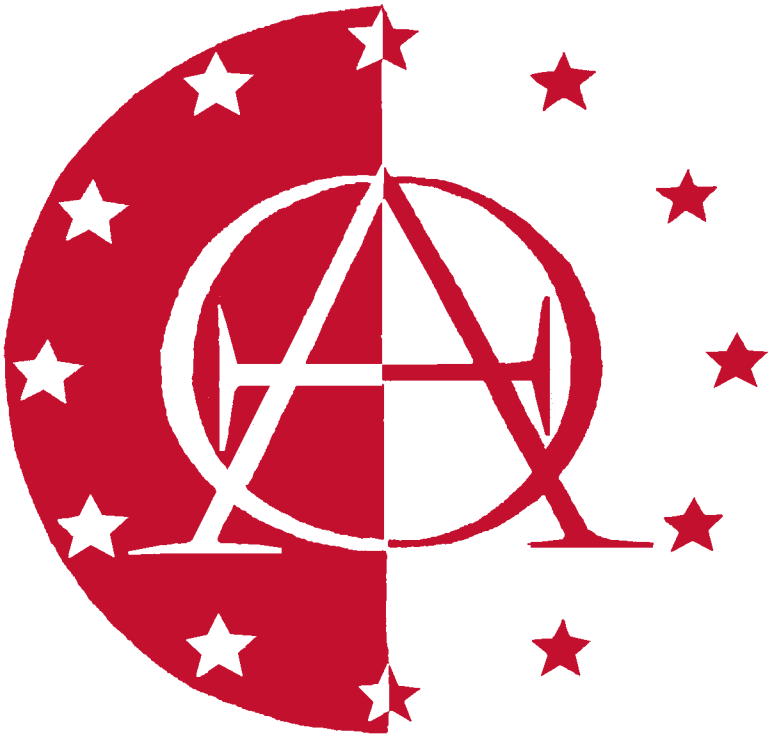


THETA ALPHA JOURNAL



OCTOBER 2011

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THETA ALPHA JOURNAL

Theta Alpha—Daughters of the Academy

From the Greek Θυγατερες Ακαδημιας (Thugateres Akadémias)

An organization of women members of the General Church

Founded 1904

Purpose: Furtherance of New Church Education

Non Nobis Solum (not for ourselves alone)

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EDITOR'S NOTES

You will find a dues notice in this issue. You can send in the form with payment OR pay your dues online. (See instructions on p.26) At the Charter Day annual meeting on October 7, TAI voted to increase the annual fee for membership to \$15. Perhaps you will be pleased to know we are also working to ensure financial sustainability by cutting costs (not just raising the dues)! In fact, printing the dues notice in this issue (instead of sending it out as a separate mailing) is a savings in itself. We have also reduced the number of pages for the current issue and increased our proof-reading efforts so we can avoid paying extra for last minute changes. Of course the annual dues pay for much more than just printing the *Journal*. See the TAI Annual Report for more details about the need to raise the dues.

Theta Alpha's stated purpose is "the furtherance of New Church education." This issue opens with Esther Yardumian-Smyth's commencement address at the Academy of the New Church. Her message acknowledges a new level of independence and responsibility for the graduating seniors. And perhaps it is *after* graduation from high school that New Church education, based on

Revelation addressed to the opening of the rational mind, can really come into its own. Dr. Kristin King’s inspirational address last Charter Day (see the April 2011 issue) reminded us of the value of a college education enriched with New Church scholarship. But what about New Church education *after* the college years? What about New Church education for seekers in middle or old age? The interview with Rev. David Millar about Logopraxis could be described as an exploration of what New Church education for the mature mind might look like. Also in this issue, Kirsten Cronlund writes about resilience, a foundational skill for New Church education at any age.

It was heartening to read in the Atlanta Chapter Report that the group used *TAJ* articles—in particular, Katya Gordon’s article on what it means to be New Church—to stimulate discussion at their meeting. Val Younan’s article, “Meaningful Contacts,” was originally composed as a letter in response to Beryl Simonetti’s piece, “Welcoming A Variety of Perspectives.” It’s nice to know that *reading* *TAJ* articles leads to *writing* more of them. I hope the articles in the current issue will spark new thoughts and enrich on-going conversations about New Church education in all its forms. If they do, please write and share your insights with us.

Angela Rose

Special thanks to Lisa Synnestvedt, Rachel Glenn, Leah Rose, Chara Daum, Noelene Rose, Dale Morris, Sylvia Cooper, and Jodi Carr for their help with this issue.

ANNUAL DUES ARE DUE!

PLEASE SEE THE DUES NOTICE ON p.26

At the TAI annual meeting held on Charter Day earlier this month, the annual dues for membership in Theta Alpha International were raised to \$15. If that amount of money presents a financial hardship for any of our readers, please send in the dues notice with a note to that effect. We don’t want to withhold the *Journal* from anyone who *wants* to receive it! But we also want to make our organization financially sustainable, and we ask for your support in this effort. All members of Theta Alpha International receive the *Journal*. If you wish to remain a member of TAI and stay on the Theta Alpha Journal mailing list, return the dues notice with payment or with a note indicating your desire to continue receiving the *Journal* in spite of being unable to pay the dues. The *Journal* is also available online at www.newchurch.org.

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

*Graduating Class of Twenty-Eleven
Saturday, May 28, 2011*

ESTHER YARDUMIAN-SMYTH

That time of year thou mayest in me behold
When yellow leaves, or none, or few do hang
upon those boughs which shake against the cold;
Bare, ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang;
In me, thou see'st the twilight of such day
As after sunset fadeth in the west
Which, by and by, black night doth take away,
Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
In me, thou see'st the glowing of such fire,
as on the ashes of his youth doth lie
As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
consumed with that which it was nourished by
This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong
To love that well, which thou must leave ere long.

The speaker of this poem is approaching the end of his life, evident in the poignant metaphors of late autumn, sunset, and the ashes of a fire after the last of the embers have burned away. The silent listener whom he addresses is someone close to him, who comes to realize that she is about to lose him, and because of that imminent loss, now loves him all the more. Shakespeare well intended for his Sonnet to raise the awareness of its reader or listener. And it certainly has become more meaningful to me as I breathe in the final few moments of my career here. But in a more relevant way, it offers an illuminating message to the graduating seniors of the class of Twenty-Eleven. Well, for that matter, to everyone here this morning.

Why is it that when something is coming to an end, it becomes more compelling to us; if we are soon to part from each other, we somehow feel more connected?

In the clinching final line of the sonnet, To love that well, which thou must leave ere long, we are all reminded to take nothing and no one for granted...ever!

Let's suppose this is possible: that we wake up tomorrow morning and God is standing over our beds. And we know it's God. And He tells us that this is our last day on the Earth. Likely, we would race around during the day to let

everyone close to us know how much they mean to us and how much we love them. Why don't we do that now?! And every other "now"?

These are not just words on a page, people!

We need to get them inside us, by living them!

This is one of the more striking lessons that Senior boys and girls have learned this year: that Life is Ephemeral. They have been encouraged to value their classmates, their gifts from the Lord, and the fleeting moments that make up their high school experience. They have been exhorted to look at each other in ways that suggest each has something for the other to appreciate, share, exchange, enjoy, respect, and applaud.

Seniors, would you believe that the first day of your last year in high school began 6,528 hours ago! Before you Math whizzes start computing, that equals 272 days! Although those days and hours that you spent sitting in class and chapel, or working on your Senior Projects, Fine Arts and Performing Arts portfolios, or maybe even your Hamlet Logs may have seemed interminable while you were in them, at some point, perhaps even at this moment, you will look back on your time here and wonder how it went so very quickly.

Now, of the aforementioned 6,000-odd hours since school began, you have spent a MERE 125.4 of those hours in Senior English class. That's it! Is it any wonder then, that I want everything that's coming to me?! If I had to condense the content of those 8,848 precious minutes into these next few, what are the most significant lessons that I hope you hold with you in your hearts, minds and souls?

Well, on the first day of English class in Benade 301, there is a quotation written on the chalkboard (Yes! You heard it correctly, I did say CHALKBOARD!)...a quotation borrowed from the brilliant Irish playwright, George Bernard Shaw, which is no doubt familiar to many, in which he forthrightly contends that: ...the true joy in life is being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one; the being a force of nature, instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy.

That first day's class concluded that this means... by sitting on the couch in a querulous drone of "woe is me, what about me, why me..." you will find nothing but misery; on the other hand, in being useful, you will find everything of happiness and fulfillment. But that then begs the questions...What do we have to contribute? How can we know what is our "mighty purpose"?

That the Lord made us the way that He intended for us to be, that He endowed each of us with the talents and abilities that He intended for us to have can neither be understood nor embraced unless we are first taught to be grateful for those very gifts. In other words, we must accept God's love and live our lives in evidence of that acceptance.

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What this further means is that we should not look around ourselves in envy, wishing to be like everyone else- “why didn’t I get...how come she has? Why is he so much better at...?” Or worse, “even what I did get isn’t enough!”

Instead, we must thank the Lord for His benefits by using them well. His gift to us is what we are; our thanks to Him is what we become. One of the most valuable results of education is gaining the ability to make ourselves do the thing that we have to do, when it ought to be done, whether we like it or not. Work because that work is its own reward, and it will build in us both integrity and a true estimation of our abilities.

We arrive at a “just estimate” of ourselves by frequent self-examinations and a continual obedience to what we know to be right and true without concern for what others may think or say or do. Nothing should be done solely to gain approval or acceptance, reward or recognition.

The reason to learn is because you don’t know what you don’t know until you know it... because you don’t know what it is that you might be missing if you don’t learn it! But once you know it, then you may determine whether you like it or not, whether you are good at it or not. We will be better able to discover our purpose if we invest ourselves wholeheartedly into everything that we do. In fact, that is our purpose!

Shaw’s quotation makes the emphatic declaration, “I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live!”

Class of Twenty-Eleven, during your time here at the Academy, you have been exposed to inestimable volumes of ideas and facts in the Sciences, in Math, Religion, Languages, Fine Arts, Performing Arts, Physical Education... all of which has included the teaching of morals and what is and is not upright behavior. You will now Go Forward to further your educations in college, or to establish your credentials in the workplace, or to search for what your talents and abilities are in other arenas of life. Who knows but that you may become CEOs, or professional athletes, or concert pianists, or perhaps even educators! Through these varied pursuits, you will have opportunities to impact your communities, your countries, and your world.

But your profession will not be the measure of your true character. What you do when there is no reward, no remuneration, no accolades will be evidence of that. Your true character will be reflected in your integrity, your wisdom, and your charity. As Bernard Shaw confirms, our lives belong to the whole community, and it is our responsibility to do for it whatever we can!

