

Theta Alpha Journal



October 2019

Table of Contents

President's Report	3
<i>Janet Krettek</i>	
Joseph in Egypt (poem)	5
<i>Nadine Rogers</i>	
Words to Music (Poem)	8
<i>Laurel Odhner Powell</i>	
Virgin Birth	10
<i>Fran Raymond</i>	
Choose Life (poem).....	13
<i>Doris Odhner Delaney</i>	
Shaking but Still Standing	17
<i>Freya Mildred King</i>	
Introduction to Adoption	21
<i>Carla Reuter</i>	
Adoption	22
<i>Taney Frazier Friend</i>	
Adoption	28
<i>Glen Henderson</i>	
The Empty Backpack	33
<i>Jenn Wagner</i>	
Role of the Arts in Preparing New Church Teachers, Part II	38
<i>Angela Rose</i>	
Bryn Athyn Church School	46
<i>Greg Henderson</i>	
Letter to the Editor	50
<i>Dale Morris</i>	
<i>Kris Heinrichs Earle</i>	
<i>Martin E. Klein</i>	
<i>Gill Simons Mayer</i>	
Chapter Report – Boynton Beach.....	53
<i>Janet Karralus</i>	
TAI Excecutive Committee Board 2019-2020.....	55
TAI Chapter Presidents.....	57

Theta Alpha "Daughters of the Academy"



Named From the Greek:

Θυγατερες Ακαδημιας
Thugateres Akadémias

Founded in 1904 by graduates of the Academy of the New Church, Theta Alpha exists to provide a forum for women for the advancement and support of New Church education in its many forms, and to support each other in our personal spiritual growth. Membership is open to interested women aged eighteen and older.

Non Nobis Solum ~ Not for Ourselves Alone

Theta Alpha Journal
Volume 15
Number 13

Editor: Helen Kennedy

2959 Sycamore Road
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006
hmkennedy98@gmail.com

Cover Artwork

Drawn freehand by Chyler Henderson,
a freshman at the Academy of the New Church

Line art by Alison Cole (pg 4) and Jenn Beiswenger (pg 49)

CONTACT INFORMATION~

CORRESPONDENCE FOR THE JOURNAL:

Please direct submissions and letters to the Editor to Helen Kennedy at the addresses on the title page.

For general email correspondence:
hmkennedy98@gmail.com

THE JOURNAL ONLINE:

Facebook Page:
www.Facebook.com/groups/thetaalphajournal

Archived copies of the Journal are available at:
<http://bit.ly/taijournal>
or
newchurch.org/resources/publications/

CORRESPONDENCE FOR THETA ALPHA INTERNATIONAL:

P. O. Box 154
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009-0154

Google “Facebook Theta Alpha International” or visit
<http://bit.ly/fbthetaalpha>

President’s Report

Janet Krettek

Dear Readers,

The world is changing fast and we need to keep up pace. Our values of trust in the Lord, service to one another and loving one another as ourselves, are everlasting. However, the methods we use to help one another and to communicate have changed. Our world is getting smaller with more people traveling, and the rise of multiple cultures. Our membership, though on the mature side, has modified their ways, but not as quickly as the younger generations. Theta Alpha International is attempting to keep pace with multiple age groups and with multiple cultures. I see this as quite an opportunity for growth and development of our organization. To do this, I encourage you to get involved. How? Let me count the ways!

- Become a committee member— current openings are Membership Secretary and a Fundraising Chair.
- Become a donor — we support numerous scholarships and programs. Among them are Baptismal Packages, the Laws of Life Essay Contest, support for new teachers, support for schools, and the Theta Alpha Journal. For these good uses we appreciate any means of support.
- Contribute to the Journal — write an article, a poem, or submit artwork.
- Support our upcoming programs as a volunteer — either distant or locally.
- Contribute ideas for our current programs or suggest new programs.
- Assist the committee with our social media accounts.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to serve Theta Al-

pha as the President. I do, however, see as the most important part of my work facilitating how the Lord is leading us in our current worldly circumstances. But it can only be according to the thoughts and ideas of our membership, and their desired paths. This is your organization. Please let me know your ideas about Theta Alpha and the direction in which it needs to go in.

Yours in sisterhood,
Janet Krettek, DO
President
Theta Alpha International



Joseph in Egypt

Nadine Rogers

Preface

This is the second time I have written a poem about a character from the Bible later to realize the poem was actually quite autobiographical. For those who may not know me, I am mother to 10 orphan children in Nepal. The first poem was from the perspective of Moses' adoptive mother, Pharaoh's daughter, and how she gains an understanding of his birth mother's courage and sacrifice as she herself has to let go as a mother. In this new poem, I was inspired by the immense weight of Joseph's task of trying to be father to Jesus. Joseph was told by an angel that he should take on this role, and then later told he must flee to Egypt in order to keep Jesus safe from Herod. I imagined the feelings of loneliness, fear and inadequacy that Joseph must have felt in that time of exile, and his ultimate realization that all he can do is move through each day the best he can, and pray that the Lord add to those efforts to make them enough.

Like Joseph, I felt very overwhelmed and inadequate in moving to a country [Nepal] where everything was different in order to try to raise children that were not my biologic children. These children had undergone so much in their young lives already — loss of parents, poverty, in some cases abuse — and I felt such a tremendous weight on my shoulders to try to help them move forward and heal from these traumas. I felt so scared of failure, and in fact there were many incidents where I did in fact fail. However, I also felt committed to the children and the vision the Lord had given me, so at some point I recognized that I just had to keep putting one foot in front of the other and march onward despite the immensity of the burden I felt. I had to accept that I truly was inadequate, but I had to keep trying anyway, praying that God, the true parent of the children, would add to my effort and make it enough. Alone, I am not enough. The name "Joseph" means "He will add" or "May He add," and this has become my prayer, just as I imagine it was Joseph's own prayer.

Joseph in Egypt

I cut the wood with precision.
I join the pieces exactly.
I rub the wax in patiently, waiting for the shine to appear.
These familiar acts are done as communion.
Communion with my younger self,
Connecting me to a safer time
When I did these same motions in my father's workshop,
The neighbors stopping by with gossip,
A new joke, a grandchild to show off.
The comfort of community in each friendly/cranky/
Flirting/scolding face that passed the doorway,
As bountiful as the sawdust in heaps beneath the work bench,
Only visible after I was no longer there to see it.
No one stops by this workshop to pass the time.
"The Hebrew does good work," they say,
And so they come for a chair, a cabinet, a cot.
But they do not come for me. I work alone,
Shifting between fear and wonder,
Desolation and hope,
Extremes careening around the corners of this room,
Colliding against the bench,
Bouncing off the tools.
So this work is also a grounding, a focus:
There is a table to be made.
Whatever memories of angel dreams may be glinting off the adze,
Whatever star dust clings to me from that baffling night
And bores into my heart as I bore into this wood,
Whatever rumors of soldier troops searching for babies
Resound in the pounding of the hammer on nails,
Still the table must be made.
So I measure, I cut, I piece, I polish.
I think of that other, long-ago Joseph,
Exiled here, like me, because of spirit dreams.
What faith sustained him in slavery and prison?
Faith that fathered insight,
Faith that formed forgiveness,
So he could look at his betrayers with love and say,

"What you intended for harm, God intended for good.
It was for the saving of many lives."
The saving of many, many lives —
So the dream angel also said to me.
And so I became father to a son not mine
To whom shepherds and sages alike bow down,
Who inspires prophecy in the temple elders,
Who rouses rage in a black-hearted king.
I was frightened enough of the ordinary kind of fatherhood —
Of fevers and hot kitchen pots, hard questions and broken hearts.
And now the boy named Savior is waiting in my room,
Waiting for me to bring home the coins that buy his supper,
Waiting for me to recite the Torah to him,
Trusting that I will keep him safe and well
With no sense of how absurd it all is —
Gold in a gutter.
A rose given to a boar.
Manna given to a man who has forgotten how to eat,
Trying to stuff a star in a jar.
It's too much for me; I buckle under the burden
Until I see those arms reach up to me
And feel those soft baby hands on my cheeks
And see the eyes sparked with a joy that I did not put there
But that he gives me so freely nonetheless,
That evoke the memory of when heaven broke into my dreams
And whispered the message, "Be not afraid."
So this work is also my meditation and prayer.
I don't know how to guard eternity in the land of time.
I don't know how to protect peace in a world of war.
I don't know how love will last in the reign of hatred.
But I can make this step-stool sturdy.
I can make this jewel box beautiful.
I can make this cradle rock gently.
So I do the only things I know how to do
Here in the country of our asylum,
And I offer my own name up as I lift the next board:
May He add, may He add,
May He add, may He add.

Nadine can be contacted at nrogersmd@gmail.com.

Words to Music

Laurel Odhner Powell

How do we experience the Word working in our daily lives? The following poem endeavors to share some of those experiences, and is paired with a story or idea in the Word from which it grew. This selection is from a book Laurel is working on, "Praying For Rain."

And God made two great lights; the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night; He made the stars also.

And God set them in the firmament of the heaven to give light upon the earth,

And to rule over the day and the night, and to divide the light from the darkness: And God saw that it was good.

