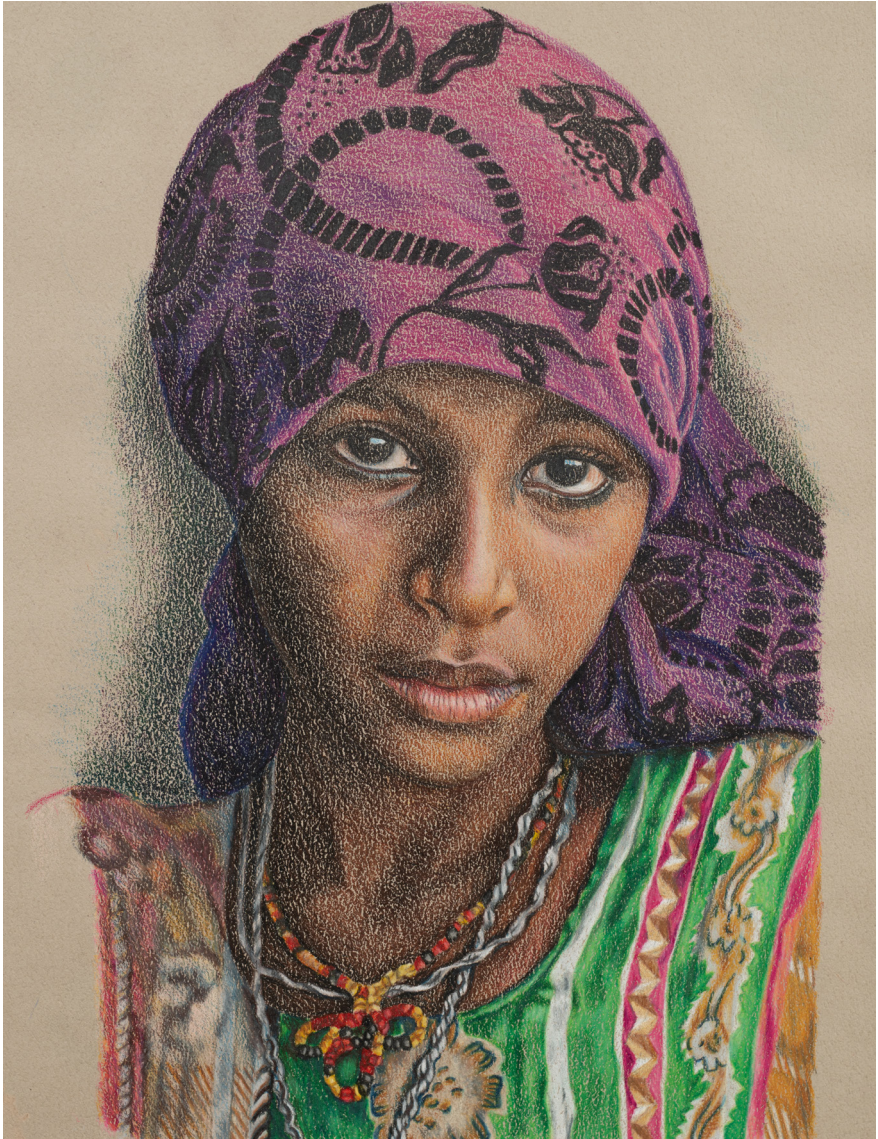


Theta Alpha Journal



June 2020

Table of Contents

Editorial	3
<i>Chelsea Rose Odhner</i>	
Knowing the Lord: A Promise and a Process	5
<i>Chelsea Rose Odhner</i>	
Twin Brothers	10
<i>Sylvia Montgomery Shaw</i>	
Teach These Things Diligently To Your Children (Pittsburgh School Teaching Dyslexia)	12
<i>Various authors</i>	
Anniversary Poem (poem)	40
<i>Meryl Cowley Machado</i>	
First Day of School (poem)	41
<i>Meryl Cowley Machado</i>	
The Role of the Arts in Preparing New Church Teachers Part III	43
<i>Angela Rose</i>	
Desk Sitting At the Cathedral	53
<i>Phyllis Pitcairn</i>	
Tours of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral	56
<i>Gillian Simons Mayer</i>	
The Butterfly Path (poem)	59
<i>Tiffany Perry</i>	
True Magic (poem)	60
<i>Tiffany Perry</i>	
Glass Half-Full.....	61
<i>Hannah Matsukawa</i>	
Letters to the Editor	64
<i>Dana Gruber</i>	
<i>Gwenda Cowley</i>	
Websites and Blogs of Readers	65
Minutes from October 2019 Luncheon.....	67
TAI Executive Committee Board 2020-2021	69
2019 Treasurer's Report	70
TAI Chapter Presidents.....	72

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
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Editorial

Janet Krettek

Calm mind brings inner strength and self-confidence, so that's very important for good health. —Dalai Lama

At this time when we are living through a pandemic, I find we are in a swirl of new information—some correct, some misleading. The information that has come down through the centuries as history shows that difficult times bring out the best and the worst of humanity. The history in books shows much of the latter. Let's remember 'her'story, the story of women through the ages. We don't have the collective memory for it, but women worked hard through every age, but did not make a lot of noise to be noticed. They rarely did much to make or win wars, or to move the borders of countries. But they did take care of the men and the children and each other. And they did a lot, do a lot, behind the scenes. Their work outside the home started to get noticed during WWII when women took over men's work in factories and even started getting paid!! The contrast with today is that most women work outside the home. Statistics show, however, that they still do the majority of the child raising and homemaking. Women are the support.

The mission of Theta Alpha is to support New Church education in all its forms, and women in their spiritual growth. Spiritual growth, here we come! The Corona virus pandemic is certainly an opportunity for us to build our core, to call upon the Lord for help and guidance as we move forward to care for our families and friends. We have gotten through worse as a human community: depressed finances, plagues, war, etc. We will get through this.

At this time we are learning at a faster rate than usual: trying new technologies to connect to one another, learning how to teach and entertain children via a screen, learning

new terms from epidemiology and infectious diseases, such as social distancing and flattening the curve.

As a surgeon I have found that at times of greatest stress I need to maintain strictest personal discipline (getting enough rest, good hygiene, eating a healthy diet, daily exercise, deep breathing, prayer, and smiling) in order to be able to think at my best. If I don't take care of me, I am of little use to others.

We ARE the Grand Human and that is seen in the ways we are taking care of one another. My daughter, who I liken to a red-blood-cell, brings fresh air (oxygen) to her muscle friends. The journalist, who I liken to a nerve cell, brings us new information. The minister, whom I liken to the immune system, works to free us from the cancer of negative attitudes and rumor spreading. Then we can freely ingest the love and positive spirit of the Lord, the spirit that wants every one of us to live each day to its fullest in order to build up our human community. As women, we can bring the calm and loving spirit of the Lord to each of our interactions to better promote the healing which we need right now as we strongly and calmly care for one another, a sure pathway to creating a better world to come.

Knowing the Lord: A Promise and a Process

Chelsea Rose Odhner

*Given at The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington,
Delaware July 21st, 2019*

In the book of Ezekiel there is a phrase that occurs more than sixty times: “Then you shall know that I am the Lord.” Ezekiel is foretelling what’s going to happen to the children of Israel and the outcome is repeatedly knowing the Lord. What I’ve found from tracing Ezekiel’s use of this phrase is that *knowing the Lord* does not mean simply knowing of God, but it suggests a much more intimate knowing. It involves a change of heart: “I will give them a heart to know me, that I am the Lord” writes Jeremiah (24:7). I want to share with you Ezekiel’s use of this phrase, and then share some thoughts on what we might be able to draw from it about what it means to know the Lord in our lives.

Ezekiel was called to be a prophet to the children of Israel, many of whom by this time are in captivity in Babylon, where he is as well. They were taken from the land of Judah, the land the Lord had promised to them, and now they are on the brink of losing it all. The only thing that has yet to be taken over is the holy city of Jerusalem itself, which contains the Lord’s temple. The temple is their most holy site—in a sense, it’s where they would normally go to know the Lord. Now they are having to adapt to life in exile, and they’re faced with having to find new ways of knowing the Lord. Ezekiel has the job of telling the children of Israel that even though most of them are already in captivity, things are actually going to get worse. He foretells of the final stages of the Babylonian takeover (the siege and fall of Jerusalem, the destruction of their most holy temple). But somehow, through all of this, in the end they will know the Lord.

That might not sound like much of a door prize. It’s a tough

message to give, and it's a tough message to receive, and the children of Israel understandably have a hard time hearing it. The Lord warns Ezekiel that they aren't going to listen to his words of prophecy because they are a rebellious house. The term *rebel* in Hebrew can mean *turned away from the light*. Their foreheads are hardened and their hearts are stubborn toward God. They can't trust that this sequence of events could lead to anything good for them, and they deny that any of it is going to happen. But the Lord tries to reach them nonetheless; and Ezekiel is only one of many prophets that the Lord raised up to reach out to the children of Israel, in hopes of turning them back toward the light and back into a relationship with God; because the Lord has nothing but love for them and wills to dwell with them in an everlasting covenant of love.

There are two main phases of Ezekiel's prophecies to the children of Israel, with a turning point in between: prophecies that lead up to the fall of Jerusalem, the actual siege and fall of Jerusalem itself, and then the prophecies that follow.

The first phase of prophecies is about the coming desolation. We read, for example in chapter 6:14, "I will stretch out My hand against them, and make the land desolate and wasteThen they shall know that I am the Lord." And in chapter 12:20, "The inhabited cities shall be laid waste, and the land shall become a desolation; and you shall know that I am the Lord." Or in chapter 13:14, "I will break down the wall that you have smeared with whitewash, and bring it to the ground, so that its foundation will be laid bare; when it falls, you shall perish within it; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

Somehow even their perishing would be a means of knowing the Lord! These prophecies of desolation come to fruition in the middle of the book of Ezekiel: the Babylonians manage to lay siege to Jerusalem itself, the heart and stronghold of Judah.

It takes three years of rising famine and disease until

Jerusalem falls and the temple is burned to the ground. All of Judah is now in captivity, except for some of the poorest people who are left to tend the land—to be vinedressers and tillers of the soil on the footprint of what was Jerusalem.

Jerusalem has fallen. At this point there's a distinct shift in the tone of Ezekiel's prophecies for the children of Israel. They go from foretelling desolation, to promising deliverance and blessing. For example, in chapter 34:27, "And they shall know that I am the Lord, when I break the bars of their yoke, and save them from the hands of those who enslaved them." And in 36:11, "I will cause you to be inhabited as in your former times, and will do more good to you than ever before. Then you shall know that I am the Lord." Or in 39:28, "Then they shall know that I am the Lord their God because I sent them into exile among the nations, and then gathered them into their own land. I will leave none of them behind."

The desolation wasn't the end! It was unavoidable; and somehow that stage ushered in a new level of capacity for them to receive the blessings the Lord willed to give them.

Every step of this process fed into them knowing the Lord: the desolation, the surrender, and the blessing. It's the same for us in our spiritual lives! We cycle through a spiritual version of desolation, surrender, and blessing. Swedenborg makes the point that an essential part of our spiritual growth is going through times of trial. We heard in our readings that "the only way [the vessels in our mind] can be softened is through times of trial." We inevitably undergo spiritual struggles, times of mental anguish and inner anxiety when evil tendencies in us are stirred up and attack what we love and the truths we believe. The Lord foresees these states and makes them serve us by being a means for us to be freed from evil and to become more receptive to divine love. One way Swedenborg puts it is that we "come into spiritual crises at the point when love needs to take the lead" (New Jerusalem 198). Even though to us it feels like we're entering further into bondage and suffering,

our spiritual struggles are actually the way out of bondage! Just like the children of Israel couldn't understand how losing Jerusalem and being entirely taken captive to Babylon could be a means to their ultimate freedom and renewal, our spiritual struggles feel like they shouldn't be happening and they couldn't possibly be good, but they actually free us from persistent negative thoughts and feelings in the long run, if we let them, which requires a surrender on our part.

