

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 March 2011

God Doesn't Make Bad Things Happen

There is a lot of pain and suffering in the world today. It is important to understand God's presence and influence in the face of very difficult situations. **Grant Schnarr** explores further.

Sometimes we can feel very alone as we strive to understand the dimensions of this world and our place in it. There are times when we strain to see a force for good working in our lives or in the lives of others. We see much evil and destruction in the world and we wonder why.

How can God let such evil things happen? Also, as we are surprised with challenges in our own lives we may wonder if God is there. We wonder if any of this makes sense. Is there a reason things happen the way they do? Are we being cared for?

God doesn't punish people. God doesn't will evil to anyone. God doesn't hurt people. A family lost a child in a terrible accident. Two church leaders came to their door to offer their condolences. They said that they felt great pain for the family, but they also added, "This was God's will," and that, "we don't always understand why God does what God does, but must accept God's will." What a terrible thing to say! I've heard stories where this has happened to people, unfortunately more times than I can count. I don't know where this idea came from. I'm sure it didn't come from God.

God is pure love and never wishes harm to anyone. The idea that God wills that bad things happen to people is not only misguiding but potentially debilitating. How can people love a God who wishes them ill or has hurt them? And yet people try by clinging to this idea, and submitting to the will of a God that really doesn't offer much in the way of love, mercy, or understanding.

The New Church teaches that God wills only good for all his people. There is nothing more important to our Creator than for every one of us to have as much happiness and fulfilment as humanly possible. When bad things happen God feels our pain, is very present with us, and works to bring out the best in a bad situation.

What we must remember is that God takes the long view. His goal is not to give us temporary and perhaps superficial and fleeting comfort in this world, but rather looks to our eternal welfare. Remember Jesus's words to Pilate when Pilate asked him if he was a king. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world" (John 18:36). He also said, "Do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we wear?'. . . But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33).

God Brings Good Out of Everything If We Let Him. Swedenborg says it is impossible to see God's Providence in the face, as it is happening, but that we can see it when we look back in reflection on the past. In other words, in times of crisis it is very hard to necessarily sense that God is present and working to bring good out of a bad situation. However, when we look back at such times we can often see the gentle hand of God at work.

Our thoughts are with **Beryl Laidley** of Coffs Harbour whose husband **Elwyn** recently passed into the spiritual world after a long illness.

The **Pause – Make Space for God** program has been working very successfully thanks to the guidance of **Kerry Lockhart** and good participation from those attending. Also thanks to **Huiling** for hosting the event at her house. The program will continue each week until Monday 21st March when our final class will also have a dinner beforehand.

We have received good news from **Bishop Brian Keith** that he and his wife **Gretchen** will be arriving in Hurstville on Tuesday evening 19th April and departing on Monday 25th April. The bishop will therefore be here for our Good Friday and Easter Sunday services. More information about the visit will be provided in the April issue of this newsletter.

Harvest Festival

On **Sunday 13th March** there will be **no church** at Hurstville. Instead it is hoped a number of the Society will be able to make the trip to Roseville to join with their **Harvest Festival** celebrations.

Please bring a donation of fresh fruit or vegetables (or tins or packets of food) which will be donated afterwards to Mission Australia and the Exodus Foundation.

After the Harvest service there will be a **Ploughman's lunch** of bread, cheese, pickles and salad followed by pie and ice cream. The cost will be \$6 per head and we need to notify Ruth Duckworth of numbers attending. (Please notify Owen Heldon by Sunday 6th if you will be having the lunch.)

Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Tracy Hinds** (4th), **Mikayla Hinds** (4th), **Don Macfarlane** (7th), **Debbie Walsh** (7th), **Graham Horner** (12th), **Edward Horner** (18th), **Bill Hall** (26th)

Rev Grant Schnarr pastor of the independent Creekside New Church near Bryn Athyn (www.creeksidenewchurch) spoke of the Emergent Church as a group whom the Lord is leading and preparing for the reception of His teachings.

Rev Stephen Simons independent pastor of the Second Advent Christian Church (www.SecondAdventChristian.com) spoke of his desire to build healthy Christian Churches by doing God's will and erasing the divide between laity and clergy.

Peter Rhodes a layman devoted to spiritual growth reminded everyone that the Lord is the One who builds His Church and that our plans are merely an appearance while Divine Providence is the reality.

Rev Susannah Currie of General Convention told about reaching out to people hungry for spiritual meaning in their lives.

Rev Chuck Blair pastor of NewChurchLive for the General Church discussed his vision for a church that focuses outwardly on other people rather than inwardly on the pastors – as simply as “loving the person in front of you”. (www.newchurchlive.tv)

Rev Frank Rose retired General Church pastor – most recently from Tucson, Arizona – suggested that individuals building personal relationships with God may eventually take the place of traditional churches and services.

News Notes

Sunday 13th February was a special day at Hurstville as we welcomed back **Rev Doug and Christine Taylor**. Doug as usual was perfectly at home once again in the pulpit and they were both warmly welcomed during their week long stay after having spent the previous month in South Australia visiting family and friends. It was also lovely to see **Stephen Taylor** and his wife **Soula** who flew over from Adelaide especially for the occasion. A Pot Luck luncheon after church was most enjoyable.

