

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 except the first Sunday of each month. But please check the calendar for each month in case of changes.

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 one 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. Please check the calendar for the month for the exact date.

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.



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2010

Comfort My People

by Rev Grant Odhner

*“Comfort, comfort My people!”
says your God.*

*“Speak comfort to Jerusalem,
and cry out to her,*

That her warfare is ended,

That her iniquity is pardoned.”

Isaiah 40.1-2

These words begin one of the most beautiful chapters — indeed, series of chapters — in all of Scripture. It's a series full of hope and promise, of a time to come when Jehovah, the awesome Creator and Saviour, would draw near and make His presence felt by His people. That presence would bring

relief from a difficult and long period of oppression and shame. Judah had been conquered by Babylon and taken into exile. Its national pride had been totally crushed. In strong terms Isaiah reminds his people of why they had become alienated from their God. But in equally strong, touching poetry he sets before them their God's sure love and the restoral that He will bring. This restoral is prophetic of His advent.

Throughout this section of Isaiah, "comfort" is a theme.

*The LORD shall comfort Zion,
He will comfort all her waste places;
He will make her wilderness like Eden,
And her desert like the garden of the LORD. ...
I, even I [the LORD], am He who comforts you. (51:3,12)*

*O you afflicted one [Zion],
Tossed with tempest, not comforted,
Behold, I will lay your stones with colourful gems,
And lay your foundations with sapphires. (54:11)*

*For thus says the LORD:
Behold, I will extend peace to [Zion]
like a river,
And the glory of the Gentiles
like a flowing stream.
Then you shall nurse;
On My sides you will be carried,
And be dandled on My knees.
As one whom his mother comforts,
So I will comfort you;
And you shall be comforted in Jerusalem. (66:12-13)*

It's clear from these prophecies that the Lord came into the world to "comfort Zion," that is, to comfort the church, and every individual of the church. In fact Jesus' familiar mission statement, from this part of Isaiah, contains this idea:

New Pastor For the Hurstville Society

We are expecting that **Bishop Brian Keith** will soon be in a position to announce the appointment of a new pastor for the Hurstville Society. This appointment will, depending on negotiations with the Australian immigration department be from 1st July 2011. So watch this space.

Episcopal Visit Next Easter

Still to be confirmed but also on the highly likely list is an episcopal visit by Bishop Brian Keith next Easter. At the time of writing Bishop Keith is in South Africa and will hopefully be able to finalise this and the matter of a new pastor on his return.

News Notes

On 25th November **Michelle Heldon** departed on an overseas trip for a year or so. High on her list of things to do is to obtain an Art Residency in a European country, preferably Finland. She also intends to work and travel. Michelle will be living initially in London England.

Rebekah Horner, Klaire and **Skye** have recently relocated to Tamworth. We do not have an address as yet as they are living temporarily on the Horner farm at Baringa Vale. Hoping that things work out well for you Rebekah and girls.

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Sam Johnson** (1st), **Gai Kennedy** (2nd), **Beryl Laidley** (14th), **Ken Horner** (16th), **Patricia Walsh** (19th), **Kristen Johnson** (29th)

Commemorative Rose and Plaque for Robert Cooper

In a thoughtful gesture the Brisbane Society has arranged for a beautiful deep red rose to be planted in the garden in front of the Hurstville New Church. Beside it on a large quartz rock sourced from the Horner farm at Baringa Vale near Tamworth is a plaque bearing the inscription:

“In memory of Rev Robert Cooper
28/8/58 – 7/7/10

From the Members and Friends of the Brisbane New Church”

Visit of Rev Grant and Sarah Odhner

The Hurstville Society is looking forward to welcoming Grant Odhner who will be arriving on Friday 3rd December. He will be joined just before Christmas by his wife Sarah and then they will both be in Australia till the end of the Australian **Summer Camp** in January.

A summary of events for December are as follows:

December 5 th	10.00 am Worship
December 10 th	7 00 pm Society Dinner and Class
December 12 th	10 00 am Worship
December 12 th	7 00 pm Carols by Candlelight at Roseville
December 13 th to 15 th	Visit to Gold Coast
December 19 th	7 00 pm Worship (NB Evening Service)
December 25 th	10 00 am Christmas Day service

January 2 nd	10 00 am Worship (Holy Supper)
January 3 rd to 9 th	Summer Camp in Canberra

For Christmas Sarah, who is an accomplished musician, has kindly offered to play for the service.