This room is filled with people who believe in each one of you; those who have devoted their lives to giving you every opportunity to have, identify, and use the Lord’s gifts and to become men and women of character and virtue. To begin, there is a distinguished group of administrators seated on this dais behind me, each of whom has been, in part, responsible for the flourishing of your interests

and talents: Chancellor Kline, Vice-Chancellor Carswell, the Principals of the Girls and Boys schools, Mrs. Odhner and Mr. Irwin, and our Commencement Marshall and Latin Queen, Magistra Cooper. And we go on to the supportive, if anxious Academy underclassmen who are finely be-decked in their full-dress panoply... and attenzione (!)...whose day awaits; AND to your Faithful Family Members and Festive Friends, who are here to cheer you on to even greater heights and to celebrate with you; most importantly to your Loving and Self-Sacrificing Parents, who have been responsible for steering you in the right direction to use all of those God-given talents, and who generously gave much of that care over to the Academy for the length of time that you have been here; and never to be forgotten your Beloved Teachers, whose unflagging devotion to your education will be remembered in various ways throughout your lifetimes...and especially to your senior class advisors: my erstwhile officemate, Mrs. Schadegg and Mr. “Good Evening” DePadua. I guarantee that you have no bigger fans here today than these educators.

And certainly not to overlook the staffs of both Glenn and Stuart Halls for the incalculable numbers of hours that have been invested in each of you in your respective dormitories; and I will speak for both dorms when I offer our thankfulness to all of you parents who have entrusted the Academy and the dorm staffs with the safety and well-being of your sons and daughters...the honor that you have conferred upon us in so doing has never been taken lightly.

And I'd like to give a SHOUT-OUT to my BFF Doctor Phil Feerrar, whose contributions to the Academy in all ways have been unmatched, and whose magnanimity to this class of seniors and to all the other classes before theirs has been both prodigious and profound! We salute your twenty-two years at ANC, Doc Phil!

And now to me...before we part for good and all...

I remember my own parents' wish for me to be a graduate of the Girls School and the Academy's need to truncate that prospect. When I was necessarily expelled in 1968, this podium was the last place I thought I would one day be. The choices I had made took me as far from this honor as can be imagined. But no matter what proverbial gutter I found myself in, no matter the vicissitudes I encountered in that veritable Charybdis, no matter that I repeatedly failed the Lord, He never for a single moment failed me; He was ever-preparing me in His own fashion for a time when I would use all of that “field work” to inform my role as teacher and Housemother in the very place I had eschewed as a teenager. It was only when I was able to have a “just estimate” of myself and to assume responsibility for my character defects and misguided behavior that the Hand of Providence led me right back to the school I had so ignominiously left years before. I consider myself blessed to have been so well received by the Academy, by this faculty, and by the many students whom I have taught in my years here. I am equally fortunate that

I stayed long enough to have known, taught, enjoyed and been part of the class of Twenty-Eleven, and to be, in a symbolic way, graduating with them today. We teach best what we most need to learn!

Back to that first day of Senior English those thousands of hours ago, to Shaw's final words written on the chalkboard: "Life is no brief candle to me! It is rather a splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible, before handing it on to future generations." My moment in time bearing the torch is over; I must now hand it off to all of you departing seniors-that you may make it burn as brightly as possible as you carry it into your own futures and before it becomes your time to pass it on. So despite how ephemeral senior year is, or how fleeting life itself is, we have an Eternity of Time to live it...

Don't miss one single second!

Get everything that's coming to you and give all of it back!

After all, today is...another beautiful day... in Paradise!

After seventeen years of devoting herself to students in the English classroom, the theater, and the dormitory at ANC, Esther is heading to South Carolina (her passion for vocabulary and her disdain for chewing gum still intact) to spend some golden years with her husband Brian.

New Church Challenge Family Grants Fund

New Church Challenge would like to remind people of our Family Grant fund to provide families living in North America needing financial assistance for programs, services or equipment for a person in their care who has a physical or mental disability.

Grants will be based on need and are to be for limited services or programs, not long-term care. Grants are for future or ongoing needs and are not made to reimburse families from past services they have received.

The family is expected to seek out what is available from sources of public or private funding (such as insurance or supported programs) before making a request. Also, families are expected to contribute toward the requested program with a co-payment of at least 10% of the total cost.

To request a grant please write to the Family Grants Committee, Box 277, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009, and ask for a Family Grant Request Form.

INTERVIEW WITH REV. DAVID MILLAR

After his ordination, Rev. David Millar served as the full time Pastor of the Adelaide Society of the New Church In Australia (NCIA) from 2003 to 2008 and is currently the full-time Director of Spiritual Training in the Australian New Church College (ANCC). This interview was given via Skype on July 20, 2011 to Gray Glenn in Kempton, Pa. using questions from Siri Odhner Hurst, Sher Huss and Gray Glenn.

Can you tell us a little about the New Church in Australia and the College?

The New Church in Australia is made up of a number of independent Societies in Australia and New Zealand that have ties to a national body that is called “The New Church In Australia” (NCIA). More loosely, the New Church in Australia is a diverse body of people who either have some sense of affinity to groups that subscribe to the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg or are interested in the Writings themselves.

The Australian New Church College is run by the board of the New Church in Australia and looks to serve the wider body of the Church through spiritual growth initiatives. It provides two programs. The first is a course of study to equip people for ministry. This training leads to a diploma and may or may not include ordination. The second is an approach to the Word called Logopraxis which is a framework for a personal spiritual practice using the Word. Logopraxis empowers people to enter into the inner work of self-examination and repentance and to bring material based on their work into a small group setting where it can be offered as the basis for building a sense of spiritual community.

What does a Director of Spiritual Training do?

The title for the head of the College used to be “Principal,” which worked well and described the emphasis on an academic model of education. But the Council of Ministers felt a growing need for the College to move away from a model primarily focused on putting information into students’ heads towards an emphasis on experiential engagement with Scripture and the Writings. We want students to be aware not just of the information component of learning, but also to be aware of how they are being affected by the material personally. We felt that we needed to find a way whereby those who are looking to the College to be equipped for ministry are able to acquire an understanding of New Church doctrine that is illustratable from personal experience. This led to a complete rewrite of our curriculum from the ground up, which is ongoing.

In my previous life I was an IT manager so I have been able to develop the College's website as well as format the courses developed by our course writers, along with other resources, so that they can be delivered online. I'm also involved in organizing and running three-day seminars which are held periodically in the different states around Australia with the support of societies and various ministers that serve here.

The other area of work is the promotion of Logopraxis, which is a framework for working with the Word personally and in community through online and face-to-face Life Groups. If I was to nail down what it is I do aside from the nuts and bolts kind of stuff I've just listed, it would be simply to support those who are committed to engaging with the Word as the basis for a spiritual practice. This involves helping people to navigate their way through the inner processes and states that arise when they are consciously looking to the Word to examine the quality of their inner life.

What first hooked you into the Writings?

The search that led me to the Writings was largely governed by an interest in the allegorical interpretation of Scripture. So, when I came across the Writings in a university library in New Zealand late in the 1980s or early 1990, I was actually doing a search looking for anything that dealt with what I now know is the internal meaning of Holy Scripture ---but then it was a sense of its allegorical nature ---and its application to the inner life. I'd come to a point in my search where I was convinced that God was real and God was One. The other thing that I had settled on was that Scripture is Divine Revelation: this was not a question for me. It was a fact. But along with that came a conviction that Scripture had an internal meaning, and it was psychological in nature. Having had a few years in a fundamentalist church where I arrived at my own conclusions that didn't fit with their doctrine, I realized that finding out where Jesus Christ fit into the picture was crucial to moving on, particularly with my love for Scripture.

I'd found various bits and pieces and read fairly widely within the Christian tradition on allegorical meaning, so when I came across the Writings it was a case of just reading and finding that my deepest questions were being answered—particularly the way it was put in the opening of *Heaven and Hell*, where we have a clear statement that the Lord Jesus Christ is God. Something just clicked then. So that settled that. I also remember the experience of having my heart being ready to leap out of my chest as it began to dawn on me that what I was reading was actually the Lord's Second Advent. On every page, particularly of the *Arcana*, I found what I regarded as psycho-spiritual applications of Scripture to life. I think I was kind of hooked before I found the Writings. Having found them, it was, well, pressingly obvious that this was where my search had been leading.

Now that you have been working with them for over two decades, what teachings in the doctrines for the New Church do you find most revolutionary?

For me, at the center of my sense of things is the idea that the Lord is the Word. That's absolutely central. By that I mean that the Lord *really is the Word*, right down to the letter. That's where He is. That's how He is present with us. That's what makes the Word what it is. That's what makes the Word active and living and able to effect profound changes in people's lives.

Moving on a bit beyond that, I think that we are put into an internal revolution of how we think of ourselves by the whole presentation of teachings about the proprium and about the Lord. We are confronted on every page with insights and truths that are revealing these two poles of human experience to us all the time, but we are reluctant to accept what truths teach. There is something in us that resists.

Seeing that the Lord is the Word, we move into a relationship to Divine Truth that really puts us in front of our self and also in front of the means by which we can be saved—from ourselves, I suppose.

What is “Logopraxis” and what prompted its development?

Logopraxis is a few things. In its most obvious form it's a structure or method for working with the Word. On another level Logopraxis is a framework for building community based around individual people's practice and willingness to share with others what they discover in the practice of the Word. The term itself is coined from the Greek words “Logos” and “praxis”: “Word” and “practice of”. The term means to practice the Word.

This goes a long way back for me. Logopraxis is really a reflection of the development of my own search. From very early on, prior to having contact with anything from the New Church, I was searching for a way of making the Lord visible in our midst. Connected with that is the idea that this is ideally done through community, through people living and sharing in the Word together. The struggle has been to find a way of facilitating that, providing a structure that enables group-life centered on the Word and on personal experience of it. Over time I moved through various forms of material. In the end it came down to looking at what I did as a practice personally and then framing that.

What really crystallized it as a structure was an initiative within the NCIA. The Counsel of Ministers here did a review of things—in particular, a review of where things need to head in the future. There were some things that we identified as crucial: people had to be engaged with Scripture and the Writings independently and have the confidence to be able to do that. The decline in the number of our ministers has prompted a search for new ways to move forward, for the church

to grow and develop. Logopraxis as a basis for small group life came out of that, and not independent of doctrine, either. One of the main foundations for the development of Logopraxis and for the principles that underlie it is found in *Heaven and Hell*, from number 491 onward. These numbers deal with the awakening of people from death into the spiritual world. Logopraxis sort of embodies the idea that the principles that are exposed here about the afterlife are principles that can be applied *now*: they have to do with awakening from spiritual death into spiritual life. There is a map within those numbers. We find from the experiences of those who are in Logopraxis work that this map can serve as a guide for people as they engage with the Word as the basis for self examination and repentance.

Could you give us a brief description of the Logopraxis framework?

Participants work in a two week rhythm. On day one, they meditatively read through a given section of Text, usually between 10 and 20 pages, paying attention to what “reaches out” to them from the Text. After meditating with those portions for a couple of days, each person devises a task that will bring one part of the Text into an active relationship to his or her everyday thinking and life. The rest of the two week session is spent observing. Afterwards, each one offers what they have learned to their Life Group.