Genesis 1:14-18

WORDS TO MUSIC*

The road is dark at night
However bright the stars shine:
Their wisdoms sparkle from the sky
But they are not mine.
I chart my course by them
But cannot see my way —
They tell me of the heavens
But I can't see which
Path to take;
Where do I go?
The moon's light shows the hills

And fields in clear silver gray,
And when it's full it makes
A silver ribbon roadway.
Faith in the truth has brought me
Reason and sweet rhyme,
And day's reflection on the night;
I won't travel
By moonlight
All my lifetime.
Moonlight can show me the way,
But delight comes with the day.
Dawn's gold light wakens the land;
The Sun rises—now I understand:
My life's bright truth
In God's love
Shines its own light
Back above. . .
Now I know why I have journeyed so far:
To find this star.

**This song was written to a piano piece, "Friends," composed by Laurel's brother, John L. Odhner.*

November 6, 1973

(Used by permission, copyright 2012 Laurel O. Powell)

The Virgin Birth and Other Fantastical Stories

Fran Raymond

In today's atheistic, secular world it seems that stories such as the virgin birth are increasingly questioned and ridiculed. People are so 'rational-science-minded' that the virgin birth easily gets racked up among all the other crazy, impossible miracles that Christianity presents, such as walking on water and rising from the dead. These are all fantastical stories! Pure fiction! And yet, the subject does need to be looked at.

Of course these miracles can't be proved scientifically. It's one of the things you accept, or not, and if you do accept, you open yourself to ridicule and accusations of being closed-minded to rational thought — a so-called 'blind believer.' So, when I don't have any hope of using science to defend my belief, I simply don't go there. I look at all the biblical stories as just stories, not scientific "provables." The stories may be historically correct, or not; they may be allegorical, or not; they may be literally true, or not. Since I don't know any of these things for sure, I am left only with what I do know. I know that they are stories. So I look at the story. . . .

Let's look at the story of the virgin birth as science-fiction fantasy. Science fiction writers bend and break scientific laws constantly to fabricate all kinds of creatures and worlds, and maybe this story does too? So in the opening chapters of this fantasy science-fiction story we read, "In the beginning GOD created. . . ."

This story begins with an indescribable, unfathomable eternal Being who does something amazing. Great mystery surrounds this God and His first act. The story goes on to say that in those ancient days God created a world to house free agents — walking/thinking creatures that were god-like in an obscure and limited way.

God apparently called the free-agent-creature MAN and

from His divine love and mercy the mystical God gave the free-agents the feeling (and consequent delight) that their life was their very own! So sets the stage for this magical, mystical, wonderful story! At this point one may scientifically analyze the story and reject it as unprovable nonsense or one may enjoy the story and continue reading just to see what happens. Let's see what happens.

Like any good story, now comes the rising action and foreshadowing conflict. The free-agent-creatures are too dense and dark-minded to KNOW that they've been created and given their own life! Yikes! The reason they don't KNOW this great truth is because they love having a life of their own more than anything they can think of! They love themselves and their own life above everything else! So delightful is this feeling of their "own" that they don't even WANT to know the truth of their origin! The free-agent-creature-man turns away from his God-Creator and goes his own way. We read about Cain and Abel, the Flood, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob. Thus begins the long and winding, inter-woven stories of conflict and struggle.

Let's fast-forward to the GREAT WONDER — the virgin birth. Earlier on in the story God had promised that He would somehow rescue the free-agent-man, who by now had gotten lost in the wilderness of his own ignorance and was suffering terribly. The God in this science-fiction story does an amazing, break-all-the-laws-of-science thing! He enters directly into His Own Creation! He impregnates His Own Creation with the eternal seed of Himself! He finites Himself! God-made-Man! BRILLIANT!

So, when I once again look at this story as simply a story, not a scientifically-provable truth, I now notice something. This story touches something inside me. I rather like the story. Why? Well, it is rather well constructed because it has all the elements of a perfect story. In fact I now see that it is THE MOST PERFECT STORY. It has a wonderful mystical beginning, an agonizingly heart-wrenching progress and it con-

cludes with the most happy of all endings. . . eternal happiness and life, for little me. . . and you. . . and them. . . and, well, everyone!

Hmmmm. The more I think of and enjoy this story, the more I notice something else. This story leads me to think about love. The story actually stimulates me to reflect upon the nature of love. Despite this story being nothing more than fantasy-fiction, it certainly has a strong EFFECT on me. I can't stop wondering now about love and how it works and how love gives and how love forgives and how powerful love is and how gentle and how wonderful, beautiful, life-giving. . . wow. And I feel happy.

How can I now deny the effect this story has on me? It leads my thoughts to think about the feeling of love — to feel love — to FEEL LOVED. All that is asked of me is that I receive and accept this love. When I allow myself to accept that I am loved, I can now for the first time draw from that love source . . . and return it. . . to GOD. . . and to others.

I can love.

This is now my life.

The PERFECT STORY now born in me.

Maybe it's not fiction after all.

Fran is a member of the Olivet Church in Toronto. In 1990 when dating her now-husband, Glenn, she noticed a copy of Divine Love and Wisdom on his bookcase. She picked it up and started to read it, but couldn't understand it. Shortly after, Mike Gladish, then Pastor at Olivet, gave her some introductory books to read. Afterwards Fran picked up DLW again and the words literally lifted off the pages to her and she fell in love with The Writings. In 1997 she and her four children were baptized into the New Church.

fran.raymond@gmail.com

Choose Life

Doris Odhner Delaney

*Heaven and earth record this day
and pray you heed now what I say:
I set before you life and death,
blessing, cursing. With each breath
in reasoned freedom, now, select
to be alive, to live in Me,
in heavenly light and energy.
For you and your family
the alternative is agony and strife.
Choose life!*

Well, thanks a lot, my Pesky Friend,
don't focus me upon the end
of life. My intention's to dance,
love adventure, snag romance!
Where the pathway forks,
the easy trail is best.
I take the pleasant way;
disregard the rest.

You're not there
where choice is made,
when I'm left weak,
anxious, afraid.
You're not in sight in dark of night,
in loss and death, in grasp and fight,
You're just not relevant, Old Man,
I do the best of it I can.

*Look not in shadow, but in sun.
Look not in sadness, but in joy.
Look in woodland, hill and stream,
in peace of sleep and charm of dream.
I'm in the meadow, in village square
among people gathered there for Me.
I'm with you in your need and prayer.
I'm in my Word; hear Me there;
Seek the manna on the trail
And do not fail to
Choose Life.*

My choice remains the same, its ease to please,
who can blame my way? "Choose life," You say.
Choose life as lived on Christian's path
where virtue's pale, salvation's doom?
I am still young, it is too soon
to waste my freedom choosing gloom.
Measure with laughter, weigh with mirth
the value of my life's true worth.
I am sure I can mend
any punishments
that You send.

*Many of your fearful years have passed,
We both already know
My answers
to your answers,
and to questions
you haven't asked.
You still can choose — though time is short.
Gloom is only in the doom you court —
Godliness does not darken your days —
a seductive myth by evil spoken —
in God's Image you are made.
Would God be sorrowful and broken?*

I choose abandonment
and revelry
and will have
no reason to amend
decisions that are made by me
while young
and confident
and free!

*Heaven and earth record this day
and pray you heed now what I say:
I set before you life and death,
blessing, cursing. With each breath
in reasoned freedom, now, select
to be alive, to live in Me,
in heavenly light and energy.
For you and your family,
the alternative is agony and strife —
Therefore,
Choose Life!*

*Doris is seventh generation Swedenborgian, daughter,
granddaughter, sister, cousin, aunt and niece of General
Church ministers. Born and raised in Bryn Athyn, she lived 40
years in the Hudson Valley of NY, has written mostly for envi-
ronmental justice and labor-related publications, and is retired
to Pittsburgh, PA. She can be contacted at dodhner@msn.com.*

Laws of Life Essay Contest

All High School Sophomore (or 15-16 year old) Swedenborgian girls world-wide are eligible to enter this contest. This essay is an opportunity to write about what YOU think is important in life. This is your chance to be heard—to write from the heart about one, or more, of your personal laws of life. Essays are to be in English (Google Translate can be used for this purpose). No name or identification can be on the paper itself to allow impartial judging, but please include your name and address in the envelope or email.

Winners receive a certificate and a check:

1st Place: \$100 USD, 2nd Place: \$75 USD, 3rd Place: \$50 USD.

Essays are printed in the *Journal* with writers' permission and as room permits.

The essay guidelines are:

"The Laws of Life" are a set of rules, ideals or principles by which one should live:

- What do you value most in life?
- What is important to you?
- What ideals do you hold deep in your heart?
- Think about the people and experiences that have helped you form these laws. . .

Pick a topic to write about:

- a personal experience/lesson learned that affects how you live/view your life now
- a quote or an aphorism that inspires or guides you

You can use an analogy, a quotation, a story, or a parable.

(No personal or romantic relationships!!)

