



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society September-October 2023

Double Issue!

You may have noticed that you're getting this issue a week later than usual, and, believe it or not, it isn't because I was lazy and/or disorganized! This was actually done intentionally. Really! I was away in Perth the week the newsletter would normally come out, and I'm taking some holiday time at the end of the month into October, so it seemed like it made more sense to just make a September-October issue. You do get TWO articles this month, though, so you can always wait a month to read the second one! However, the most time-sensitive entry is regarding the Summer Camp/Retreat in January, on the next page. Please give that article a read through ASAP and let us know your thoughts.

Parallels in Sports and Spirituality

by Rev Todd Beiswenger

You might know this already, but baseball is my favorite sport; that said, I really don't watch very many games... maybe one every couple of weeks, but I do *read* about it nearly every day. What really has been catching my attention, the more I read, though, are what I see as good spiritual practices that are being employed by baseball teams in their quest for a World Series Championship.

There are some practices which spirituality and baseball share that perhaps are pretty obvious. Getting players to buy into a "team first" attitude is paramount, because sometimes you have to do what is good for the team even when it doesn't benefit your personal statistics. People who are regenerating have to similarly adopt an attitude of "doing what's right" to benefit society even when it doesn't benefit them personally.

Here's an example that goes a bit beyond something as simple as that. It's about valuing good process over the outcome. We get this lesson very clearly in the Elijah story: Elijah performs a great miracle, then flees to Mt. Horeb and complains to God that nobody is listening to him. The lesson is that Elijah didn't need to worry about who he thought was listening, he just needed to concern himself with doing what God said. Have a good process, don't worry about what you can't control.

In baseball, there is no shortage of stories about young pitchers who have been very successful up until they reach the major leagues, and then they flounder. Over the last 15 years or so, what baseball teams have found is that these young men have the *physical* skills, but it is actually their *mental* skills that need sharpening.

I was reading an article about one of these pitchers who had really turned his career around this year, and the reporter asked how this transformation started. He said:

"I had a meeting with [the team's general manager] and he told me to meet with a mental skills guy. That has really helped. I guess a lot of it was just anxiety and nervousness. Killing all that, it's just made it a lot easier. Makes it actually fun to be out there, you know?"

Okay, but how do you "kill" anxiety and nervousness? He said that he was taught to value process over outcome. Specifically, he was told that he had to

reorient his mindset to just focus on “executing pitches.” It doesn’t matter what the hitter does. All that matters is whether he did what he was supposed to. Like with Elijah, *who* listened was beyond his control, so he wasn’t supposed to worry about it. Did Elijah do what God asked? Yes. Did the pitcher execute the pitch? Yes.

This idea of freeing ourselves from outcomes transforms how we navigate the world. It allows us to stay in the moment, and not just *stay* in the moment, but *enjoy* the moment. The pitcher said how he used to get nervous when he was called into the game, but now he’s excited to go out. He doesn’t have to worry about the outcome, he just has to throw the pitch. After that, whatever happens, happens. The very same lesson is so important to us. Do what God says. Don’t worry about what will happen next because it really is beyond your control. When we realize that we really can’t control outcomes, we might just find that we don’t have to be so worried and nervous about the world; rather, we can find it interesting and exciting to watch God bring about an outcome that we couldn’t imagine.

2024 Church Camp: Need Your Immediate Feedback!

from Rev Howard Thompson

IMPORTANT: *I am writing to you today to ask for a strong expression of intent to attend this year’s retreat. With the several changes in program and format that have taken place, I am concerned that we will not have sufficient numbers to hold the camp. If we do not, I need to know that now. Please respond directly to me (revhathompson@gmail.com) with an indication of your intention to attend the retreat and, if applicable, how many you are responding for (spouse/children). Please respond by 10 September.*

It will have been 4 years since we have held a retreat, the last being our 2020 gathering in Adelaide. While our venue for 2024 was set some time ago, we’ve had to delay this announcement as we’ve been attempting to potentially transform camp. I apologize for this taking as long as it has, and as those ideas haven’t come to reality, here’s a breakdown of what the Camp/Retreat will look like:

What: The NCIA's 2024 Summer Retreat is themed "What's the Use?" It's a resonant theme, especially in an era where traditional expressions of faith seem to be waning in our rapidly changing culture. As our church communities experience these shifts, many of us might find ourselves grappling with the profound question, "What's the Use?"

Yet, this question, poignant as it may seem, isn't just limited to our collective faith journey. It's also deeply personal. Each one of us, at different moments in our lives, might question the purpose or significance of our thoughts, intentions, or actions. What value do they bring? What impact do they have? Frankly, some of us may even question our own use in this world.

