

Religion is of life, and the life of religion is to do what is good

(Doctrine of Life 8)

The New Church is an international organization of people striving to improve their conscious relationship with the Lord, Jesus Christ, the one God who rules heaven and earth.

We extend a warm welcome to everyone, and invite you to take what you like and return it freely. We use the Bible and the Heavenly Doctrine revealed by the Lord and published by Emanuel Swedenborg to guide us in our lives, especially in our relationships. We freely share our love and understanding with each other, and try to give one another support in our spiritual journeys.

Our pastor is **Rev. Garry Walsh**. Garry grew up in the Hurstville congregation and is pleased that together with his wife and children, he is able to serve this group as their pastor. He is available on call to help people work through any of the life issues that affect their relationship with themselves, their neighbours and their Lord.

Worship Services are held each Sunday at 10:00 AM. **Sunday School** for children ages 0-14 runs concurrently with the Sunday Worship service. In summer there is child minding during the services.

Young People's Group is held every second week.

Doctrinal Classes are held on the 1st and 3rd Fridays of each month (summer excepted) beginning at 7 30 pm. Tea and social precede the class on the first Friday each month at 7.00 pm..

Discussion classes on fundamental New Church teachings are held on Wednesdays at 9 30 am.

The Swedenborg Bookroom, at 22 Dudley Street, Penshurst, contains books by and about Emanuel Swedenborg for sale or loan. It is open by appointment.

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<http://www.newchurch.org.au/hurstville>

Call or come at anytime.



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society March 2005

Piercing His Side

An Easter Message by Rev. Garry Walsh

This year Easter falls in the month of March. For this reason, our Newsletter this month begins with a focus on one small portion of the Easter story.

The Lord, through the Old Testament prophet Zechariah, wrote in advance about an important element in His own crucifixion. There in chapter 12 of the book of Zechariah we find the words:

And I will pour on the house of David and on the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplication; then they will look on Me whom they have pierced; they will mourn for Him as one mourns for his only son, and grieve for Him as one grieves for a firstborn.

“They will look on Me whom they have pierced.” These words proved to be

literally true. All four Gospels describe scenes of utter brutality that mark the end of the Lord's natural life here on Earth. After enduring severe physical torment and more than three hours on the cross the Lord spoke these three closing words, "It is finished." And, we are told, He bowed His head and gave up His spirit (John 19:30).

The afternoon of that dreadful day was growing late and the evening was fast approaching. According to Jewish custom, the going down of the sun would have marked the start of the new day. And, because the new day was their Sabbath, the Jews asked that the legs of the three crucified men be broken to hasten their deaths. In this way their bodies could be brought down and they could be properly dealt with before the commencement of the Sabbath and its prohibition regarding the performance of unclean duties such as handling dead bodies.

The two others who were crucified with Him had their legs broken as the Jews had requested. But, Jesus on His cross in the centre was left alone. It was clear that He was dead already. We read the words from the Gospel of John:

But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out (John 19:33, 34).

It is difficult to picture what actually transpired here. Many people have tried to direct the acting out of this scene with mixed success. One example is Mel Gibson's brutal and bloody depiction of Christ's passion. This movie also seems to struggle with these images. The movie shows centurions smashing the legs of the other two men to hasten their death. With the Lord though, they questioned whether He really was dead. And so, they sought to guarantee that He was dead by thrusting a spear into His side. We have to really question whether this was the way things transpired that day. If the Roman centurions really were uncertain whether the Lord was dead or not, surely they would simply have broken His legs as they had done with the others.

The truth is that there was no uncertainty. The Lord was dead, at least in the natural sense of death. The thrusting of the spear into His side was not a sign of doubt. It was a sign of something else. It was this "something else" that the Lord could see in advance. And, the things that the Lord could see provided the basis for the prophecy that He gives in the book of Zechariah.