The Hebrew word for desolate actually means *to be put to silence* or to be astonished or stunned. Our thoughts and feelings are actually vessels that can be more or less receptive to the Lord's love. The ones that aren't receptive resist and oppose the love that God is. These vessels are hardened against the Lord's constant loving inflow. Thoughts of this kind never allow for a positive, loving outlook. Have you ever tried to talk yourself out of fear or reason with it? The thoughts that stem from fear have a way of always coming up with convincing arguments in their favor that keep us caught in a tangle of fear and worry. We can't change what they're like, but they can be stunned into silence. And when they are, we can surrender into the Lord's loving presence, we can surrender our self-will to the Lord's will. And then the Lord actually molds or works those *hardened vessels* until they become pliable and open to the Lord's love. Desolation, or times of spiritual struggle bring about the exact conditions our minds need to be freed from hell's oppression and opened to love.

I was amazed to learn that Swedenborg actually pinpoints fear and distress as the primary symptoms of the onset of a spiritual crisis—the phase just before a shift toward love takes place (Arcana Coelestia 4249). This doesn't mean every time we experience fear we're having a spiritual crisis, but I've noticed the truth of this claim in my own life. I wonder if you've ever had the experience of being caught up in worry and fear, or as Brené Brown calls it, a *shame storm*, then something happens to tip the balance and you just break

down in tears, or soften in some way? There's a release and then those tears bring a sense of relief; there's an inner shift and the fear is lifted. For me, motherhood has provided ample opportunities for this spiritual growth cycle to occur. And for whatever reason, bedtime has been a prime setting. I can think of numerous times that I've been trying to wrestle three energetic children through proper dental care and down for bed, and if the hassle of trying to convince them to listen to me wasn't enough, my outer experience was kicking up self-critical thoughts that churned inwardly away about my motherhood, how this is probably easier for other people, or I'd be having a different experience if only I were more patient, or positive. These escalate in proportion with the unmanageability of the moment, coming out sideways in anger and frustration. It reaches some inner tipping point, and then, it might be something one child says, or I catch my reflection in the mirror, or I'm just struck by the contrast between my inner overwhelm and the tenderness of the moment—settling kids safely in their beds—and my heart cracks open. My self-concern is stunned, and I soften. I soften enough to be present to the feelings that are coming up for me—the sadness, the shame, the fear—rather than being blindly driven by them.

Maybe you can think of a time or times in your life when blessing has come after desolation, with a pivotal moment of surrender in between. In the language of Twelve-step recovery, our lives become unmanageable and we acknowledge our powerlessness, we soften in the face of life being *too much*, and then from that place of surrender, we come to believe that God, a power greater than ourselves, can restore us to sanity. An inner shift happens and we find ourselves surrounded by love, a love we weren't able to perceive before.

Chelsea Odhner is a production manager, writer, and moderator for offTheLeftEye. She lives in Glenside, PA with her husband and three children. She can be contacted at crodhner@gmail.com.

Twin Brothers

(poem on opposite page)

Designer's Note: This poem's specific aesthetic spacing required it to be printed as it appears.

From the author: I had given in to despair over the loss of my grandson Reace, his parents' pain, and the desperate situation of his twin, Kai, who had to struggle for his life in the NICU. I prayed desperately for help from this sudden onslaught of despair. Even as I sobbed, I started to type my thoughts. After the third line, a split occurred—one for each twin. By the time I typed out "Or was that our dream, and yours a dreamless sweetness," I had stopped crying. My despair was morphing into a sense of awe. And I was startled by what I saw as an angelic form, arms outstretched.

Sylvia attended ANC College, and taught at Boston University and Bryn Athyn College. She wrote the poem after her daughter-in-law gave premature birth to identical twin boys. Reace died. His brother Kai, weighing 2½ lbs, is now a thriving 8 month-old baby. Contact Sylvia at montshaw3@gmail.com or 36 Maple Lane, Sutton, MA 01590.

Twin Brothers

Sylvia Montgomery Shaw

You were two
intimately interwoven,
a cell that split in half, the quintessence of sharing;
genes, mysterious engineers and architects, silent progenitors of eyes,
dark and sleek, lips, nose, forehead, limbs, mirrors of each other like sky and lake on a
calm day. Identical, yet each of you given your own soul, as distinct as snowflakes
that from heaven fall. Oh, little boys, tiny boys, did you reach across your gossamer
sacks to touch one another? Play in your dark dream world
warm and secure, flexing in preparation for crawling,
toddling, walking, running to laughter-tuned days?

Or was that our dream, and yours a dreamless sweetness
without expectations or disappointments? And I wonder:

At what precise moment did God who made you cradle you,
returning one to the warm sea and the other to heaven's light?

Extracting from the failed body an angel to grow, thrive,
and reach across worlds to touch the brother he guards.

Teach These Things Diligently To Your Children

*The Transformation Of the Pittsburgh New Church School
To Include Dyslexic Friendly Instruction.*

Julie D. Uber, Teacher: This coming June, Pittsburgh New Church School (PNCS) will celebrate 135 years of New Church education! We are proud that the Charter establishing the Academy of the New Church (and subsequently the General Church itself) was signed over a luncheon table right here in Pittsburgh, back in 1877. School began in the fall of 1885 in a private home. The cornerstone was laid for a new building farther out from the city, in a new neighborhood called Point Breeze. The date of that event was June 19, 1929, and dozens of people in the congregation were there to witness and celebrate the day. A few months later, in October, the stock market collapsed, fueling the beginning of the Great Depression. Building plans had to be scaled back. Part of the original property was sold off to become housing and some architectural features were deleted to save money. The current building, however, is both beautiful and welcoming, and it serves many uses. PNCS occupies one wing, while the sanctuary fills the other.

Declining enrollment is a problem for most of our New Church schools. This has certainly been true in Pittsburgh. Our largest enrollment was in the 1960s and 1970s, when two families in the society had 12 children each, and several others had six or more. We saw a gradual decline, which accelerated over more recent years. Families have not been as prolific and the congregation has been smaller overall. The enrollment continued to drop, to a low of 9, and it seemed then that we would not be able to keep the school alive. We felt we were holding on to this wonderful use by the tips of our fingernails, year after year. Then the Lord did something amazing with us. He turned hopelessness into joy!

The whole transformation started with a dream. The dream

developed as a result of a problem. The problem was that Cyndi Glenn and Gabby Uber had children who needed help learning to read. Both teachers, they decided to research reading programs that are designed to provide step-by-step assistance in multi-sensory learning. They enrolled at the Pittsburgh Dyslexia Center to get training in Orton-Gillingham reading so that they could help their own children. The Orton-Gillingham instructional method is research-proven to teach dyslexic children to read. It is systematic, sequential instruction of individual sounds in words using multiple senses (sight, sound, and touch) simultaneously to reinforce the learning. First Gabby and then Cyndi began taking classes so that they could help their own children. Very soon they realized the dream was not big enough. It needed to be expanded in order to accommodate other children who would benefit from learning this way.

Cyndi and Gabby's children showed big strides in development. The Pittsburgh New Church School was on the brink of closing, but Cyndi and Gabby saw potential. The realization had dawned that a number of other local New Church children were also struggling with learning differences and difficulty with reading. Pastor Calvin Odhner, who was our principal at the time, caught fire with enthusiasm. He encouraged them to see if their dream could be realized. They brought to the faculty a series of questions: *Could we become a New Church school that specializes in working with students with dyslexia and reading challenges? Would the rest of the faculty be willing to get some training in the multi-sensory methods and systematic teaching techniques needed? Would the Pittsburgh society support us through this change? Would teaching this way still serve the needs of our students who don't have challenges in learning?*

Answers may be found in the pages that follow, in the words of students, family members, teachers, and members of the congregation.

People with dyslexia don't have an easy neural pathway in their brains when it comes to recognition and decoding of sound/symbol correspondences (phonics). They need step-by-step help to build new pathways for things many find simple: phonemic (unit of sound) awareness, word recognition, comprehension, and fluency. Dyslexia can complicate every aspect of school from organizing homework and class projects to prioritizing which homework assignment to tackle first. Related difficulties can include challenges in memorization of math facts and concepts (dyscalculia) and struggles with writing (dysgraphia).

Aside from our pastor, the entire faculty has received some training in the Orton-Gillingham method of teaching reading, as well as in multi-sensory teaching techniques for other subject areas. Miraculously, people appeared to join our team just as the need for them arose. New faculty members Melissa Sellner and Bethany Tough joined the team. Melissa came complete with a bachelor's degree in Special Ed, and a reading specialist certificate, and Beth made it possible to split our classes so that we maintain a student to teacher ratio of no more than 6:1. Dr. Joe Nocera became our Admissions Director, and has also worked on marketing so that people in the Pittsburgh area are beginning to know our name. (If you Google "dyslexia Pittsburgh" PNCS comes up second, right after the Pittsburgh Dyslexia Center.) We have a great website presence thanks to congregation member Steve David. People can find us on Facebook, too.

PNCS is a supporting member of the Pennsylvania Branch of the International Dyslexia Association, and of the Learning Disabilities Association of Pennsylvania. Parent support groups meet monthly at our school, and recently Cyndi and Joe began organizing kids' get-together evenings. It is very valuable for both parents and kids to feel they are not alone, and to spend time with others with similar stories to tell. This is also a great way to get our name out there as a resource and a support in dealing with dyslexia.

There is a crying need for schools that can reach and teach children with dyslexia. Scientific studies have found that dyslexia may affect up to one in every five children, but many schools do not provide accommodations for dyslexia. The Pittsburgh Public Schools are reluctant to acknowledge a diagnosis of dyslexia, because if they did so, they would be obligated to provide dyslexic children with special services, and this is viewed as too costly. This results in a large population of frustrated parents and despairing students. There is one charter school in Southwestern Pennsylvania that is designed to help those with dyslexia—and of course, it is full. They have begun referring students on their waiting list to us.

We are now in the midst of our second year as a dyslexia-friendly school, with 18 students, and we are discovering what works. And it works! PNCS teachers recently finished mid-year evaluations of the students, and we are thrilled with the results. All students have made excellent progress, including two who leapt forward approximately two full grade levels in reading just since they came to us at the end of August.

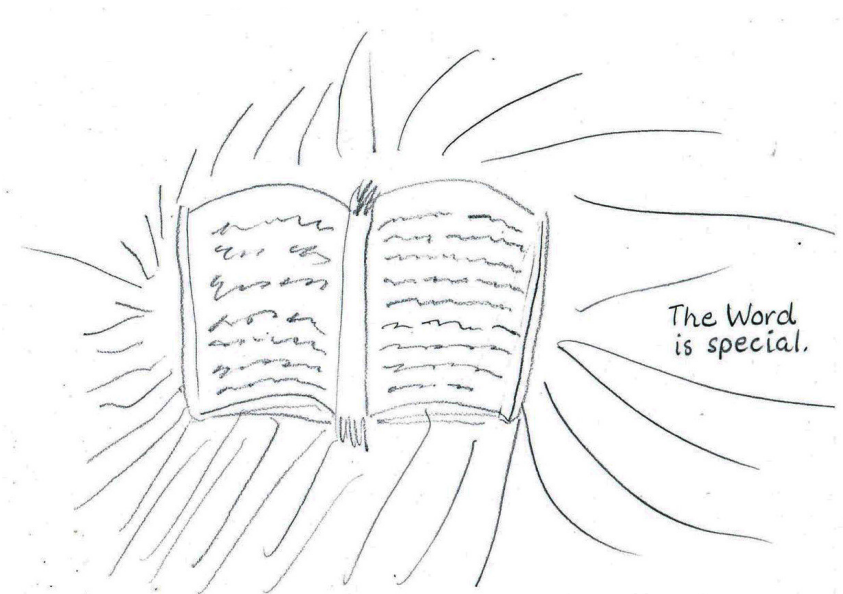
There are real rewards in this work, such as when a student who came to us all closed in, not speaking above a whisper because of the teasing and mockery she had been accustomed to, after a few weeks she began to look at people, and soon to offer a shy smile. Another student let us know she appreciated her new learning environment by hopping down the hallway like a bunny, chanting, “I love this school, I love this school, I love this school”

This past summer, PNCS’s Multi-Sensory Institute (our special programs and tutoring branch, known as MSI) began a new initiative, a two-week summer program offering Orton-Gillingham reading and multi-sensory math, art, music, and robotics. This proved to be very popular. One parent wrote in the evaluation, “My child learned more in one week here than in a year at [regular school]!” Several families asked for applications to enroll their children at PNCS, because of the

very positive experience they had. The news was getting out. We've begun planning for an expanded program next summer.

