This year *Secrets of Heaven* volume 11 has been released and volumes 12 and 13 are expected soon. Also, an audiobook version of *Opening the Inner World* and the new title, *My Entire Humanity: Essays on Swedenborg’s Spiritual Process and Our Own*, a collection of posthumous essays by the Rev. Dr. George F. Dole.

The current approach of the Foundation is that: *We meet people through the interests they already have, and guide them toward Swedenborg’s ideas.*

(JFS)

LAST WORDS

Ben Sasse, a 54-year-old retired U.S. Senator from Nebraska, gained a following he never anticipated after being diagnosed last December with stage-four pancreatic cancer and told he had just three to four months to live – which he has extended. He did not retreat into family and privacy as many do but went public: a much-admired “*60 Minutes*” interview, columns in *The Wall Street Journal* and podcasts advocating for hope, values and optimism.

“Cancer is bad,” he said, “but I already had a death sentence. We all do.”

Yes, we all know we will die but live with the hope that it will come after a long and useful life – not sudden and tragic. We are blessed to know that: *The life of every person is foreseen by the Lord, as to how long he will live*, and from earliest infancy the Lord’s providence is watching over us “*with regard to a life of eternity*.” (*Spiritual Diary* 5002)

Sasse's Reformed Christian faith tells him that God ordains everything, leaving him to reconcile why God allows such tragedy with good people. But he believes God has a plan for his life – and his family – even if he does yet understand. He chooses courage, grace and hope.

That comes through in a column he wrote for the *Journal: Habits for Humanity in the Age of AI (Help Your Kids Build the Character to Make the Most of Technology Rather than Become a Slave to it)*. Even in the throes of his death sentence, he wanted to be hopeful and useful:

Character, whether of an individual or of a nation, is molded by habits and by time. This republic requires men and women to do long-term deliberation, serious thinking, honest humility and daily striving. What good is it to gain the whole world if we forfeit the souls that we're supposed to form? We can't expect to remain free without being virtuous, we can't be bold without being rooted, we can't be great without aiming first to be good. We must deliberately shape our children's souls so that they can be creators, doers and thinkers embracing the next frontier.

These are among the “Last Words” he leaves to his family and to all of us – words that add meaning to a life cut short.

They also echo a legendary “Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 2007, after he too was living under a sudden “death sentence” of pancreatic cancer.

Pausch was a popular computer science professor with a wife and three young children. He, too, chose to be visible and public with his “last words” – delivered to an overflowing lecture hall and memorialized in a best-selling book, *“Last Lecture.”*

Many tears were shed with his wife – their children then too young to understand. He chose to be upbeat with his “last words” – funny, nostalgic and courageous in recalling the dreams of his childhood, imagining the dreams for his children, and advocating for all of us to dream, to hope, to believe.

He died 10 months later – forever remembered with tears and smiles.

As with so many others, their last words – public and private – were filled with grace, gratitude and hope. They came to the ultimate peace that overwhelms our own “death sentence”:

Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

(BMH)

Announcements

ORDINATION, First Degree

The affection for interior truth teaches what is in the Word. This is evident from the symbolism of a shepherd as being one who leads and teaches. From this affection a church is a church, and a pastor is a pastor. (Arcana Coelestia 3795)

Jung, Jin O

At Gwang-Ju, South Korea, May 10,
2026, Rt. Rev. David H. Lindrooth
officiating.

BAPTISMS

Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God. Truly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it. (Mark 10:13-15)

Adams, Elizabeth Carol

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April
26, 2026, daughter of Jeremy and
Julia Newell Adams, Rev. Steven P.
Gunther officiating.

Cole, Dorothy Rose

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, May
30, 2026, daughter of Benjamin and
Joy Brown Cole, Rev. Dr. Thane P.
Glenn officiating.

Agbe, Chaye Marcelline

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire,
March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise
officiating.

Cranch, Asher Bradley

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April
26, 2026, son of Benjamin and
Brianne Good Cranch, Rev. Jeffrey
O. Smith officiating.

Ban, Sadako Ange Gertrude

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire,
March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise
officiating.

Fogel, Hailey Monroe

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April
25, 2026, daughter of Jack and Shelby
Odhner Fogel, Rev. Charles E. Blair
officiating.

Bocker, Zachary Charles

At Rochester, Michigan, April 1,
2026, Rev. Erik J. Buss officiating.

Fogel, Jack William

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 25, 2026, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Fogel, Shelby Catherine Odhner

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 25, 2026, Rev. Charles E. Blair officiating.

Glenn, Josiah William

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 19, 2026, son of Coleman and Anne Grace Hurd Glenn, Rev. Jeffrey O. Smith officiating.

Goodluck, Rejoice

At Yenago, Bayelsa, Nigeria, January 11, 2026, daughter of Okeremo and Blessing Goodluck, Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta officiating.

Kouakou, Amon Ardine Janessa

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise officiating.

Kouame, Adjoua Eleonore

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise officiating.

Kouame, N'Dri Berenise Moncera

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise officiating.

McQueen, Diane Houghton

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, April 10, 2026, Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh officiating.

Ogigipke, Blossom Idipa

At Yenago, Bayelsa, Nigeria, January 11, 2026, son of Progress Ogidipke and Irene Onimite, Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta officiating.

Opus, Wisdom

At Yenago, Bayelsa, Nigeria, January 11, 2026, son of Robert Opus and Goodluck Blessing, Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta officiating.

Oula, Lehendu Eunice

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire, March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise officiating.

Reesor, Waylon Brock

At Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, February 8, 2026, son of Brock and Amy Johnson Reesor, Rev. Mark B. Allais officiating.

Resmini, Edward Louis

At Toronto, Ontario, Canada, February 22, 2026, Rev. James P. Cooper officiating.