Submissions are to be sent to:

Theta Alpha International, PO Box 511, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, USA

Or email to: ANCdaughters@gmail.com

Entries must be received by **March 1, 2020**

Congratulations to these winners of the Laws of Life Essay Contest 2019

1 st	Shaking but Still Standing (#13)	Freya King
2 nd	Glass Half Full (#21)	Hannah Matsukawa
3 rd	Letting Go (# 1)	Emma Stine
tie	Doesn't Mean I'm Lonely When I'm Alone (#9)	Caelyn Henderson

Honorable mention

4 th	The Simple Kindness of a Stranger (#14)	Laken Bau-Madsen
-----------------	---	------------------

(The following essay won first place in the Laws of Life essay contest for 2019)

Shaking but Still Standing

Freya Mildred King

"Well, would you?" I'm still not sure why they asked. They didn't bother anyone else with the question, so why me? Maybe they already had an idea of what my response would be. But if they knew my answer they wouldn't need to corner me like they were doing now. "Come on," one girl asked, prompting my reply. I swallowed carefully hoping the sound wasn't as loud to their ears as it was to mine. I shouldn't have been this nervous. These people were my friends, so why didn't I trust them? I remembered how Mom had smiled and told me this morning, "You're pig-headed, that's a good thing." I unwound my arms from around my stomach, drew back my shoulders and lifted my chin out of the hunched-over, meek stance I'd developed far too easily. I looked into the eyes of the girl in front of me, then briefly at the one behind her. My voice was, for once, a normal volume. My hands didn't shake. My breathing was even. I spoke clearly and without emotion. "No. I wouldn't." They didn't speak to me again for the next two years. I didn't regret my answer.

I have written this document with the hope that someone will read it and learn the value of being, what some people call, “stubborn” or “headstrong” or “pig-headed.” These are the stories of how I earned one of the most useful skills in my life. The purpose of this paper is not to tell people what they should or shouldn’t believe. In an effort to prevent this issue or any biases that may arise I will not be stating the main opinion I was defending. Also, know that I did not and do not hate anybody in this story. I love and care for them all very much. It is perhaps because I cared for them that this was so difficult and so important. Because it is important to listen to what others have to say, to decide what you believe is right, and to stand by that belief, because without something to stand for we as people have no purpose for being.

I was about ten years old when my dad taught me how to draw Celtic knotwork. I liked the rules, the symmetry. I liked that if you followed the rules, everything turned out well. So I memorized the rules, practiced making sure I got them right, and soon I could design my own knots and make up my own rules for them and they turned out well, too. I learned a lot from my dad. He and Mom gave my siblings and me other rules growing up, like: respect your elders; lying is significantly harder to keep up than telling the truth; don’t hit your sister with a Wii remote. But they also taught us by example. I got to see how kind my dad was to everyone and how people would smile after my mom gave them a hug. I saw how they supported each other in their marriage and how much they cared for children and anyone who came into our home. They both loved Swedenborg’s Writings and the New Church. My parents inspired many of my core values through what they told me and how they lived their lives.

Going to elementary school opened my eyes to many new ideas. I met lots of other kids who had different rules than I had because they had different parents, and thus I got exposure to a lot of different beliefs and opinions. I ended up trying each of these strange new rules for a little while, but none of them felt

right. They made me question my parents’ rules, though.

Parts of each guideline made sense and other parts didn’t, so I asked my mom and dad and a minister I knew about them. They gave me some things to think about and after I had collected all this information and heard other people’s opinions, I formed my own. Even though I had different ideas, my parents still loved and supported me.

It was not until seventh grade that I realized how different the world’s view was from mine. I had already understood that some people’s opinions would differ from mine. For example, one rule I’d retained from my parents was that you should respect adults. In seventh grade, three of the girls in my class spoke poorly of teachers behind their backs, perhaps not intending rudeness but not making any effort to be polite. They spoke as if they knew better when the teacher had been working hard at her job for years. It was painful to listen to, and I was sad. I was not angry with the girls; I had just wished I wasn’t around it so often. I still hadn’t quite come to grips with this concept when something worse happened. My best friend had made a decision that was, according to most of the people I knew, fine. We will call this friend Chrysanthemum. Now when Chrysanthemum told me and our other friends of this decision, my conflict began. All the previously mentioned friends loved Chrysanthemum as much as I did, the difference between us is that while some of their ideas differed from Chrysanthemum’s, they didn’t stand in direct opposition to her decision the way mine did. I believe Chrysanthemum’s decision was evil. It was not that she was evil or malicious but that her choice was evil in the sense it would harm her and cause her great pain. I was stuck. I couldn’t support something I thought would harm her, but I felt guilty for not being supportive. I’m almost positive that everyone present knew I disagreed because suddenly I felt ostracized. They didn’t invite me to hang out anymore. We barely talked. I was too preoccupied being nervous to notice for a while. I was terrified for Chrysanthemum if she continued and terrified to go against the majority. I became confused and

alone and miserable. I wondered if I was crazy. How could so many people believe the same thing and be wrong? It didn't make sense. Maybe they were right. So I tried. I tried so hard to accept it and believe it and be okay with something because everyone else was. But part of me couldn't. I knew if I agreed it wasn't because I thought it was right. I would have agreed because it was easier. So for a while I genuinely hated myself. I thought I was a mean awful person who was closed-minded and too self-absorbed to support her friend. I didn't talk to people as much anymore, I tried but my voice got quieter and quieter. My posture, which I used to be proud of, became hunched over and slumped. I looked at the ground more than anything else and talked to myself when no one else would. I was sad and alone. But then Mom told me something, that gave me the strength to keep going. She was wondering if Chrysanthemum had told us about her decision because she was unsure of it. With those words, I had a purpose. I had a small bit of evidence that maybe disagreeing wasn't being mean. Maybe by disagreeing I could be the person who gave her the strength to change her mind if she wanted to. And if she didn't change her mind I didn't need to either. We could still be friends, just friends at an impasse. If I turned out to be wrong and crashed and burned I knew she'd drag me to my feet, dust me off, and give me some tea, and I knew I'd do the same for her. I would stand by what I believed and live according to it, because I honestly believed it was true and good.

About two years later my old friends started talking to me again and, while I still don't trust them as much as I used to, we are still talking. I think they either forgot that I disagreed or thought I changed my mind about it. If Chrysanthemum ever knew what I believed she said nothing about it. Throughout the whole experience and after, I continued to talk to my mom about everything, and it made me feel closer to her than ever. Now if someone asks for my thoughts on something, while I try to be kind, I don't sugar-coat things. I'm honest and blunt because I've learned the importance of listening to influences, forming my own opinions and standing by what I believe in.

Introduction to Adoption

Carla Cooper Reuter

Needless to say, there are many different paths that lead to adoption, many different adoption arrangements, and many different journeys through adoption. Each and every adoption is unique; equally so is each person's experience within an adoption unique. They are all deeply personal.

There is no *right* adoption experience or story. Using positive adoption language, however, is paramount in listening to and understanding a person's story. Birth parents *choose* an *adoption* plan for their child; adoptive parents *are real* parents; and children *were* adopted into their families.

As an adoptive parent, my story of the adoption stops the moment my daughter was born. If asked, I can tell you why my husband and I chose to pursue adoption; I can tell you about the process of adoption; I can tell you *how incredibly humbling it was to be chosen by her birth mother*. I can tell you that the birth mother is the strongest, most selfless person I know. Anything about my daughter's story is not mine to share. It is hers, and when asked, she may or may not choose to share it.

Historically, adoption stories have been told through the adoptive parents' perspective. More recently, thankfully, the narrative also includes birth parents and the adopted persons themselves. Within every adoption is heartache and joy, just as when a child enters a family through natural birth. That's how life works. The following adoption stories are filled with elements of heartache and joy. Doubt and wonder. Fear and courage. All things that make life wonderful and complex, and, ultimately, a blessing.

Carla is married to Doug Reuter and has three children. She teaches 7th grade girls at BACS and can be reached at creuter77@gmail.com.

Adoption

Taney Frazier Friend

Hi, my name is Taney Friend and I was asked to talk about adoption. I am happy to for any readers who might be interested, or considering adoption themselves. I thought I'd explain the process because it was so much of my world for a long time.

My family was formed by adoption. My oldest child, Celeste, was adopted from China in 2005, my youngest child, Scott, from Philadelphia in 2012. I have done a international interracial adoption, and a domestic interracial one.

Adoption is a very long process. It involves piles of paperwork, and money for all the paperwork. It involves the state and the city where the prospective parents live, and for international adoption, another country. It's not for the faint-hearted because it is about having your life examined over a period of 6 months to 2 years.

The first thing I needed to do was to get a social worker. In any adoption it is critical to find a good social worker who will sit down with you and create a Home Study. Ours was a very large profile on me as a child, my parenting beliefs, my relationship with my husband, his relationship with me, his parenting beliefs, and, if we had any current children in the household, both of our relationships with them. It also included my relationship with my own parents, my husband's with his, our home, our religion and what school we planned on sending the child to.

In interracial adoptions prospective parents are asked how they plan to incorporate the culture of that child into their lives. Since my second child was going to be Black, I was also asked how I plan on making sure that he has a connection with people of the same racial background. The social worker signed me up for a series of classes on recognizing prejudice

and racism in children's lives, and, of course, there are piles of books out there to read.