This year, our presenters will delve into the relevance and purpose behind their individual presentations, reflecting on the core theme. But this retreat isn't just about introspection; it's about community dialogue. Together, as a New Church community, we'll dedicate time for introspection on the larger, more encompassing question: What's the Use of Church?

In a world constantly evolving and redefining its values, how does an institution as venerable as the church retain its significance? How can it remain a beacon of hope, guidance, and solace in today's landscape? We'll embark on this journey of discovery, seeking answers and perhaps finding even more questions, as we explore the enduring relevance of the church in our contemporary world.

When: 15 January (after 4:00pm) to 20 January (before 2:00pm), 2024

Where: The NCIA 2024 Summer Retreat will take place at the Winmalee Christian Conference Centre. Just 90 minutes west of Sydney, the Winmalee Christian Conference Centre is situated at Winmalee, in the Blue Mountains, near Springwood, NSW. The site is fully catered for Camps, Conferences & Retreats by Christian Groups, Schools and community groups. Nestled in the picturesque Blue Mountains, enjoy the peaceful atmosphere the mountains have to offer. Relax listening to the local bird life while enjoying delicious home cooked meals, or get active with bushwalks adjoining the National Park & other recreational facilities we have on site. It's only a short drive to Katoomba, Leura & Blue Mountains National Park. Your Blue Mountains Camp awaits. <https://winmaleeccc.com.au/>

Accommodation: Winmalee is a smaller facility than we have used in the past. While they can accommodate up to 60 people, fully half of that number is accommodated in 2 15-bed dormitory rooms. The remainder are accommodated in 10 family-style rooms with 4-6 bunks. Half of these latter rooms are ensuite.

How Much: Fees for the 2024 Summer Retreat are estimated to be: Adults \$550, Students (≤ 17 yo) \$400, Children (≤ 6) Free

I hope to see you in the Blue Mountains this coming January!

Class on September 14th, 11am: “Mirror, Mirror: Reflections on Spiritual Principles Through Snow White's Journey” with Rev David Millar

For the July newsletter I wrote about my attempt to find a vain character in the Bible, one who was like the evil Queen in Snow White. Well, some years ago, Rev David Millar did a study of old fairy tales, and found that they use some of the same symbolic language as found in the Word. This led me to ask David of his insights about the Queen in Snow White, and eventually I thought it would be fun for him to present his findings as a class for us. Live-stream and recording links will be found on the church website.

Class on October 26th, 11am: “How Good Do You Have to be to Get Into Heaven?”

I was going through the General Church clergy archives, and I found this interesting presentation by Rt Rev Brian Keith. As I looked through it, I couldn't help but think that those of us who attend our classes are all closer to the end of life than the beginning, and every now and again I sense that some people would like some reassurance that, when they do cross over, they will end up in a good place.

I think this presentation addresses a lot of those concerns. Not only are there a number of passages showing just how easy it is to get into heaven, but there are also a number of passages that address the opposite: just how bad you can be and still NOT go to hell! The system that God has created is designed to get you to heaven. You've got to try hard to not get there.

As usual, I'll live-stream this class, and the recording will end up on YouTube. Check our website for details: www.hurstvilleneewchurch.com

NCIA Minister Meetings Report

As I've written before, one of the main purposes of these meetings is to get the ministers together in a space to allow for the cross-pollination of ideas. What is working well, somewhere else, that could work well here? – and vice versa. Last year the observation was made that Brisbane is the only society seeing growth, so this year's meetings were set up so that we could attend a service in Brisbane to see if there was something which other congregations could replicate.

The service that Sunday was a discussion-style format they call “sacred

circle.” It’s a fairly simple style where the Word is opened, and Darren has a Bible story that he works the group through going from the literal sense, offering an internal meaning, and then allowing people to add their comments on it.

What’s useful to note about this though, is that it seems that the new people who are attending the church are people who have found Swedenborg first, then found the church. They do seem to gravitate to the sacred circle instead of the traditional service on offer, but to me it seems that there’s an attraction and interest in the teachings before they’ve even walked in the door. So, while the new-comers do seem to prefer that format, they’re also not coming just for that format.

At a Society meeting we had a couple weeks ago we discussed this and decided that we didn’t want to replace our traditional service with this format, so perhaps this isn’t our path forward at this time.

Perth Visit Report

I flew out to Perth on August 25th and returned on the 27th. It was a whirlwind tour, and I don’t think I’m exaggerating when I say that I was busy every waking minute I was there. I went from place to place visiting with people, as well as hosting a class at a local coffee shop on Saturday morning and church, with Holy Supper, on Sunday morning.