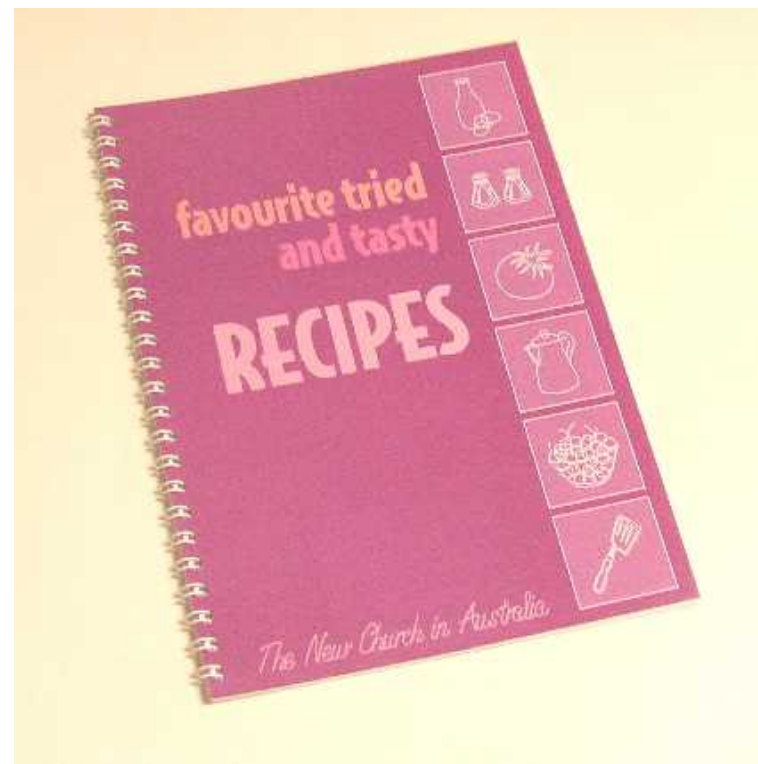
We are drawn to ask the question, "What would motivate someone to thrust a

March Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Tracy Hinds** (4th), **Mikayla Hinds** (4th), **Don MacFarlane** (7th), **Debbie Walsh** (7th), **Graham Horner** (12th), **Scott Lockhart** (16th), **Deanna Walsh** (16th), **Bill Hall** (26th), **Trevor Favell** (27th).

The New Church in Australia – Recipe Book

Some time ago, New Church people in Victoria put together a book of "Tried and Tasty Recipes" to raise funds to help New Church young people attend New Church summer camps. The folks in Victoria tell us that they have personally tried most of these recipes and feel certain that you will enjoy them just as much as they do. The Hurstville Society still has a supply of these books. They sell for \$10 plus postage if required, so contact Garry and he'll make sure one gets on its way to you.



celebrations. If it works out that he can be with us during all or part of that time, anticipate that he will have a central role in the Friday evening Doctrinal Class and the Sunday morning worship service.

Director of General Church Outreach's visit:

It is a pleasure to announce that **Rev. David Lindrooth**, Director of General Church Outreach will be visiting us in the first week of April. David is actually due to arrive on Wednesday, 30th of March. He will lead the doctrinal class to be held on Friday, 1st of April as well as worship on Sunday 3rd of April. Also, mark your calendars and plan to stay after church for a special Society Meeting that Sunday. The plan is for David to speak to us on Friday evening about General Church Outreach in general, its aims, and some of the outreach projects currently underway. The Society Meeting on the 3rd will focus on particular things that the Hurstville Society might be able to do in the way of outreach.

Work Day:

As most people involved with the Hurstville Society recognize, our property takes a lot of upkeep. Please note that a Work Day is scheduled for after church on Sunday, 6th of March. It will follow a brief meeting of the Anniversary planning committee where progress reports on various aspects of the planning will be presented. If you would like to lend a hand with work on the property, especially the grounds, but cannot make it here or cannot stay around on the 6th, please talk to Norman Heldon or Garry and there will no doubt be found plenty of things that you can get involved in at other times.

Comings and Goings:

During February Hurstville Society regulars **Dot Heldon** and **Patricia Walsh** along with Patricia's husband **Brian** and their daughter **Debbie** spent time in sunny Southeast Queensland, visiting the sights and the many relatives and friends that live in that part of the world.