The Logopraxis framework is just a way to engage with the Word. Once a person experiences that engagement, the Word Itself begins Its Own process within the person.

Why is it important for you to share Logopraxis and have it grow beyond your own sphere of influence?

Good question. I look at Logopraxis as the basis for a living, organic form of personal and collective spiritual life. I am not aiming for it to be an institution. I like the idea of its organic nature and a willingness to allow it to be what it has to be—even to the point where it may in some cases become a very different thing. If Logopraxis is to support the expression of people’s spiritual life in a social context, in a communal context, there has to be a level of freedom for its evolution and development. The only safeguard for the development of vibrant spiritual community is the willingness of the individuals to be engaged with the Word for their own personal work. That’s the only safeguard and it’s something you can’t “legislate”. The principle is, I suppose, heaven’s perfection is found in diversity. So it is important that Logopraxis as an approach really does remain just that: a framework. Those who take it on as a framework need to be able to find their unique expression as a community.

As a framework Logopraxis enables people to both discover the doctrine for their own life *and* how they can *use* doctrine to live their life. You can't clone that. As people really explore doctrine for themselves they will then contribute in various ways to the Logopraxis community as a whole. That's the freedom people have. Logopraxis is not like a straightjacket people need to wear; rather, if it's used as a framework for group life, there is scope for it to develop and change in ways that better suit the needs and situation of those who are using it, and that's fine.

Why study “Logopraxis”? What does it do for us compared to just reading the Heavenly Doctrines?

(Rev. Millar qualifies the question: Logopraxis is the *method* of study as opposed to something you study itself.)

The Logopraxis approach or method of study enables a person to be much more consciously engaged in his or her reading of the Word. We know that reading the Word is to be encouraged. There are benefits to doing that. But Logopraxis is very much more than reading the Word, because it provides a basis for reading it consciously, with a level of attention and sensitivity that we don't normally bring to it. Most people come to the Scriptures and the Writings in a way in which the Word is left passive and the reader is active. In that case, we experience that “we are studying the Word”. What Logopraxis does is turn that on its head, and we discover that it is actually the Word that is studying us. That is the discovery that people make as they engage with the Word using Logopraxis. They discover that the Word is capable of taking them into a study of themselves and leading and guiding them in that process. The Word Itself takes them through the processes that are involved in their reformation and regeneration.

Logopraxis takes as a starting principle that *the Word is true*. There's no question about the Word being Divine Truth. That's an accepted principle from which we work. Knowing *how* the Word is true, that's another question. We come across things in the Writings that we may think we understand, but when we really take stock and try to provide an illustration from our life that illustrates it in a real way, we find we struggle. That's a sign that what we are reading is knowledge not accompanied with understanding. Logopraxis enables people to bring their knowledge of a principle into life; to practice that principle and see it illustrated in their life. When *that* happens, then a person has understanding. It's much easier to share truths from a real understanding of them. With understanding you can accommodate the truth to a listener in a meaningful and accessible way.

Is Logopraxis for everyone?

I'd like it to be, but the reality is that it's not. As a way of working with the Word in life it's clearly not for everybody. We are seeing people touch on

Logopraxis, experience it, and make the decision it's not for them. That's fine. Logopraxis is something that will appeal to those who are willing to do what it asks of them. That's the other thing about it. Logopraxis is the basis for group life. It's not an exclusive thing—in fact I would say that it's incredibly inclusive, but it is also self-filtering. If you're not engaging with the Word personally then you'll probably find it a bit difficult to engage in a Logopraxis Life Group and share your experience because you won't really have anything to share.

The short answer is no. It's not for everybody. But in terms of spiritual life, you can't get away from the need to practice self-examination and repentance as it applies to one's inner mental life in some form—and Logopraxis just offers a means for making that more real for people on a daily basis.

Are there any dangers?

Perhaps I'll just say it's not easy in the sense that you are going to be confronted with things within yourself that perhaps have been lying dormant for a very long time. There are 'dangers' in that sense: we are going to undergo a level of unpleasantness as we work through whatever needs working through. But there is no danger if a person is sincerely working with the Word. The Word is well able to guide and direct anyone. And having a community of people who are involved in this kind of work is a major support to enable people to hang in there when the going does get tough.

So the danger in Logopraxis is really to the *proprium* or to the self-understanding or self image we carry of who we think we are. It's a threat to that: a major threat. And that leads to a lot of conflict in people as light gets shone in there. That's the only danger I can see in my years of being involved with Logopraxis and working with people who are committed to it.

How do people learn more?

We are accessible on the web at <http://anccollege.org>. I'm also happy for people to contact me by phone (61 8 8277 1891) or to email me at dwmilla@gmail.com. If you know someone who's already involved with Logopraxis work, then just have a conversation with them and get a sense of what it's really about.

A native of New Zealand, Rev. Millar now lives in Adelaide, South Australia with his wife, Mandy, their son Steven, and Rosemary Greenwood, Mandy's mother. David enjoys sharing a day together with Mandy: going to the farmers' market, catching their son's rugby game, and having dinner at a café.

DAWN CHORUS

CHANDRA HOFFMAN



**Cheryl and Hayden at sunrise,
Grand Cayman 2002**

My mother-in-law died in the early hours of August first, while the East Coast birds sang their dawn chorus. It was her favorite time of day, and as we drank tea and watched the sunrise, my husband and I took a teaspoon of comfort in that, that her spirit might be soaring and dipping with the swallows, calling out with the wrens and the finches. Cheryl and I had planned to write a children's opera based on this birdsong phenomenon. She brought her flute whenever she visited, because she had to practice for her concert schedule, but also so we might get serious about this opera project. She would do the music, but, "You're the writer," she told me.

She always rose with the sun.

When she was at our house, it was to make recordings of the birds and to drink chicory coffee and share memories with her grandchildren. When we took our annual winter vacation to the Cayman Islands, she was the first up, reading an entire novel on the screen porch, waiting for me to lumber out of bed and join her on her next morning ritual, a walk of the entire Seven Mile Beach, collecting sea glass. At her home in Buffalo, she spent her winter-dark morning hours in the bathtub on the phone, talking fashion and thrift and art with her sister, an even earlier bird on the West Coast.

My mother-in-law and I were well-matched from the moment her son introduced us—high energy, creatively hungry, lovers of vegetables and words and walking. At that point, she had already endured breast cancer for two years, diagnosed at an untimely thirty-seven. Her cancer was a third person in our relationship, someone hunkered down in the backseat behind us, lurking predatorily. We were good at addressing it when it reared up, but even better at ignoring it.

It was a happy day for us all when five years after meeting, her son and I married, when I started affectionately calling her Cherry, when she gave me a heart-shaped antique silver necklace because I was "the daughter of her heart."

When we were together, we took occasional breaks from Scrabble and walking marathons. If we weren't cruising thrift or shoe stores, we were crunching rice crackers and carrot sticks, composing children's stories and contest winning poetry, scribbling them on index cards we kept tucked in her dictionary. If she was in Buffalo, where she was the director of UB's flute program or preparing for concert performances from Southern France to Carnegie Hall, we spoke on the phone daily. She talked with my husband on his hour-long commute to work, to me as I washed dishes and folded laundry, and then, the capper, she spent several hours telling knock-knock jokes and stories with our young sons in the evening.

When she visited, she welcomed my boys' early morning companionship—tidepooling on the beach washed in sunrise, stories in the kitchen, breakfast picnics on the porch with the birds serenading, while my husband and I slept in and counted our blessings.

If it truly takes a village to raise a child, she was our village's sage. The majority of our beach walk and phone conversations became about 'our boys', her son and grandsons, analyzing their behaviors and theories. She sent me beautiful journals, ads for writing contests and articles on motherhood. I have one from her on the concept of 'thumos'—male energy in young boys that I have worn thin, copied for all my friends with sons.

Once, faced with a crossroads in our lives, the house we rented going on the market, deep holes in our resumés that reflected Jonathan's and my early wanderlust, I asked Cherry's advice.

"You're a writer," she told me again, and I laughed. My oldest son was a full time job, born with challenges that required several hours of specialists a week, my constant devotion.

"No, no," I told her, "I need to do something that actually makes money."

She insisted I send out the stories we'd been playing with, things I'd dashed off and sent for her keen editing, her economic and whimsical way with words.

"Where would I find time?"

"Get up in the early morning, put on the kettle, put in a load of laundry, and write."

Instead, I started an event planning company, despite her constant affirmation that I was a writer, despite the fact that her very existence proved a woman could be both a successful mother and artist.

Her cancer moved, breast to lymph to lung to brain. At her encouragement, I applied to a school in California for my masters in creative writing. The same day I was accepted, I learned I was pregnant, this time with a daughter.

"How can I do this?" I sobbed to her, meaning get my masters degree across the country with three kids under the age of five; meaning, be a mother to a little girl?

"Early mornings," she told me. "Get up before they do."

I resisted. She had told me for years that she had no sympathy for her college students who came in whining that they didn't get enough sleep.

"Get over yourself!" This was one of her favorite sayings, delivered with emphatic affection. "I haven't slept through the night since I had Jonathan at nineteen!"

"What about the other, being a mother to a little girl?" I whispered, because my relationship with my own mother was often turbulent.

"Think of our relationship as a model," she told me frankly. "Love her like I love you."

I finished graduate school, with a novel manuscript as my thesis. I gave birth to a daughter I named Piper, which means 'flute player', because, though we all denied it, we were losing our Cherry. In June, she went in for a treatment that injected chemotherapy directly into her tumor-riddled brain and suffered a massive seizure, the beginning of the end.

I finished my novel that summer as she died slowly, still resisting rising in the early mornings. I watched my boys, five and two years old, struggle to comprehend their loss, too early an introduction to death. I ached for my husband as he lost the woman who was as much his best friend as she was mine. I rained tears down on the daughter at my breast; she would never know her namesake.

In the hospital, Cherry had promised me she would haunt us afterwards, and she did. That summer, we were constantly visited by dragonflies, alighting on the shoulder of my oldest son while he canoed on our pond, sitting on my knee at the beach and buzzing about us as we planted three cherry trees in her memorial garden. On the morning after my novel sold, I stepped outside at dawn to see not one but dozens of dragonflies swirling overhead.

How did I finish that first novel and start my second?

I set my alarm for sometime between 4 and 5 am. It's not pretty. In the winter, it is worse. My house is cold and dark and my bed is warm and full of people I adore. But I tug on the knee-high, baby blue, fluffy momma, furry boots Cherry bought us both on her last Christmas, and I put on the kettle, put in a load of laundry, and I get started.

Spring and summer, it's better. I sleep with the windows open so I can hear the birds, often waking ahead of the alarm to turn it off, slipping out of the bed that by morning is a tangle of children's limbs and loveys and cats and snoring. I sit down with my tea, and my computer, serenaded by the hum of the washer and the beautiful chorus of the birds that my mother-in-law loved.

And I write, because she taught me, you can be a mother and an artist, but you have to get over yourself, and you have to rise with the dawn chorus.