At the beginning of the 2019-2020 school year, we received two important accolades. First, Robert Morris University here in Pittsburgh, came to us with a proposal. The education department wanted to place graduate students studying dyslexia education in our school as tutors. The university believed that we would benefit from the free assistance in tutoring struggling readers, and the RMU students would fulfill practicum requirements. This symbiotic collaboration has been working beautifully.

The second piece of awesome news came with a check attached. The Peirce Family Foundation awarded PNCS/MSI a grant to help cover the costs for a four-week summer program this coming summer. To top it off, they invited us to submit a further grant request toward scholarships for students attending PNCS in 2020-2021. This adds to the strong support PNCS has already been receiving from private donors; Asplundh Foundation and Glencairn Foundation are also among our



valued supporters. The need for funding will be on-going. A team including members of our staff and of the congregation is working on writing additional applications for grants.

Today, Cyndi and Gabby are planning a celebration. They have completed all the requirements for full Orton-Gillingham certification. This is roughly the equivalent of attaining master's degrees! February marked their last tutoring sessions and papers due, and they received certificates as fully trained Orton-Gillingham instructors. As I write this, I am amazed at the blessings we have felt pouring from the Lord. He asks us to "teach these things diligently to your children" (Deuteronomy 6:7). We at PNCS will continue to put forth our best efforts to do exactly that. It will be exciting to see where we can serve Him in the next few years.



Cynthia F. Glenn, Principal: During our years of struggling with low attendance we realized that a few of our New Church students were also struggling to keep afloat with the academic demands of school, especially reading. The students were not able to read the Word. The thought of not being able to serve those children properly was heartbreaking. Their families were staunch supporters of New Church education and dearly wanted their kids to receive a New Church education.

What to do? Getting the training to help those students would be a big commitment both in time and money, but losing them might have ended the school for all the other New Church children who wanted to stay as well. After much discussion, research and prayer, two staff members decided to take the plunge and get the training. The school then decided to commit to offering enrollment to the kids with learning challenges, specifically dyslexia. The New Church parents were appreciative, and the children were relieved to finally get the help they needed. More importantly, the staff was able more fully to understand the struggle these students had been going through for years. The kids could now relax and know that there were teachers who understood their struggle and were equipped to help.

As word spread that we helped children with dyslexia our enrollment inquiries began to increase. Could adding dyslexia instruction to our marketing focus help save the school and serve the Lord at the same time? Helping others certainly seemed to fit the New Church belief that our lives should be of use to others, bringing children to the Lord through instruction in the Word. We could save our New Church school for future New Church families AND be useful, helping others struggling in the world.

In times of need and darkness, just when we think all is lost, the Lord is there. The Lord provides help for those who knock and ask. Well, I don't really remember knocking and

asking for the Lord to turn our school into one dedicated to helping children read, but, apparently, He knew. Our initial goal was to help our own; however, the Lord had other plans.

As we gained confidence in our abilities and we shared our story with others, it became clear that there were many children in the church universal who were suffering with inadequate reading instruction. One of the basic tenets of New Church education is to teach children to be of use in the Lord's creation. What better way to teach them this lesson than to show them by doing. Our start was fueled by saving our own, but over time I have come to realize that looking to save and help others has in turn helped us even more than I thought possible.

I have found it amazing and surprisingly difficult to hear people praise us for saving their children from academic ruin; we are just doing our jobs. A parent new to the school has thanked us for saving his son's life. More and more parents are praising the good works we are doing for their once struggling children. We hear it quite often now and I am positive that we are doing the Lord's work every day here at PNCS. Many people have asked me the following questions and I answer in absolutes.

Is the Pittsburgh New Church school still a New Church school? *Absolutely.*

Does it serve New Church kids and families? *Absolutely.*

Does it serve non-New Church kids and families? *Absolutely.*

Does it teach New Church Doctrine? *Absolutely.*

Does it work to make angels? *Absolutely.*

Does it help the Lord's children? *Absolutely.*

The following is an example of New Church education in progress at PNCS. We have quite a few new students this

year, one of whom I will call Frederick James. During his first couple of weeks at school it was obvious that Frederick was used to defending himself from ridicule and harassment. He felt the need to make preemptive strikes at other students before they would have a chance to make fun of him. He said lots of negative comments about school and assignments and was defensive when anyone questioned his actions. He was aggressive at recess, and would laugh or say unkind comments to others when they made mistakes. This was the atmosphere he was used to: Establish dominance or be dominated.

A few weeks ago, Frederick quietly told one of our teachers that by the end of the school year he wanted to be “one of the good kids.” Of course, she encouraged him, and praised the progress he was already making. We see him becoming a more patient and loving classmate every day. He now actively participates and answers questions in worship as well. He has decided that doing well in school, both academically and interpersonally, is possible.

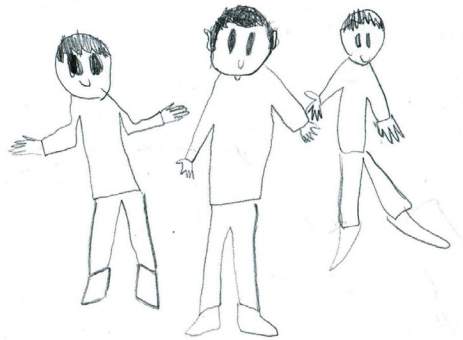
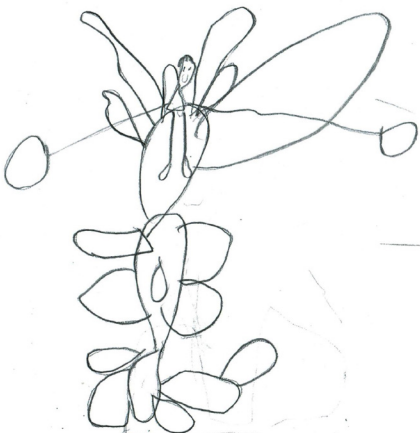
Not all children have found a home at PNCS. We have had a few children who have moved on to other schools. In the recent past we had two children with mild autism in the school and even though they were sweet and seemed to fit right in it was clear that they were not getting what they needed to reach their full potential. Both are now in different situations and thriving. We stay in contact with them regularly to see how they are doing because we still consider them part of the PNCS family. We have also turned some prospective students away because their needs were beyond our expertise. PNCS is not well equipped to educate children with behavioral and emotional issues. PNCS offers a loving and caring atmosphere but sometimes a student’s needs are beyond what we can support. In those cases, we have to turn them away, suggest other placements, and provide other supportive networks for those students. We are beginning to work closely with other organizations in the Pittsburgh area that provide special needs services. One of our goals is to help

families find the services they need for their children.

The Lord gives blessings and talents to all His children. All children are part of His creation, have talent to share and therefore can be useful citizens in this world and the next. By showing the parents and students of our school how great serving others is, they may become interested in joining our church efforts as well. Often parents will ask how they can be useful to the school. Perhaps they will get to know us better by offering to help our mission, and get involved through their own free will. And then in time, hopefully, they may find a New Church home with us.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Theta Alpha International for launching a fund-raising campaign on Facebook for PNCS this last fall, during Charter Day weekend. It was such a wonderful surprise to hear that this group of New Church people saw the worth of what we were trying to achieve and were actively doing something to contribute. Financially we are still working hard to make this project successful, so any donations to PNCS are most welcome. Check out our website to learn more, at: www.pittsburghnewchurchschool.org.

Climbing a tree!



Friends.

Gabrielle Uber, Teaching Specialist at PNCS and Mother of PNCS student: I said to my daughter, “But Andrea, you like school! You like Mrs. Donaldson. Why did you get so angry with her today? She said you refused to get out your phonics book?”

“I hate phonics! I don’t understand any of it!”

“Well, this is not the way to solve this problem, Andrea.”

“My way to solve the problem is to go to the bathroom till phonics is over!”

She stood there crying, stamping her foot in frustration, an eight-year-old girl who loved school! What was going on? A few months later we had our answer. She was exceptionally bright but also dyslexic. She really couldn’t understand the phonics. She couldn’t spell. In third grade Andrea didn’t always spell her own name the same way. She had great ideas but insisted someone scribe for her on tests and worksheets. She read comfortably way below her grade level, and then got bored with the simple story lines. We read with her every night and later learned she was memorizing the words, not really learning to read them.

My choices were few. Our public-school system would not even admit she had dyslexia and would not offer her services until she was failing and three grades behind. I could hire a tutor in Orton-Gillingham reading tutoring, the one research-proven teaching method that works for dyslexics, at a rate we would be hard pressed to afford, or I could learn the method myself. This latter choice was actually the only choice that would keep her at Pittsburgh New Church School (PNCS), and that stood any chance of helping her. So, I bought the two-inch-thick textbook and a bunch of other stuff and I began to learn.

In May of 2012 I started pulling Andrea, my son Lee, and one other boy out of classes at PNCS to tutor them. That was

seven years ago. Today, Andrea is a straight-A junior at our local high school, an honor student taking five AP classes (college level) this year. She is soaring! She might actually get her first B this term. Lee is thriving in an online program which suits his unique learning profile. He has autism. But he needs to read independently for this to work and now he can. The other student, whose dyslexia was far denser, and compounded with writing difficulties as well, just headed off to high school this fall. I had the pleasure, and the enormous responsibility, to teach him language arts in his last year at PNCS, trying to get him ready to go out into a world where the teachers didn't understand his needs, his strengths and his weaknesses. We had been waiting to see if he would sink or swim out there in the jungle. Had we prepared him well enough? Reading and writing are both still a struggle for him and always will be. It will take him a lot of extra effort to be successful. Can he do it?

These three students have had advantages at PNCS that cannot be compared to any other educational experiences anywhere in Pittsburgh. Our public-school systems have not been serving these children at all. There are schools which cater to the needs of dyslexic students elsewhere. There are quite a few up and down the eastern seaboard. But none provide the invaluable benefits of New Church education. There are other New Church schools throughout the United States, but none that could give these children what they need to learn to read. By the blessings of God, these three children, and a handful of others who have followed, have been given a chance—a gift of invaluable worth.

Now that we have opened our doors and shouted out to the other six thousand dyslexic children in Pittsburgh that we are here, I have had the privilege to teach more students who desperately need what we have to give. We have students coming to us at all ages from kindergarten to seventh grade. I think the biggest discrepancy we have seen so far is a child six years behind in reading and math ability. *Six years!* We

know that we can identify dyslexia as early as age 4. We have research-proven teaching techniques and data that concludes the earlier we identify them and start teaching them the way they learn best, the better the outcome. The general population includes 10-20% dyslexics, depending on how you define it. It is a monumental failure of our educational system that they come to us in such great need.

