

MEMORIAL SERVICE FOR REV. ERIK SANDSTROM

Rev. Erik Sandstrom was born in 1909, which is how he was able to reach age 98! His inauguration into the priesthood was in 1934, and the ordination into the second degree in 1935.

The rest can be found in the address.



**RESURRECTION ADDRESS:
REV. ERIK SANDSTROM
MARCH 21, 1909—DEC. 11, 2007**

BY THE REV. CHRISTOPHER R. J. SMITH

“Before Abraham was, I am” (John. 8:58). “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). Divine life is the only reality. “I am the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live” (John 11:25). Divine life is the only reality. “I am the vine, you are the branches. Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). Divine life is the only reality. Is this something we believe, really believe, in our heart of hearts? Certainly, the Reverend Erik Sandstrom gave every evidence of believing it, right to the core of his being. And during his last days, it is something he often repeated. Divine life

is the only reality.

It was not a thought that he kept to himself while others might be talking around his bedside. It was something he wanted to express, that he wanted others to hear and consider. In fact, it strikes a note that rang throughout his life. He recalled wanting to be a minister since early childhood. His mother said he had declared this goal when he was just five years old! As a teenager, he was used to giving evening worship for his scout troop. At age twenty-five, he entered the priesthood and remained there for 73 years.

Mr. Sandstrom was born in Stockholm, ninety-eight years ago. He grew up in a congregation that became the first General Church society in Sweden. The two years following high school were marked by his serving nine months of military service, successfully completing a course in banking, and meeting Dr. Alfred Acton. Dr. Acton had come from Bryn Athyn on sabbatical to find and photocopy manuscripts written by Swedenborg. He remembered attending every doctrinal class given by Dr. Acton to the Stockholm society. And when Dr. Acton learned of the young Erik's desire to become a minister, he did all he could to help.

Rev. Sandstrom had started his first pastoral assignment, in Sweden, in 1934. Looking back, Mr. Sandstrom saw the twenty-one 21 years that he served in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark as "marked by a deliberate effort to establish the authority of the Writings, not only as to doctrine but also and even more importantly as to life."

In 1955, Rev. Sandstrom was called to serve the Michael Church, in London. In England, the Sandstrom family "experienced eight years of happy and harmonious life of study and worship in the church." A visitor was always warmly welcomed and made to feel right at home. The manse at 135 Mantilla Road was indeed a happy place to visit.

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London was followed by a call for Rev. Sandstrom to be Professor of Theology and Religion at the Academy of the New Church. At the same time, he served parishioners living in Akron and Cleveland, Ohio and Erie, Pennsylvania. He was responsible for proposing and organizing the 1966 General Assembly in Oberlin, Ohio. He retired at the age of sixty-nine after serving six years as Dean of the Theological School. Moving to South Dakota in 1978, he was resident pastor for that area, as well as visiting pastor to the Denver Circle until he retired a second time eight years later when he and his wife moved back to Bryn Athyn. Even then, he continued to add to his long list of side jobs – giving classes and worship for small groups, acting as a consultant for the Swedenborg Society in London or for the Liturgy Committee in this country. Until quite recently, he was a senior teacher for the Asia Mission, assisting Rev. Yong Jin. And all the while, he felt privileged to be invited to give occasional classes in Cairnwood Village right up to his last days.

Rev. Sandstrom's life gives strong testimony to the fact that he never lost sight of his call to be a priest, with the solemn duty to let the Word be known and followed. He was passionate about many subjects, including the Divinity of the Writings, the nature of the Divine Human, the Additamentum, and the timing of betrothal. When he found himself at odds with others, he would write and speak fearlessly. His diligent study of the Word gave him the ability to expound on any doctrine at the drop of a hat, giving the impression that he had only just been reading the pertinent passages! Just when you thought he had lost his train of thought, that he had meandered too far afield, he showed that he was simply picking up loose ends to zero in on the question at hand! Mr. Sandstrom would point to such a passage as this: "It is to be known that the church is in accordance with its doctrine, and that doctrine is from the Word; nevertheless it is not doctrine

but soundness and purity of doctrine, consequently the understanding of the Word that establishes the church. Neither is it doctrine, but a faith and life in accordance with doctrine...” (*True Christian Religion* 245). When this happens, then we are truly thinking, not about the Writings, but from them.

