

Church News

ELDERGARTEN 2008
BY FORREST DRISTY

The eleventh Boynton Beach Eldergarten was held at the Boynton Beach New Church during the period January 20 to 25. Under the capable leadership of director Gale Arnoux, and with the expert assistance of a large number of the society's experienced members, the event followed a long tradition (dating back to 1995) of providing senior members of the church with a stimulating educational experience pertaining to the teachings of the New Church.

The popularity of Eldergarten is evident from the fact that the number of applicants usually exceeds the number of spaces available. That was certainly the case this year, when kindhearted stretching of sensible limits resulted in a total attendance of about 140 eager students, all of whom had attained the prescribed "age of wisdom"—that is, all of whom were at least 60 years old (see *Arcana Coelestia* 10225). These studious participants were from near and far, some from as far away as Colorado and Canada.

The opening event was the registration on Sunday evening, January 20, when each student received a folder containing useful information pertaining to the coming events. Also provided, to everyone's delight, was a tasty "light supper" including an amazing array of delicious desserts. It was a wonderful way by which the participants could meet each other in preparation for the coming classes.

Each class day opened with a brief worship service followed by three lectures, a break for refreshments coming after the first one. After the third lecture we were all given a hearty box lunch, which could be eaten in company with colleagues around one of

the numerous tables that were located inside and outside the church building. It was an arrangement that promoted conversation on all manner of subject matter. Afternoons were set aside as free time.

The lecturers this year were Rev. Peter Buss, Jr., whose topic was *The Lord's Vision and Our Reality: Problems Caused by the Gap*; Brian Henderson, Assistant Professor at Bryn Athyn College, whose topic was *Breaking the Chains: The Role of Swedenborg and the Writings in the Struggle for Freedom and Abolition*; and Rev. Grant Odhner, whose topic was *On the Brink of the Land*. These lecture topics were so different from each other that there was no danger at all of overlapping material or of any repetition whatever. However, they all had one characteristic in common: effective Power Point presentation. I will attempt to give a brief description, however inadequate it may be, of each topic.

Peter's lectures were concerned with the enormous gap that exists between the ideal, heaven-like picture of what life could be if we all lived in accordance with the truths of the Word and the chaotic, disorderly picture of "real" life as many people experience it. Special attention was given to issues pertaining to marriage and the family and to our current culture, which seems to be in opposition to the truths of religion. By use of helpful imagery involving Big T (infinite truth), Middle T (denominational truth) and Little T (personal truth) he laid out a very clear exposition of the necessary steps we can follow in order to close the gap as it exists in our own lives, thereby also narrowing the gap as it exists in society as a whole.

Brian spoke to us about the momentous surge in freedom that occurred during and following the latter half of the eighteenth century. This included spiritual, religious, political, and personal freedom, with special attention to the abolition of the slave trade and the final emancipation of all slaves. These subjects were

viewed as results on the natural plane of the Last Judgment witnessed by Swedenborg in the spiritual world in the year 1757. He discussed interesting but little known information about the role of early Swedenborgians in all of these developments.

With Grant we were carried on a most inspirational overview of the entire book of Deuteronomy. After discussing the general nature of that book and its relationship to the other books of the Old Testament, he described its various parts and its overall role in the story of the Israelites as they were on the brink of entering the Promised Land. Many references were made to the spiritual significance of the historical record with special insight into its correspondence with our own process of regeneration. The listeners were left with a renewed respect and affection for the hidden truths in that venerable book.

The Eldergarten days and evenings were by no means restricted solely to the learning of profound historical and theological material. Opportunities were afforded for a number of less intellectual activities. On Wednesday some 55 adventuresome participants boarded a bus that took them many miles northward and, as it were, several decades backward to a part of the state that was more like the Florida of many years past. This remote location, called Forever Florida, included a working cattle ranch as well as many hundreds of acres of natural rangeland. A swamp buggy tour of the premises and a substantial cattleman's dinner fortified the travelers for the long bus ride back to the reality of Boynton Beach. In the meantime, a group of 23 intrepid golfers, who had opted out of the bus trip in favor of a day on the links, encountered a local downpour that restricted their game to a mere nine holes. Their disappointment was assuaged, however, by an excellent dinner in the club house in company with a large number of non-golfing companions.

Without doubt, the social highlight of the Eldergarten was its final event: the banquet on Friday evening at the Delray Beach

Country Club. It provided ample opportunity for the participants to circulate amongst themselves and converse on every imaginable subject before being treated to an elegantly prepared dinner of fish or chicken. Following the repast they heard Rev. Kurt Ho. Asplundh deliver in humorous poetic form a delightful summary of the events of the week. To conclude the banquet, thereby bringing to a close the events of Eldergarten 2008, we listened to our executive bishop, the Rt. Rev. Thomas Kline, give an inspiring presentation of his views on the purpose and values of the General Church and his ideas regarding its growth and development in the coming years. It seems clear that the best and most exciting years of the Church lie just ahead.