Chandra (Kistner) Hoffman is a graduate of the ANC girls school ('92), Cornell University ('96) and received her Masters in Fine Arts from Antioch University in 2007. She lived in eleven

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international cities before returning to her hometown of Bryn Athyn with her husband and three young children where she is at work on her next book. To learn more about Chandra or her debut novel, *Chosen* (Harper, 2010) visit www.chandrahoffman.com.

OCTOBER

By now, it's mostly just the crickets and the geese,
But a late departing thrush
Spoke up this morning too.
It was startling to hear against the drying out,
Sounding not at all like death
As the leaves were letting go.
Perhaps there's no denying grief,
But in that other woods
The sap is always rising.

Carla Glebe Kerr
2008

RESILIENCE: THE FOUNDATIONAL SKILL

KIRSTEN CRONLUND

Eight years ago I was hit with the most devastating adversity of my life - my marriage of 15 years suddenly fell apart. At first I cried a lot, turned to friends for support, and tried to avoid staring into the blank future that opened up in front of me. Slowly, though, I began to find ways of coping that made me feel better and, bit by bit, I incorporated them into my life. I don't know how I found them, but it was as if I was handed one stepping stone after another. I latched onto them eagerly and repeated them over and over again. These stepping stones led me from depression and defeat to hope and joy. They also gave me the strength to branch out courageously in directions I would never have foreseen for myself. Through the practice of these new skills, I not only bounced back from an experience that could have flattened me, but I developed more confidence and purpose than I had felt in a long time.

The path that these stepping stones outlined for me began with my return to the Bryn Athyn Church School where I had taught 6th grade for five years before having children. I spent one year as a tutor there, and then taught 3rd grade for three years. It was during my last year in 3rd grade that I learned of the Masters in Applied Positive Psychology (MAPP) Program at the University of Pennsylvania, and the instant I discovered it, I knew I had to be a part of it. I will never regret my decision to enroll, but it was probably the craziest thing I've ever done. I discovered that I would not be permitted by BACS to take the program at the same time that I taught, so, with many tears and hugs to my students and colleagues, I quit my job with a strong vision for the incorporation of Positive Psychology into education and *no idea* how I was going to support myself and my kids. It was during MAPP that I learned officially of the skills of resilience, and each lesson explained why the things I practiced during my divorce set me on a hopeful path. Now I advocate for the teaching of these skills wherever possible because my own personal experience convinced me of their incredible power, and I have also seen the data that show they make a difference for many people who practice them. I now use these skills on a regular basis in the raising of my three boys, in my role as Director of the Bryn Athyn Church School, and in my friendships.

Resilience is the ability to bounce back after challenges, to remain hopeful and open to possibilities, and to grow and develop in new ways. This bouncing back doesn't necessarily happen immediately after the challenging event, and it certainly doesn't have to look cheerleader-ish. More likely, it involves an initial setback, followed by the practice of a specific set of skills (outlined below), and then a recommitment to the original goal and another attempt at it. Resilience is

arguably the most important skill we should be practicing ourselves as educators and parents and should be teaching to our youth.

Let's look at two fictitious 7th grade girls, Daisy and Rose, who both bomb a math test; they both score a 58%. There are many similarities between these two girls at the outset, but looking at their school performance over the next few months highlights their differences. Daisy, although initially crestfallen, recovers and scores an 85% on the next math test. The rest of her grades and demeanor continue on their usual path – doing well academically and participating actively in class discussions. Rose, on the other hand, also shows initial dismay over her 58% on her math test, but never recovers. Not only do her math scores continue to decline, but her performance in other subject areas also goes down. She becomes withdrawn and nearly silent during class, and she even begins to make excuses when her friends invite her to social gatherings. These are extreme examples of resilience and non-resilience, but these behaviors really do happen in our young people and ourselves, *depending on how we respond to the adversities in our lives*. The difference in outcomes for Daisy and Rose has to do with what goes on internally for each girl – how they speak to themselves internally, how they frame the 58%, where they place their focus, and whether or not they are able to make changes in areas where they have control while letting go of areas where they have no control.

The most important place to start in teaching the skills of resilience to our young people is to practice them ourselves. Children and young people internalize the outlook the adults in their lives exhibit. Our children and students watch carefully as we make mistakes, and they listen consciously and subconsciously to the words that come out of our mouths and to the messages of our body language and tone of voice. If we lose our favorite pair of expensive sunglasses and our response is, “I’m such an idiot! I can never keep track of my things,” they’ll learn that when mistakes happen those mistakes are an assessment of our capabilities, and they will transfer that message to themselves. If our response is to instead say, “What an inconvenience. Oh, well. I guess I’ll drive to work without them and look for them when I get home. When I find them I’ll make sure I put them where they belong so I don’t lose them again,” the message they internalize is that setbacks occur, but these setbacks do not define us, and they don’t have to color our day. They learn to talk to themselves in that same way, allowing for flexibility when they make mistakes.

It is perhaps even more important how we speak to the young people in our lives about *their* setbacks. If one of our students forgets his homework for the third day in a row, we may be tempted to say something like, “Oh, Marvin! You’re so forgetful! You would forget your head if it wasn’t screwed on.” Internally we may be saying even more extreme words, such as, “I don’t believe Marvin even did his homework. He’s lying and trying to get out of the consequences... again!”

Even though we don't state these words out loud the message is conveyed subtly through tone of voice and body language. Marvin internalizes the message that he is not capable of completing and bringing in his homework. This may lead to a phenomenon called the Pygmalion Effect which shows that the beliefs that educators, parents, and mentors of young people hold about the capabilities of young people have a profound impact. Marvin will begin to live out the beliefs the teacher has about him.

The Pygmalion Effect was identified through a now famous experiment done in the 1960's where teachers were told of a "new scientific finding" that students' abilities were indicated by their eye color (blue-eyed students having a lower IQ than brown-eyed students). Although the teachers never said anything to the students about this "finding", their students' performance quickly began to reflect what the teachers now secretly believed. There are many theories as to how these messages were conveyed to students, but the point I want to focus on here is that our deeply-held beliefs about our students' and children's abilities to bounce back from life's challenges have a powerful impact on their own beliefs about themselves, and thus on their behaviors.

Marvin would have a much different outcome if his teacher *believed* that he could overcome his struggle with homework completion and said: "Marvin, I notice this is the third day in a row you have forgotten your homework. I'm concerned that you're falling into some bad habits, and I know you're capable of more conscientious behavior. I've seen you walking your sister home from school every day so I know you can remember the things that are important. If you forget your homework again tomorrow I'm going to keep you after school to complete it, but I bet you can remember to bring it tomorrow. What do you think?" A dialogue with Marvin could uncover ways in which he is struggling to remember his homework, and his teacher could assist him in creating a plan for success, perhaps involving Marvin's parents as well. The belief that Marvin's teacher holds in this scenario is that Marvin can be successful and recover from setback, and this belief sets Marvin up for success with his homework. More importantly, though, Marvin internalizes the belief that making mistakes is not shameful, but instead is an opportunity for growth – and he believes that his teacher believes in his ability to be successful.

This message of flexibility and recovery are key components to all kinds of growth – physical, academic, emotional, and spiritual. If we model and teach the children in our care that we all make mistakes and that we all can learn from those mistakes, then they are much more likely to take healthy risks, to approach learning with a spirit of inquisitiveness, to laugh at setbacks, and to pick themselves up when they fall down. The Lord wants this for us, which is why He doesn't allow us to see all our evil tendencies all at once, and He offers messages of hope and growth throughout His Word. His words in John 8 to the woman who was caught

committing adultery were not, “That’s terrible! You harlot! You’ll never be able to have a healthy relationship again.” Instead he simply said, “I do not condemn you. Go and sin no more.” This is a message of resilience and hope.

It’s easy to see that we play a critical role in the development of resilience in young people – both in modeling resilient behavior ourselves and also in cultivating the practice of resilience in students and children. But *how* can we do that? I have spent a lot of time as a student and mentee of a researcher and trainer named Dr. Karen Reivich, who has devoted much of her professional career to the topic of resilience. Many of the ideas presented in this article stem directly from her work, although I have added a few ideas that I have adopted from other sources. The incredibly good news is that resilience is not something we are either born with or not; we can all practice specific skills that will lead to greater resilience, flexibility, and success in our lives. It takes effort, but the skills themselves are teachable, from as early an age as 11 or 12, and the benefits are tremendous.

The Skills of Resilience

There are four categories of resilience skills: 1) Thinking; 2) Worldview; 3) Mind-Body-Spirit Connection; and 4) Surrender. The first category is the most complex, and in the eight-day resilience trainings I have been a part of, this skill takes five of the eight days. I will outline the basics for this article, but there are subtleties and nuances that I won’t be able to get into here. Feel free to contact me (my email is in my bio) if you would like more details.

Thinking

We are taught in the Writings that we cannot do the work of changing our loves. That is something only the Lord can do for us, but we must do our part in repentance and reformation by attending to our behavior and our thoughts. Sometimes the best way to change our thinking is to compel ourselves to change our behavior, but another gateway into growth and development is to examine our thinking, to shift our patterns of thought, and to allow that to change our emotions and behavior. In psychology this is called Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), developed by Aaron Beck and Albert Ellis. To explain the profound impact of altering our thinking after adversity, let’s go back to Daisy and Rose. After receiving a 58% on her math test, if Daisy had been paying close attention to her thinking, she would have noticed herself internally saying, “Ouch! I can’t believe I got a 58% on this test. That doesn’t feel good. I guess I’ll have to talk to the teacher during recess to find out what I missed, and I’ll need to study harder before the next test.” Thoughts such as these are realistic; they empower Daisy to reach out to get the help she needs, and they identify a path to success. On the other hand, if

we were to identify Rose's thinking after receiving the 58% on the test, we would more likely hear this: "I stink at math. I knew it! I used to be able to fool everyone into thinking I could do math, but finally the truth is coming out." It's no wonder Rose gives up after this self-barrage of blanket statements about her inability to do math. And it's also not a surprise that her sense of self worth is impacted by this new "realization" about her limitations.

We can help adolescents, teenagers, and young adults to identify their thoughts, to examine them to see if they are really true, and to shift their thinking to more productive ways of looking at an adversity. This is sometimes called reframing, and after much practice it can become an easier response. But it takes a lot of practice. We humans tend to believe the first thoughts that pop into our heads, without thinking twice. Let's say you receive an email from a coworker that says, "I have to talk to you about something important." If the first thing that pops into your head is, "Uh-oh. I must have done something that upset her," then you may be distracted until you have an opportunity to talk with her. You may snap at the people around you because you are in a heightened state of agitation – and it's all based on the assumptions that you're making in your head. We've probably all had the experience in a situation like this of finding out that the topic our coworker wanted to address was not related to the one we dreaded. In the meantime, our behavior negatively impacted those around us. In a situation like this, if we learn to tune into our thoughts in the heat of the moment we can identify the assumptions we're making and challenge them. "What is the evidence that she is upset with me? She seemed fine yesterday, and we haven't had any contact since then. It could just as easily be something else."