February also saw **Margaret Heldon** spending time with her brother **Ken Horner**, wife **Kerry** and family at their home in the New South Wales Hunter Valley town of Singleton. It was a pleasure to lend a helping hand and get to know her niece **Babbette** and nephew **Edward**.

spear into the side of a dead man?" In answering that question, perhaps we can see that this was really an ultimate act of disdain. Consider how the Roman centurions had treated the Lord earlier that day. Once the sentence of death had been handed down on the Lord the centurions stripped Him of His clothes and twisted a crown of thorns on His head. They put a purple robe on Him, bent down and in mock worship and adoration shouted, "*Hail, King of the Jews*" (see Matt. 27:28-31; Mark 15:17-20; John 19:1-3). The abuse and the mocking that day were not restricted to the centurions. Later we find the Jews joining in as well.

Likewise the chief priests, also mocking with the scribes and elders, said, "He saved others; Himself He cannot save. If He is the King of Israel, let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe Him..." (Matthew 27:42).

Other people, whose nationality is not identified, were said to have walked by and "*blasphemed Him, wagging their heads and saying, 'Aha! You who destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself and come down from the cross!'*" (Mark 15:29, 30).

As suggested, the centurion's act of thrusting his spear into the side of the Lord's body was just one more gesture of disdain. It seems he couldn't help himself. He had to take one last jab at the Lord. No doubt others there that day, given the chance, would have at least contemplated doing something similar.

What does this say about human nature? Here were Jews and Gentiles alike, joining together to mock the Lord and in the case of one of them, to act out what he and others were probably feeling and to physically thrust a spear into the Lord. It speaks volumes about the nature of the fallen human condition. And, as it turns out, the attitudes being shown in this story are attitudes that continue to afflict humanity today. This is because by "piercing Jesus Christ" we are told, "nothing else is meant than to destroy His Divine truth in the Word" (Apocalypse Revealed 26).

The natural act of piercing the Lord's side was symbolic of the disdain that people can have for the Divine truth of the Lord's message. It is not uncommon for someone to ridicule an idea that doesn't suit them. This applies particularly to the Lord's Word. The Lord's divinely revealed message is filled with ideas that some people don't particularly like. So it is that the Lord's message and the people who openly follow it can be ridiculed by people who want to think and live differently to the teachings there.

In the actions of the centurion we see the human tendency to reject the Lord's Word in favour of self-serving false ideas. We see him giving the Lord's body one last jab before it disappeared forever into the tomb where it was believed that the Lord, along with His claims of who He was and His unwelcome ideas, would be forgotten.

Something surprising, though, happened when the spear punctured the Lord's side. We read that "*immediately blood and water came out*" (*John 19:34*). Again, the movie *The Passion of the Christ* has trouble dealing with what is being described here. What the movie shows is a strange discharge of blood and then water. It sprays the centurion and others with liquid that had an appearance similar to when someone partially restricts the flow from a garden hose.

Mel Gibson and the team that worked on *The Passion of the Christ* aren't the only ones who have struggled with the scene that the Gospel of John describes. Throughout the centuries Christian scholars have tried to find a scientific explanation for why the blood and the water came out of the Lord's body as it did. Several theories currently exist. The one that seems to be the most widely accepted suggests that the Lord's heart had ruptured from the trauma of His experience with the result being that blood from the heart along with fluid from the envelop around the heart were the substances that could be seen flowing out.

In a natural sense this may well be the case. The reality, though, is that it really doesn't matter. As we can expect with the Lord's Word, the description of this flow of blood and water is given for reasons that are primarily symbolic. We find the work *Arcana Coelestia* teaching that, "in these places 'blood' is not used to mean the life-blood of the human body when it has been shed, but the blood of spiritual life, which is God's truth when violence has been done to it by falsities arising from evil" (AC 9127:6).

