

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.

Temporarily the Hurstville Society is without a **Pastor**. During this period the Society will be served by lay leaders and visiting preachers.

Worship Services are held each Sunday at 10:00 AM. **Sunday School** is held concurrently with the worship service.

Young People's Group is held once a month in conjunction with the Young People's Group at the New Church at 2 Shirley St, Roseville.

A tea and social in conjunction with **discussion** meets on the 1st Friday of each month (January excepted) beginning at 7 00 pm. This will be conducted by visiting ministers when available or lay led as appropriate.

Bible Study and **Discussion Classes** previously held midweek have been suspended until further notice.

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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Call or come at anytime.



See page 6 Rev Ayi, second from left with friends from Ghana on November 22nd

The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2009

The Shepherds

A Christmas Talk for Children by Rt Rev Peter Buss

The Lord could of course have been born in the most splendid palace with huge rooms, and servants, and all sorts of things, and He could have been laid on a bed surrounded by precious stones, like diamonds, if He had wanted. After all, this is His world, and He can make anything He likes. Why did He choose to be born where He was?

We are told there were several reasons, but one of them was that He wanted to be born where the best people could see Him. You know, people of this world would say that the best people are the kings and the rulers and the rich people. But the Lord knows that the best people are those who love what is good and true, those who work to bring happiness to others, and who don't cheat and lie and bear grudges against others. He knew that the kinds and

rulers and rich people of that time were evil, and so He chose to be born where really good simple people could see Him – and those simple people were the shepherds.

Not many people saw the Lord when He was a baby. Mary and Joseph did, of course. The wise men did, because, as we know, they deserved to. They weren't just clever, they knew many truths, and they used what they learned, and looked for and found the Lord, and worshipped Him. Because they loved the right kind of learning, and because they used it wisely, they saw the Lord. Simeon the old man did, because he was a righteous man, who waited and longed to see the Lord. Anna did, because she was one who worshipped the Lord day and night, all his life and served Him.

But of all the people who saw the Lord, only Mary and Joseph, and the shepherds, saw Him in the manger on the night that He was born. The shepherds were the only ones called to that place the very night He was born, and they were the only ones sent by angels, who saw heaven opened and the angels singing their joy at the birth. It was partly because these shepherds were people who were fit to see the Lord that He was not born in a palace where the shepherds wouldn't have been allowed in. He was born where they could come and see Him.

What was so special about the shepherds? They were not rich. They were not rulers. They were not wise like the wise men, in fact they almost surely didn't know how to read books at all. All they knew were the few simple teachings they had been given about the Word, and they knew what their duty was in life. They knew what was right for shepherds to do.

These shepherds must have been men who did keep those simple teachings they knew. They did their work well – they kept watch over their sheep, so that no one could bring them harm and in other ways they must have been good to other people. That was why the angels could be sent to them. That was why they cared enough to go, right away, and hurry to Bethlehem, and look for the baby Lord. And they found Him and wondered and went back to their work giving glory and praise to the Lord and for all the things which they had seen.

Sunday 31st January Worship service at 10 am.

Note: As in past years there will be **no newsletter produced in January** but a calendar and News Notes page will be printed.

News Notes

Please make a special effort to bring **food** for the **Exodus Foundation** on **Sunday 13th December**. Food is always needed but it is particularly important at this time of the year. However please don't bring perishables. Just regular packaged and tinned food is what is required. This will be the final pick up for this year.

Also a reminder to keep the stamps coming in. **Rhonda Hall** had a nice letter from **Margaret Skinner** thanking us for the stamps so far. It is in a good cause helping the **Leprosy Foundation**.

Also in a good cause is the Mo grown by **Murray Heldon** for **Movember**. Movember is an annual, month-long celebration of the moustache, highlighting men's health issues, specifically prostate cancer and depression in men. At last count Murray had raised over \$400 for the cause.

Returning to Sydney after a year or so living in Tamworth are **Rebekah Horner, Klaire** and **Skye**. They will be living in the Manse, 26 Dudley St for the next few months. It will be good to see them again regularly.