It's relatively easy to spot the assumptions of young people because all you have to do is listen. Many adolescents are very open about how they're processing the world around them. You can hear them saying things like: "I'm so stupid!" "My hair is so ugly!" "He *made* me do it!" "I stink at this!" "It doesn't matter if I study." When hearing statements such as these, we can step in and say, "Really? Does he really hate you? Do you really think you'll never be able to write this essay? What's the evidence to support that statement?" A young person may react flippantly, saying, "I was just joking!" but the message does start to make an impact, especially when young people practice reframing their own thoughts and experience the difference in their feelings based on that practice. Formal resilience training, something I will have the great privilege to deliver to the 7th and 8th graders at the Bryn Athyn Church School this year, helps to lay the groundwork for this kind of reframing. During this training students will practice with real-life adversities, identifying their thoughts and how their thoughts lead to their emotional reactions and their resultant behaviors. They will then practice challenging their automatic thoughts and thought patterns to see that they have the

power to choose a more productive way of thinking – one that leads to success instead of defeat.

Worldview

This skill is about directing focus and attention. Because we are bombarded with stimuli too great for our brains to process, we constantly choose what we will pay attention to and what we will ignore. If we drive down the road and are consumed with irritation at the driver in front of us who is going too slowly, we may very well miss the beautiful sunset that is available to us if we choose to lift our vision slightly. We also may miss the opportunity to have a good conversation with our child who is sitting in the back seat in silence as we fuss and grumble about today's drivers. There are ways to consciously cultivate a focus on what is good and pleasant and hopeful in the world, and, again, these are practices you can teach to a young adult, and you can practice them yourself. And cultivating this outlook leads to greater resilience.

Keep a gratitude journal. Training yourself to regularly notice good things puts you into a frame of mind where you start to see things to be grateful for everywhere you turn. You don't take things for granted, and your relationships will be enhanced as you express your gratitude to your loved ones on a regular basis. Writing or speaking your grateful statements aloud often enhances their power, and elaborating on why something is meaningful also gives it weight.

Savoring is another thing that can be cultivated. This is the practice of taking the time to fully absorb the beauty or pleasure of a good experience. Some great things to savor are: a delicious meal, especially one that has been prepared for you; a hug from a loved one; the beauty of nature; the power of a worship service; a supportive conversation with a friend; a baby's smell; a moving piece of music; or a memory from a favorite vacation. The list could go on and on, and that's kind of the point. Once you start to actively savor the good things in your life, you will notice more and more things to savor and you won't have as much attention to give to the ugly and unpleasant things. Ultimately, it will change the way you look at the world.

Focus consciously on your own and other people's strengths and talents. We as human beings are hardwired to notice what's not working or is bothering us about ourselves and other people, but we can retrain ourselves to pay attention to and highlight people's strengths. If you have a student who is a jokester you may be more likely to be irritated by his jokes if you're thinking of things he is not doing well than if you appreciate his humor (when it is appropriately directed). While I am not advocating that we ignore areas that need attention, relationships are greatly enhanced when people actively focus on the other person's strengths. If done well, you can motivate a young person in your care to make improvements

by helping her to see how she can use her strengths to bolster an area of weakness. There is a free online assessment at www.authentic happiness.org called the VIA Survey of Character Strengths that will identify your top strengths (and there is one for young people). I have developed a series of questions, which I am willing to share, that I have used with young people and adults to facilitate conversation about these strengths. It tends to lead to powerful insights and strong connections between the people sharing their strengths with one another.

Mind-Body-Spirit Connection

The Writings talk about the strong connection between the natural and the spiritual worlds. When we experience strong emotions, our bodies respond – we cry when we’re sad, our fists clench when we’re angry, we get jittery when we’re anxious. The cognitive resilience skills outlined above are effective at curbing emotional reactions, but there are times when targeting the body directly has a tremendous impact on the emotions. Regular exercise improves not only on our physical health, but also positively impacts our ability to cope with stress and adversity. You don’t have to be a marathon runner to reap the benefits, but moving your body regularly has great rewards. Guided breathing and progressive muscle relaxation are other ways to calm the body instantly. Meditation, too, is a powerful tool for regulating emotions. People who undertake a regular meditation practice are calmer overall, they are better able to focus, and their relationships are enhanced. And paying attention to the foods we put into our bodies can also lead to greater resilience.

Surrender

Turning power over to the Lord in times of great stress or overwhelm is one of the most important things we can do to be able to emerge from the other side of adversity intact. Asking for His help through prayer, through turning to trusted loved ones (through whom He works), or through His Word can provide us with what I call the Ultimate Safety Net. It is very powerful to be able to trust that we and our loved ones will be taken care of, even when we can’t envision what the future holds in store. Being able to relinquish control is key to moving through adversity – especially dramatic adversity - with flexibility, hope, and joy. This approach is something we cultivate in our church schools and in our families.

A final recommendation for resilience that doesn’t fall easily into any of the above categories is mindfulness. Mindfulness is an approach that is interwoven among several of the skills of resilience outlined in this article and takes real maturity to master. It is described as being “fully awake” or “fully present” to what exists in every moment. It involves nonattachment to a preconceived outcome, and

encourages flexibility in thought and action. A mindful approach can be brought into our everyday interactions by remaining aware of our thoughts, our feelings, and our responses to situations and other people, knowing that we have a choice in every moment about how we react. Mindfulness is not an easy thing to achieve, and it's a complex concept, so I don't know that I'd attempt to teach it to adolescents, but young adults can start to grasp the ideas. It grows and evolves gradually with practice, so introducing it early can help our young people get a head start on the benefits that come from it.

Conclusion

The skills of resilience are important stepping stones for success, with application to natural challenges and spiritual challenges. These skills can and should be directly taught to young people because they lead to an ability to make the changes that are required in repentance and reformation, as well as success and happiness in relationships and careers. And our practice of these skills, as adults in the lives of children and students, enables us to model them for the young people in our lives, and it also helps us to do the inner work that is required to be fully available to the care of our students and children.

Kirsten Cronlund is Director of the Bryn Athyn Church School. She was formerly a classroom teacher of 6th and 3rd grades and also worked as a tutor. She earned a Masters in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania in 2008 and a Masters in Positive Organizational Development from Case Western Reserve University in 2010. She lives in Hatboro with her three sons – James, Jordan, and Atticus Boatman.

THE NEW CHURCH ADOPTION GRANT

The New Church Adoption Grant (NCAG) was established to give financial help to families seeking to grow through adoption. The grant is *not* income-based and applicants may receive up to \$25,000 towards an adoption of a special needs child, as defined by the state of Pennsylvania. The child must fit at least one of the following categories: 1) A member of a minority group 2) Age 5 or older 3) A member of a sibling group which is placed together 4) Has a physical, mental, or emotional condition or disability 5) Born with a genetic condition which indicates a high risk of developing a disease or disability.

We are also seeking donors to contribute to the grant. If you feel called to help support families who want to give a loving home to a needy child, please consider giving. Donations are tax-deductible and should be made out to Bryn Athyn Church, earmarked for the Adoption Grant.

If you are interested in either applying for such a grant, or making a contribution, please contact Sacha Wade at craigandsacha@aol.com or by phone 215-947-1705. *"Whosoever shall receive one of such children in My name, receiveth Me..." Mark 9:37*

HOW TO PAY TAI DUES FOR 2012

TAI Members in the United States have two ways to pay dues:

- 1) Fill out the form and send it with your check to TAI, Box 154, Bryn Athyn, PA
- 2) Pay with a credit card online. Go to www.newchurch.org. On the far left, under the heading Find, select “an article or publication.” Select “Theta Alpha Journal.” Click on the payment button.

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- 2) Send payment to a chapter leader or treasurer from the list below. Please do so within three weeks of receiving this dues notice.

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contact Margaret Heldon, 15 Browallia Crescent, Loftus, NSW 2232
phone: 02 9545 3823
email: margaretheldon@optusnet.com.au

CANADA:

Judith Stewart, 64 Evenstone Ave, Kitchener, ON, N2R 1N9
Checks payable to Theta Alpha Guild

Amy Jutras, 279 Burnhamthorpe Rd, Etobicoke, ON, M9B 1Z6
Checks payable to Theta Alpha

ENGLAND:

Mrs. G. Wyncoll, 30 Midland Close, Colchester, Essex CO2 7RS
Checks payable to Kathleen Wyncoll

SOUTH AFRICA:

The New Church Buccleuch, PO Box 412956, Craighall, 2124
Checks payable to The New Church Buccleuch

OR Electronic funds transfers (EFT's):

Account holder:	The New Church Bucceluch
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Branch number:	010945
Account number:	011716576
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TAI Dues Notice For 2012

Please fill out the form below and mail to:

Theta Alpha International
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Bryn Athyn, PA 19009

Dues (2012)	\$ <u>15.00</u>	(includes April & October 2012 issues of <i>Theta Alpha Journal</i>)
Translation Project	\$ _____	
Contribution to the General Fund	\$ _____	(to support the scholarship fund and other educational uses)
TOTAL	\$ _____	

Make checks payable to **Theta Alpha International**

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Please pay dues by December 31, 2011



Calling all Sophomore Girls (Tenth Graders)

You are invited to participate in an essay contest

“THE LAWS OF LIFE”

“**The Laws of Life**” are a set of rules, ideals, or principles by which one should live. What do you value most in life? What is important to you? What ideals do you hold deep in your heart? Think about the people and experiences that have helped you form these laws. This essay is an opportunity to write about what YOU think is important in life. This is your chance to be heard – to write from the heart about one, or more, of your personal laws of life.

THREE CASH PRIZES:

First Prize: \$75.00 USD
Second Prize: \$50.00 USD
Third Prize: \$25.00 USD

SUGGESTIONS FOR YOUR ESSAY

Pick a topic to write about: 1) A personal experience/lesson learned that affects how you live/view your life now, or 2) An aphorism or quote that inspires or guides you. To help structure your essay you could use...

→ an *analogy* – such as: “Having a strong set of personal laws is like having a strong foundation for a house.”

→ a *quotation* – “Life is figuring out how to make stepping stones out of stumbling blocks.”

→ a *story or parable* and offer commentary on it.

SCHEDULE: Your essay must be mailed to arrive by **April 30th 2012**. Mail to: Theta Alpha International, PO Box 511, Bryn Athyn, Pa 19009, USA. Include your name and your postal address.

Please Note: Winning entries may be published in the Theta Alpha Journal.

WELCOMING THE NEW

(First place essay of the 2011 Sophomore Girls Essay Contest)

JACKIE SHIHADDEH

The day is melting into twilight—all is calm, all is serene, all is bliss. The breeze carries with it the songs of the birds and the many secrets of heaven. As I sit here and take in the peace of Earth, I also enjoy the peace of mind that I feel knowing I have made the right decision. At times like this, I always wonder what my life would be like if I had not found the Academy. Would I have been able to see the twilight, or would I overlook it and succumb to the night that so often envelops us?