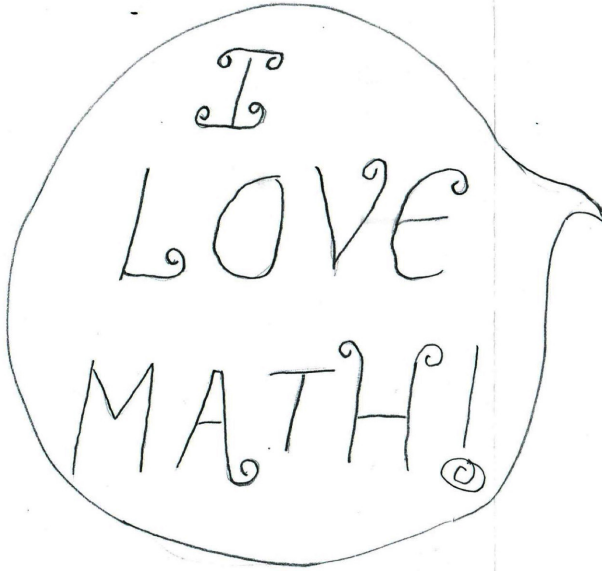
They also come to us as broken souls with crippling anxiety, learned helplessness and a poor store of knowledge from years of not learning in the classroom. ADHD is very common in children with dyslexia. Additionally, they are often put together with behaviorally challenged children since there aren't enough special education teachers to separate the two populations. They come to PNCS and quickly learn they are SAFE here! Free to learn, with the opportunity to be good kids and make friends with other good kids, in a bully free zone, unique to their experience.

I ran classroom worship recently where we talked about harboring resentment. I asked them to draw a picture of a resentment they held, then they were to circle emotions they felt associated with that resentment off a list I had prepared. One child asked if he could write one in. Yes, I replied. What will you write in? *Hopelessness*, he said. There were murmurs around the room and when I collected the papers, more than half the kids—the new ones—had written in *hopelessness*.

The boy I mentioned earlier just got his first report card in high school. High honors. High honors! Unbelievable! His mother and I did a dance and cried with joy and relief. Another child of PNCS, a dyslexic child, successfully sent off into life! But the joy gets quickly tempered by a day at school. There is so much work to be done! There are souls to save. These kids need what PNCS has to give.

This is rewarding beyond what I can describe to you. I am on a mission to pull that boy who wrote in *hopelessness*—and all the others—through to a place where he can see a light

to guide him, a faith in a God who believes in him even on the days he doesn't believe in himself, and enough tools that when he leaves our care, he will fly!



Playing house at recess is a lot of fun.

Bethany Tough, Teacher: Pittsburgh New Church School (PNCS) is a special place. It is a place where the presence of the Lord is always felt; it is relied on to provide a kind, loving, caring and supportive learning environment. We strive to maintain a sphere that is safe, innocent, and kind. The staff, students and parents all work together to ensure that each student is provided with the support that they need to succeed. I feel honored to be a part of a special team of teachers and faculty, whose goal is to collectively educate the whole child, academically, spiritually and socially. Our small student to teacher ratio allows for each student to receive individual attention, which in turn provides the proper supports (materials and instruction). It is a gift to be able to meet each student's individual needs! Another of the gifts with which PNCS is blessed, is the ability to spread the Lord's Word to all students. It is an incredible experience to observe young children being guided daily by the Lord's teachings. They transform from being anxious, defeated and defensive children, into students who are receptive to learning, open to kindness, and proud of themselves.

Doris Delaney, Volunteer: I've had the privilege and joy of doing some volunteer work in the classrooms at Pittsburgh New Church School (PNCS). I appreciate what I've experienced here partly because of my personal history with dyslexia – my own, that of relatives, a former employer and others.

I was raised on books in a large academic family but by the end of third grade, I still could not read. Recently I happened to see many of my siblings' and my own report cards from our elementary school years, approximately 1930 – 1960, "*So-and-so would excel scholastically if only he/she would apply her/himself in the classroom and not daydream the morning away.*" Almost all of us struggled to read. IQ tests showed we are a gifted bunch and life shows that almost all of us strained

for even the smallest token of success. Brightest of all, one of my brothers went through third grade three times. He was never able to read well enough to conduct family worship for his own family, which he longed to do. Yet he held an important job in plastics research, was an amazing abstract thinker, a brilliant man!

While in third grade in the 1970s my youngest daughter still could not read. A child study center found her to have insufficient visual and kinetic memory. We had similar results when her older sister was tested. There seemed to be nothing wrong with my youngest's auditory skills, so we did all her homework out loud. It made a huge difference. I've learned recently that reading out loud is a small part of an overall program of multi-sensory education that helps to enable dyslexic children to learn.

I was once employed by a very creative man named Sean, who gradually worked his way up to owning and operating an upscale restaurant. He was head chef and greatly appreciated by his business executive clientele. But Sean could not write a shopping list. He dictated it to me; I had to calculate amounts and costs. He could not. In a moment of exasperation, he suddenly told me he'd left school in fourth grade and was "too stupid" to ever learn to read, write or add. Nearly in tears, he wailed that everything he did was so hard—so very hard—and always he had to pretend that he could function like a normal human being.

Only an extremely bright person could rise to Sean's level of success without reading or math skills. I told him that. I told him he must be very intelligent, amazingly so, and more of a success than he gave himself credit for. Gradually, as we talked, he began to relax and finally to chuckle and shake his head in wonder. He was about fifty years old. He told me I'd just changed his life. Sean should not have had to wait fifty years to hear that he's as smart as his customers.

At PNCS, children come into the school believing they

are stupid. They have experienced little success and much humiliation. They don't think there's any help for them. Within days, they realize that there's something different here, and within weeks they've begun to read. Soon they can scoot around the Bible to quickly locate a specific book; they learn there's a Lord who loves them, that life is forever, that usefulness leads to heaven. They read the Word out loud every day, participate in discussion of what they've read, and learn and honor the teachings of the New Church.

There's Clare, whose daughter was a new student. Clare asked one of our teachers, Gabby Uber, if she and her family would be welcome at our June 19th festival, asking *and who, by the way, is the woman clothed with the sun?* Gabby explained. Clare and her family came to the banquet carrying a huge cake she had baked for us. Standing on top is a three-dimensional woman, clothed with the sun.

There's Joe, or "Dr. N," as the kids call him, our Admissions Director. He has a Ph. D. in education and he loves the kids, brings his son and wife to many events, plus his son's Sunday school is here. Joe reads Swedenborgian pamphlets and lets us know we've got some good stuff here. He is absolutely devoted to this school. He raised admissions from ten students last year to 16 this past fall. At this writing there are nearly 20.

There are the children themselves. *Ho-hum, another school, another certain failure waiting to happen. Ho-hum, my parents insist I go. Count the hours until I can get out of here. Hope the other kids don't notice me. They may realize how stupid I am.* Fear and resentment quickly turns to surprise and excitement. First of all, all the children have similar difficulties. There's no ugly taunting because somebody can't read. And then suddenly one is reading. Another is adding, another is writing.

There's Noelle who wouldn't talk if she could avoid it. Wanted no part of group activities. She lived to sketch, could write, but no reading. She couldn't; she didn't expect to learn,

she's tried too many times, she hated school, hated it, *hated it!* One day a teacher came bursting inside gasping, "Noelle is playing kick ball!" Teachers pressed to the window making room for each other to actually see Noelle mixing with other students. She's back this year and looking like an old-timer who knows this place inside-out; and really doesn't mind the little kids, after all; in fact, she's very kind to them.

How can I describe the teaching staff at PNCS, this dedicated group who so passionately believes in the potential of every child here? I see professionals striving to learn more, do better, and constantly search for innovative ways to support their students. Our teachers work twice the hours scheduled, volunteering late afternoons, evenings, and weekends—and on top of all that, they constantly pursue their own advancement, spending evenings driving to and from special courses towards certification, thereby reinforcing the school's credibility as well as their own skills in teaching dyslexic children. In this work, their affection for the students is surpassed only by their affection for the teachings of the Heavenly Doctrines, through which they lead the children out of their disabilities into the bright light of service to the Lord and to the neighbor.

Theresa, Student, 8: I like PNCS a lot. It's fun. I like the kids at PNCS. They are loving and kind. The teachers are so nice they make it easy to learn and I enjoy going to school. Mrs. Gabby is my reading teacher. She is nice and kind. Mrs. Glenn is my math teacher and she does some fun stuff with us. She makes math fun.

Kurt Riedel, Parent of PNCS student and teacher at neighboring parochial school: I am a veteran teacher in a parochial elementary school in Pittsburgh's east end. Although my experience has been primarily with "regular" students, my graduate work was in special education, and so I have

always drawn upon what I studied to enhance and strengthen my teaching. Every student, of course, has “special needs.” In my school, as is the case in most, we endeavor to teach every child, and so the child who learns differently presents us with a particular challenge: *how do I meet his/her educational needs, while teaching up to 30 other students in my class, several others of whom might have learning challenges as well?*

For the sake of brevity, I will skip ahead many years until I adopted a child from Guatemala. Oscar, of course, attended the school in which I teach. I was thrilled to have him there, both because I liked having him close by and keeping tabs on him, but also because my school is known for its strong, high academic standards, its grounding in Christian principles, and its caring teachers.

However, it was when he was only partly through first grade that it became apparent that Oscar was not progressing, academically, at the rate of the other boys and girls. Oscar was (is) a pleasant, strong-willed boy, kind, smart, athletic, sociable, good natured. But beginning then, and increasingly more so as he advanced into higher grades, Oscar struggled in academic areas, and it seemed to all stem from his reading ability. Despite his hard work and good teachers, Oscar just wasn’t “keeping up,” and was getting more and more behind, and also more and more frustrated. After a series of testing, which found Oscar to be reading at a first-grade level in spite of now entering the fifth, Oscar was diagnosed by an educational psychologist as having dyslexia. With my background, of course, this wasn’t a baffling concept to me, but what to do about it was.

After some unsuccessful attempts at having Oscar admitted to schools which dealt more closely with dyslexia and/or other reading difficulties, and becoming a bit panic stricken about keeping my boy in a school where he wasn’t being educated, I happened to Google “dyslexia Pittsburgh” and was then

introduced to the Pittsburgh New Church School, and only blocks from where I teach. Of the many providential aspects of this find, one was that when I immediately called the school, I was told that they were having an open house that very evening. I attended, talked to the staff about my son, and took home the application papers.

Let me say that when I first entered the school, I knew Oscar was “home.” The atmosphere is small, communal, and welcoming. Since Oscar’s time there, a year now, he is a changed student. He is blessed with knowledgeable and caring teachers who, it is apparent to me, go out of their way to manipulate the lessons, the groupings, the material, and the instruction, to meet the needs of each and every child. Oscar is happy and thriving. He remarks often about how PNCS is the best fit for him, and that the teachers understand his dyslexia, and are patient and persistent with him. Equally important to me is that the Lord is also allowed in the school, and that prayer and turning to God are integral parts of his education. I am thankful every day for PNCS, and am sure that my gratitude for it will continue long after Oscar has left the school, and continues to reap the benefits of what he is being given there.

Clare Stefanini, School Secretary and Parent of PNCS student: “I feel like I’m going to die,” my daughter Saffron says tearfully, imploringly, as she waves her arms and jumps up from the bed. My beautiful, perfectly healthy 9-year-old daughter feels impending doom intermittently throughout the day. At first it just started at bedtime, and then it worsened, gradually occurring any time during the day. We were referred by the doctor to take her to a psychologist for therapy. We tried going to a naturopath, essential oils, and baths with mineral Epsom salts. She was losing weight, hiding food and lying about eating it. Her stress was becoming our stress, and her stress, as we gradually came to realize, was stemming from

her challenges with reading. The school district we moved to when she was in 3rd grade quickly deduced that she was behind and she was experiencing challenges. They tested her and assessed her with an Individualized Education Program (IEP), giving her time with a reading specialist and making the spelling list smaller for her to memorize. They made it easier for her to pass grade level, but in fact she was falling behind every day. By 5th grade, she was still continuing to read at a 3rd grade level, and her math achievement was behind also. She was struggling, and the stress of feeling confused and unable to keep up with her classmates had grown, with repercussions overflowing into her daily life.