We have received a DVD sent by **Angela Allen Cooper** from the New Church Live team which features the story of the **Ark**. This has been produced very much with outreach in mind and will provide plenty of discussion when we show it at a Society doctrinal class.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Gai Kennedy** (2nd), **Beryl Laidley** (14th), **Ken Horner** (16th), **Patricia Walsh** (19th) and **Kristen Johnson** (29th)

December and January

Please note the altered schedule of events for December and January.

Friday 11th December

No dinner and class. It appears this date will not be suitable for many people and there is no other viable alternative date.

Sunday 13th December

10 00 am Worship “Christmas Gifts” by Rev Lorentz Soneson.
7 30 pm Carols by Candlelight at Roseville

The official invitation from the Roseville New Church reads as follows:
Do come and join us at Roseville for our Carols by Candlelight on Sunday 13th December, beginning at 7.30 p.m. We hope that we will be outside in the church garden for this celebration of Christmas and its meaning. If the weather is against us, we will hold it in the church hall. After the Carols, everyone is invited over to the manse for drinks and mince pies and time to be together. We very much look forward to seeing you.

Sunday 20th December

7 00 pm Evening Service “The Christmas Star” by Rev Fred Schnarr.
Following the service everyone is invited to **refreshments at The Lockharts.**

Friday 25th December

10 00 am Christmas Day Service “Angelic Appearances at the Time of the Advent” by Rev Dan Heinrichs

Sunday 27th December through Sunday 24th January

No church services at Hurstville (but see below regarding Summer Camp).

Monday 4th to Sunday 10th January

Annual Summer Family Camp at Elanora Heights. For those not already booked into the camp there will be the opportunity to join in on Sunday 10th for the final worship. If planning to come to camp on this date or any other day please contact **Carolyn Heldon** on 0434 581 994 by 21st December.

As we grow in this world, many people will try to tell us that the really important thing is to be a big, important man in the world. People think they must look up to those who have made a lot of money and to those who become rulers because that is what we ought to do. And it is not wicked to make money, of course. But when the Lord came down to earth, he did not seek out the rich and the famous. He looked for the just and devout men, like Simeon; for men who were wise in the Word and used their knowledge, like the wise men; and perhaps, most especially, for simple people who quietly went on with their work, doing the little things that the Lord had told them to do – people like the shepherds.

We cannot all be great, or clever, or rich. But each one of us can be like those shepherds – each of us can be faithful in the few things we are given to do. And we must remember that only the shepherds saw the Lord that wonderful night so long ago – for it is to such that the Lord comes first. For He loves those who are simple in heart, and who keep His laws faithfully, night and day.

Christmas Celebration in Africa

by Rev. Ayi, Segno-Kodjo

Christmas is celebrated throughout the African continent by Christian communities large and small. It is a time for families, friends gathering and feasting. It is a joyful moment for children especially, because many children have the chance to wear new clothes and receive gifts. More importantly, Christmas is a moment many Africans go to church to deepen their religious belief by celebrating the birth of the infant Jesus.

Every country has its own unique celebrations. Traditional Christmas celebration is fun time for people, but not fun for goats and chickens. These constitute the main protein along side okra soup, rice, fufu in the traditional dishes for the feast in Togo and Ghana. On Christmas day every family is expected to snap a chicken or a goat depending on the financial condition of the family. At the Christmas season the price of those two animals doubles, the earlier you buy it the better, since it can triple.

Preparation for Christmas usually starts in the first week of December. Churches, storefronts, houses and trees are decorated with palm branches and balloons. Some are decorated with Christmas lights. Local market places are filled with goods and foodstuff from all over. Adults and children engage in different commercial activities to make extra money for the D-day. In the night-time children come together and celebrate the season with fireworks.

On Christmas Eve, many churches hold special services filled with Christmas carols and lighted candles. After the church service, music and dances go all night to dusk in the corners of streets.

Christmas Day Children's time. Children between 15 and below are first to wake for the day; they come in groups singing Christmas songs, using broken five gallon plastic buckets and empty metal cans as drums. They go from house to house singing to people and we received a small gift of money in return. That was our MOMENT for us when I was growing up. We used to make enough money, and come evening we have enough money to buy fire crackers. I wish you could feel what I'm talking about. After the morning show all children go home to prepare for church. This is the time we dress up in our new clothes – it is like a fashion show.