What is life without the acceptance of change; the ability of letting go of what always was and welcoming the new? It can be scary to venture into an unfamiliar surrounding full of people you have never met. But this challenge to push yourself in new directions is a law of life that can only help you in the long run. It takes courageousness to be able to break the boundary that so often holds us back from change, but once the barrier is defied there are no limits to what you can achieve.

I used to feel like there was a void in my life; something pertinent missing that I could not quite put a name to. I realize now that this void was the desire for something more in my life, something beyond what could be seen or held. It was love, compassion, acceptance, spirituality, and a sense of belonging that I craved. I found all that I was looking for and more when I discovered the New Church. It was my desire to find a Church, since religion was never part of my life and I was curious. It so happens that my mom and I ventured upon the New Church by chance. I do not think this was a coincidence, however. There truly was a guiding force leading me to find what I have always been searching for. I often wonder what would have become of me if I had not pushed myself for a change. I never imagined leaving everything I have ever known—my school, my friends, my familiar routine, my judgments and perceptions—and doing so voluntarily. It took a tremendous amount of courage to leave it all behind, and even more courage to recognize the need for this change.

I truly believe that a person is made human by their spirit. This spirit is not a static thing; it continues to grow, develop and change eternally. My spirit certainly transformed after finding a new outlook on existence; an outlook that is highly influenced by the remarkable people that now surround me. I can't imagine not knowing the friends I have made at ANC, being clueless to the spiritual world or never being privileged with chapel every morning. I sometimes travel back to the day when I made the decision to come to a new school. If I had not accepted change, I would still be living an unfulfilled life and all the irreplaceable connections I have made and experiences I've had would have never been possible.

If we each took a step back to look at our lives, I'm sure we could all see the barriers that we draw for ourselves. We would be able to notice how sometimes clinging onto the familiar is just a way of staying within the lines of our comfort zones, when in reality there is something better on the other side. I am grateful that I made it to the other side of that line. By doing so, I gave my spirit a chance to evolve and gave myself the opportunity for new experiences, new surroundings, and a new purpose in life. After all, what is life without change?

Jackie Shihadeh is entering her second year as a student at the Academy. She has much support from her family, being the youngest of 10 children. Jackie has always aspired to be a writer and hopes to pursue this dream.

GARDENER BIRDS

LAVINA SCOTT

From the yet-to-be-published book, *The Path of Our Life*
by Ken and Lavina Scott

Ever since I was a little child, I have enjoyed watching the happy chickens some people have that are free to scratch in the earth and wander wherever they will. They tend to make a mess of your doorstep so I never really wanted to have any, but I still enjoy seeing them at other people's places. But since we built our own little secret garden enclosed within the protection of the cedar fence, the Lord has given me a multitude of miniature free chickens—the flocks of song sparrows that feel at home here. They inhabit the gardens and flower beds all summer, and I see them often working side by side with me, scratching in the earth, to loosen the soil under the plants, and as well, they constantly watch for and eat insect pests. I've come to think of them as little gardener birds, and as kindred spirits. But recently I gained even more respect for them.

About a week ago, on some nice warm spring days, I dug up one of the flower beds right by the house, and covered it with a thick four inch layer of last year's dry leaves I found on the lawn. I thought when I plant the petunias in that space, in a few weeks from now, I will mix some of the leaves into the top soil to enrich it, and use the others for summer mulch. But then we had a late spring snow storm, so I had to stay indoors for most of a week. But my little garden helpers have been busy working in spite of the weather. I've been watching them through the window, whole flocks of them, day after day, scratching through those dry leaves, and in the soil underneath them, happy as anything, searching and pecking, finding what they need for food and sustenance, and at the same time, I'm sure, cleaning up the leaves and ridding them of insects pests or eggs that were clinging to them.

Those tiny fragile little feet of theirs mix up the soil and loosen it as efficiently as I do with my much bigger garden trowels and scratchers. And I've seen quite an amazing thing happen in these few days. Most of that four inch layer of leaves is now mixed in and buried by the brown sandy loam of the flower bed! The sparrows did it all by themselves! While they were (to all appearances) happily and freely pursuing their own ends and purposes, they were simultaneously doing the Lord's work, unaware.

In the Lord's marvelous and intricate providential care of His world, there is an interconnectedness, and an interdependence of all things, and the uses that one species contributes to the whole, benefits and provides what is needed by many others. (And in this, the slowest learners of all seem to be humans.) But the tiny sparrows with their tiny feet, demonstrated so effortlessly and happily how their contribution, though humble and relatively insignificant, accomplished an astoundingly useful result. It isn't just in my little flower bed that they work their magic—it is in all the woods, in all kinds of places all around the world, millions and billions of little birds doing the same useful thing of working up and mixing leaves and such into the soil to prepare ground for the growth of seeds, and plants and trees, and forests. Who knows how many seeds of mighty trees have been planted by their little feet scratching in the earth?

Silently, and invisibly, the Lord leads and directs each of us (humans as well as other creatures), to seek for those morsels of food (and experience) that we need at the time to sustain and nourish us for natural and spiritual growth. And as we do our insignificant scratching in the earth, we are part of the greater whole complex of uses. And we know not what effect our efforts may produce, even years from now, or what "series of consequences extending even to eternity," that our activity may have set in motion.* It is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes.

Might it be that the Lord's loving hand is gently and silently leading, and invisibly guiding and inspiring each of us to find delight in doing the uses He needs to have done, even while we, like the humble and unassuming sparrows, enjoy a perfectly happy sense of being free to concentrate on other things, and to live as we please, and to fly where we will. I really think it might be so. And what is wonderful! The more clearly we see and acknowledge the leading of the Lord's Divine Providence in our lives, the greater is our sense of personal freedom! And the more nearly a person is conjoined with the Lord, the wiser he becomes, and the more free he seems to himself to be.**

*See *Arcana Coelestia* 3854:3.

**See *Divine Providence* 43 and 44.

Lavina Lemky Scott (ANC Girls School '59) lives on a farm in Crooked Creek, Alberta, Canada. She has three children. She doesn't call herself a widow because she feels her husband, Ken, with her still and knows their marriage is eternal.

BOOK REVIEWS

Sapphire

Gertrude Nelson Diem



Sapphire

By Gertrude Nelson Diem

Reviewed by Amanda Rogers-Petro

Sapphire, a posthumously published novel by Gertrude Nelson Diem, is a book of cosmic ambitions. The action takes place in a hospital, on a dark city street, on a planet called Planet of the High Wind Sound, and in the mind of God. The story is a dense and mysterious meditation on the purpose of the incarnation, the relationship of Creator to creation, the role of the female in creation, and the special role of planet earth in cosmic history.

Nelson's story follows four characters – the gifted, strong-willed nurse Maxine; her fiancé, newspaper reporter Jasper; Roohoo, a curious extra-terrestrial, and the Man who is God Himself, who is never referred to as Christ or Jesus, though the character remembers various events from Jesus's earthly life. The Man-God appears to Maxine in the hospital as she tends to a very ill newborn. Throughout the night, she carries on a conversation with God while experiencing events mundane and miraculous. One minute she is overseeing the astonishing resurrection of the baby who'd been pronounced dead and sent to the morgue, the next moment she is bickering with a rival nurse about workplace politics. In a parallel narrative, Roohoo, from the Planet of the High Wind Sound, desires to learn more about Earth, which his people call the earth of the dead. With the help of an angel, his spirit is transferred into the body of Jasper, Maxine's fiancé, while Jasper's spirit enters Roohoo's body. These magical plot elements are interspersed with poetic meditations on the nature of God and the relationship of the infinite to the finite.

Roohoo's planet of origin is magnificent with crystal mountains, clear rivers, flowers, forests and meadows where beautiful horses run. The Earth that Roohoo experiences is an American city, with depraved gangs of conscienceless children, wandering drunkards, and desperately dysfunctional couples in joyless nightclubs. The people of these two planets reflect the landscapes they inhabit. Roohoo and his wife and children are docile, harmonious and deeply at peace, while the Earthlings are ornery, angry, discontent and violent. Yet the book is a passionate defense of Earth and an argument for its vital role in the fulfillment of the Divine nature.

Diem describes Earth as a gate between heaven and hell, between the garden and everything outside the garden. This in-between state is referred to as

“in Sapphire.” The humans in the story are described as being “in Sapphire” when their sense of self will is strong in them. Diem implies that human willfulness is blessed because it brought about the Incarnation and made the perfection of God more perfect when he took on the imperfection of mortality.

The book is multilayered and multi-textured, moving between the surreal story-line and rhapsodic prose poems on deeply metaphysical themes. Diem probes spiritual paradoxes through the perceptions of characters thrust from ordinary experience into supernatural awareness. Through language that pushes against earthly logic, Diem challenges readers to join her characters “in Sapphire” – the between place where finite and infinite can meet.

(Available at www.fountainpublishing.com)



How I Would Help the World

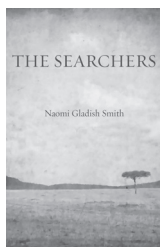
by Helen Keller, with an introduction by Ray Silverman

Reviewed by Karin Childs

My heart is warm every time I read something written by Helen Keller. Few things could be as inspirational as a person who could find so much beauty in life without being able to see or hear. This little book is based on an essay that Helen Keller wrote, expressing her fervent desire to share the love she felt for the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The introduction by Ray Silverman briefly tells Helen’s story, with a special emphasis on her introduction to Swedenborg’s works by John Hitz, a friend of Alexander Graham Bell. Annie Sullivan had brought Helen the tools for a mental awakening, and John Hitz brought the tools for a spiritual awakening that would give Helen the basis for her amazingly positive and hopeful viewpoint.

Helen was only 14 years old when she was first handed a copy of Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell*, but she could immediately feel that this was a work of great significance. As she grew to understand the text more and more, she found increasing amounts of joy and wonder. In *How I Would Help the World*, Helen uses her poetic, affectionate style to tell us why she finds the concepts in Swedenborg’s works to be so useful and wonderful. This small book provides an excellent way to inspire yourself or a friend to realize the treasures that lie in those writings. With respect and warmth, the Swedenborg Foundation has taken on the task of helping Helen Keller to help the world.



The Searchers
By Naomi Gladish Smith
Reviewed by Jon Childs

This is the third novel in a series that follows characters in the “world of spirits” as they make their transitions after death, facing choices and adjusting to life in a spiritual world. In *The Searchers* we follow a woman named Kate. Kate has already been living in the world of spirits for a while, and she is given an assignment to help her nephew Dan adjust after he has died of suicide.

Meanwhile, we meet other characters. Frank, a former Chicago cop, forms an attachment to Kate, though Kate is married to someone who is still on earth and is still in love with her husband. Birgit is a woman who must overcome survival mechanisms that she developed on earth as a result of being abused. Janet, a bishop’s daughter, feels that she knows all about the spiritual world and is resentful when she has to attend classes to learn more. Janet had also taken pride in never remarrying after being widowed at a young age, but because she hadn’t thought much about her husband during the years they were apart, she is unable to remember his name when they meet after death. A pretty young woman named Pegeen and also Dan’s own fears from his former life of crime lure and drive Dan toward a dangerous location. Kate, Frank, Brigit and Janet all end up in a doomed city trying to rescue Dan before it’s too late.