My sister-in-law, a special education specialist, suggested that she was dyslexic and that she needed more help. The school district would not define her as dyslexic; they called it a specific learning disability. They modified her schedule to help her with the difficulties as best they could. However, it seemed clear that she needed more specific tutoring to overcome her challenges. After my sister-in-law came and gave her a comprehensive neuron-psychological evaluation, we began to look at our options for getting her help. We inquired at Provident Charter School, as it was specifically for children with dyslexia. It would be a significant commute to get her there every day and there was a waiting list for acceptance into the school. I looked for a dyslexia-specialist tutor and found the closest one to be 45 minutes away.

Then I noticed that another school came up when I searched the Pittsburgh area for dyslexia—Pittsburgh New Church School. My husband inquired and went to visit the school. They were close enough to make commuting feasible and would give Saffron the full curriculum assistance that my sister-in-law said Saffron needed. We then attended one of the school's Open House nights, and the kids enjoyed meeting the teachers and doing crafts, while I found comfort in discussing Saffron's issues with people who understood. Hearing about the small class sizes and multi-sensory approach to teaching

children with dyslexia was very enlightening. We felt confident immediately that this school would help Saffron. She enjoyed her visiting day and looked forward to making the transition after the holiday break.

Now, almost a year later she is making great progress not just in her ability to read, but her confidence and motivation to read! The teachers are able to help her in all her subjects to overcome her reading and spelling challenges with a variety of techniques. They have speech to text technology as well as reading pens (tools that will scan text and read it aloud) that the children can use for other subjects such as social studies and science, where students must read to learn. They also find ways for children to use their given talents wherever it's possible, such as with Saffron's natural artistic talent. The teachers find ways for her to learn visually or draw things in classes other than just art class.

My daughter also benefits from learning good values and the lessons in worship and religion class, since we had not previously exposed her to much religion. I think being in an environment where good behavior is expected from all is a much better learning environment. She has been accepted and has found great friends at the school, and this has helped her to relax and be a kid again. Her bedtime stress occurs only occasionally now, if she is over-tired.

My life also changed, as I was laid off from my job as a contractor at Highmark last April. Saffron mentioned that the school's secretary was leaving, so I decided to apply for the job. I knew it would be a challenging position with many "hats" to wear, since I would not only be the school's secretary but also the administrative assistant to the church and pastor. Getting to know the members of the church has been a great experience. Everyone is so friendly and accepting; they have been patient as I learned all the different parts of the job. I have been able to share my talents in baking, creating a special cake for the June 19th Celebration, as well as bringing

my kids to a wonderful summer camping experience the church hosts, called May Camp. Since learning about the New Church, and how they endeavor to help their neighbor, I am not surprised that the Pittsburgh New Church School has found a way to help the Pittsburgh community through their specialized educational offerings. I am grateful to have found such a wonderful school with dedicated teachers that strive to help every child attending soar to their highest potential.

Atticus Stein, Student, 12: I have been here at PNCS for four years now. Over that time, I have seen a lot of changes. Overall the school could improve, but it is better than other schools, especially public schools. The school keeps kids from cursing and talking about any un-mild topics like criminals, gory stuff and other things. My favorite thing that happens each year is Fun Day at the end of the year. The school teaches Christianity. I learned to read in fourth grade because of my late start to school. If you join this school you would come out with a better understanding of life, but the one thing that this school and all other schools share is that school stinks.

Jennifer, Parent: One year ago, our daughter was struggling to read in a school that could not help her. The kindergarten teacher called to say, “We don’t know what to do with her.” For months we requested meetings with her teacher and tutor but were ignored.

By mid-year her confidence had plummeted. She began to make comments such as, “I am not smart; I am the funny girl.” That is what began our journey. First, we had her tested for a learning disability—the diagnosis was dyslexia. Next, we researched the resources she needed to be successful. After months and months of searching for a school to provide the proper teaching method, we found Pittsburgh New Church and School.

It is the only school in the Pittsburgh area to offer a reading curriculum using the Orton-Gillingham method for kids her age. While she has only been attending for a few months, the difference is astounding. The teachers are caring and sincere and are in constant communication with us. The best part, her confidence has grown tremendously, and she is beginning to read up to three letter words. While the road ahead is long, we are grateful to have found a school with teachers who want to make a difference using methods to help children with dyslexia.

David Alden, former Student and graduate of PNCS: My name is David Alden. I attended the Pittsburgh New Church School for ten years, kindergarten through ninth grade. Looking back, I would say they were the happiest years of my life. During that time, the school averaged about 30 students and there were 5 in my class. We had an amazing staff of teachers who taught us in a firm, caring atmosphere. I had a lot of difficulty learning and struggled all the way through school. It turns out I have dyslexia. I was never aware of what dyslexia was, and no one back then was looking into that type of learning disorder. The most powerful evidence for me was my time in “the upper grades,” (7th, 8th and 9th). My teacher, my mentor and role model was Dirk Van Zyverden. He had a unique teaching style, and most of the girls didn’t like him. He was also my supervisor from 7th through 10th grade. He arranged to have me and my best friend work for the church. We worked hard and accomplished a lot of projects that would not have otherwise been done. Most importantly, though, were the life skills I learned in the process like, diligence, thoroughness, and pride in a job well done. Seldom does a day go by that something doesn’t remind me of him.

There is something special about a small school with a small class size where teachers can fine tune the curriculum to the needs of the individual. My thoughts on the Pittsburgh

New Church School focusing on dyslexic education: I feel that the Lord has led the staff to take on this endeavor. It warms my heart to see what has already been accomplished with the students that have been involved in the project. To think of all the children who may be spared the difficulties and shame that so many of us dyslexics have lived through is truly a blessing. We surely will see resurgence in PNCS and many people will be exposed to this wonderful organization that is the Pittsburgh New Church.

Noelle's Story, from her mother's perspective: In the fall of her seventh-grade year Noelle entered the kitchen and out of the blue said, "Mom, I think there is something different about me than the other kids at school." She couldn't articulate what it was, and neither could I, but I knew she was right. Shortly after that she was placed on the waiting list to receive a neuropsych evaluation.

During the following weeks (really months) until she was seen I made mental notes: she was often "sick", she would tell me she did her homework on the bus, she talked about being tired in school, she said her math teacher talked really fast, she mixed up basic words, she had trouble communicating, she had to retake tests often. The odd thing was these were all things I noticed, yet not once did a teacher reach out with these concerns, and her grades were A's and B's so nothing made sense to me. I thought she was a highly anxious child with low self-esteem, and maybe she had some social challenges, but I never considered a learning disability.

So, when the evaluation came back and Noelle was diagnosed with dyscalculia (a learning disability like dyslexia but with numbers), I was surprised. I had no idea what it was. I had no idea where to turn so of course the first thing I did was Google "dyscalculia resources Pittsburgh." That's when I learned about the Pittsburgh New Church School, and Noelle started within two weeks of her diagnosis, as soon as I realized

her school couldn't meet her needs.

It was quick. Some parents prefer to slowly remove the band aid by soaking the wound in water first and section by section remove it. Not me. I prefer to just rip it off. The pain is intense to start but the relief and benefits come quickly. That's what we experienced at PNCS. Noelle had such a difficult start. She was so angry with us for our decision. For her first few weeks (OK, months which felt like years) she didn't speak to anyone at school, barely cracked a smile and constantly complained about her class size and no kids her age. But I could see the relief and benefits of the transition fairly quickly, even if she couldn't.

Noelle now had a group of caring adults who rallied behind her, and even when she pushed them away, they remained constant. They understood that she had been living in a school environment designed for her to hide and that she spent years believing that she was dumb. It took a few weeks (mostly because I was given the silent treatment) for Noelle to tell me about her days at school. I was surprised when she told me about Social Studies and that she discovered (with Ms. Glenn's help) that she learns better when read aloud to. She brought her math homework home and actually completed it! She was even able to explain her work to me. It was amazing to see. She was growing, learning and becoming the little Noelle that I lost years before.

In the final weeks of that school year, Ms. Gabby spent time with Noelle, explaining what her learning disability meant but more importantly explaining the great strengths that she sees in Noelle. Not once had a teacher paused to do this for Noelle and it meant so much to her and me. Noelle was not only being taught how to read and do math but she was being poured into and loved on. She was being seen.

I had no idea that Noelle was silently struggling with a learning disability for 12 years. I'm so grateful she is now in a place that gets her; a safe and loving environment that sees

her strengths, teaches so she can learn and involves her in the classroom. She might be the oldest. There might not be many kids her age and she might not have school sports or activities, but she is understood, she is heard and she is loved; and because of this environment she is learning, engaging in her subjects and is gaining a better understanding of herself. I know this because when an adult who doesn't know her story recently asked Noelle what her favorite class is, she took a few moments to consider the question then simply stated, "All of them."

Noelle's Own Story, Student, 14: I was diagnosed with dyscalculia, and soon found out I had dyslexia, at the end of seventh grade. As soon as we found out my amazing mom did research and soon came along PNCS. Within a couple weeks I was going to this school. I was terrified because I knew no one there. I'm sure I was tough to work with because I was so shy, but the teachers were very supportive. We don't just sit and listen to a teacher till you fall asleep. We actually learn in a fun way. I have grown more confident in myself and my learning. This school is changing my life.

Cyndi Glenn, as parent of the first PNCS/MSI graduate: As a New Church teacher, I could not wait for my son to start school at Pittsburgh New Church School (PNCS). Kindergarten went well. He loved school and I was so happy that he was getting exposure to a loving environment that cherished the Lord. Then came 1st grade, with more intense reading instruction. My son came home from school daily in tears stating that he hated school and that he was stupid. What happened?

He continued to struggle all through 1st, 2nd, and into 3rd grade. It was a constant battle to get him to go to school. Then a PNCS teacher said, "I have learned a new way of teaching

reading. May I try it with your son?" After a few months he began to read. He never loved school but he learned that with hard work and this new approach to teaching he could learn, and that his future was no longer hopeless. He was not stupid. It was just that his brain processed written words differently. It continued to be difficult through 4th, 5th, and 6th grade, but in 7th and 8th grade he began to see that he could learn on his own. He could be independent and successful.

My son is now in high school and works very hard to get good grades. He even made high honor roll this past term, but more important to me is the fact that his teachers keep telling me that he is one of the nicest kids. I chalk that up to New Church education. PNCS teaches about the Lord and how to be a kind person, and that by being so, you can make the world a better place for all of us. Thank you, PNCS, for teaching my son to read and even more importantly, that being kind to the neighbor IS worshipping the Lord.

Our thanks to Doris Delaney and Gabrielle Uber, who requested and collected the statements by individual contributors to this article.

My daughter, Meryl, wrote these poems many years ago. I have kept them in my drawer and periodically find them and reread them, enjoying the perspective of a young person. I've been meaning to send them to TAJ for some time!

"Anniversary Poem" was created when my husband asked Meryl to make a card for me for our anniversary, and this is what she came up with. It was nicely computer printed and had some vines drawn around it to make it look official. So sweet.

Gwenda Cowley

Anniversary Poem

Fifteen years ago today
Our lives were like separate vines.
We started growing closer then;
And now we're both entwined.

Since the moment you said "Yes"
Our vine has been growing strong.
Bearing fruit to cover our knots,
While the Lord prunes all along.

Sometimes the sky gets cloudy,
But still we reach for the light.
When we're thirsty during a drought
We spread roots with all our might.

We've grown so much together;
We'll grow 'till our job here's done.
During all our growing each day
I'm still glad that you're the one.

“First Day of School” was written when Meryl was college-aged, observing her parents taking our youngest daughter (2nd grade) to her first day of her new school in Arizona. It holds special meaning to me since Meryl now watches her own children going off to school and the cycle continues.

Gwenda Cowley Meryl Cowley Machado, 1997 age 14

The First Day of School

*When you marry you are like two children, together.
The child in one
Embracing the child in the other,
and all their memories sing together like old friends.*

Today I watch children grow.
The schoolyard swings with running
and talking and all the excitement
of a summer never to forget.
No matter how nervous, no matter how new,
no matter how much like any other fall —
this one is this one.