Note that as has been the practice in past years there will be no newsletter in January but a Calendar and News Notes will be printed.

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me;
Because the LORD has anointed me to preach
good tidings to the meek;
He has sent me to bind up the broken-hearted,
To proclaim liberty to the captives,
And the opening of the prison to those who are bound;
To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, ...
To comfort all who mourn. (61:1-2; quoted by Jesus in Luke 4)*

“Comfort.” How wonderful it is to be comforted! To be given assurance, to feel the encouragement of another human being, someone whose caring presence lifts our mind from our doubt or depression, grief or despair.

“Comfort” is a warm, loving word, but interestingly its spiritual meaning relates to truth (Arcana Coelestia 6578). We associate comfort with a loving touch and word of support. These are important expressions of love. But in themselves they tend to bring only temporary relief. True comfort comes from hope. And what brings hope? Isn't it an alternative *vision* of what can be? A new *sight* of what we can *do*? This vision can come only through truth.

The Lord came as truth — truth from Divine love. This is what a “Son” sent from a “Father” means. Jesus was the Son, the Word, the Light, the Way — images of truth. He even calls Himself, directly, “the Truth” (John 14). His spirit that He promised would be with His disciples for all time (after He left their physical sight) to help or comfort them, He called “the Spirit of truth” (John 16). It was through the truth that the Lord brought us a new vision of spiritual life at His coming. That truth declared who He was more clearly than ever before. It restored our trust in our God’s “goodwill toward men.” It showed us His constant desire to forgive us and lift us up. And it showed us clearly how we could find freedom from sin through His power.

This is why the Lord came speaking words of truth: to bring to us a new vision, that we might have life more abundantly (John 10), that His joy might remain in us, and that our joy might be full (John 15). How else can the Lord bring His blessings to us, other than through the truth? Freedom

demands that we respond freely through a sight of truth.

And He can only bring this new sight of truth when we are ready — when we are ready for the inner warfare to stop, when we are ready to be lifted out of our “iniquities,” when we are ready to embrace more fully the *comfort* of His truth.

Wishing you a new state of readiness this Advent season. May you be touched by “tidings of comfort and joy!”

Meet Grant and Sarah Odhner

Hello everyone,

Sarah and I are looking forward to meeting you and serving you this coming month. The editor asked if we would introduce ourselves.



Currently Sarah and I live near Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania USA. We have six children, the youngest of which just started university. We’ve collected two spouses and a grandchild so far, and look forward to gaining more family.

I grew up in USA, in New Jersey, the Philadelphia area (not close to Bryn Athyn), and New York state. Sarah grew up in the UK. She lived in St Albans, north of London. Her family was active in the Michael Church in London. We met when she came to school at what is now called Bryn Athyn College.

My main job is teaching in the Academy of the New Church Theological School. I also travel to New York City once a month and preach at the New York New Church, home of a General Convention group. Our two groups meet together when I go. Sarah has a few jobs. She is an accompanist for chapel and for the music classes in the Bryn Athyn Elementary School (her boss is now our son Nathan, the new music teacher there). She also works at the General Church Office of Education. One of her main roles there is developing Sunday School curriculum. She’ll be giving a workshop on Sunday School resources at the camp in January.

My work has taken us to a number of different congregations. I served one year in the Glenview Society, near Chicago, Illinois assisting Bishop Buss (not quite Bishop yet). The next year I became the founding pastor of the Boston Society, where we spent eight wonderful years. For the next twelve years I pastored the Oak Arbor Congregation in Rochester, Michigan. and was headmaster of its elementary school (your former pastor and native son Garry Walsh worked for me for a year there). I’ve been in my current job for 8 1/3 years, and have loved teaching the doctrines of the New Church at a graduate level, and helping train men for the ministry.

A few personal interests. Sarah and I, and the entire family, love music — a variety but especially classical. We also enjoy nature and many aspects of Natural History. (I am particularly into birds, and am looking forward to your rich birdlife! The other thing I’m excited to see is the southern night sky and its constellations.)

While I am with you I am eager to meet people and visit. Please make bold to invite me over for a visit — even if it involves some travel. That is a priority for me, not an imposition.

Wishing you well,

Grant, with Sarah