In a symbolic sense, what was shed once the Lord's side was pierced was the truth that is the life-blood of a person's spirit. This truth exists with humanity on two levels. It exists on the spiritual level, as depicted by the blood, and on the natural or literal story level as depicted by the water (*ibid.*). Seeing the blood and water flow from the body of the Lord was like watching a person take the literal Word, together with its internal meaning, and throw it on the ground where the truths would be washed away by the rain, swallowed up by the earth, or simply trampled under people's feet.

Monday evening, 11th of July: (Actual date of the 100th Anniversary.) Official Opening with light refreshments. 7:30 - 8:30pm in Baringa.

Wednesday morning, 13th of July: Reading and Discussion class as per normal. Extra copies of the reading materials will be available and visitors are very welcome.

Friday evening, 15th of July: Doctrinal Class suitable for all focussing on "What is the New Church?" Everyone is encouraged to bring a friend.

Saturday, 16th of July: A variety of day-time activities are being planned on the property, many of which will be focused in the gardens. The exact nature of these activities is still to be determined. Stay tuned for future editions of this Newsletter.

Sunday, 17th of July: 10:00am morning worship and closing of our week or celebrations.

You are warmly invited:

At this time the Hurstville Society would like to extend a special invitation to all those people who have had an association with the Society over the years. Each of you have contributed in your own special way to the success and spirit of the congregation.

Lending a hand:

It will take the hard work and talents of many people to make the 100th Anniversary Celebration the success that we expect it to be. If you feel as if you can lend a hand with any of the events you see on the schedule, from advertising to event planning and running, please talk to Garry and he will direct you to the people who are already becoming involved in coordinating that aspect of the week's events.

Bishop's visit:

At this stage we are very much hoping that the new Executive Bishop of the General Church, **Rt. Rev. Tom Kline**, will be able to join us for our Anniversary

What Do We Say The New Church Is?

Last month this Newsletter included some thoughts that helped answer the question, “What is the New Church?” Readers were encouraged to send through their thoughts. In response, **John Frost** from the General Church Circle in Perth sent through this statement of purpose:

A NEW CHRISTIAN CHURCH

The New Church transcends all religions, philosophies and human disciplines and its presence in the natural world is limited only by the environment of each individual, every nation and all humankind.

We seek to extend this presence by sharing God’s new truths with all who care about a world of unity and peace.

Among the many wonderful thoughts submitted by **Bill Hall** in Rockhampton, Queensland is the following:

The New Church teaches that people do not have life in and from themselves but that all life flows in to them, even though life always appears to be in and from themselves. Good and truth flow into people from the Lord through good spirits and angels while evil and falsity flow into people from hell through evil spirits.

Hurstville Society News

100th Anniversary Planning:

At a meeting the Hurstville Society’s Anniversary Planning Committee on 13 February, the following schedule of events for the Society’s 100th Anniversary was drawn up.

Monday through Sunday, 11th through 17th of July: Open House throughout the day for people to come and view displays in the church, Baringa and gardens. At least one greeter/guide will be on duty at all times and light refreshments will be available.

This violence to the Lord and symbolically to His Word was done by a centurion. He stands as a symbol of all those people who altogether deny the Lord in themselves, and who therefore “kill and pierce Him in themselves” (Apocalypse Explained 38). These are people who are really killing themselves. They are destroying something vital within their own lives. Now, as we can sometimes see in the world around us, this destruction of the Lord within a person does not necessarily have adverse immediate consequences. But, in time, the extent of the spiritual damage will be obvious. We hear the Lord speaking to us in the book of Revelation:

Behold He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, and they also who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen (Revelation 1:7).

“D” Is For Danger

by Norman Heldon

There is a danger, a very real one, that those of us who have grown up in the New Church, our parents having been members, may have developed what is called a traditional faith. We accept the church’s teachings, we are loyal members, we attend worship services, and some doctrinal classes, but we don’t read the Word, including the Writings of course, as regularly as we probably should.