There were a couple of interactions that are not confidential and worth telling... Friday afternoon I was invited to attend a child’s birthday party, and it was quite a party with lots of other kids and their parents there. I started making conversation with one woman, and it didn’t take too long for us to figure out that we both had a lot in common. She is very much interested in spirituality, but despite sending her son to a Christian school, she has a much broader view of it than what she has found in various other churches. We’ll see where it leads, but she did start following me on Instagram, so if nothing else she’ll have more exposure to the New Church going forward.

The other encounter was with the man sitting next to me on the plane trip home. He was probably in his 70s, and a semi-retired electrician. However, our real connection was that he is a Mormon, and I’m not sure how much you know about Mormon beliefs, but suffice it to say New Church & Mormon teachings have a fair bit in common. Not surprisingly, he had never heard of the New Church or Swedenborg, so I left him with a couple of

websites to look up and my contact details.

It's always one of those things where I wonder what has been accomplished with these seeming chance encounters, but as I said to the woman at the party, "Isn't it interesting that out of all the people here, somehow we found each other?" She agreed. I think that perspective is important, because if we see that God brought somebody into our life, then maybe we give that encounter a bit more weight, and who knows, maybe it will make a difference.

Unintended Consequences: Environmentalists Create an Angry God and Increase Pollution!

Would you like the world to be a greener place? A world that is less wasteful of resources, one where the practices in use not only by people, but by businesses, are sustainable? Of course you do, who doesn't want clean air and water? What kind of Grinch would say they wanted *more* pollution? Environmentalists will tug at your heart strings says that we want it not just for ourselves, but for the children. There are many ideas that are promoted these days to achieve this, but today I want to share with you a story about environmentalism gone wrong. It's a story about how some recent efforts have become self-defeating to the intended cause, and if only they would adopt a New Church idea of God they could actually achieve their goal. Ok, maybe I'm stretching things, but hear me out...

This story starts in the world of investing. Maybe you know this, but these days companies are given an ESG rating – which stands for “environmental, social, and governance.” The ESG rating is designed so that investors can quickly determine if a company takes into account things other than just making money. For example, a “Governance” issue would be this: does the company in question work in countries that allow child labour? A “Social” issue would be does the company work in countries that oppress women and prevent them from voting? You can probably easily imagine what would get a company a poor “Environmental” score... engaging in deforestation, burning lots of coal, or creating lots of emissions in general.

The idea behind ESG investing is that you only invest in green companies, so essentially you're rewarding companies that score well and punishing those that don't, thus improving the world. That's the theory anyway. Since more and more people are environmentally conscious these days, there are seriously large amounts of money at play here. Bloomberg states that about

\$35 *trillion* is tied up in ESG investing, and by 2025 they expect it will be a third of all investments.

A good example of ESG investing is the country of Norway. In the 1960s they found enormous amounts of oil and gas in their continental shelf, and started drilling. The money from that was put into a national investment fund, now worth over \$1.4 trillion USD. This fund was very diverse, and they owned about 1.4 percent of every public company in the world.

Then they started ESG investing, and the sell-offs began. No more would they hold shares in oil and gas companies, or companies that explore and drill for it, despite the fact of where all of their money came from. If your company makes weapons, recreational cannibus, tobacco products, or uses coal in any form, it was sold off. This is exactly what proponents of ESG investing want. The “dirty” companies are punished which will make it more expensive for them to get money... and somehow it's going to make them more green.

What's the problem here? It's in the “somehow.” You see, you have to think about the fundamental nature of green versus “brown” companies.

Researcher Kelly Shue says that green firms tend to be services firms, like Spotify, Prudential, MetLife, American Express. Silicon Valley Bank, which recently collapsed, is one of the greenest firms in their sample, which makes sense. How can a bank pollute that much, right?

Conversely, the “brown” or “dirty” firms have a business that is just fundamentally more energy intensive. For example, Southwest Airlines and FedEx are on the bad list, but since solar powered airplanes don't exist, they'll never be as “green” as a bank, right?

Perhaps you can see where this is going. The ESG investors, in their zeal to punish the low-scoring companies, are actually self-defeating. Why? Because it is the low scoring companies where the largest potential pollution reductions can be found, and by making money more expensive for them to borrow it is making it more difficult for them to invest in green technologies. The brown firm typically pollutes 260 times as much as a similarly-sized green firm, so if that brown firm were able to cut its emissions by just a mere 1%, that is actually way better for the environment than the green firm cutting its emissions by 100%. Think about it like this: for every million dollars invested in a transportation company, you'll get a much greater reduction in pollution than investing that in a bank because the bank basically didn't pollute in the first place.

With the additional financial pressure placed on them, brown firms are now also forced to think more about short-term survival than developing new tech, which, interestingly enough, they would be more likely than green companies to do.