We will remember
that first smell of walking in—
the different smiles and fresh new ponytails—
and the old familiar faces that later show up to be friends,
who walk with us to cover their own fears,
somehow knowing the importance of today
as we step off alone into the unsearchable crowd,
small heads bobbing above our brand new backpacks.

And even though shiny cars
line up along the street,
only half-filled with moms as they drive away,

I bet not one of them really believes
She is the driver.
I watch them pulling out—some in business dress,
some in Mommy outfits—
and marvel at what Somebodies they are
to people three feet tall.

Who would've thought that
I would have the luck to make a friend
who'd help me on my way to being my own?
I look again and all I see are people
and people and people—
not kids or grownups or teachers—
just one palm meeting the other of God's great hands.
The same school turns from universe
into a garden growing angels,
then back into a world unto its own.
Inside these mingling realities
we all dance together:
the circle, the torch, the gift,
passing around and around . . .
And then I see two faces
two old friends from long ago—
coming back to cry and wait here 'til the day's end.

Meryl Cowley Machado, August 2002 age 19

The Role of the Arts in Preparing New Church Teachers, Part III (Parts I & II can be found in the April and October 2019 issues of the Theta Alpha Journal.)

A Faculty Development Study for Bryn Athyn College

Angela Rose

Part I addressed how the arts provide an opportunity for cultivating qualitative perception and why that is so essential in the work of an educator. Part II was about how the arts can help develop the aesthetic sensibilities of teachers. When the sensory needs of children are fully appreciated, the work of an early childhood educator can be more fully understood as the work of creating an environment that nourishes the senses. Part III discusses how the arts can enliven a teacher's imagination, a term that is used in two senses of the word—as related to creative expression and as a mode of perception. Special attention is given to a teacher's use of story, the language of the imagination.

Cultivating the Imagination and the Power of Story

Because creative expression is a very fluid modality in which one is constantly testing out new possibilities, ready to be surprised by new forms emerging in the medium, artistic tasks help develop the power of imagination. Greene (2001) said of aesthetic encounters, “. . . careful and active perceiving (of qualities of movement, textures of sound, nuances of color) is what releases imagination, makes possible syntheses and transformations” (p. 55). Indeed, active perceiving is often what prods creative expression: we want to capture a feeling and express it through a gesture in dance, a line of poetry, or a composition of colors. By taking courses in dance, literature, painting, etc. students can enliven their capacity for imagination, a realm not governed by rigid rules.

The importance of a prospective teacher cultivating her power of imagination cannot be over-emphasized, because the language of the imagination is the native tongue of children. As stated in *Secrets of Heaven* 3020:2, "To the natural mind also belongs all the imaginative faculty, which is . . . in the greatest vigor with children and in the first age of adolescence." To reach young students, we must speak their language and translate our instruction into images and story. De Charms emphasized this idea throughout the lectures on the philosophy of New Church education: "We teach children everything by means of a story" (Rose and Glenn, 1993, p. 17). The ability to reach children through image and story can only come about through the teacher experiencing the world artistically and imaginatively herself.

In her book *Childhood: A Study of the Growing Child*, von Heydebrand (1988) described how to bring the world to young children in an imaginative way by telling stories in which, for example, flowers "beloved of the blessed sun . . . open their blossoms . . . and tremble fearfully upon their stems when shaken by rough storms":

But this should never be done sentimentally. It can only be done when the teacher, in his love and reverence for nature and his artistic vision, has brought to life the poet in himself. To be a poet does not mean to dabble in the fantastic and assert unrealities with poetic license. It means bringing to manifestation secret laws of nature which would never come to consciousness but for artistic vision. It means penetrating more deeply into the being of nature and dwelling consciously where children dwell unconsciously (p.98).

It is of the utmost importance to learn about where "children dwell unconsciously" if we teachers are to reach them in our lessons. Swedenborg (2000) had this to say about

the consciousness of children:

By means of communication that is common in the other life, I have been shown what children's concepts are like when they are looking at various objects. It is as though everything were alive; so in the smallest concepts of their thought there is an inherent life. I gathered that children on earth have concepts that are much the same when they are involved in their play, for they do not yet have the kind of reflective thought that grownups have about what is inanimate (*Heaven and Hell* 338).

So, to reach young children, teachers must be able to move freely in an imaginative conception of the world, and artistic work is the proper training ground (and playground!) for this preparation. And as Heydebrand made clear, this imaginative conception of the world is not sentimental or fanciful but rather is attuned to the laws of nature. Odhner spoke in similar terms when discussing the pure intellect—the faculty which gives us the power to think and reason—which Swedenborg referred to in *Rational Psychology* 131-135. Odhner (1969) stated:

. . . in the “pure intellect” there pre-exist the intuitive patterns of all universal truths, such as axiomatic or prime natural verities, i.e., the intuition of the laws of the natural realm Nor can its wisdom ever be expressed openly in human speech, but only represented by similitudes, parables, and symbols (p.59).

Here we can see again why the arts are especially suited for preparing teachers to create lessons permeated with imaginative elements. All of this praise for the value of the arts is not meant to undermine the value of the sciences. Rather, we should recognize the imagination also plays a crucial role in scientific research and in the development of innovative technology. Artistic work does not negate the need for science;

it supports the sciences.¹ However, in the field of education, which is both a *science* and an art, it is plain to see that, as currently practiced, the science of education holds sway. What is measurable on a test dictates policy, curriculum, funding, and methodology, and the vitality of education suffers as a result. In preparing future teachers we must balance mainstream education's emphasis on what is measurable by cultivating the capacity to perceive the immeasurable as well as the ability to work in the realm of image and metaphor.

In his book, *Why the setting sun turns red and other pedagogical stories*, Eugene Schwartz (1997) identified the use of story as central to Waldorf education:

During the last decade, any number of writers have rediscovered a tenet that has been understood in all religions throughout the ages: stories represent the most economical and therefore powerful way of conveying ideas and moral precepts. That is to say, all the imprecations and commandments, all the consequences and punishments, all the harsh words and stern warnings in the world cannot modify behavior with the elegance and efficacy of a beautiful and meaningful story. . . . This belief in the power of the story is a pillar of Waldorf education (p. 9).

Given the clear teaching in *Secrets of Heaven* 6333 that the stories of the Word were given especially for children, one would hope that the belief in the power of stories would also be a pillar of New Church education. Unfortunately, it is not unusual to hear a teacher or minister explain the meaning of a story from the Word to even very young children. De

1 *It is well beyond the scope of this paper, but it should be mentioned that Goethe, the great German poet and scientist of the eighteenth century, developed a mode of scientific observation that went beyond the merely measurable and engaged the faculty of imagination to perceive the living reality of archetype.*

Charms' and Synnestvedt insisted: "Children are only able to visualize things concretely. For that reason the religious teaching of children must be concrete. It is a great mistake to attempt to impart to them abstract spiritual ideas" (Rose and Glenn, 1993, p.20). De Charms went on to say, "We must insinuate spiritual truth rather than teach it openly" (Rose and Glenn, 1993, p.20). This "insinuation" is the art of teaching—imparting knowledge in such a way as to hint at deeper truths contained therein. Indeed, the teacher's own belief in the power of the stories of the Word will communicate to the children their inner, sacred value. In addition to telling Bible stories, New Church teachers who have cultivated their imagination can also teach through therapeutic stories especially created for their students.

Therapeutic Stories

Therapeutic stories have a moral, healing quality. Teachers may tell them to address negative situations that have arisen in the classroom, or teachers may create a therapeutic tale to help a particular child deal with challenging circumstances. Although it is common in Waldorf education for teachers to write their own stories for students, Schwartz (1997) pointed out that,

any story can be used therapeutically, if the teller has a keen sense of the right moment and setting in which to tell it. A . . . teacher can use the rich store of fairy tales and fables, legends and myths . . . and apply them to any number of situations. . . . But now and then a question or quarrel, a class crisis or an individual triumph, may call upon a teacher to return to the sources from which all stories arise and draw upon the springs of her own inspiration (p.10).

Notice that Schwartz recognized the need for a "keen sense of the right moment and setting." This is the capacity that Eisner claimed the arts can cultivate: getting a feel for a good

fit. Indeed, a well-timed story can be a catalyst for growth and change in the life of a child; it can be a tool in the work of transformative education. How does a teacher go about creating a therapeutic story for a student? This question takes us back to the practice of observing and perceiving the child and then opening oneself up to guidance from above. *Divine Providence* 312:3 has this to say about people who wait for something to flow in:

The only people of this kind who actually receive anything are the few who deeply long for it. They occasionally receive a kind of answer through a vivid impression or a subtle voice in their thinking, but rarely through anything obvious.

The passage goes on to say that these people are never told what to believe or what to do, but rather they are led through an enlightening of their understanding: “Everything that flows in from the Lord flows in by an enlightenment of our understanding and by a desire for what is true, actually through the desire into the enlightenment.” Our desire to help a child who may be struggling with loneliness, separation anxiety, jealousy, or any other life issue, is the kind of devotion that invites enlightenment. Working with the usual framework of a story—beginning, conflict, journey, resolution—we weave together images, ones related by analogy to the likes or characteristics of the child we have observed (Perrow, 2008). Kathy Schrock, who taught first and second grade at the Kempton New Church School for more than two decades, has given workshops on the use of therapeutic stories and shared poignant examples of their healing effects.

What E. B. Glenn (1979) said about the use of analogy and the “metaphoric seeing of abstract or spiritual things in the images of natural ones” can perhaps shed light on why these stories can be so helpful:

Analogy. . . as the imaginative intuiting of resemblances and discovery of the inner human world through

corresponding sensory symbols . . . has power to break through the analytic bonds of discursive reason and show [us] things otherwise unrealized about humanity and about ourselves (p. 113).

A teacher who has cultivated her imagination can use analogy and metaphor in creating therapeutic stories, but she can also use them in all the subjects she teaches. Any given subject can be taught in a way that touches on higher truths. In the words of de Charms, “If we were fully convinced that anything on the curriculum did not contribute to a child’s spiritual development, either directly or indirectly, then it is hard to see what place it would have on the curriculum” (Rose and Glenn, 1993, p. 24). He went on to say, “The subject being taught, whatever it may be, is molding the spirit every day according to the way it is taught” (Rose and Glenn, 1993, p. 24). Here again we see the need for teachers to engage in artistic work so they can cultivate the imagination to teach their subject with a touch of metaphor: the cycle of life in nature, the order of mathematics, or the beauty of a poem—all these seemingly secular subjects carry reflections of higher truth. A teacher’s conviction that there are layers of meaning in all subjects intimates belief in a spiritual world, a belief that is a hallmark of a New Church teacher. Her vivid imagination and her belief in the layers of meaning within the natural world will affect how she teaches, and her appreciation and gratitude for the Lord’s Divine presence in all of creation will permeate the way she shares stories with her students.

Conclusion

At Bryn Athyn College we have the chance to take a stand against the materialistic view of education which values only what can be represented by a test score. We can embrace the arts as central to preparing teachers for the work of transformative education. The arts can help cultivate that state of awareness and wonder that comes in

an aesthetic encounter; they can help engender a heightened appreciation for the eternal being of each child in our care. By developing their capacity for careful attention through artistic work, teachers will be better able to observe the children in their care, perceive their inner qualities, prayerfully ask for guidance, receive inspiration, and respond to their needs.

Future teachers who are aware of the developmental needs of childhood will be convinced of the need for natural beauty in a child's environment. Again, the arts can be of service to help develop an aesthetic sense. Teachers who are able to judge what constitutes a developmentally appropriate environment, one that is nourishing for the senses, will be better able to fulfill the purpose of New Church early childhood education: to prepare the environment so that heaven can do its work.