I recommend honestly to any prospective adoptive parents to read all of the books, every single one you can get your hands on, read. It will be a long time before your child comes, so read as much as you can and continue to read after the adoption. Read also about the scary stuff. Please read about attachment disorder and drug and fetal alcohol syndrome. I read about grief and separation anxiety. I read up on trauma that children face who live in an orphanage for a year, like food and trust issues. I may never face any of this at all but I need to be prepared. I remember watching a social worker on a Ted Talk explain perfectly what a child is like who will come to you through adoption. First take a paper cup and draw a happy face on it. Next tear one large piece out of the cup for when their biological parents decided they could no longer parent their child and had to place the child for adoption. Next, take a small piece out for being passed around to different people; then take a piece off for living in an orphanage, and then a piece off for not being held quite enough, or not receiving enough food. When done, even with all the tape in the world the child will still have holes where the love that you try to pour in spills out, but here is your child and you love her or him with every ounce of your being.

Love, while fabulous, will never be enough. It takes Time, Understanding, Forgiveness, Listening. And it is totally worth it! OK, when I had the Home Study done, I still needed to get background checks on me and my spouse, and clearances from the police. Then all these documents needed to be certified, and some needed to be notarized. For the international adoption, our passports needed to be updated and copied, and put with all the other documentation, including the Home Study. Then I took all the documentation to the embassy of the country I was traveling to because it all needed to be certified by them.

My husband, Malcolm, and I traveled to China to adopt our daughter in 2005. I won't tell about her personal adoption story because it's my daughter's to tell, not really mine as a parent to talk about. When someone asks me about Celeste's adoption, if it's just because the person is curious, I usually ask Celeste, "Do you want to talk about your adoption?" I guarantee that 95% of the time Celeste says "No," which is her prerogative. This holds true, also, if someone asks about my son's adoption, though his story is very different from my daughter's.

I would like to say one last thing about my experience with international adoption before moving onto domestic ones. International adoption is ending. In 2000, among various United Nations recommendations to the Hague about international adoptions, one included a recommendation that children would be better off in orphanages living within their own culture and language, rather than being raised by people in a different country, and possibly in a different language. Following upon that recommendation, adoption agencies in many countries had to become Hague-qualified¹. This leaves many children suffering in poorly staffed and under-staffed orphanages throughout the world. Along with this recommendation, I have found that a number of other ideas the United Nations has about adoptions do not help children in certain countries in the world.

When I adopted Celeste 15 years ago, Russia, China, Guatemala, Ethiopia, Vietnam, and Cambodia, etc., were available to adopt from. Now, adoption from Russia and the ex-communist block nations such as Kazakhstan are somewhat closed. This is because of a very small number of sad instances where the adoptions went badly. Vietnam closed international adoptions because of problems with human trafficking. Guatemala closed them because some of the children were not legally up

¹ In the *Intercountry Adoption Act of 2000*, the Hague Convention established specific practice standards in regard to International adoption which all Hague-Accredited agencies must meet. www.adoptfamilyconnections.org

for adoption. Ethiopian adoptions shrank because the children had relatives who didn't want to place the children for adoption. Cambodia is completely closed. China allows special needs adoption only, unless the prospective parents are willing to wait about six years (I believe) for non-special needs adoption. In addition, it is hard to find a program that is simple and straightforward, without a whole lot of weird hoops to jump through. It's one of the reasons we decided to adopt our second child domestically.

For our second adoption we needed about half as much paperwork as the international one. Of course, a Home Study was required. There are differences, though. For the Domestic Home Study we had to make a profile or a story of us with many pictures, including a picture of our home. It was placed with about forty other files and presented to prospective birth parents. The birth parents then chose the couple they wanted to parent their child. With anyone doing an adoption, there is a difficult part to it — the birth parents can decide within a certain time period to change their minds and parent the child themselves. That is their right, and I have learned to respect it because it is a newer way of taking a difficult situation, that of the birth parents not knowing anything about their child, and turning it into something doable. We were picked six different times and in all six, the parents changed their minds. This is very unusual. The hardest one for us was when a birth mother picked us and the biological father was absent. Later he identified himself and decided he wanted to parent the baby. We had the baby with us in our home for over three weeks but had to give the child back. That still makes my heart hurt just writing about it. Then, on July 4, 2012, during the fireworks in Bryn Athyn, Malcolm got a call. He stood up suddenly and said "What? I'm sorry. I can't hear you. What? It's a boy at Temple. OK. Don't. OK. We will come there tomorrow morning. OK. 7 lbs. 6 oz. OK. Will be there. Thank you!" The next day we met our son, Scott. Later on we met his birth mother and continue to have a relationship with her through giving and receiving cards and letters and pictures. We hope to meet

with her again this year to see how she is doing.

Fast-forwarding now to my children's lives today, Scott is 7 and Celeste is 15. Because they are of different ethnic backgrounds, both have faced racism from as young as age 3 from grownups, and from as young as age 4 from other children. My Asian daughter has had kids pull their eyelids at her. They have been called names. Scott and Celeste have gotten dirty stares, and they call them *evil eyes*. Other children have told mine they don't want to play with them because they are different. My children desperately wish for images of people in the Bible to look like them. In addition, I need to prepare them for how to deal with the police in a way that will keep them alive. I need to tell my son not to wear all blue or all red as a preteen because they are gang colors, adopted, unfortunately, throughout the country. I also need to tell Scott, "Never wear baggy pants or hoodies." I have to tell both my children, "No matter how fabulous and kind you are, some parents will not want you dating their sons or daughters because of the color of your skin." My daughter will have to work twice as hard in academics as teachers will assume she is a good student because she is Asian. My son will have to work twice as hard at sports as coaches will assume he is good at them because he is Black. These are just some of the challenges my children will face. I am aware of never having had to face any of these things when I was a Caucasian kid growing up in the area I did. In addition, I need fellow parents who have faced these issues in their lives, and my children need adults in their lives who reflect them racially. We have been very lucky. My children not only have Asian and Black adults in their lives, but they also have children in their classes that are non-Caucasian, and adopted. These adults and children are the biggest gift my kids have received.

I appreciate having this opportunity to share some of my experiences with you. Aside from all the problems and issues, my husband and I are grateful that there is adoption in this world. We are very grateful we were able to grow our family

from it. It has been the greatest blessing in our lives. My children are the love and joy of my heart

Taney Frazier Friend was born in Bryn Athyn, the daughter of Bob and Bonnie Frazier. She graduated from ANC in 1993. She currently lives in Huntingdon Valley with her husband, Malcolm, and their two children who attend the Bryn Athyn Church School and the Academy of the New Church. Taney Faith Friend can be contacted at TFaithff@mac.com.

Call for Articles!



We need and want to hear from everyone throughout the world in the pages of our long-lived and well-loved *Journal*. Everyone has something absorbing, interesting, thoughtful or humorous to share. Contact information is in the beginning of the *Journal*.

Adoption

Glen Henderson

People ask me, “When did you know you were adopted?”

At eleven months I don’t remember my first mother (birth-mother, *Debra*); my second mother (grandmother, *Eleanor*), who helped raise me early on; or my third mother, (foster-mother, *Susie*) who raised me for the next six to seven months until she was stricken with incurable cancer. By the time I met my fourth mother (permanent mother, *Carol*), I was eleven months old.

I had four mothers in less than a year—and each of them loved me without reservation. I consider myself blessed in that respect. I sometimes wonder if having so many loving women care for me in my first year of life has in some way given me a deep faith in the goodness of people. Regardless, I carry that sentiment today.

My adoption took place in the nineteen-seventies. Then, it seems adoptions were more closed and it was rare to have contact or knowledge of one’s birth parents. Today adoptions seem to be generally open and rules are set with all parties in mind—not just the rights of new adoptive parents. Mine was certainly closed and I had zero contact with my birth parents (my adoptive parents had never met them), and I was provided limited fragments of their past, and only after lots of questions.

I remember those limited fragments well. They were fuel for the imagination. “I think she may have had red hair” provided endless possibility and wonder. *Is that woman at the store in the Willow Grove mall with the reddish hair my real mom?*

“Your birth parents loved one another very much” was a romantic dream of true love somehow lost. *What happened to them? Did he die?* “No, I don’t think he died, but I don’t know where he is.” *Do you know his name?* “No. We don’t.” *Do you know my mother’s name?* “No, we don’t. We never asked.”

It seemed unbelievable and unfair that I could visit my foster mother before she succumbed to cancer but never knew my birth parents.

The issue of genetic parents was important to a young middle child. My brother and sister had the genetics of my adoptive parents. I was the different one.

I had known I was adopted as far back as I can remember. I remember the book my mother read during intimate moments. *And Now We Are A Family* (author unknown to me) was a book the social worker had given her during the adoption process.

It was an orange hardback with blue letters and child-like handwriting. The illustrations were Humpty-Dumpty-egg-like depictions of the mother and a little baby, and two mothers with happy families.

I enjoyed the special time with my mom who would read it to me, but I also remember some resentment. *Why am I separated from my siblings — why doesn’t she read this book to them?*

I never felt damaged by any of these memories. Instead I began to wear the badge of adoption with pride. *I am different. Maybe I’m special!* But curiosities lingered, and they bubbled to the surface as a teen.

“We think it’s best if you waited until you were eighteen.” My nine year old brain could not process that far into the future and I only wanted to satiate my curiosity to know my birth parents. *Isn’t that my right?*

Now I was seventeen and curious once again. It was Spring Break, and with little to do and in the selfish world of a high school junior I decided to defy my parent’s sage advice—which was to wait—and now it was suggested, “We think it’s best to search after you finish college.”