Church Services Africans are very spiritual people. Going to church is generally the main focus of Christmas celebrations in Africa. Nativity scenes are played out, carols are sung and in some cases dances are performed. One of my earliest Christmas memories in Togo is, when I was in grade five, I played the role of Joseph in the Nativity story.

Christmas Dinner After attending church families and friends get together for dinner. The tradition is that, families who live in the same neighbourhood share food with each other; that is, a family would take what she cooked to other family, and the other does the same. I remember one time my mother received ten different dishes from ten families. Africa has plenty of sunshine in Christmas time, in Togo people troop at the beach for picnic.

- Commenced a redraft of the *Welcome to Pittsburgh New Church* pamphlet.
- Assisted with various aspects of the running and promotion of the school. Of special note, the school has chosen 'Australia' as its topic for Project Week and I will fully cooperate to ensure that Project Week is a success.

Aside from the usual run of church, school and administrative duties, I have been attending Hebrew classes at the Reformed Presbyterian Theological School (Wednesday mornings) and at the Agency for Jewish Learning (Monday nights). This has given me useful insights into the text of the Old Testament and contributed to the content and quality of sermons.

In his closing remarks Robert makes it very clear his is hoping to return to Australia as soon as possible.

New Director – Swedenborg Centre

Michael Chester has been appointed to the position of Swedenborg Centre Director from 1st January 2010 following the retirement of **Neville Jarvis** who has held the job for 27 ½ years. Michael is not a newcomer to the Centre and has been in contact with the Centre for some 20 years. He has also been closely involved with the Swedenborg Association of Australia Inc. since its inception in 1992

Michael brings a number of other skills to the position he is taking up. He is a trained teacher in religion, science and maths; he has a personal interest in and understanding of yoga and of other spiritual approaches and practices. He and his partner Julie teach Dru Yoga. He also has a good knowledge of modern technology skills. It is Michael's keen wish to assist people become better acquainted with the teachings found in Swedenborg's spiritual writings and promote them throughout Australia.

Michael's contact email address is michael@swedenborg.com.au
Swedenborg Centre, 1 Avon Road, North Ryde, NSW 2113 Ph 9888 1066

What's Robert Cooper Been Doing?

In mid-June of this year, **Robert**, his wife **Huiling** and son **Matthew** moved from Bryn Athyn to serve the Pittsburgh New Church Society as part of Robert's pastoral development beginning on July 1st. Robert has gained considerable exposure to the pastoral and educational aspects of ministry. Robert's responsibilities also extend to the church circles in Erie and North Ohio and he has visited Florida and North Carolina. The following is taken from Robert's half yearly report to the Pittsburg Society.

As Hurstville doesn't have a church school, and is unlikely to, it was decided to allow the pastor Rev Amos Glenn to spend more time as Principal of the school and for Robert to focus on the 'core business' of preaching and marketing the church.

An abridged summary of activities is itemized below:

- Preached 12 times out of a possible 20 occasions.
- Holy Supper service and doctrinal class at Erie;
- Led the Sunday *Living Courageously* group (once substituting for the youth leader);
- Collated, printed and distributed 700 brochures which contained content on *Living Courageously*, the School Open Day and Nathan Gladish's marriage seminar;
- Convened doctrinal classes at Valencia studying the Book of Revelation serially.
- Planning a seminar for the men's group on the weekend of March 26-27, 2010 which will examine the Book of Revelation (2 meetings);
- Facilitating the management of the Marketing Committee (six meetings): this group has looked at issues such as 'process', the website, pamphlets and distribution; approved purchases etc.
- Gave Church representation on the School Open House evening.
- Pastoral visits to those who are ill or occasionally absent; and
- Gave briefings on church doctrine and beliefs to a few 'walk-ins' who expressed interest in the faith, the school, a child's baptism or a marriage ceremony.

Gift Giving Those who can afford it will generally give gifts at Christmas. The emphasis is more on the religious aspect of celebrating the birth of Jesus and singing in church, than it is on gift giving. The most common thing bought at Christmas is a new set of clothes to be worn to the church service. I never received or expected a toy as a present from my parents. There were no toy stores to shop at anyway. We children fabricated our own toys. We used metal cans to make toy cars, houses etc...In the rural areas, churches and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) give children gifts of school books, soap, cloth, candles and other practical goods.

