



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society November 2021

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Church of the Unregenerate

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

Strange things happen when one's wife goes away. A couple of years ago Jenn took off to Canada to visit with family, and left me at home in charge of Zach. There were some things that we all knew would happen: Zach and I would eat fast food on a regular basis, play lots of video games, and stay up as late as we wanted. But what I didn't expect was that I would step into a new world that has had me rethinking what church could look like.

That world was the world of CrossFit. Now honestly, I find it rather uncomfortable to even admit that I would go to such a place. In my mind, I've had this feeling that people who go to specialty gyms are people with big muscles and small brains. They perform this mental magic trick by being able to live off the high of being able to be better than somebody else, but not actually accomplishing anything. I mean seriously, what do you do at a gym? You pick something up and put it back down. Then you pick it up and put it back down again. And again and again... Oh, sure, maybe you lifted more weight, or did it more times, but really, what was accomplished? Nothing! All the weights end up right back where they started! And yet people feel superior to one another by accomplishing more "nothing" than somebody else. Instead of sleight of hand, in my opinion it is sleight of mind to convince ourselves and others that anything was actually done.

But it gets justified under the umbrella of "health," despite the fact that plenty of unfit people live to a ripe old age. As a result I think the "health" justification is often really just a cover for the real reason: vanity. We want to look good. So suffice it to say when Howard introduced me to the idea of going to a CrossFit workout I wasn't exactly receptive. I mean, I understood why *he* was interested. If I looked like him, I'd probably try to do something to try to improve things too (I've apologized in advance to Howard for that, but I couldn't resist. Not regenerate yet.).

Despite all of that, Howard talked it up, assured me that my preconceptions were not accurate, saying that CrossFitters are good, supportive people and so arranged for the two of us to do a CrossFit workout nearby me. It was... fine. But a couple of months later, with Jenn off in Canada I decided to do a one week trial. The workouts I was doing on my own were becoming boring, so I thought that this would keep me interested, and do a better job of getting a more rounded work out. I also figured with a teenage boy in the house, I needed to make sure I stayed in good enough physical shape to maintain my Alpha-male position. Plus if I'm in better shape, my cricket game should improve! I just hoped Howard was right about the people.

As you might imagine, starting at a gym is an ego crushing experience. We all go through the same routine, but it is easy to look around and see people lifting more, doing it faster, and before I knew it I was going down that rabbit hole of thinking that they were somehow "better" than me. I was able to keep that in check for the most part, reminding myself that everybody has to start somewhere, and that ultimately it didn't really matter how much or how fast I lifted anything. It's not like I was there to impress anybody.

No matter how slow I was or how little was lifted, at the end of each workout I have to go to the computer and enter my results. It's actually good, because doing that enables me to keep track of progress, and seeing improvement is very motivating. As time passed and I got to know people, I also found that Howard was right about the people. For the most part they were really nice, and to my surprise were very encouraging. We weren't competing against each other. We all were just competing against ourselves. We congratulate each other when a personal best is posted. It didn't matter that it wasn't a high PB, it just mattered that it was a PB.

Days and weeks would pass and I kept looking at my charts though and seeing that I was accomplishing more nothing every week! At the same time there was no delusion about where I stood among the other people there... but it didn't matter. It just didn't matter. I really came to like this system.

It's gotten me to thinking that what if church was like this? What if we all had a chart on file at church, one that was posted on a big electronic board for everybody to see... you can think of the categories that we can work on... selfishness, greed, controlling/manipulating others, lust, gossip, speaking meanly/rudeness, patience or lack thereof, sewing discord among people, and yes, I should include "making fun of friends and colleagues" as well... those seem like a good start. You rate yourself on these. Maybe you rate yourself with some input from others! Yikes! But it doesn't matter how poorly you rate on a particular evil, all that matters is that you're putting in the effort to improve. Perfection isn't expected, but effort and progress is. For example, next month I won't make any derogatory comments about Howard's looks!

I know, being fully honest and transparent about these things can actually be pretty embarrassing, much more so than just not being able to lift much. Yet can you see how this approach would be beneficial? Instead of just coming to church and hiding behind a façade pretending that things are fine, there would be a certain amount of accountability for actually putting in some effort as well. While others would encourage you no matter what, you would see that your peers are improving, and so there'd be some internal compulsion to conform to the group. It would be a good use of peer pressure. There'd be no guilt though either, because the effort is being made, and with effort comes progress. Of course, some will self-select out, but it will be because they chose to leave, not because we weren't supportive and encouraging.

We'd really have to get good at the whole "no judgments" thing to start with, but in this world of posting our highlights on social media it might be good to hear that everybody isn't as perfect and wonderful as they'd like us to think. One difference between the Church of the Unregenerate and CrossFit would be that the goal of CrossFit is a well-rounded workout, but when it comes to spiritual growth we are to pick one or two things and just focus on them. We read in TCR, "Therefore, kind reader, look into yourself, search out one or another of the evils within you, and from a principle of religion, remove them; if you do so for any other reason or end, you only succeed in concealing them from the world. Know yourself, and get to work on them" (#566).

Now I do have to acknowledge that there are some drawbacks to this idea. Just as I was reluctant to join CrossFit for the perceived judgment I would encounter, laying all of your personal failings out in a public setting certainly would be a massive obstacle to joining this church. How would we react when the new guy “Fred” who is 60 years old fills out his chart and states that he needs to stop using teenage prostitutes? Yes, he does! Could we stomach it when he fails, but still says he’s trying to set a new PB?