Whatever happened to eighteen?

With the encouragement of a friend, we dissected every

shred of evidence (not a lot) and began a woman-hunt. I didn't want my parents to know that I was defying their wisdom. They loved and nurtured me and I wanted to respect them but we had a *name!* How I found that name is a story for another time.

Constructing a loose timeline we could guess her age and knew she was a Montgomery County resident at the time of my adoption. My friend and I spent a good portion of that Spring Break examining yearbooks in high school libraries around the county. We made up stories to gain access to pictures. "Our old babysitter is about to turn forty and we'd like to surprise her with a photocopy of her high school yearbook photo" usually allowed us past the raised eyebrows. In my heart I knew that if I found her photograph, my memory of mother number one would immediately spark recognition, and I would cry.

This was before the internet, of course, and the yearbooks didn't turn up much. We turned to the Yellow Pages making phone calls to carefully create family trees based on names. *That woman who just answered the phone...could be my mother!* With a few leads in play we even staked out a few residences. *We just have to wait in our car a bit longer to see if the woman entering the apartment has red hair.* Nope. No red hair. Wrong address. Back to school again. Four years passed until I met my birth mother. I had just finished college. In hindsight, my parents' reservations were valid. As a child and teen my burning desire was based on my needs. I had not considered that in pursuing my history I was affecting the lives of other people—and opening possible wounds. I might not have been able to handle these emotions at a younger age.

Since my adoption was *closed*, the court was only allowed to provide me with *unidentifiable information*—and needed my birth mother's permission to share anything of value: address, phone number etc. Coincidentally the social worker was the same woman who handled my adoption 21 years before—and she remembered me and was moved. "In my experience it is rare for men to seek out their birth parents."

"Do you remember them?" After a professional pause she

replied, "I never met your father but yes, I do remember your birth mother." More unfairness. *This woman I don't remember has met her; I never have and she can't give me information!*

I left for the court with a homemade VHS tape and a brief letter I wrote. I made the tape as a slideshow set to music. The slideshow was a chronology of my life: baby pictures, photos of my family, trips, holidays and school highlights. I hoped the address the court had on file (which I was not yet privy to) would fall in the right hands. There was no way of knowing. I drove home.

Within hours, the phone rang. It was the social worker. My birth mother received my tape and there was a letter awaiting me at the court. For the second time in one day, I drove to the courthouse. On the steps outside I read a simple hand-written letter and cried. *This is her hand-writing! She cares. She wants to communicate.* I had no idea what to do next.

Letters and pictures back and forth via mail over the next few weeks left the ball in my court. I had a phone number now but for some reason I was hesitant to use it. My uncle's advice came to my mind from many years before, "If you find them, don't have any expectations."

I mustered the courage to make the phone call.

I couldn't wait one more day. We had spoken over the phone and now the floodgates were open. I drove to Philadelphia the next morning to meet her at her home. To this day I cannot describe the feeling I had when her screen door swung open and I stared into the eyes of my first mother. We talked for hours with only a few tears here and there. I asked about my birth father and she retrieved a holiday card with a return address. He wrote to her around Christmas time each year asking if she had heard anything from Kevin—my first name. She saved his letters but never wrote back. He was living in Colorado.

The reunion with my birth father, Jimi, is so packed with stories that I cannot begin here. There were hugs, tears and my

realization that yes, genes and traits do carry from parent to child in spite of separation. I found out about a half-sister. I met Jimi's wife, Shirley, a lovely woman who accepted me as her own son—although she never had children of her own.

Years later, Jimi traveled East to meet his “grandbabies” and catch up with his only son. He has made this trip twice. Each time my birth mother, Debra, came to meet him. Their reunion in my living room after thirty years is an experience I still remember as some kind of dream. In my estimation, not one week passed since they were running around Philadelphia together in the early seventies exchanging jokes and painful memories. I sat on my couch as my children played on the carpet and watched them re-live experiences I had never heard about. They had a history and a mutual respect and a shared fondness. It was somehow peaceful to realize that. Now, we talk to Jimi and Shirley several times each year. Debra comes to my home every Wednesday for dinner and to help my children with their homework or just to share stories from the week. She never married and never had any other children.

I am blessed in so many ways, but they are also blessed. They have knowledge of the son they once lost and never thought they would see again. They have grandchildren that they adore and talk about to their friends. And my real parents (not the birth-parents I thought were my real parents when I was a young boy) have been gracious and loving through it all. They are grateful to her for her courage. Not a month goes by without my mom reminding me to include Debra in a family event. I don't need to be reminded. She is part of my life now—and always has been.

Glen Henderson is the owner of Henderson Custom Painting and resides in Huntingdon Valley, PA. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts at Bucknell University and is a veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom (Captain, US Army). A former teacher and part-time actor, Glen enjoys time working on his garden, kayaking and traveling with his two children. He is blessed to have been raised and educated in the New Church in Bryn Athyn, PA. Glen can be contacted at hendersonpainting@gmail.com.

The Empty Backpack

Jenn Wagner

It's that time of year again, that time when cooler air starts sweeping through, when the excitement starts to build about pumpkins, hot cider and bonfires. And it's the time when every commercial seen on TV reminds us that school is starting very soon.

When I was younger, there was nothing more exciting to me than school supply shopping. I got to pick out all the coolest pens, notebooks, binders (Lisa Frank Trapper Keepers were the best you could get, and if you know what I am talking about, I'm showing my age!) But most importantly, the one item on the list that was my favorite to get was a backpack! The stores had so many to choose from. Whether I wanted one that was so colorful it was blinding, or I wanted one to show off what my current favorite TV show was, the options were endless. I could choose a standard backpack with two straps, or maybe I wanted to be a little edgy and get a bag with one strap that I wore across the body. Again, my choices were limitless. Even though I've owned what feels like 50 backpacks, and I can hardly remember whether they were pink, Barbie, big or small, I can tell you about the one backpack I've owned that I will never forget for the rest of my life.

This backpack was a pretty ordinary bag, just plain black with a turquoise rim around all the edges. It was one I owned for awhile, so it showed signs of wear and tear. I used it for sleepovers, travel and moving from home to my college dorm. So why is this backpack so memorable? Why can't I shake the image of this certain bag from my brain? Because this bag would be the one that would carry newborn baby clothes, pacifiers, and pink blankets into the hospital one day and then carry absolutely nothing out of the hospital another day.

In 2004 my high school sweetheart and I had gotten pregnant. I was eighteen at that time and attending my freshman year in college. I'll start out by saying that abortion was never an option, it didn't cross my mind and I did not allow it to cross my boyfriend's mind, this child would live. Now you may be thinking, "Well that's no big deal, tons of eighteen-year-olds have babies, raise them, and the baby turns out perfectly fine. Why in the world would you give up your own baby?" That's a great question, it's a question I still to this day wonder about every now and then. So let me answer it from the spot I was in fourteen years ago.

I grew up in a wonderful home, with great parents and two awesome little brothers. Right there we can cross "terrible family life" off the list of reasons that I chose adoption. I was raised in church, I dedicated my life to Jesus when I was a teenager, and I attended church on Sundays, Wednesdays and any other night I could get my foot in the door. My college was a Christian university and all my friends were good and decent people. So, drugs, alcohol, bad influences, tough life—they can all be crossed off the "adoption-reason" list.

Here is the answer, my honest, most simple answer as to why I gave my daughter up for adoption. It is that I didn't know what I was doing. Now hear me out here, I'm not saying I didn't know what the adoption entailed, or what I was doing with the adoption, I am saying that I didn't know what I was doing with my life or who I was at that time. At that point in my life, I didn't know if I was going to marry the baby's dad or even if I wanted to. I didn't know if I wanted to keep going to school, or even if I could while taking care of a child. I didn't know how my friends and family would treat me knowing I was pregnant outside of marriage. Would I be able to financially take care of her? Would I be able to do it on my own if I chose not to be with this man? If I chose not to be with him, would there be another man who would want to marry a single mom with a child and love my daughter as his own? What if I don't raise her right? What if I am not good enough? What if I can't love her the way

she deserves to be loved? These questions attacked my mind every day while I was pregnant. I didn't know what my life would become or what her life would become if I had chosen to raise her. That unknown shook me enough to choose an option that would be the hardest decision I would ever have to make.

But here's where I can tell you that this story is not meant to be a sad one, this is a story that is full of joy, love and life!

Romans 8:28: And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.

God causes all things to work out for the good for those who love and serve Him. That's just what He did for me and my daughter. Getting pregnant with my boyfriend at a young age was not the best thing to happen at that time, but God took that bad situation and He turned it around to create a good, beautiful story, a story that would help others who may be going through the same thing.