What now of the future? Some people, the Word says, “are immediately...taken up into heaven” (*Heaven and Hell* 426). It is possible that the Lord will call Mr. Sandstrom to do something akin to the radio broadcasts he made while living in the Black Hills of South Dakota. He may be asked to preach in the world of spirits. The Lord may use his passion to make known why the New Church is the crown of all the churches that have existed on this earth (*True Christian Religion* 787). Mr. Sandstrom pressed us to see that “the holy city New Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven” (Revelation 21:2)—is a city, not a garden. However, the city has streets and streets lead somewhere. Where does the Lord want us to go?

The answer is clear, in one of Mr. Sandstrom’s favorite passages: “A man is born to the end that he may become a charity” (*Charity* 154). “Every man who looks to the Lord and shuns evils as sins becomes a form of charity, provided that he honestly, justly, and faithfully carries out the work of his occupation or employment—from affection and its delight” (*Charity* 158). “The sole use for which a person is born is that he may perform a use to the community he is in” (*Arcana Coelestia* 1103:2).

Now keep in mind that there are several conditions for the New Church to increase from just a few until it covers the earth “as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9). One condition is that it must first grow in the world of spirits (*Apocalypse Explained*

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732). Now, Mr. Sandstrom has barely arrived in the world of spirits. Death is a mere passing from this world to the next, and is sadly a fact even though the Lord said to the repentant thief on the cross, “Today you shall be with Me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Imagine the broad smile that came across the face of the two celestial angels who had been sent to receive and protect him, and imagine their surprise. “Praise the Lord; look at what we have here!”

Then can you see the twinkle in Mr. Sandstrom’s eyes. “I’ve been looking forward to meeting you.” “*You* were expecting *us*?” “Not only you but my wife Bernice also. I know she is close by. There are many friends I am keen to see again. Already my heart is singing with gratitude to our Lord.” We read “After death man is possessed of every sense, and of all the memory, thought, and affection, that he had in the world, leaving nothing behind except his earthly body” (*Heaven and Hell* 461).

Now he is no longer here in the flesh, for he has risen. He has been raised as the Lord promised. “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all to Myself” (John 12:32). So we have gathered to remember him and to see something of the Divine Providence in his life. And just being here is an expression of our gratitude to the Lord for having given Mr. Sandstrom many talents and a long, full life in which he used them so very well. May the Lord bless him with an ever-growing awareness that Divine life is indeed the only reality. And we pray that he and his wife may enter into the joy of our Lord, who says, “I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6). Amen

Message from the Sandstroms

Dear friends,

Our beloved friend and colleague, Erik Sandstrom Sr., entered the spiritual world this afternoon, Tuesday December 11. He passed peacefully from one world into the other. He retained his remarkable clarity of thought and purpose right to the end, discussing with us the essentials of the church, as well as expressing his warmest love.

The family hoped we might communicate to you one or two of his final thoughts on this earth. As he thought of moving to the next life, he said that “the Lord’s life is the only life that is life, and we are life from life.” Then “We will see each other once again, when the invisible world becomes visible to us all.”

His final spoken thoughts on doctrine were that charity is the only thing of the church, but he added quickly that only from the Writings can we now establish that charity. For, he added, charity is not good deeds, but the interior affection that moves you all the time from within, referring to Charity 158. “This is what the New Church is for,” he added. “The Second Advent has the power to create this charity in the human heart.”

When someone asked him what was the most important truth the New Church needed to emphasize, I suspect you all know his answer: “To worship the visible God, the Lord Jesus Christ – to see Him in our understanding, to have a picture of Him in our minds when we worship Him, to feel His presence, His power and His love when we turn to Him.” This last message is his prayer for all of us to continue our service, to allow our Visible Lord to be present, that His New Church may prosper in human minds and hearts. And we can feel sure that this is what he will do into eternity.

With warm affection from the whole Sandstrom Family.
Peter M. Buss Sr.