So what does any of this have to do with the New Church, or even spirituality? The spiritual principle that comes to mind for me is that the Lord desires our amendment, not our punishment. The ESG investors seems to have lost sight of the fact that what they really want is for low-scoring companies to change their ways, but because they've become so focused on the punishment side of things they're actually *preventing* the outcome that they seek.

What I find particularly ironic about this is that when you talk to younger people about the Bible, they often find the idea of a wrathful God very distasteful. They point to the story of Noah's ark and find God's destruction of the world as punishment for sin to be unthinkable. Yet, as environmentalism becomes its own religion, we find that they have created their own god in the image of the old church, one that punishes and destroys those who fail to do his, i.e. their, bidding. So, not only have these ESG investors failed in reducing pollution, but they have actually become the very thing that they say they detest.

Now I suppose some people will fairly say that you don't need spiritual principles as part of an investing strategy. But to me, isn't that really the whole point of ESG investing in the first place? ESG is basically a secular spirituality, where they are doing what is right - in their own eyes. The good side is that they are trying to do what's right, but the bad side is that, well, remember the book of Judges? In that book we are told that people did what was right in their own eyes, and the stories are horrifying. If you want a refresher as to how bad humanity gets when we set ourselves up as god, just look up the story of the Levite and the concubine. It's not a pretty picture, and just how we see people who think they are doing good slowly degenerate throughout Judges, that's what seems to be happening with these ESG investors.

You and I really can't do anything about this particular problem, but Ms Shue and her team are doing what they can to illuminate ESG investors about how their efforts are currently self-defeating. However, I think this is a good example because all of us will have a situation in life where we have to try to use some incentive to change either our own behavior, or the behavior of somebody in our life, and it's important to really think it through.

Whenever that situation occurs we would do well to think about how the Lord sets His priorities, and structures His government. He wants a heaven from the human race, and in order to create that He desires our amendment, not our punishment. Can we structure our priorities and principles likewise?

For more information, see Freakonomics Radio Episode 546: Are ESG Investors Actually Helping the Environment?

Chinese Swedenborg Study Group

One of the other items that came up at the meetings in Brisbane was a chance to hear from Rev Ian Arnold regarding his involvement with the Chinese Swedenborg Study Group that is based out of Brisbane. Here's a quick run-down of what is happening with that...

The meetings began 5 years ago, and now there are 137 people who are signed up for the group. These meetings are all live-streamed, so while 40-50 of the people are Brisbane based, the reality is that people from around the world participate in these meetings. Average attendance though is typically around 25, but there are additional people who will watch the recording later. While they didn't say how many, personally I find that with our church live-streams, we get most of our views from people watching later.

In these meetings they've studied *Heaven & Hell*, *True Christian Religion*, *Divine Providence*, as well as Bazil Lazer's book *Temptations*. Recently they've been working through Rev John Odhner's "What the Bible Says" series of articles. It's worth noting that they've had to translate all of these materials first in order to study them, so it is a lot of work and really shows their dedication to the study.

However, what I found is that this group is really just the tip of the iceberg. Beyond this one, there are 9 others, totaling 800-900 people. Among this larger group there's a woman who left a high paying job three years ago and has used the time to translate nearly every volume of the Writings herself!

Personally I think this is all really impressive. I've heard over the years that there is great hope for the growth of the church in Africa and Asia, and this is because the people there haven't been exposed to, and taken on, the teachings of the old Christian church. As such, the belief is that they will be more amenable to New Church teachings. To me, these groups show the validity of this line of thinking. It also shows me that the church is growing, even if we're not seeing it in the traditional ways.

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General Church Assembly

June 27 to 30, 2024 Bryn Athyn, PA

It was originally planned for 2020, as it seemed appropriate to have an assembly on the 250th anniversary of the birth of the New Church. Obviously, that didn't happen. However, we're now at a point where international travel is becoming routine again, so we're finally going to be having an assembly next year. We invite you to join with us to learn, be inspired, connect with old and new friends, and deepen your faith.

It will be an American summer gathering for adults, both young and seasoned, as well as teens and children, to remind us of what draws us together: the messages we have been given from the Word, and our efforts to lead lives of devotion to them.

Gather and grow at the 2024 Assembly!

More information coming soon. Questions? Reach out to gcassembly2024@newchurch.org

Birthdays

September: Happy Birthday to Owen H (6th), Carolyn H (8th), Klaire H (9th), Liam J (10th), Sylvia H (13th), Karen E (13th), Jeffrey H (15th), Phillipa H (15th), Azalea R (19th), Phillip W (29th)

October: Happy Birthday to Stuart H (10th), Zach B (10th), Murray H (13th), Darren K (20th), Cameron W (20th), Jenn B (27th)

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Call or come at anytime.