I decided to pursue an open adoption, one where I would still get to be a part of my daughter's life and watch her grow, just from the back seat. I was able to choose the people whom I believed would be the best parents to raise my daughter. This was one of the tough parts, I had to set aside my own pride that no one could be better than myself to raise her. But that's just what I did, set it aside and chose two people whom I know God divinely set apart to be the parents of my baby girl. This man and woman had one little girl already, which makes me even more confident that this was a God thing, because I went into choosing a family with the rock-solid idea that I was not going to choose people who already had kids, because I didn't want any jealousy or favoritism to come into play. I was able to meet the family, get to know them and establish a connection before I had my daughter. With open adoptions birth mothers are able to see their children up to twice a year and have as much open communication with the child as the adoptive parents allow, which normally isn't much. Going into this, that was my mind-

set, that I would get to see my daughter maybe once a year and perhaps get a phone call on Christmas. I wasn't upset about the amount of communication, I was grateful enough to have any little part in my daughter's life that I was able to. But again, God is good, and my story turned out to be a little different.

I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl on April 9, 2005. She was perfect and I enjoyed nothing more than holding her and staring at every feature on her tiny face. But as I soaked in every moment, all I could hear in the back of my mind was, "You only have two days left with her, only two days left of this." That night in the hospital was the hardest night of my life. As any normal newborn would do, she cried and she cried and she cried some more. Nurses would come in and ask if I wanted them to take her to the nursery so that I could get some rest—mind you they were all aware of the adoption situation and were so compassionate and helpful. I would tell them through tears streaming down my face that I was ok, I wanted her to stay, not because I loved the loud crying or that I enjoyed not getting any sleep. I wanted her to stay because I didn't want to sacrifice one minute, not even one second of the only two days that she would be mine. Her parents came to meet her the next day, and what a celebration it was! They cried, I cried, and she cried, but that was normal for her. I was able to see in that moment how much they loved her, how special this connection was, how beautiful my daughter's life was going to be.

Then it was time to go. Time to say goodbye to this child that had grown inside of me for the past nine months, this child that heard me cry too many times to count from the inside now heard and saw me cry for a completely different reason. I sat there with her in my arms, sobbing, trying to explain to her why I was doing this, like she would understand. My face pressed on hers; I didn't want to ever forget the way she smelled, the way she felt, the way she fit into my arms. I sang to her, kissed her soft skin, laid her down and picked up my backpack. It was much lighter now, like I was carrying air. I said goodbye and walked out the door with nothing but my empty backpack.

Do you remember when I had stated that most birth mothers only get to see their child once or twice a year and whatever more the adoptive parents would allow? This is how my story is different. For the past fourteen years, I cannot keep track of how many times I have seen my daughter, because there have been so many! Her adoptive parents are one of a kind, a gift that only God Himself could give. They send me numerous pictures, videos, photo books and more. My daughter will call me on holidays, my birthday and sometimes even Mother's day. We've gotten together whenever possible just to spend time together, whether it be at the beach, at her house, or even a park. Her parents make sure she knows who I am and I am welcomed into her life with open arms. Watching the amazing life my daughter has been given is a blessing and my heart could not be any fuller!

Taking on the title of a birth mother is one of the hardest things anyone can do. I still struggle with it from time to time, but I promise you, it does get easier. Even now as I type this, tears are streaming down my face, because I can close my eyes and in an instant I am back in that hospital room holding my little girl, smelling her sweet scent, kissing her little nose and whispering "I love you" over and over again so she'll never forget. Being a birth mother means sacrificing yourself, sacrificing your wants, your needs, your body, your desires, your pride to give your child a life that surpasses what you could have given her. It's not easy and it's not without pain, but it is a beautiful gift that you can give to not only adoptive parents, but to your child also. That empty backpack even, though light as air, may feel heavy and it may hurt to carry, but God can take it and fill it with things you may not even know you needed in your life. If you're looking into adoption as your choice, please know from a birth mother's heart, that it will be the greatest accomplishment of your life.

Weeping may last through the night, but joy comes with the morning. Psalm 30:5

Creating a Nourishing Environment for the Senses

Angela Rose

For a prospective teacher, a developed sense for aesthetics will be of great practical value when it comes to designing, arranging, and decorating a classroom. Compared to the act of perceiving the inner nature of a child, this may seem like a superficial, external application of the aesthetic sense and therefore of minor importance. Far from it! Young children are very sensitive to their environment, and education in the first years of life should focus on nourishing the senses as well as the physical body. This has been a principle of New Church education since its inception. In his *Conversations on Education*, Benade (1976) emphasized that infants should be surrounded with:

“natural forms and objects which are innocent, harmless, tender, harmonious; with whatever is orderly, good, and beautiful. . . because [these] are in keeping with their spiritual associations. . . Children. . . [will] absorb through their senses and whole body what is necessary for development (p.24-25).

Beth Johns (1989) in her book, *Heads, Hearts and Hands* also emphasized the “need for richly and wisely stocking a child’s storehouse of sense impressions” (p. 21). Providing rich, nourishing sensory experiences for children has been a consistent theme in New Church education, often tied to the teachings on remains. Benade wrote for an audience in the 19th century; Johns wrote in the 20th century. We are now almost two decades into the 21st century, and the question of what constitutes a developmentally appropriate environment is more relevant than ever. The world in which children are growing up today is vastly different from the worlds of these

New Church authors, but as evolutionary biologist, Gabrielle Principe (2011) pointed out, children’s brains have not changed:

The *human* version of the brain emerged some two million years ago. . . . Civilization. . . has been around for a meager ten thousand years. . . . *Modern* civilization. . . has emerged only in the past hundred or so years. By the standards of evolution, that’s not enough time for the brain to adjust. And this is exactly why the modern world is imposing unwanted side effects on our children’s brains (p. 14).

Principe’s book presents dozens of studies documenting unwanted side effects of our modern lifestyle. She notes that the Foundation for Child Development’s 2010 Child Health and Well-Being Index “has sunk to its lowest point in the thirty-five-year history of the index” (Principe, 2011, p. 14), and that childhood depression, anxiety, attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, and phobias are all on the rise. Principe (2011) offered the following explanation:

There are likely several factors underlying children’s tumbling well-being, but. . . some of the most common difficulties of today’s children are likely by-products of the rapid and profound changes in their lifestyle. Within the space of the last two or three decades, almost everything about the environment in which children grow up has changed (p.15).

Principe’s book is required reading in our teacher training program. It highlights the need for educators to understand what constitutes a developmentally appropriate environment. Young children need an environment rich in sensory experience, but our modern world tends to bombard the senses rather than nourish them.

Eisner (2002) also emphasized the primacy of sensory experience for children:

During the course of human development there are certain critical periods during which stimulation and nurture of sensory capacities are crucial. . . . Observations of infants and preschoolers provide compelling evidence of their need to experience and understand the world by exploring its qualities. Almost everything they encounter is not only touched, but when possible tasted, listened to, explored through as many sensory channels as lend themselves to knowledge of its qualitative features. Getting to know the world for the preschool child means, in large measure, getting to know how it can be experienced through all the sensory modalities (p. 20).

This passage reminds us that while we are all affected by the quality of the sense impressions of our environment, this is especially true for young children. *Secrets of Heaven* 5126 states, "From infancy to adolescence we are purely sensory beings. We take in only earthly, bodily, and worldly information through our physical senses, and this information forms the basis of our thoughts and ideas." As Pestalozzian educator Bruehlmeier (2010) put it, "The younger the children, the more concrete, the more appealing to the senses, the more tangible the material must be." In describing the effects of the environment on young children, early childhood educator, Rahima Baldwin Dancy (1989) asserted, "The attention to detail and beauty will be reflected in the mood of the children and the quality of their play" (p.265). Murphy-Lang (2010) said, ". . . up until the age of five, the little child is wide open. If you surround him with busyness and bright, coarse colors, he becomes all 'eye' and cannot separate himself from the visual input. This is naturally overwhelming" (p.20). Benade (1976) held a similar view about the importance of simplicity in a child's environment: "Many objects, especially many different objects, will have the effect of producing distraction and of preventing the early formation of the habit of concentration" (p.60).

Developing the aesthetic sense of prospective teachers

so they can make judgments about what constitutes a developmentally appropriate environment is therefore of paramount importance. Are the colors in the environment soothing or garish? Is the music light and joyful? Does it have a calming influence or an unsettling effect? Is the visual environment over-stimulating? Are there mass-produced, laminated, factory-made posters on the walls or handmade artistic displays? Is one type of display really better than the other (factory-made vs. handmade, for example)? Do computers belong in an early childhood classroom? These are questions that prospective teachers can address more effectively when they have a developed aesthetic sense and a knowledge of child development.

Some of these questions revolve around the use of natural or synthetic material. Does it really make a difference if children sit on plastic chairs or wooden chairs? Does it make a difference if the wall holds a slate chalkboard or a plastic whiteboard or an electronic smartboard? Are natural objects and materials *really* more beneficial in a child's environment than artificial ones? Benade (1976) thought so:

Loving and gentle treatment of children leads them to act lovingly and gently toward their playmates and is a means of storing up in them remains of good. This use to them is strengthened and extended by surrounding them with natural forms and objects which are innocent, harmless, tender, harmonious; also with whatever is orderly, good, and beautiful (p.24).

Benade (1976) also valued handmade objects:

...natural objects are not trifles, but matters of grave concern. Utmost care is to be taken that they be good and true in substance and form, of use and beauty, gathered first from nature, as the work of the Divine hand, and then from the best and truest art of man (p.62).

No doubt Benade was very familiar with the passage in

Secrets of Heaven 4345, which states, “The knowledge which everyone possesses in early childhood is sensory knowledge. And this serves as a basis not only for cognitions of interior natural things but also later on for cognitions of spiritual things. For spiritual things are founded on natural ones and are represented within them.”