I know that I have often experienced this upon reflection. I can see times when I was disappointed by the direction my life seemed to be turning and later this turn was exactly what I needed. I have seen times of sorrow in my life bring a deeper sense of spiritual connection to God and the reality of life after death and heaven.

One of the worst times in my life, involving an untimely death, gave me an opportunity to be a helper and a guardian angel to two of my dear friends, which lasts to this day. I would never desire tragedy as a means of growth, even as we pray in the Lord's Prayer, “Lead us not into temptation,” but I am amazed and dumbfounded at the good God manages to bring out of even the worst of evil.

Look at the horrible act of terrorism of September Eleventh, something so far from God's will and even more horrible to be committed in God's name. However, the love and charity that poured out of all people, not only in the United States, but around the world, was astounding!

The cynics say that this was temporary and fleeting, but didn't a part of us change forever? Or, at the very least, did we not have that opportunity presented before us in this horrific time in our lives? God didn't make this event happen or will it, but God didn't abandon us. God was there in a huge way, working through the same human freedom and choice he gave those terrorists, but now the choice of thousands was love and compassion, and a resolve to rid the world of such hideous efforts.

In times of tragedy we may not be able to see immediately that God is there, leading us to peace and comfort, and so much more. However, we can rest assured that this world has been set up in such a way that all can be bent and turned toward good.

God provides constantly that the choice for good is always present, and continually lifts us up from our pain and doubt to freedom to live and love again. The real question is, can we trust this? Can we find the good, or at least pursue it, and allow the force of love and life to lift us up? When we do this we can heal and even grow. And this growth is eternal.

From “New Church Connection” 2007 Issue 2 in memory of those affected by the devastating earthquake on 22nd. February 2011 in Christchurch New Zealand.

A Day of Healing: Visions for the New Church

By Bruce Henderson, Director of Communications
(Reprinted from *Around the New Church* November 2010)

Six years ago, a healing process took root within the New Church. On October 9 that wave of healing crested in a watershed moment with a Swedenborg Colloquium at the Philmont Country Club in Huntingdon Valley Pa near Bryn Athyn USA. About 200 people attended the all day session sponsored by **Dr Gerald** and **Emily Jan Lemole** and the Lord's New Church, to hear 12 speakers and two panel discussions on visions for the New Church. The event was dedicated to the memory of **Bishop** and **Mrs Louis B King**.

In was in 2004 that women from three New Church organizations – The General Church, General Convention and the Lord's New Church – initiated a retreat, *Gathering Leaves*, was dedicated to the promise in Revelation that “The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.” Since 2004, the retreat has continued every other year – one time in England – and has been gathering momentum along with those healing leaves.

This year's retreat, in the early summer at The Lord's New Church, was open to men as well as women of all New Church/Swedenborgian denominations and focused on the common ground all the branches share.

Louise Rose, whose husband **Frank** was one of the presenters at the colloquium, said one of the concepts behind *Gathering Leaves* is that a tree would look silly if all of its branches went in the same direction. The beauty of a healthy tree us that its branches extend in many directions but are all joined in the trunk and roots.

This year's Swedenborg Colloquium gave further hope that the “leaves” are healing the branches of our New Church “nations”. It was a positive step, with everyone respecting each other's differences, but recognizing the unity that we are all part of one New Church, devoted to the teachings revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg.

Speakers at the colloquium represented the General Church, General Convention and The Lord's New Church, as well as independent organizations, giving their own visions for the New Church in response to what the Lord is doing for His Church with the promise: “Behold I make all things new.”

Many may have come to this colloquium with doubts, many more with hope, but all seemed to leave inspired by the sphere of good will and mutual respect, and uplifted by a sense of healing.

Speakers and Topics

Rt Rev Thomas Kline gave a slide presentation on the inspiring and promising growth happening all around the world – particularly in Africa and Asia – in many branches of the New Church and outside of existing organizations. (www.newchurch.org)

Rev Dr Reuben Bell told of his Samara Center in Maine (www.samaracenter.org) and his efforts – based in Revelation 21 – to share the Church in a way that “doesn't look like church” and welcomes people of all religions.

Rev Hugh Odhner pastor of The Lord's New Church (www.thelordsnewchurch.org) reminded everyone that the Church is unified by charity and when love for others rules, differences do not divide.

Rev Dr Jonathon Rose, Series Editor of the *New Century Edition of the Works of Emanuel Swedenborg* for the Swedenborg Foundation (www.swedenborg.com) said the only way to build a closer presence of the Lord with His Church is through repentance, reading the Word and reaching out to others with love.

Rev Jane Seibert of General Convention (www.swedenborg.org) spoke about the way Divine Providence has led her and leads all of us and provides the true direction for the Church.

Rev Dr James Lawrence from General Convention and the Swedenborg House of Studies (www.shs.psr.edu) talked about lay efforts that have changed the face of the Church, such as the Parliament of World Religions.