

News & Notes January 2023

No Church January 1st or 8th

At our last society meeting we decided to take a break from our regular services for the first two Sundays of 2023. We'll resume on the 15th, and I expect that to be a Holy Supper service as it is our tradition to start the year with that.

Summer Women's Weekend

'Seven' is a special number in the Word, and it was special for the ladies who gathered for our seventh (already!) women's weekend in mid-December, too. Having done this a few times, now, our group of New Church-minded women enjoyed spending time together, learning, playing, helping and praying over the course of our two-day retreat at The Tops Conference Centre. Eight women made the trek – from as near as Bulli and as far as Port Macquarie! – to Stanwell Tops and were joined by four more via Zoom for sessions on topics such as cultural intelligence, feminine Swedenborgian spirituality, Manoah, his wife and Samson, meditation, birth kit assembly, Pictionary and more! We had repeat attendees as well as newcomers, and it seems that everyone was glad to have come. Since venues book out quickly, we're already looking at possible autumn and spring 2023 gathering dates: if you're at all interested, please drop Jenn a line (jenn@beiswenger.net) and let her know!

Journey Program – Shift, Starting February 5th 2023

As is our pattern the last ten years or so, we kick off a spiritual growth program in February. This time we'll use the program “**Shift**,” which came out in 2011 but by my records I've never used here. The program runs 7 weeks, and we'll start with “Shift” themed worship services on February 5th. There will also be a discussion group, but we're changing from our normal time to instead run these on **Wednesday mornings at 11am**. Here's a description of the program:

Although painful at times, struggle often signifies the beginning of change. Whether it's relationship issues, financial concerns, bad habits, we all struggle. And fortunately, we all have the God-given power to shift our focus, our perspective and our priorities, which can lead to exciting life changes. But why do this alone?

Shift is a seven-week spiritual growth program in which participants learn about themselves, about God, and about how to make shifts in their lives. The program draws on the Jacob story from the Old Testament. Here is your chance to offer your struggles before the Lord, and watch them turn to blessings.

Weekly topics: A shift of...

- Awareness: Notice the conflicts
- Perspective: Remember the Lord is here, now
- Focus: Keep in mind who you want to be
- Expectations: Have patience with the process
- Motivation: Recognize when it's time to make a change
- Confidence: Hold on through the wrestling
- Heart: Show your love

The Sounds of Music

As the local folks know, **Ros Taylor** has been in town lately visiting her family. As usual, Ros is a helpful sort and has offered to contribute in any way she can to our church. In the past she's led

some discussion groups, but this year I had a different request of her. For our church services we've been using recorded accompaniments to sing our hymns to, but there are a number of hymns that we don't have recordings of, and others that were recorded on the organ at the Cathedral... and that just doesn't really fit the vibe of our church.

As such, I asked Ros to record on piano some hymns, and she was more than happy to do so. She recorded a total of 18 hymns for us, which will allow us to sing some hymns that we haven't sung in a while as well as increase the quality of some ones we've been using. So "Thank You" to Ros for the use of her talents!

But wait, there's more! One of my favorite Christmas songs is "Calm on the Listening Ear of Night," but that's a song that is difficult to play and one where we only had a computer generated recording. For this hymn **Julian Duckworth** was willing and able to create for us a new recording, so this Christmas for the first time in my time here we'll actually have a decent recording to sing from.

And that's not all! I've reinstalled the microphone at the back of the church and set up a switch at the lectern that will enable me to switch between the lapel mic and mic at the back. The main point of this is so that if a person is listening online they don't just hear my voice, but instead hear the group. That's the idea at least. So hopefully this will bring a better singing and listening experience to our church in 2023.

Virtual Camp – January 20-22 2023

This is a reminder that while we won't be having an in-person family camp this year, **Rev Howard Thompson** is in the process of organizing a virtual camp that will be running January 2023. Unlike Family Camp, the commitment of time is substantially less, and there is no financial commitment! So after you've spent all of your money on Christmas presents, maybe this will be a good, free activity. And, since it is virtual, you can attend while sitting at the beach, while walking through a national park, or even just sitting in your pajamas drinking a coffee. The plan is to have an opening worship Friday morning, 2 sessions Friday and Saturday concluding with a closing worship Sunday morning. I hope you can find a session or two or four to enjoy. If you're interested in joining in, please contact myself or Howard so we can email you the link/s.

Final Thoughts – Do We "Know" Too Much?

Do we know too little or too much? If you go back a few hundred years or so, and you wanted something to change, you prayed to God for it. Depressed? You prayed for deliverance. You need a medical miracle? You ask God. Today, we don't do that so much anymore. We turn to science. But has that limited our ability to receive a real miracle? We say [insert your request here] can't be done because we KNOW the science of how [whatever your problem is] works, and as a result we don't ask God for a miracle because we think science says it can't be done.

Throughout the Bible the Lord says He is bigger than our problems. Need a body of water parted? No problem. Need a healing? He's an expert in that. The Lord's birth into this world was a miracle of it's own, but not the only miracle around the Christmas story. You've got angels appearing to shepherds, people being advised in dreams, and of course a woman who was too old to get pregnant having a child. Science would have said none of these things could happen. If you allow the Lord to be born into your life, all sorts of OTHER miracles will come with it. But you've got to do your part. Ask for the miracle. Be willing to be less certain, to "know" less, and maybe you'll find out that there's a Christmas miracle for you.