Our parents, or perhaps grandparents, had discovered the New Church teachings somehow, somewhere. They were searching for the truth and Providence led them to it. They may have found one of Swedenborg’s works in a library or in a second-hand bookshop, or a friend may have given them a book. The point is that they were excited about it; they soon realized that here was the truth they’d been looking for. They sought and found other books of the Writings and read them eagerly. Perhaps at first they didn’t even know that there was a church to which they could go.

I’m speaking of my father’s experience, but it has happened to quite a number of people. Not long in Australia from Sweden he discovered a book of the Writings in a second-hand bookshop in Melbourne. Some time later he went

looking for a church that taught the doctrines. Recently in a couple of the publications we get from other Societies, I've read of the excitement and delight of other people who had found these wonderful teachings. One lady said that she'd attended a number of churches but her questions weren't answered. She found herself asking, "Lord, is this all there is?" And then, she found the New Church.

We don't forget to eat nourishing food every day to keep our bodies healthy. And we need also the spiritual food daily so that we will approach each day with the intention of putting into practice what we have learned from the Lord. Five minutes reading will become ten minutes, ten minutes half an hour, for it becomes a pleasure, not a duty. The New Church needs to be a reading church if it is to grow. Also, we are serving others by our reading, strengthening the ties between heaven and this world. We even help the angels, for while we are reading, especially from the literal sense of the Word, they get great delight from a deeper perception of truth. (see "Additional Thoughts.." below).

Swedenborg had Rules of Life and the first one is, "Diligently to read and meditate on the Word of God." Think about that; not only to read but to meditate. He did himself, surprisingly for he was a very busy man, serving Sweden in the mining industry and also in its government. He was a scientist, a prolific writer, and eventually a revelator.

He says in *Apocalypse Revealed*, "Once I fell into profound meditation about God" (AR 961). In *Conjugal Love*, "When I was in meditation about the arcana of conjugal love..." (CL 208). Also, in *The True Christian Religion*, "One day I was in meditation about the creation of the universe" (TCR 76).

To meditate is, "to exercise the mind in (esp. religious) contemplation. I tried it after reading some of the book *Divine Providence*. Following are a few of the thoughts that came to my mind.

The Divine Providence is the government of the Lord's Divine love and wisdom. So, He didn't create the world and people and just leave them to struggle along somehow. His loving care is with all people, every single one, every moment of their lives. His purpose in creation was that there would be a heaven from the human race. Isn't that a wonderful thing? Everyone ought to know it; it's the right of every child to be taught it. He created us because He wants us to live in heaven forever, usefully, happily, wisely. Life here is a training ground. What a pity that many scientists blind themselves, limiting their thoughts to concepts of space and time. They cannot or will not envisage a Creator or a spiritual world, a

world that is more real than this one but not of material space and time.

To be an angel is to love what is good and true from the Lord. Yes, we can think what is true and do good, but knowing that it is not our good and truth but the Lord's. That's a humbling thought. Our natural tendency is to claim the good as our own and expect praise for it. We can of course feel delight from the things we do for others, while reminding ourselves that our good qualities are gifts from the Lord.

I began reflecting then about the laws of Divine Providence.

Additional thoughts from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg

When it [the Word] is read by a person, spirits and angels immediately perceive it spiritually according to the representations and correspondences (Arcana Coelestia 2763:2)

This may seem amazing, and thus paradoxical, namely that the angels understand the meaning of something written, even if the person [reading it] does not understand it, nevertheless it is most true, for it was proven today by experience. From this one may infer that when little children are reading the holy Bible, angels understand and see the meaning of the Word more clearly than when grownups are reading it, as has also been told to me (Spiritual Experiences 895).

Book Club

The Baringa Ladies Book Club is scheduled to next meet in Baringa at 6pm on **Tuesday evening, 8th of March**. The book being discussed this time is *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* by Mitch Albom. It is expected that a portion of the made-for-TV movie will be available for viewing at some stage during the evening.

Unlike last time, the dinner will not be pot-luck. Anticipate Laurel supplying lasagna and green salad. A \$3 donation from each person should cover the cost. All are welcome. Bring a friend!