Rose, Aaron

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, May 14, 2026, Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Rose officiating.

Sampson, Imaitor Sampson

At Yenago, Bayelsa, Nigeria, January 11, 2026, son of Imaitor Sampson and Margaret Emmanuel, Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta officiating.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Scheer, Oliver Lincoln

At Glenview, Illinois, June 1, 2025,
son of Danny and Taylor Dettmer
Scheer, Rev. Mark D. Pendleton
officiating. Delayed report.

Schuetz, Jameson Allen

At Rochester, Michigan, May 17,
2026, Rev. Erik J. Buss officiating.

Synnestvedt, Brynley Rae

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,
February 7, 2026, daughter of Ryan
and Erika Becker Synnestvedt, Rev.
Kurt Hy. Asplundh officiating.

Thankgod, Isaac

At Yenago, Bayelsa, Nigeria, January
11, 2026, son of Isaac Dede and Ella
Isaac, Rev. Kuroakegha Ebute-Metta
officiating

Thomas, Malcolm Seid

At Pheonix, Arizona, March 1, 2026,
son of Joshua and Nicole Iwuoha
Thomas, Rev. Jean A. Atta officiating.

Tosseguoue, Kpagre Aude

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire,
March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise
officiating.

Tradre, Nintoh Oceane Maheva

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire,
March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise
officiating.

Woker, Hayley Elizabeth

At Westville, KwaZulu-Natal, South
Africa, April 17, 2026, daughter of
David and Kelly Methven Woker,
Rev. Jerome B. Dube officiating.

Wyncoll, Nora Capri

At Kempton, Pennsylvania, February
14, 2026, daughter of Seth and Alair
Brock Wyncoll, Rev. Brett D. Buick
officiating.

Yao, Yao Gervais

At Yamoussoukro, Côte d'Ivoire,
March 29, 2026, Rev. Bab Moise
officiating.

BETROTHAL

*I will betroth you to Me forever; yes, I will betroth you to Me in justice
and judgment, in loving kindness and mercy: I will betroth you to Me in
faithfulness, and you shall know the Lord. (Hosea 2:19,20)*

Heinrichs-King, Deacon Bradley**Heinrichs and Hannah Mejer King**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania,
April 26, 2026, Rt. Rev. Bradley D.
Heinrichs officiating.

MARRIAGES

Love truly conjugal is from the Lord alone, and exists with those who are in the conjunction of good and truth from the Lord. When two minds are conjoined as to be one mind, there is love between them. (Apocalypse Explained 983)

**Allen-Monzo, James Allen and
Marissa Monzo**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, May
2, 2026, Rev. Malcolm G. Smith
officiating.

**Eckensberger-Asplundh, Shawn
Michael Eckensberger and Alexis
Lindsay Asplundh**

At Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, May
9, 2026, Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh
officiating.

IN MEMORIAM

*Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.
(John 14:1-3)*

Asplundh, Scott Martin

January 22, 2026, of Meadowbrook,
Pennsylvania. 68

McDonough, Martha Croft

March 18, 2026, of Huntingdon
Valley, Pennsylvania. 97

Davidson, John Michael

March 21, 2026, of La Crescenta,
California. 83

Morey, Betty Irene Byerly

May 1, 2026, of Bryn Athyn, Penn-
sylvania. 97

de Chazal, Paul

April 17, 2026 of Paris, France. 81

Odhner, Eudora Heinrichs

April 19, 2026, of Bryn Athyn,
Pennsylvania. 92

Fuller, Jeryl Glenn

May 31, 2026, of Glenview, Illinois. 86

Pendleton, Cairn

June 6, 2026, of Huntingdon Valley,
Pennsylvania. 57

Jungé, Judith Ellen Abele

May 8, 2026, of Huntingdon Valley,
Pennsylvania. 79

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Sandstrom, Rev. Dr. Erik Emanuel
June 13, 2026, of Huntingdon Valley,
Pennsylvania. 84

Templar, Elizabeth Ann Kitzelman
March 16, 2026, of Glenview, Illinois. 81

Synnestvedt, Lee Glen Coffin
May 16, 2025, of Glenview, Illinois. 88

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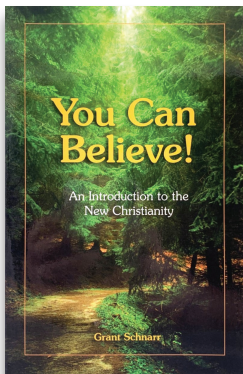
Have you ever struggled to understand the tough parts of the Word? Think of passages highlighting death and destruction, or stories and sayings that present either moral/philosophical problems or challenges to science/logic. Check out ***Looking Deeper Into the Bible: Making Sense of Seriously Problematic Themes and Passages in Sacred Scripture*** by longtime New Church pastor Mike Gladish. This readable, stimulating book not only discusses how spiritual revelation came to include such difficult passages but also helps the reader discover the wise, helpful spiritual tools for daily life that are found within these tough passages when their inner symbolic meaning is understood. Available at NewChurchBooks.com or Amazon.



**Looking Deeper
Into the Bible**

Making Sense of Seriously Problematic
Themes and Passages in Sacred Scripture

by the Rev. Michael Gladish



There's a **YouTube show** called ***Mysteries of Faith*** (with thousands of subscribers), featuring friendly conversations on major New Church concepts. Search YouTube for "NewChurchVideo" and then look for "***Mysteries of Faith***." The show is based on a book called ***You Can Believe! An Introduction to the New Christianity*** by Grant Schnarr. Like the show, this short book covers a lot of major New Church concepts in a conversational, approachable style. You can pick up the book at NewChurchBooks.com or on Amazon (in paperback or for Kindle). Check it out and tell a friend or relative.

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