To enhance their capacity for imagination, future teachers should take as many fine arts courses as possible and immerse themselves in literature and mythology. Once teachers have developed an appreciation for the pictorial, imaginative nature of a child's mind, their teaching methods will be permeated with images and story. Special efforts may be made to create therapeutic stories for their students. A background in the arts will stimulate the use of analogy and metaphor in the creation of these stories and in teaching all subjects on the curriculum.

These benefits of a background in the arts—an enhanced capacity for observation and perception, a well-developed aesthetic sense, and a fertile imagination—can be the signature results of a New Church teacher training, a training that prepares teachers for the work of transformative early childhood education. I will close with a quote from Beth Johns (1989) describing the kind of qualities artistic work can engender in a future teacher:

A person who is artistically and perceptively aware is vital and dynamic, someone who cares deeply about life. . . . She's always ready to look and listen, full of energy

and ideas. Her hands are frequently at work on some interesting project. Her eyes sparkle. . . . Others are drawn to her and feel warmed in her presence (p.14).

May our future New Church teachers be sources of vital support and warmth for the children in their care.

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Desk Sitting at the Cathedral

Phyllis Pitcairn

What to Expect: My plan was to help the Church. I'd help by contributing my time desk-sitting at the Cathedral. Lori Klein drove me there for my first glimpse of the job. I expected the Cathedral to be hushed and still, few people around besides ourselves. No activity to speak of during the week. I'd just sit at the desk and be prepared to speak with anyone who came in with questions to be answered.

We parked the car. There were many cars there, also some trucks and pickups, gardeners and electricians, a few people strolling along the paths. We stepped inside. Someone flew by with two ministers' robes, one in each hand, looking altogether like an angel with the robes fluttering and waving behind her. A phone was ringing. A group was starting a tour and someone was speaking with them. Others were in the book room. A volunteer was trying to ask a question about cleaning votive candles. From inside I heard the organist practicing, pausing, re-playing a certain section over and over again. Various people called to one another over the sound of the organ. "Where does this sofa go?" "Are there more of this book at Cairncrest?" "Phone call for Julie!" "I need some information for my daughter's wedding this Sunday. . . ."

I wouldn't call it bedlam, but neither was it hushed nor still. I tried to not block traffic as two people came through carrying a tree-sized potted plant. Someone with a huge ladder was headed the opposite direction. A woman brought freshly-printed brochures to another desk-sitter and asked him to fold them just-so between phone calls, visitors, questions, ladders and small trees going by. Two little girls twirled and skittered about, practicing something.

Providence: Providence led me there, and then continued to lead. An example: A Mormon visitor who worked with

Jonathan Klein had serious doctrinal questions, beginning with why the Lord came to Earth. I found myself smoothly presenting one core doctrine after another, all of them related, providing a sweeping, comprehensive picture of our beliefs for this man, a picture I never knew was inside of me! Providence answered his needs, and also a need of my own.

While at the Boulder church, after desk-sitting a number of times in Bryn Athyn, I overheard a gentleman asking what this church was all about. He had a copy of Heaven and Hell which was available to visitors. I believed the New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrines (NJHD) was a far more helpful book for visitors, and while searching to find one for him, I happened upon Helen Keller's book. In the grand scheme of things, that was no accident. In showing him the book, I learned this man had performed in the play about Helen Keller. He was very excited to learn that she was New Church, and took the book eagerly. After he left, I noticed that NJHD was half-hidden on the bookshelf beside the Helen Keller books.

Listening: At the Assembly, Bronwyn Henry said that an important way to do missionary work is to listen to people. And so when Nancy Henson came through the Cathedral, I listened to her and her husband. They had recently been baptized into Convention and had not known about the General Church until the day they came to see the Cathedral. I spent a long time listening to Mr. Henson's concerns. He was especially interested in New Church education. The Hensons later came to the June 19th events in Bryn Athyn and parts of the Assembly here.

Listening to another visitor made me realize that she and her husband were far more interested in doctrines concerning marriage than they were in the focus of Heaven and Hell upon the other world. And so I was able to give them literature appropriate to their needs.

Helping the Church: I began this work believing I would sacrifice some of my time and energy to serve a good cause. But the truth is, it is I who am served. The hustle and bustle of activity at the Cathedral is exciting and assuring that the uses of the Church are in competent and enthusiastic hands. But more, the joy of speaking with visitors and answering their questions is the most satisfying experience for me. I never realized before now that my entire life has equipped me with the answers that other people are eagerly seeking to learn. Helping at the Cathedral reinforces a lifetime of affection for the Church and faith in its teachings, and makes me aware of the huge gift available to us, the gift of joyfully participating in the Lord's gentle growing of His Church.

August, 2005

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*.

Tours of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral

Gillian Mayer

When I was a child my family went to church every Sunday at the Bryn Athyn Cathedral. At the adult service we had our own seats that we used every week and no one ever sat in them. At 21, I went to South Africa as a teacher, and a few years later married Patrick Mayer there. In the ensuing years, I had four children and only returned to Bryn Athyn when Patrick and I retired forty years later, moving there from Cincinnati. I was very happy to return to the Cathedral again for worship, and over time, developed a desire to find out what made the Cathedral so special. I felt it so strongly that I became a tour guide. To learn about the building, I followed all the guides as they gave tours, studied Bruce Glenn's poetic book on the History of the Cathedral,¹ Vera Glenn's description of the windows,² Mr. Ariel Gunther's book³ and Richard Linqvist's booklet.⁴ In addition, I read the scripted tour written for certified Historic District Guides.

As visitors enter the building, Julia Schmucker is at the front desk to greet them, ever-constant, ever-cheerful, giving everyone a warm welcome. For the guides, Julia honors and finds value in the individual way each one of us gives a tour. The Cathedral had its 100th anniversary in 2019, and stone carvers, wood carvers, metal workers and glass specialists gave talks as part of the celebration of the church's dedication. All who spoke are part of the faculty teaching the Sacred Arts at the Bryn Athyn College. By this time, it was clear in my mind that the Cathedral was built to reflect our New Church beliefs, and I decided to focus on that aspect of it while giving my tours.

1 *Bryn Athyn Cathedral, the Building of a Church* by E. Bruce Glenn

2 *Angel of the Lord*, by Vera Glenn

3 *Opportunity, Challenge and Privilege*

4 *My Story of the Bryn Athyn Cathedral*

When people come for a tour, I greet the visitors and ask where they are from. My next question is “What do you want to know about the Cathedral?” They always say “Everything!” It often happens that the person has driven past the Cathedral for years on Second Street Pike, is now retired, and is interested in finding out about the building. In addition, we receive tourists who are making a day trip from New Jersey or Allentown or even Chicago, just to visit the buildings in the Bryn Athyn Historic District.⁵ People have come from every continent. We have had parents of Bryn Athyn college students (ones who aren’t church members and aren’t familiar with us), descendants of the men who actually built the building, musicians, people from many different religions, but *very rarely anyone from our own community.*

In addition to tours, the Cathedral is also open all day for prayer and reflection. We have many regulars who come to pray and meditate, including one man who had been coming for seventeen years! He never said a word to anyone until one day he said to Julia Schmucker at the front desk, “I’m leaving the country for two years tomorrow. I’m off to Cambodia.” From their short exchange Julia did learn that he works as a doctor for infectious diseases.

An example of a tour I recently gave was when eight adults came from Philadelphia. They were early for the tour, so they walked around and were very anxious for the tour to start to find out all the details. For me, it is very magical to take a group like this into the nave. They become almost speechless from the beauty of the building. A purple hue fills the sanctuary from the sun hitting the stained-glass windows above the altar. In addition to the blue windows, there is a stained-glass window of the Lord, and below the Lord are the twelve apostles. Then there’s a golden altar with the Word (I say Bible) on it, and seven oil lamps around it, representing the Love surrounding the Word.

When turning from the East window (which I’ve just described)

5 *The Bryn Athyn Historic District includes the Bryn Athyn Cathedral, Glencairn, Cairnwood and Cairncrest*

to the West one, it is more challenging to talk about it, and to explain the meaning of the images in the stained glass. When asked, many people say they are familiar with the book of Revelation in the Bible, and most times they know a little about Michael and the great red dragon. But the Woman Clothed With the Sun is a complete mystery to most of the people I have taken on a tour. I then explain about it as best I can, and how it fits into our beliefs.

True to their word, people are fascinated with everything about the Cathedral. Another recent visitor was a geometry professor. I asked him about the twenty-three stars of David that are in the floor as you ascend the main aisle. My professor said that this star is made up of two triangles which stand for the natural and spiritual sides of a person. The hexagon created in the middle from the two triangles intersecting is the most stable shape possible. It appears everywhere in nature. So I added another piece of information to share.⁶

Many times, people who come for tours are stopping at the Cathedral before they go to Glencairn Museum. Since the people need to have an appointment for a tour of Glencairn, we try to keep track of the time.

At the end of the tour I take the people into the small chapel and talk about the window in it that tells the story of what happens when you die. If there are children in the group, I always double check with parents to see if it is alright to talk about the window. It is surprising that most people are willing to hear what I have to say about heaven, and so often the children are totally engrossed in the story of the things that happen when we die.

As a result of all this, I now know why the Cathedral is so beautiful, and feel very grateful I can serve as a guide.

Gillian can be contacted at Gilliansmayer@gmail.com.

⁶ For the stone masons who built the cathedral the hexagons were meant to be Masonic symbols, not Jewish stars.

The Butterfly Path

Tiffany Perry

A golden butterfly appeared in my path,
Hovering, whispering, "Follow me."
My heart inquired, "Where do you lead?"
"To joy," was the reply.
Flitting, flying, dancing up the trail,
Circling my legs, urging me on.
I follow, skipping in the speckled sunlight,
Aware of Nature's song.
The warmth of God's Love embraces me,
The sparkling creek carries me in Providence.
Stones in gentle forms,
Lead onward up the hill.
My yellow-winged messenger flies away,
The emerald trail reveals a small chapel.
I lift my voice in grateful song,
For my spirit, my heart, is home.

True Magic

Tiffany Perry

A soft breeze brings whispers,
Floating down from the sky.
A small voice in the ear,
A light caress on the cheek.
Embraced by the morning star,
Time stands still,
My heart is bathed in Joy.
All the world melts,
My spirit reaches up,
I touch the Creator's hand.
And dream of passing through
Amber doorways,
Climbing staircases,
Less anxious about reaching the top,
Feeling more awe and wonder.
What is around the corner?
Will new truths pierce my ever-curious mind?
Jacob's stairway is eternal,
Pulsing in Divine love.
Nails trip my feet
Testing the spirit and my heart rises to the challenge.
Step by step I climb,
Gently led by the ever-present Light.
My sole desire is to be a lamb
Frolicking in Heaven's fold.
Love transforms my heart,
Wisdom wakens my mind.
One day, may I arise,
Cradled in my Shepherd's arms.

Tiffany Perry is an Office Assistant who pursues writing, painting, photography, and occasionally participates with Community Theater productions. She and her husband, David, currently live in Oreland, Pennsylvania. Tiffany can be contacted at tdperry1977@verizon.net.

The following essay was awarded second place in the Laws of Life Essay Contest for 2019.

Glass Half-Full

Hannah Matsukawa

When I awake in the morning, my thoughts turn to the day awaiting me. Sometimes I feel unbearably tired; sometimes school feels overwhelming and the last thing I want to do is get out of my warm bed. When I feel overpowered by this reluctance, I think of the things that move me, the moments throughout my day that encourage and inspire me. When I stop to consider individual parts of my day, I see that my life is full of delight and motivation. Looking at the specific things that give me joy everyday helps keep me grounded, and gives me a positive glass-half-full perspective to my world.