I have cited William Benade, George de Charms, and Beth Johns to show how the importance of a teacher’s aesthetic sense is rooted in the history and traditions of New Church education. However, it is not enough to rely on the wisdom of past authorities in preparing New Church educators. The currency of higher ed today is evidence from scientific research. As I mentioned above, Principe’s book references dozens of studies on how the senses of young children are impacted by modern life. (For example, Principe (2011) cites over fifty studies on the benefits of playing in natural settings, or green space, including increased attention span and ability to focus, stress relief, fitness, coordination, and enhanced creativity.) But this is still not enough to prepare a future teacher for the work of creating a developmentally appropriate environment for young children.

Future teachers need firsthand experiences with nature and natural materials themselves. Arts and crafts work provide a wonderful means for developing an aesthetic sense. In a hands-on, creative mode, students can gain an intimate knowledge of the qualities of wood, metal and clay, and observe how these materials change and transform when meeting the elements of water, air and fire. (I am finding that students come to college with less and less experience with natural material and the elements. For example, I have had three students that, previous to my class in which they were asked to light a candle, had never lit a match before.) When future teachers have developed an aesthetic sense of their own and observed for themselves the settings where they can see children thriving, they will know how to create a developmentally appropriate environment.

In his book, *Hidden Levels of the Mind*, Doug Taylor (2011) described the sensory level as being the “lowest kind of mental activity there is, because this is the level where we all begin as infants” (p.27). The word “lowest” sometimes denotes what is of least importance, but in this case, what is lowest is *foundational* to the higher levels of the mind. As *Secrets of Heaven* 10225 states, “. . . a prior state is constantly the plane of the states which follow.” While there is a growing trend to push academic learning earlier and earlier, New Church early childhood educators can perhaps stave off this temptation by attending to, even championing, the needs of the sensory level of the mind. As de Charms and Synnestvedt pointed out in the lectures on the philosophy of New Church education:

That which is of most use to the child—real use to him—at any stage of his mental growth is that which most fully enriches his reception of the heavenly influences of those angels that are present with him at that time. This is the real use, the great use, not learning to take delight in something that truly belongs to adults (Rose and Glenn, p. 10).

Benade (1976) was of the same mind regarding what is appropriate and inappropriate up until the age of five:

It does not seem best at this early age to impart to children systematic instruction, but rather to allow them to absorb through the senses and the whole body what is necessary for their proper development, and to this end also it is requisite to look well to their surroundings. For, as is evident from *True Christian Religion* (n. 335), infants form habits by means of objects which are presented to their senses. Being surrounded with orderly, beautiful, soft, pleasant, tasteful, odoriferous things, they absorb sponge-like. No need of training here (p.25).

An especially important question to ask is about the appropriateness of introducing screens into a young child’s environment. That is a topic beyond the scope of this article, but let’s at least pose the question, “what do electronic devices

offer the senses?" They stimulate the senses, to be sure, but do they nourish the senses? When considering the sensory level of the mind, it is perhaps useful to expand our usual definition of the senses beyond the five we are accustomed to. Young children are developing other senses too: the sense of balance and the sense of the movement of their body in space (proprioception). But they can only develop these senses if they are moving! Sitting in front of a screen does not afford the proper opportunity for movement. For the first time in human history, we have a generation of children who are not spending their childhood outside playing in nature. The implications for the sensory and physical health of children are profound.

One often hears that the goal of New Church education is to prepare children, not just for life in this world, but for a life in heaven as well. Former kindergarten teacher, Gray Glenn, put the role of a New Church teacher in proper perspective when she made a distinction between the purpose of education and the role of the teacher. She said the *role* of New Church early childhood educators is not to prepare children for heaven, it is to *prepare the environment* so that heaven can do its work in children *now* (G. Glenn, personal communication, April 17, 2012).

Creating a healthy, developmentally appropriate environment for young children has never been more challenging. A knowledge of child development and a well-developed aesthetic sense are indispensable for New Church educators so they can bring order and beauty into a child's surroundings. Indeed, preparing a proper environment for children can be thought of as the core role of New Church early childhood educators.

References

- Benade, W. H. (1976) *Conversations on education* (2nd ed.). Bryn Athyn, PA: The Academy of the New Church Press. (Original work published 1888)
- Bruehlmeier, A. (2010) *Head, heart and hand: Education in the spirit of Pestalozzi*. Retrieved from <http://www.bruehlmeier.info/index.htm>
- Dancy, R.B. (1989). *You are your child's first teacher*. Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts.
- Eisner, E. (2002). *The arts and the creation of mind*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Johns, B. (1989). *Heads, hearts, and hands: Nurturing creativity*. Bryn Athyn, PA: General Church Press.
- Murphy-Lang, C. (2010). *Developing the observing eye: Teacher observation and assessment in early childhood education*. Ghent, NY: The Association of Waldorf Schools.
- Principe, G. (2011). *Your brain on childhood: The unexpected side effects of classrooms, ballparks, family rooms, and the minivan*. Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Rose, A. and Glenn, G. (1993). *Excerpts from Bishop George deCharms' the philosophy of New Church education*. (Unpublished manuscript). Bryn Athyn College, Bryn Athyn, PA.
- Secrets of Heaven*. (2003). Revealed through Emanuel Swedenborg. Translated by Lisa Hyatt Cooper. Unpublished. (Original work published 1749-1756)
- Taylor, D. (2011). *The hidden levels of the mind: Swedenborg's theory of consciousness*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Press.

Bryn Athyn Church School

Greg Henderson, Principal

This fall, by our count, is the Bryn Athyn Church School's 122nd year serving the families of the Bryn Athyn Church. We have 254 students in kindergarten through 8th grade with 45 more children attending the Bryn Athyn Church Preschool which is in our building as well. To this number add the 31 fulltime teachers, the 21 part time teachers, the 5 preschool teachers and the community volunteers and there is lot of life in our building each day.

All of those 400 individuals are here each day because of our mission. The Bryn Athyn Church School was founded, and continues, in order to provide children with a New Church education. The end of this education is to prepare students to become confident, caring and useful citizens of the natural world, and also of the Lord's heavenly kingdom. A passage from True Christian Religion (305) speaks of "prosperity in time and happiness to eternity." Our decisions at the school are directed by these two goals, one natural and one spiritual, and we work towards them through our academic programs, behavior management systems, and programs like weekly classroom meetings and student leadership groups. This is in addition to religion courses, classroom worship and morning chapel.

At BACS we strive to give our students a well-rounded education; this includes courses in reading, math and science which are so valued in schools today. At the same time we include history, geography and composition, as well as specialist subjects such as physical education, music, and art. We also provide additional subjects, such as Spanish, to some grade levels, and electives to our 7th and 8th graders. The electives are a chance for the Upper Unit students to delve more deeply into a subject interesting to them, or

to learn more about a topic that is new. During the year students can choose from over thirty different offerings, for example, drawing and painting, yoga, cooking on a budget, and architecture. While the format of specialist classes changes as students progress through the grade levels, there is a consistent emphasis on the importance of teaching to multiple intelligences. Our academic program is designed to teach our students about their world and provide them with the skills to positively impact it, but the key is that these courses are also integrating spiritual concepts in ways that can only be found in a New Church school.

Students at Bryn Athyn Church School receive a strong education, building an academic foundation which will serve them in high school and beyond. We utilize nationally recognized programs as well as unique New Church curricula. Our program is supported by standardized assessments, but not directed by them. With an average class size of just over 15 students per teacher, our students learn in an environment attuned to their personal strengths and needs while also providing them with the benefits of being part of a group.

Our school is fortunate to have a student support center. Its dozen part-time teachers, along with the Montgomery County Intermediate Unit (providing additional services), work to ensure that our students have the tools necessary to succeed academically, socially, and emotionally. This includes counseling and academic support as well as an enrichment program.

We believe that real learning takes place when the students' affections are engaged. Their learning experiences at BACS are enhanced by events such as integrated feasts, plays, art projects and simulations. There are also many opportunities for our students to perform. The first and eighth grades put on plays for the school and community, and other grades perform smaller plays, musicals and puppet shows. There are also school concerts in the spring and at Christmas. Our

students' educational journey is a combination of collecting information and honing skills, but also creativity and collaboration.

The curriculum is also enhanced by after school programs such as dance and athletics. The dance program serves students in all grades and even in preschool. Students are introduced to several styles of dance and put on two performances a year. After-school sports are offered in all three seasons to students in 5th – 8th grades. Our coaches combine experienced players with newcomers to build unified teams which play against neighboring schools in seven different sports throughout the year. We have also recently begun sending teams of readers to participate alongside 32 other schools in Montgomery County's *Reading Olympics*. Throughout the year there are whole school activities and other programs which allow for different grade levels to interact. One, which is a highlight for the students, is field day held each May.

Our students are able to have this full educational experience because of the generous support we receive. In addition to the financial donations we receive, we are also the recipients of a vibrant volunteer program. This past year volunteers donated over 3,500 hours through this program. Every hour of the school day volunteers are here supporting us through their work, and with their presence. It is affirming and humbling to be the recipient of both of these donations, as it is a constant reminder of people's support for our mission.