I enjoyed this novel. The various plot threads held my interest. It really made me think about the importance of examining your life and your motives.

WHAT IS ART?

AND IS THERE SUCH A THING AS NEW CHURCH ART?

WENDY SONESON

I recently had a dialogue with my sister about the nature of art. Since we both dabble in making various forms of art, we wonder, are we artists? Is what we make or write good art? And at what point could it be considered New Church art? We are both writing and painting in between teaching, so the teacher in us wants to define these things and teach them to others.

Our mother may be watching us from above. Marjorie Rose Soneson was a writer and former Theta Alpha Journal editor, but that's not the reason she would be watching. As girls, my sister Soni and I were very different. She was the adventurer; I was the bookworm. Mom is watching, because she spent decades trying to make us get along, and she does not want us fighting now, either. Soni and I are using our grown-up tools of good communication and skills of conflict resolution, so I am pretty sure Mom will not have to put us on the steps holding hands until we say something nice to each other, as she used to.

Our dialogue about art started when my sister asked why I disliked an artist who paints sentimental paintings which are pretty and very popular. If people enjoy them, we queried, are they not art? This started a long conversation about what is art in the first place. And if it is art, was it good or bad art?

I ask my middle school students to consider this conundrum when we discuss art: Is a painting of an angel, done very messily with clashing colors, good art? Is a painting of a man murdering children, done very carefully with stunning composition and color combinations, bad art? Is it the subject or the execution that matters? In literature, if a story is about war, done in a masterful way, a bad book? And is a story about good people loving one another, written in stilted, boring prose, a good book? These are extreme examples, but they help highlight the issues.

In some schools of thought almost everything is art, and is only good or bad in the eye of the beholder. Others require standards that must be met before deciding whether it is good or bad art. In the school of thought that everything is art--including trash, nature, and someone sneezing-- there can be no discussion, since everything becomes a matter of opinion. I will address here the field of study that attempts to categorize and understand intended works of art.

By most standards, art needs to evoke a response in many viewers that is significant. There is a lot of disagreement about the rules, yet one thing experts agree on is that most of the best examples of art break the rules. But with this in mind, we can at least have the discussion.

There are levels of art as well as levels of artists. Essentially, everyone is an artist, because being creative is part of being human, as we are all made in the image of the Creator. Some art is for entertainment, pleasure, or decoration. The higher forms of art reflect the nature of the human condition or society in a way that pushes civilization and human development further. Art can look ahead of the times and tell us what is coming by commenting on what is happening now in a way that no one had considered before.

Parents can look at their child's creation and call him or her an artistic genius. Many adults have called themselves artistic geniuses with little agreement by the general public. Some of these people turned out to be right, but they were so far ahead of the crowd, no one in their time period could see it. Other artists tell

tales about the state of the world that no one wants to hear. That is why repressive governments censor or even condemn artists who tell the truth.

And if there were such a thing as New Church or Swedenborgian art, what would it look like? Would it have to be paintings and novels based on New Church doctrine? Would the paintings have to depict memorable relations? Or would the message of the art simply have to be in line with the spirit of regeneration? Could literature or paintings that point out the question of human or spiritual existence qualify as New Church art?

Most of us in the artistic world think depicting subject matter is not the purpose of art. It is, instead, the treatment of the subject matter that qualifies it. (Brings it to the level of art with a capital A.) Why do countless artists continue to paint still lives and figures? Don't we have enough of them? They continue to get attention because artists figure out a way to channel something more in their treatment of these subjects. We can get inspiration, new ideas, or wake-up calls to the human spirit through viewing statues or reading poems even centuries after their creation.

How about the artists? What is happening for them? Everyone has the capacity to create from birth. We can all learn the tools and the language of an art form-- how to play the piano, use pastels, or manipulate words into image and thought. But when do our creations become more than technical expertise? When do they cross the line into being true art?

As an artist who has tried for over half a century, I know that most of what is created is of far more value to the creator than it is to the reader, listener, or viewer. Most of my students will never make great art. Of the thousands I have taught, few have become professionals. But their success is not my purpose in teaching art. I want my students to have the skills to reach those lofty heights, because it is like flying with the angels when an artist succeeds in, transcending the drudgery of human existence and touching the hand of God, as in the Michelangelo fresco. Artists leave the world of time and place (space?), taste what our nature is all about, and experience visions of true reality. The best artists can bring this experience back to others, but having it for themselves alone is worth the effort.

Swedenborgian art, to me, would be any art that brings the experience of knowing our spiritual nature. And if this were the case, there would be a lot of this art in the world created by artists who have never heard of Swedenborg. Any novel that succeeds in a person's questioning his or her life approach by seeing a better way of being, for example, would fit this category of art.

Many things that cannot be categorized as art can also make us see new ways, change our thinking, or increase our compassion for others. But art can do it more elegantly, more quickly, and with far more joy than a pop psychology book or an experience with one of life's tragedies. I would argue that art could even prevent some of life's tragedies. An attempt to make art, or truly experience a great work

of art, can keep us awake and thinking clearly.

What is in the museums may or may not be art to you, but it probably is to a lot of others. It can be a good experiment to try to figure out why. An even more fun adventure is to discover art where most people do not expect to find it, such as on television, on the side of a building, or in a journalist's report. There are many hidden gems to be found if you look with an open eye and heart.

My sister and I may end up agreeing to disagree about what is art, what is good or bad art, and even what the purpose of art is. I know at least we agree that the attempt to make it is worth the trouble. She is writing a narrative non-fiction about her spiritual journey with a theme of helping other women find their voice. I am working on a fictionalized novel of our mother's descent into mental illness. Both of us hope to help others with our creations, but know for sure our work is helping us move forward. We cheerfully disagree about which is the better painting medium-- acrylic or watercolor-- and appreciate each other's attempts to solve the problems of composition and color theory. But Mom up in heaven does not need to worry. We are getting along just fine!

Wendy Soneson is a watercolorist and art teacher of inner city boys and retired adults. She publishes a weekly art newsletter on line, which you can find on her website, wendysoneson.com, and holds a M.Ed. in the Arts in Human Development.

MEANINGFUL CONTACTS

VAL JORGENSON YOUNAN

I live in Woodbridge, Ont., Canada, just outside Toronto, and I'm connected to the Olivet New Church Society here in Toronto. I am writing in response to Beryl Simonetti's, article in the Fall TAJ. When I first read it, I felt so inspired to communicate with Beryl, that I sent her an email right away. I SO appreciated her fantastic thoughts and wish I'd been at her Gathering Leaves workshop! Not only did I agree wholeheartedly with what she discussed, her words have provided great validation for me, personally. While I have felt very strong and clear about my direct connection with the Lord and my acceptance of the truths in the threefold Word, I have never felt like I "fit-in" *entirely* with my New Church society. By that, I mean, in addition to feeling part of the society, I also feel *very* connected and akin with many people outside the church and because of that, have felt like I'm not as "committed" to the church society as I'm "supposed to be." I have long struggled with that feeling. Beryl's article helped me to acknowledge and truly validate the

love I have of connecting with so many people on a spiritual level in discussions around mutual values. In fact, I don't really have many, what I would consider, "close friends" with whom I regularly talk, in our Toronto church society. And yet I feel very close to many others with whom I've developed solid, deep, personal connections.

Many years ago, when I was working in the corporate world, my closest friend at work was a Muslim woman. We were so close because of values that we shared. Of course there were specifics that didn't match, but we will always consider each other one of our dearest soul-mates, because of the higher spiritual values that brought us together.

My husband is an Assyrian Orthodox Christian. We courted for 9 years (!), during which time we had extensive conversations about spiritual values and continued to be drawn closer and into marriage. (As it happens, our story was featured in the October 2010 issue of *Caring For Marriage* magazine, if anyone's interested in the full scoop.) I love what we have created. We more often attend the New Church, he and our young sons and I, and sometimes attend "Assyrian Church" as we refer to it with our sons, distinguishing it from "English Church," (being careful not to label them "Mummy's church" or "Baba's church"). They are both our family's churches. I have always seen the churches as fitting together as the Word (Old Testament/New Testament) and the Writings do. Being so ancient, the Assyrian church is fairly simple in its faith, but true and what I would call "clean" (e.g. the Assyrian Church did not ascribe to the Council of Nicea and does not believe Mary to be the mother of God, just of Jesus, etc.).

Really, what our boys get from attending Assyrian church is cultural, not doctrinal (primarily because it's all in Assyrian, but also because they don't have as much doctrine to offer, especially to children). My husband gets reconnected with his roots there, and he gains new seeds and deeper learning and understanding when attending the New Church. I am helping to build our marriage by making the Assyrian church part of our family portrait. It makes a huge difference in how I have been welcomed and assimilated into that community. (I'm about the only non-Assyrian amongst a few hundred, generally.) And, of course, it means so much to Kamil that we have found ways to share our faiths and that neither is being discounted. I really trust that the Lord is in that place, and we are receiving what we need from it. The boys are learning so much from going to the New Church services and Sunday School, but more so at home. In addition to praying (sometimes the Lord's Prayer in Assyrian), and reading stories from the Word, we are trying to teach the underlying messages that can include both perspectives. And, as they get older, I'm explaining the deeper meaning of things, in ways that they can understand.

Often, however, I have struggled to feel "okay" about all of this. From my General Church upbringing and society/familial perspective, I have tended to feel

“not good enough,” partly *because* I’ve not been as ‘exclusive’ in my commitment to the New Church society. I have lingering thoughts about how I *should* have held-out to find a New Church husband and *should* be more single-minded in my devotion to the New Church society. For goodness sake, I’m Theta Alpha Guild president—isn’t that enough?! (I’m just kidding!)

Beryl’s article has helped me to let go of some of that “*shoul*dy” baggage and feel more proud and blessed and actually called to this path. I have always felt a great love for *all* people and very *easily* connect with most people on *any* level. I have meaningful contacts, but I am very uncomfortable with the idea of trying to put my beliefs on someone else. If it comes up, it comes up naturally and seeds may be sown. I have always cringed at the concept of an “exclusive society” and cannot comfortably be a part of that ideology. My experience has always been that it is clear if someone is curious or interested in more information. It is equally clear when they are not, and it actually creates a shut down if we provide information they’re not interested in. Most people are leery of anyone trying to offer them their religion. I love the idea that this is all practice for my work in heaven, welcoming newcomers from all points of the earth and finding ways of leading to deeper discussions about the truth. I’ve even envisioned that perhaps there’ll be a special job in heaven for Kamil and I, working as a bridge, helping to introduce the huge Assyrian community to a newer understanding of what they already know. We’ll see! I look forward to more commentary and discussion on this!