Christmas is time to 'Give' and to 'Take' The Lord was born 2000 years ago, the wise men came, and after they fell upon their faces and worshiped the LORD, they opened their treasures and offered to the LORD gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh. May we also, as we go through the Season, open our hearts to give to the Lord all what we have received from Him. May we celebrate this Christmas with the hope that the Lord will be with us in every step we take to strengthen our homes and communities. A Saviour is born for ALL mankind, let us be glad and rejoice in it.

Farewell to Australia I am happy to join my family in the USA. I came home two days before my son Silas' birthday. We went out for walk in a freezing weather. It was fun.

I enjoyed myself well in Australia. I give thanks to the Lord for making this trip glorious for me. I have made friends that cannot fade in my memory. My sincere appreciations go to the Hurstville New Church Society for inviting me into their fold. I extend this thankfulness to my other brothers and sisters in Brisbane and Canberra. My love goes to you all. A friend of mine told me "...*Ayi, it's just AU REVOIR... the next time we see one another*". On behalf of the New Church congregations in Togo, we wish all of the best for you and yours this Holiday Season.

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We in Hurstville will always treasure fond memories of Ayi's visit. We learnt a lot about Africa and benefitted from Ayi's refreshing way of presenting the truths of the New Church. He promised something special

for his **last Sunday** with us and he certainly delivered. We had a **taste of Africa** with three African men from Ghana joining us for church and providing African music during the service followed by dancing with everyone joining in following the service – just like they do when they worship the Lord in Ghana and Togo. (see picture on front of newsletter).

After the service there was a luncheon during which Ayi was presented with some personal gifts for his family as well as a cheque for \$1,000 for the church in Lomé in Togo where they are raising money to acquire land so that they can have a permanent location. With personal donations added the above amount was increased to almost \$2,000.

In related news the **Basil Lazer Fund** will be providing assistance with books for Togo, a challenge as the language is French.

Letter to the Editor

The special African Edition of the Newsletter, November 2009, has made me realise that it is very misleading.

The first point is that the Hurstville Society is a part of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, whereas its title states that it is "The New Church Newsletter", implying that it is a part of the New Church in Australia, which it is not.

The second point is that throughout this edition the implication is that the Hurstville Society is part of the same organisation as the New Church in Africa and the New Church in Australia. On page 7 it is stated " ... we, New Church members in Africa..."and "...Brian Keith has recently made a visit to several of the West African Nations further underlining the importance of the Church in this region...". Again, no distinction is drawn between the General Church and the New Church in Africa. The implication is that they are one and the same.

The third point concerns the article commencing on page 8 under the

heading "The Centenary Celebrations of the New Church of Southern Africa" and we learn about the Centenary Celebrations and that the New Church in Southern Africa has 70 Ministers and 35,000 members. Again, no distinction is drawn between the Hurstville Society of the General Church and the General Church on the one hand and the New Church in Southern Africa. The implication is that the Church to which the Hurstville Society belongs has a huge base in Southern Africa.

In my view this is all legally improper, it is misleading, if not actually deceitful.

Given that a different organisation has registered itself as the New Church in Australia, the Hurstville Society, a member of the General Church, should not be purporting in its heading to the Newsletter to be part of the New Church. Similarly, it is wrong to imply that the Hurstville Society is part of the New Church in Southern Africa. That article should have made it clear that the New Church in Southern Africa is not the same organisation as the General Church of which the Hurstville Society is a part. The General Church in southern Africa is totally separate from the New Church in Southern Africa, yet the Newsletter clearly leads one to believe that the Hurstville Society is a part of that organisation.

Yours sincerely
Barrie Ridgway

Editorial Response: While Barrie is strictly correct in pointing out that a clear distinction was not made between the General Church of the New Jerusalem and other branches of the New Church we would ask how important is this? We find it sad that Barrie has chosen to write a strongly worded letter on this point and ignore what we thought was the main thrust of the articles by Rev Ayi and Rev Ian Arnold viz how their religion is their life for the Africans.

In the spiritual world where we arrive after death, no one asks what our faith has been or what our beliefs have been, only what our life has been, whether we were one kind of person or the other. Emanuel Swedenborg, Divine Providence 101