While we are proud of the experiences our students are having at BACS, we are also constantly looking to the future. As the world changes so do the strengths and needs of our students, and we are continually looking for ways to best provide a New Church education for them. This includes implementation of new technology and reworking of lessons. It also includes working with the office of General Church Education to update curriculum. Our teachers participate in numerous professional development studies throughout each year. We

begin each year by reading a book on education and finish each year with a religious study led by our school pastor. The Bryn Athyn Church School, along with the Bryn Athyn Church, has also begun a study of our building. As significant maintenance is coming due, it is a natural time for us to look at the ways our facilities might better meet the educational needs of the students.

It is an exciting time to be at BACS. We are proud of the past 123 years of New Church education that we have provided for our families, and are excited to see the ways in which we will meet our mission in the future.

Greg Henderson attended New Church schools from preschool through college. After teaching 8th grade for seventeen years, he is currently serving as principal at the Bryn Athyn Church School. He can be reached at greg.henderson@bacs.org.



Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Julia Robinson's talk in the April Journal on what it means to love or acknowledge the Lord went some way to explaining something I have often pondered: whether friends who declare themselves atheists or agnostics, yet who lead useful, considerate lives based on well-considered principles, are OK spiritually. Julia suggests that yes, they probably are: "The important thing seems to not be whether the person outwardly acknowledges the Lord, but whether the person serves the neighbor with humility and love, and also the quality of that love and its alignment with truth."

Such friends would add so much to life in the next world! They certainly do so in this world. Yet because they are doubtful about God's existence, they might not end up in heaven? I can't really believe that. Her suggestion that "we may be too limited in our idea of who God is, and what it means to love God" eases my unease.

I'm a firm believer that all faiths have within them the capacity to lead people to heaven. Trouble is, these friends have no faith, though they are definitely aware of Christianity and other religions, and were even brought up as Christians or in Christian schools. It's decidedly not my role to judge them. Each of them is on the path they need to be on in their spiritual journey—the Lord will guide them in ways that suit them best. Hopefully, eventually, they'll reach their own place in the next life—I do hope I'll be able to spend time with them there like I do here.

We are born for no purpose but to be useful to the community we live in and to our neighbors.
Emanuel Swedenborg, Heavenly Secrets 1103

Long may the Theta Alpha Journal continue—it is useful to the 'community' it lives in.

Dale Morris
Stonesfield, England
dale.morris@zen.co.uk

Dear Editor,

Throughout my lifetime I've often admired the close friendships many of my friends have with their sisters. I have two brothers I adore, but no sisters. Sisters can create such nurturing relationships with each other. In spite of being sisterless, I've belonged to different sisterhoods throughout my lifetime, starting with Girl Scouts, and most recently my Zumba friends.

This past week I came home exhausted after a day of work as yet another new school year has begun. I felt like I was getting sick, I was so depleted. It didn't take me long to realize that at the age of fifty-six the best remedy would be to go to bed. So I did. After a quick nap and a light supper, I looked for some reading material and found the TA Journal from April which I had not yet read. I took it to bed with me and started from the back and read forward. What a healing gift it was! For in the pages of this edition, I was reminded of another sisterhood I belong to. It was so uplifting to read the thoughts of my like-minded TA sisters (and a few brothers!). The articles, poems and artwork carried my thoughts to a higher realm, that of the heart and soul.

Thank you to Theta Alpha, thank you to the contributors, and thank you to the behind-the-scenes workers for tending to this most precious sisterhood of New Church women.

Your sister in the Lord,
Kris Heinrichs Earle
Delray Beach, Florida
madameahs@gmail.com

To the Editor,

To me, in the April, 2019, *Theta Alpha Journal*, you have captured a peek at the power of art. First, look at the heart by Jenn Beiswenger on page 56. Her heart is filled completely with the leaves of life, the heart strings of affection, the flowers of joy, and the bonds of love . . . filled to the point of overflowing. And yet, consider the poignant *young woman* by Chyler Henderson on page 62. With but one endless stroke of the pen this simple drawing suggests innocence, humility, strength, patience, love, and much more . . . it says it all, about women!

We, being creations of the Lord God, are able, thus, to share the art of His love and wisdom through the very tips of our fingers! 'Tis a wonder and a joy, is it not?

Sincerely,
Martin E. Klein
Boynton Beach, FL

Dear Editor,

Thank you so much for all that you do to share the *beautiful* contemplations, meditations and happenings of us as we diligently live the beautiful teachings of the New Church. I would love to comment on each offering, but especially I want to thank Kathy Schrock for taking us into her classroom and giving us a little glimpse of heaven. I hope your thoughtful presentation will inspire other teachers to share.

As this Journal attests, the teachings of the New Church affect every part of our lives. Helen Kennedy brought this up a notch with *Meditations on Heavenly Communities*. Luckily a few friends were able to talk to her about this rather novel way of thinking.

It is not easy to put pen to paper or fingertips to com-

puter, but it means so much to so many. Thank you all for sharing your thoughts and inspirations.

Affectionately,
Gill Simons Mayer
Bryn Athyn, PA

Chapter Report Boynton Beach Theta Alpha Women's Guild

Our group has about four meetings a year. We set up snacks for after the Sunday Service, arrange flowers for the chancel, set up for Holy Supper, and provide children's Christmas gifts. Last November we had a Thanksgiving dinner which Pat Klein managed. Many of our former activities have been dropped because our group has fewer active members. This year we are donating money to the newly renovated office, library, all purpose-room and nursery/Sunday school room.

Sincerely,
Janet Karallus

Scholarships Available!

Two education scholarships will be offered for the 2020-21 school year. This annual award is for the purpose of supporting women attending the Bryn Athyn College of the New Church who desire to become New Church teachers and declare education as a major or minor (or Interdisciplinary Degree).

The annual scholarship award amount is \$2,100, for up to 2 recipients. One award is for an incoming freshman, and one award is for a current Bryn Athyn College of the New Church education student. Each may be used toward tuition, fees, and/or books.

Three scholarships are available to women students of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church who have a 3.0 GPA, are studying **Religion** (major, minor, ID) or **MARS** program or are **international** students. There are (2) \$2,000 and (1) \$1,000 scholarships awarded to eligible recipients who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. These are annual merit based scholarships that can be used for tuition, college fees, books or supplies.

Applications are due **February 1, 2020**. To apply: email ancdaughters@gmail.com or call Sarah Wong at BAC 267-502-6085 or see BAC website.

2019-2020 Scholarship Winners

Sarah Odhner, for doctrinal studies

Rachel Elphick, for education studies

Denali Heinrichs, for both education studies and religious studies (two awards)

Jordan Brunne, as an international student

New ANC Scholarships!!

Two annual scholarships are now offered for the 2020-2021 school year in the amount of \$2,500 for up to 2 young women who exemplify the teachings of the New Church. The Scholarship may be used toward tuition, books or fees. These are annual merit and need-based scholarships and may be applied for yearly.

Applications are due **April 15, 2020**. To apply: email ancdaughters@gmail.com.

Theta Alpha International 2019 Executive Committee Board

Janet Krettek, DO (Fuller)

President

jmkrettekdo@gmail.com

Carla Joyce Reuter

Vice President

creuter77@gmail.com

Brita Synnestvedt Conroy

Secretary

brita.conroy@bacs-gc.org

Renee Mergen

Corresponding Secretary

nightrn52@gmail.com

Melodie Haworth Greer

Treasurer

melodie.greer@newchurch.org

Rebekah Russell

General Church Education Liaison

rebekah.russell@newchurch.org

Cheryl Buss Cooper

ANC Girls School Liaison

cheryl.cooper@ancss.org

Sarah Jin Wong and Kelly Ballard

College Women's Co-Liaison

sarah.wong@brynathyn.edu

kelly.ballard@brynathyn.edu

Helen Kennedy
Journal Editor
hmkennedy98@gmail.com

Carol Bongers Buss
Member-at-Large
carol.buss@newchurch.org

Carol Ebert Henderson
Member-at-Large
bchenderson66@gmail.com

Barbara Charles Doering
Member-at-Large
bcdoering@yahoo.com

Call for Art Submissions!



As you can see from the beautiful cover art and line drawings, we are hoping that the *Journal* can present some of the visual art that Swedenborgians around the world are creating.

Please send us images you would like to share with *Journal* readers and feel free to write a few sentences about what you send in!

CHAPTER PRESIDENTS 2019-2020

Atlanta, GA
Nicola Echols
nicola.echols@gmail.com

Boynton Beach, FL
Janet M. Karallas
mcclarrenj@aol.com

Glenview, IL
Sue Lee
sueflee614@gmail.com

Kitchener, ON Canada
No chapter president currently

Pittsburgh, PA
Barbara E. Glenn
barbara.glenn46@gmail.com

Washington, DC
Becca Synnestvedt Smith
beccalek@yahoo.com

This issue of the Theta Alpha Journal was formatted by Michelle Chapin using Adobe InDesign CC. The text is set in Optima and Minion Pro. Printed by Paradigm Digital Color Graphics, Southampton, PA.



THETA ALPHA JOURNAL

Published by Theta Alpha International
P.O. Box 154
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

NONPROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE

PAID

LANGHORNE, PA
PERMIT NO. 81