In my scheduled, structured life at school, I look for little moments that break up the monotony of my day and keep me excited. I think of my social interactions with friends and teachers, all the people that make me smile, and what I can do to help them smile in return. It can be difficult to remember that school should be a stimulus, not a burden. Interesting projects and assignments, subjects such as History and English, coming home with new facts, new ideas, and new perceptions remind me of my desire to learn. Perhaps the day is Wednesday, and perhaps it feels as if it should already be Friday. Wednesday is only halfway through the school week. Then I think to myself, "No, Wednesday is already halfway through the school week." Though I do not have a free period to work on homework, I have choral and get to spend time singing, something I love dearly. While I might not have some of my favorite classes, later in the day we work on tap and hip hop at Dance. I actively choose to look for the glass half-full,

look for the moments that overpower my negative thoughts and fill my day with delight.

I also find this happiness by spending time reading, listening to music, and watching tv with my family. Yet during my days and weeks at school, I find it difficult to carve away this time to relax and recharge. Therefore, I look for the small pockets of time throughout my busy day where I am able to do the things I love. When I get to homeroom early in the morning, I try to read my book. On my drive home from school, or while in the shower, I listen to music I otherwise do not have time to listen to. When I get home, my sister, having finished her homework, is usually sitting on the couch cross-stitching and watching tv. I sit down with her for a couple of minutes, spending what frugal time I have during my weekdays to enjoy her company. While at many times I think to myself that this is not enough, I remember to appreciate these little moments in my life.

When the world feels unbearably large and overwhelming, I try to use a positive perspective to help me feel stable and remind me to be grateful for the many benefits I have. Perhaps reading an article in the news or hearing about a horrible event that occurred will leave my thoughts reeling with hopelessness for humanity and our world. When I feel this way, thoughts of the specific moments of good in my life do not calm me down. In fact, thinking about the goodness in my life in comparison to the world around me makes me feel horribly selfish. Why should I care if my day was tiring when people suffer in ways I cannot even comprehend? Questions, thoughts, comparisons haunt my mind. By broadening my perspective, I tend to lose that sense of stability. I still grapple with this constantly, and know I will continue to grapple with this far into the future. When my negative thoughts spiral out of control, I try to think of the moments that brighten my days. Maybe if I persevere, maybe if I seize the day and make it an incredible one, then my practise of positivity will help me toward improving the world around me instead of

complaining about it.

At times when I feel overpowered by this negativity, the moments where I encounter small smiles broaden my perspective, and doing the things I love to do fills my day with genuine delight and beauty. The seemingly empty glass overflows, and I work towards drinking in every good moment while I still can. As I fall asleep at night, I tend to analyze the past and stress about tomorrow. By striving to bring a positive outlook to my life, I try to shift towards reflecting on the past and anticipating the future. I bring positivity to my actions and encourage others to look for the goodness in their lives. Positivity is a mindset to achieve, and I work every day towards obtaining this perspective and seeing the small beauty in moments that compose the glass half-full.

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!

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

The *TAJ* always has interesting articles, poems, etc., BUT this recent publication by far is the most interesting ever. The four articles concerning adoption were heartfelt and really pertinent in today's world. Glen Henderson's story had me crying from joy that he found his biological parents and that his wise adoptive parents blended Debra into his life. This is a remarkable bio. Likewise *The Empty Backpack* was heartbreaking in the choices that had to be made, the support given to this mother, AND her being included in an open adoption. Tears streamed down my face with her narrative.

I can't ever remember being so moved by articles in the *TAJ* and I've been reading each edition since the 1960's. Congratulations on tackling difficult current issues and presenting these in a loving manner.

Sincerely,
Dana Gruber

Dear Editor,

Thank you (and your team) so much for another excellent publication! After misplacing my copy, I finally found and read cover to cover the October 2019 issue. I really enjoyed the articles on Adoption, appreciating the different perspectives they offered. It is always satisfying to get my Journal and I wanted you to know that this work is appreciated! I love to hear what my sisters (and brothers) in the worldwide church are thinking about these days. I usually begin with the letters to the Editor, and as others have mentioned, read it back to front!

Please keep up the great work.

Gratefully yours,
Gwenda Cowley Toronto, Canada
gwendacowley2@gmail.com

Websites and Blogs of Readers

The following websites and blogs of church women are worth looking into. To have yours included, send your name and internet site in an email hmkennedy98@gmail.com or a Facebook private message to Helen Kennedy (men also.)

Jenn Beiswinger

www.facebook.com/RenJenn - check out my photo albums.

Karla Buick

A directory of artists who create specifically New Church themed art. www.silverbrancharts.com. "No information is available for this page," will come up. That just means there's no informational blurb about it. Click on the site anyway; it has a listing of beautiful artwork done by members of the church.

Chandra Hoffman

www.chandrahoffman.com - This is my website with author blog, although I probably won't be super active there until my next project finds a home.

Helen Kennedy

<http://hmk98.blogspot.com> - An archive of essays, poems, and various forms of writing I have done over the decades.

Lara Muth

I don't have a blog yet, but I can be followed on Twitter:
[@LyraMariner](https://twitter.com/LyraMariner)

Abbey Nash

You can find all of my socials on my website.
www.abbeynash.com

Tiffany Perry

[Poetry Naturepoetrysite.wordpress.com](http://PoetryNaturepoetrysite.wordpress.com)

Hilda Rogers

Both are about my art, of course.

<https://www.dailypaintworks.com/Artists/hilda-rogers-8286> on my *Daily Paintworks* site

<https://hilda5462.wordpress.com> – my blog

Wystan Simmons

Blog <https://embracingchaos.net/>

Theta International Annual Meeting and Luncheon

Friday, Oct. 4, 2019
Heilman Hall, Bryn Athyn Society Building
Janet Krettek, Leader

1. Blessing and luncheon.
2. Performance by the ANCSS dance ensemble.
3. President's Report from Janet Krettek.
 - a. Theta Alpha International provides:
 - i. College scholarships which are given to deserving students of education and religion.
 - ii. A new high school scholarship.
 - c. Finances are going well.
 - d. The Journal is active and comes out biannually.
 - e. More women are needed to serve on the Executive Committee.
4. Treasurer's Report from Melodie Greer.
 - a. TAI is relying on a few large donations. We need smaller donations too.
 - b. Producing the Journal costs less than it used to, due to using a new printer.
 - c. Other things TAI has paid for this year:
 - i. Baptismal gifts for babies.
 - ii. Breakfast celebration honoring senior ANC girls.
 - d. Report and budget approved.
5. Acceptance of minutes from Oct. 2018.
6. Scholarship check accepted by Wendy Closterman on behalf of college students who have been awarded funding.
7. Janet Krettek kicked off a TAI fundraiser for the benefit of the Pittsburgh NC school. In addition to providing New Church education to its students, PNCS is now providing activities designed to serve children with Dyslexia. This requires additional teacher training and specialized technological tools for students to use. There was a motion from the floor that TAI match

- any funds raised up to \$500, giving PNCS \$1000 if we reach our \$500 fundraising goal. The motion passed unanimously.
8. Janet recognized women who have served as presidents of Theta Alpha chapters for ten years or more:
 - a. Verna Brown in South Africa.
 - b. Margaret Heldon in Australia.
 - c. Lauren Rose Kuhl in Atlanta, GA.
 9. Alaine York presented a memorial resolution for those members who have passed on during the previous year. She read Psalm 84:1-4, read the names of those deceased, and then there was a moment of silence.
 10. Nina Dewees presented information about the upcoming General Church Retreat (formerly known as the Assembly), June 18-20, 2020, in Bryn Athyn.
 - a. Organizers hope it will be a time of spiritual renewal.
 - b. There will be presentations, workshops, etc. They are looking for presenters.
 - c. Your attendance will help the event to be a rich experience for everyone.
 11. Keynote speakers were Kathy Cooper Johns, Principal of the Washington New Church School, and Beth Brock, who runs a preschool in Bryn Athyn. Both women shared touching and sometimes humorous stories of what it was like having been adopted by wonderful New Church families. They also told of seeking and finding their birth mothers, and what that has meant to them. Following their presentations, they fielded questions from the floor.

Theta Alpha International Board
April 2020

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Corresponding Secretary - *position open*

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2019 Treasurer's Report

	FY 19 Budget	Jul '18 - Jun 19	FY 20 Budget
Ordinary Income/Expense			
Income			
43400 · Direct Public Support			
43470 · General Fund Contribution	8,000.00	10,070.00	8,000.00
Total 43400 · Direct Public Support	8,000.00	10,070.00	8,000.00
45000 · Investments			
45040 · Bank Interest - Money Market	10.00	8.02	10.00
45050 · Interest/Dividends - NCIF	7,000.00	7,000.00	7,000.00
Total 45000 · Investments	7,010.00	7,008.02	7,010.00
46400 · Other Types of Income			
46420 · Scholarship - TAI	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00
46425 · Scholarship - ANC Fund	10,000.00	10,000.00	10,000.00
46430 · Miscellaneous Revenue	0.00	10.61	0.00
Total 46400 · Other Types of Income	14,200.00	14,210.61	14,200.00
47200 · Program Income			
47230 · Membership Dues	2,200.00	1,979.70	2,200.00
Total 47200 · Program Income	2,200.00	1,979.70	2,200.00
49000 · Special Events Income			
49030 · Luncheon ticket sales	1,200.00	2,610.00	1,600.00
Total 49000 · Special Events Income	1,200.00	2,610.00	1,600.00
Total Income	32,610.00	35,878.33	33,010.00

Expense				
60300 · Awards and Grants				
60310 · Scholarship - TAI	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00	4,200.00
60315 · Scholarship - ANC Fund	10,000.00	10,000.00	10,000.00	10,000.00
60320 · Cash Awards and Grants	1,500.00	900.00	1,200.00	1,200.00
60330 · Noncash Awards and Grants	1,000.00	472.74	800.00	800.00
60300 · Awards and Grants - Other	200.00	0.00	200.00	200.00
Total 60300 · Awards and Grants	16,900.00	15,572.74	16,400.00	16,400.00
65000 · Operations				
65020 · Postage, Mailing Service	50.00	119.85	100.00	100.00
65030 · Printing and Copying	100.00	0.00	100.00	100.00
65040 · Supplies	50.00	0.00	50.00	50.00
65060 · PayPal Fee	50.00	29.61	50.00	50.00
Total 65000 · Operations	250.00	149.46	300.00	300.00
65100 · Other Types of expenses				
65090 · Journal Expense	9,000.00	9,429.52	9,500.00	9,500.00
65120 · Luncheon Expense	1,200.00	1,691.63	1,600.00	1,600.00
65130 · Baptism Project	500.00	234.22	400.00	400.00
65170 · Senior Event	500.00	250.39	400.00	400.00
65100 · Other	0.00	22.49	0.00	0.00
Total 65100 · Other Types of expenses	11,200.00	11,628.25	11,900.00	11,900.00
Total Expense	28,350.00	27,350.45	28,600.00	28,600.00
Net Ordinary Income	4,260.00	8,527.88	4,410.00	4,410.00

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Gathering Leaves

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

love,
joy,
peace,
patience,
kindness,
goodness,
faithfulness,
gentleness,
and self-control

Galatians 5:22-23

28th - 31st
August
2020

Purley Chase Centre

Gathering Leaves, the international retreat for Swedenborgian/New Church women, will take place at the Purley Chase Centre, in Warwickshire, England. The theme for the event is "Fruits of the Spirit." There will be a variety of activities, and time for connecting. Room and board fees for the retreat for everyone are being covered by generous donations, at the Early Bird rate. Details about this generous offer, the event, and about booking in, are on the Purley Chase website. (www.purleychasecentre.org.uk)

Update: As we are sure you are all aware, COVID-19, the illness caused by the Novel Coronavirus, has now been classified as a worldwide pandemic and governments around the world are requesting curbs on social gatherings and advising travel to be restricted. As the collective Gathering Leaves Committee, we have decided to make a final decision and announcement about whether to proceed with Gathering Leaves at the end of May. This may be somewhat optimistic, but we should be better able to see how measures have worked to impact the situation at that time with a fervent hope that we may be able to proceed with our Gathering Leaves event at the end of August as planned.



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