It would also be problematic for married couples, as airing your dirty laundry in public isn’t usually a good pathway to marital bliss. If everybody knows that your spouse has a thing for the hot guy or girl working at the local café... well, that’s probably not helpful. So maybe you don’t attend this church with your spouse.

Even with these obvious negatives, and others that I’m sure I haven’t thought of yet, I still feel like there’s something to this idea. I really like the CrossFit ideas of accountability, no judgments, personal support, and some method of tracking progress over time. It’s a path of personal, spiritual growth, and unlike lifting something up and putting it back down, there actually is something being accomplished.

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Baringa Repaint and Refresh

At the beginning of the year we had decided that we would have some sort of celebration in November to commemorate the centenary of the construction and dedication of the church building. Until this date there was no building where the society members could meet. The land in Dudley St had been purchased the year before. Long term members and readers may recall that in 2005 there was also a 100th anniversary celebration, but that was of the founding of the church society.

Anyway, as part of this celebration we decided to have Baringa refreshed. A number of cracks in the walls have been developing over the years, and so it seemed it would be a reasonable time to repaint the place as well. This was all supposed to happen back in July, but then lock down happened. At this point the work is scheduled to begin November 15, and we expect it to take a week or two.

Beyond that work, we also expect to do a fair bit of decluttering, getting rid of much of the accumulated stuff that seems to have just landed here over the years. With that and the new signage that was mentioned in last month’s newsletter, it should make for a good look inside and out.

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The Remarkable Success of the Street Library

I don't remember when it was, but probably a couple of years ago by now, that my wife suggested that the church should put a small street library out front. I thought it was a stupid idea. I couldn't fathom anybody actually using it. At the same time, it wasn't expensive and a good project for the Sunday School boys to do, and after all these years I have learned that I generally do well when I listen to my wife. As such **Jenn, Ralph and the boys** pushed ahead and they installed it November 2020.

Since then all I can say is that it has been used much more than I would have ever imagined. It hasn't been unusual for me to be walking from the house to the office and seeing somebody parked at the street and using the library. In fact just recently somebody dropped off so many books that they had to be brought inside. We'd have to triple the size of the library to fit it all!

The cynic in me had the thought of, "Well, I bet they're just exchanging the 'normal' books and none of the church or spiritual ones." Wrong again! Any church books that I've put in there have all found new homes, and it isn't like I've only put a couple in once. Now, I haven't heard from any of the readers, but still, the job is sowing the seed, and that is what is happening.

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The Appeal of the Weird

I've produced a number of videos for YouTube at this point, and it has seemed that no matter what I produced, the most popular videos were the ones dealing with the stories of early Genesis... Creation, Adam & Eve, Noah. No real surprise there.

But a few months ago when I went to search for some new ideas, I noticed that the most popular live streamed church services were the ones that dealt with forbidden foods, regulations regarding priests and Micah's idols from Judges 18. Strange stuff, and pretty obscure in my opinion. But apparently there was an audience for these, so I decided to repackage those church services into dedicated YouTube videos which I've been rolling out over the last couple of months.

Well, the results are in, and "Forbidden Foods" has about 50% more views than the Creation story this month, and triple Adam & Eve and Noah's Ark. I was advertising the video on regulations regarding priests, so it's hard to get a fair comparison right now, but it is interesting to see that people are interested in understanding some of these strange, obscure stories in the Bible.

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Spring 2021 Women's Weekend

Ladies, the time is fast approaching: our women's weekend is right around the corner! Mark your calendar for **November 26-28** for our next women's weekend, and let **Jenn Beiswenger** (jenn@beiswenger.net) know of your interest, if you haven't already, so that she can send you the relevant information. What with all that's going on, this will primarily be a *virtual* gathering of like-minded women, although you're warmly encouraged to physically get together with other ladies in your area, if you can.

Among other things, we will look through the New Church lens at Jesus' mother, Mary, how this pandemic has affected our faith, and some things we can do to prevent dementia -- plus there will be fun ice-breakers, games night, a dramatized meditation and opportunities to visit with old friends and new from across this beautiful country of ours. If you've participated before, you know that these are enlightening, encouraging, fun weekends. If you haven't yet, now's your chance. We hope that you will join us!

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The Greater Implications of Spiritual Sight and Blindness

We say “I see” when we understand. It’s a simple way to talk about what spiritual sight is, that “seeing” in a spiritual way is about understanding. A few weeks ago I did a service looking at the Lord’s healing of a blind man, and afterwards **Heulwen Ridgway** said that it reminded her of passage 6032 in Arcana Caelestia that talks about our internal sight and picks up where I finished the service.

Essentially it states that just as our natural eyes need light to function and see, our internal sight – that is, the intellectual power of the mind – needs spiritual light in order to function. Without the Lord providing spiritual light, and us being receptive to it, not only do we lack understanding “but also any of its activities, such as cogitation, reflection, observation, circumspection, and many others.”

This is a big deal. Without spiritual light, that is, if you don’t have the Word in your life, your reflections, observations, all of your mental processes will be as productive and accurate as a person staggering around in the dark. I don’t know about you, but the last couple of years I’ve felt like the world has gone crazy. Maybe crazy isn’t the problem. Maybe this is just what happens when the world ignores religion and is spiritually blind.

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Birthdays

Happy Birthday to **Cliff Adamou** (2nd), **Jesse Horner** (3rd), **Brian Heldon** (8th), **Cathy Kermond** (11th), **Skye Horner** (11th), **Lori Heldon** (30th)

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