Val (Jorgenson) Younan lives in Woodbridge, just north of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She and her husband Kamil have three children, two sons whom they are raising here on Earth and their, eldest, Larsa, is being raised in heaven. Val has been a stay-at-home mom for the past 5 years and, is now considering options for using some of her other skills - and regaining some sanity and balance in the process.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor,

In the last issue of TAJ Alanna Rose asked in her article on meditation if anyone knew of an esoteric branch of Swedenborgianism. There is one. It has its organizational center in the Australian New Church College. Rev. David Millar is the Spiritual Director.

If the sermons on the college site <http://anccollege.org/> speak to you and you have further questions, I’m happy to help.

Gray Glenn (pingie@ptd.net)
Kempton, PA

Dear Friends,

I love the Theta Alpha Journal! It makes me feel connected to other women in the Church - whether discussing women's issues or education - and as a woman living isolated from New Church people, it means a lot to me.

I was not able to attend the Academy- but all of my seven children did. I'm an elderly widow now, and not familiar with all of this new social networking. I still depend on the written word or the old-fashioned telephone (not the Smart phone) to communicate with people. Imagine that! So you can see why I love the Journal in its present form. You no doubt will have many opinions to consider. Regardless of what form the Journal takes, I send my love and gratitude for the many years it has enriched my life.

Sincerely,
Bettie Bruser
Baton Rouge, LA

Dear Editor,

Wystan Gladish Simons suggests in her recent letter that "formal education might take a look at the concerns of the unschooling movement." Let's do that right now!

First I'd like to reflect on the way certain things that used to be everyone's birthright have somehow become luxuries accessible mainly to the educated middle and upper classes. Drug-free birth and home birth, breastfeeding, grass and trees to play in, whole organic food, free-range livestock, pesticide-free natural-fiber clothing—in the past, those were the norm. The alternatives, at first so alluring, looked less utopian after a while; the natural way came back into fashion with an extra gloss of glamour and self-conscious enlightenment; and we see that curious reversal where the primitive becomes sophisticated, desirable—and also costly, either directly or indirectly. I'm uneasy with the idea that unschooling has attained that status, beyond the reach of the masses.

I have not read Gladwell's *Outliers*, but my research suggests that the book is more about explaining the phenomenon of Outliers than disproving their existence, showing that native ability, while vital to achievement, by itself does not guarantee success.

I'd rather not see the value of "10,000 hours" of study and practice used to justify piling more homework, drill, and memorization on schoolchildren. Remember, Bach was so driven, even as a child, that he spent six months copying his brother's forbidden music manuscript by moonlight (so goes the legend). He had a fire burning inside him. It was said of the young Handel that the only way to stop him from playing music would be to chop off his fingers.

The quality of hours spent before and after a critical breakthrough can be

very different. Once Helen Keller had been tamed a little, Annie Sullivan plunged her into language, spelling into her hand much as a companion would converse with a seeing and hearing child, yet taking care not to over-drill Helen in manual spelling. After her epiphany at the water pump, Helen was unstoppable, demanding words for everything she touched and committing them to memory almost instantly. At that point a new level of systematic instruction became practical and productive, and Helen progressed so rapidly that she sometimes had to be coaxed away from her studies.

Instead of trying so hard in the classroom to reproduce the external appearance of inspired academic work, we could use more focus on lighting the fire of inspiration from the start: not necessarily igniting a lifelong passion, just enough interest to make learning free-flowing and satisfying. But “leading by the heart,” as Wylan says, “is easy to say, but not so easy to achieve.” A true and deep heart connection requires a warming-up period.

I recently found my copies of Eleanor Deckert’s seven-part newsletter series about teaching, *The Next Step*. My favorite (though I like them all) is the fourth newsletter and teaching pattern, “Tending the Fire.” She points out that the more attentively a fire is set and kindled, with thought given to the arrangement of the logs, air flow, and the sequence of fuels offered, the sooner the fire will settle into a steady, self-reinforcing blaze.

Speaking from vast experience cooking on a wood stove, Eleanor Deckert says, “I really DON’T want to waste time on a smoldering mess. I want to get going with supper. I want to be warm. I want to do other things today than have sooty black hands, smarting red eyes, coughing and blowing on coals.” This might aptly describe a teacher struggling to make an initial connection with a roomful of students. The author continues, “Before a fire is lit [when] the stove is completely cold, part of the difficulty is that the chimney full of cold, heavy air is actually pressing DOWN on the fire. Warm air must start to draw UP the chimney first before the fire will catch.” Then she makes the connection: “As something new is introduced to a student, there is often a heavy, cold layer of resistance which must be gently blown away, or lifted off to allow the warm enthusiasm to rise.”

This is just a small sample of the newsletter’s lead article. The image of the fire is one way to approach pedagogic theory in a coherent and nuanced way that honors natural rhythms of learning. I see at least four distinct steps that need to happen in a classroom. First, establish basic manners and ground rules; next, build rapport and mutual respect with the students; then find common ground of interest and inspiration: that groundwork primes the students for more disciplined and demanding work. Larger logs can be fed to a fire that is burning strongly and well. (I doubt that I have what it takes to handle a “tough room” where the students are compelled to be there and have good reasons to distrust me. I’ve chosen to put myself only in teaching situations where the first two steps are quick and easy.)

The deepest issue isn't about formal schooling vs. unschooling, but about the well-being of the learner. If children thrive in a formal schooling situation, well, jolly good show. When they have ongoing difficulties, at that point our educational values are tested. When my second daughter attended the ANC Girls School, she was where she wanted to be and her learning was spontaneous and joyful. In her senior year she wasn't kidding when she said, "I've done my calculus homework, and now I'm going to do my physics homework. Could life be sweeter?" My youngest experienced the opposite: high school made her crazy. I was a parent who thought unschooling was great ... just not for me! But faced with an unexpectedly determined, self-aware teenager who openly challenged me to live my beliefs, I took the plunge, though with considerable angst and resistance (like that cold chimney air pressing down on the fire). OK, I had to be pushed off the diving board.

One thing that makes formal classroom schooling more challenging than a more loosely structured learning setup is that it's harder to stop doing things that don't work for an individual student, keep trying different things until something does work, and refrain from assuming that it is the child who needs fixing. What looks like laziness and apathy may stem from emotional or developmental issues that can be addressed in a straightforward way. Inconvenient as it may be to accommodate individual needs, the payoff in the form of eager, engaged students can be wonderful, indeed.

Sincerely,
Linda Simonetti Odhner
Horsham, PA

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I was so happy to see some of you during the General Church Assembly gathering/ meeting on the evening of June 22nd! Twenty-one members attended the meeting and more dropped by throughout the evening. We had visitors from across the United States, one from Canada and a letter from Australia. Thank you for your participation! And apologies to those of you who were in town but not aware of the meeting; we advertised to the best of our ability. The minutes from this meeting appear elsewhere in this *Journal*.

The theme of the Assembly meeting was "What is TAI?" I've occasionally wondered about the existence and future of Theta Alpha International. In order to explain and convincingly 'sell' TAI during the meeting, I needed to do a little research and soul-searching to answer that question for myself. I'm pleased to report that I consequently have a renewed passion for TAI, one which I look forward to instilling in you. My preparation helped me recognize the true uniqueness of

Theta Alpha: while many other General Church groups serve similar uses (e.g. Office of Education prepares religion lessons), we are the only *global* network of like-minded *women* who share a passion for the Lord and His revelation through Emanuel Swedenborg and who want to actively *promote* it. That's nothing to sneeze at! Our endeavors to spread the Word of the Lord throughout the world and across generations range from translating religion lessons into French (and hopefully other languages in the future) to encouraging young writers & thinkers through the sophomore girls' *Laws of Life* essay contest to making New Church secondary & post-secondary education more readily available to students around the world through the Academy Scholarship Fund and, our newest project (coming soon), providing baptismal packets to new parents. These are all aspects of a broad definition of New Church education.

At this meeting we launched our fund raiser for Bryn Athyn College of the New Church, which is at the core of New Church education. The college is where many can delve deeply into the Heavenly Doctrines and begin to love the Lord's Word for themselves, and it is where men and women are trained to be New Church teachers who can bring the Lord into every aspect of the curriculum. The fund raiser was the sale of hand-dyed silk scarves and more will be available at the Theta Alpha luncheon on Charter Day.

"We, the women of the General Church of the New Jerusalem who are organized under the name of Theta Alpha, wish to support the uses of New Church education in its many forms. The truths as given in the Word are the basis and guide for the performance of our use."

Respectfully yours,
Jenn Beiswenger

THETA ALPHA INTERNATIONAL ANNUAL REPORT 2011

The executive committee held five regular meetings during 2010-2011 as well as the Annual Charter Day meeting. The minutes from that meeting were published in the April 2011 issue of *Theta Alpha Journal*, but a short synopsis follows. In addition, President Jenn Beiswenger welcomed Theta Alpha visitors to the assembly during registration and conducted a short meeting with members and friends who were present.

Annual Meeting

The annual meeting and luncheon was held on Charter Day, Friday, October 15. A record 150 members and guests were in attendance to enjoy a delicious meal prepared by Carol Buss, Carol Henderson and Allways Café. Theta Alpha made a profit on the luncheon of \$276.87. At a later executive committee meeting it was

decided to donate the profits to Bryn Athyn College and raise the amount to \$300.

Highlights of the meeting included a memorial resolution read by Lelia Howard, a vote to contribute \$8065 to the Academy Scholarship Fund, and a welcome to new members of the executive committee - *Theta Alpha Journal* editor Angela Rose, and new Members-at-Large, Anna Friesen Cole and Debra Barratt Thompson. At the end of the meeting we were treated to an informative and inspiring presentation by Kristin King, President of Bryn Athyn College. Her presentation was aptly titled “Bryn Athyn College Education”. This excellent address can be read in the April 2011 *Journal*.

Translation Project

Evangeline Lindrooth continues to head the project of translating the popular *Jacob's Ladder* religion lessons into French for use in Benin, Togo, Côte d'Ivoire and other groups now being developed. To date levels 1, 2 and 4 have been completed and were displayed at the Assembly by Rev. Sylvain Agnes. Level 3 is now being translated for later publication.

Evangeline asked for assistance as this project goes forward, and Carol Buss volunteered to help with this use. Carol had already been helping out by reworking the projects designed for English editions to make them more suited to other cultures and the materials available to them.

Theta Alpha Journal

After a year without the *Theta Alpha Journal*, it is once again being published, now under the capable leadership of Angela Rose. This year, fall and spring issues were mailed to members across the United States, Canada and around the world. These issues are now also available on line at www.newchurch.org - Resources and Sermons – Publications - Theta Alpha Journal. With access to the internet, Journal articles can now be translated into one of 57 languages through the magic of Google Translate. This is an easy, almost instantaneous and cost-free way to translate New Church materials. However, since the translation is done by the computer and not a human being, some phrases or idioms may not translate with total accuracy. Nevertheless, it does provide a means for other countries to access these and other New Church collateral materials in a cost effective manner.

Membership Report

Theta Alpha International was delighted to receive requests from and grant regular membership to three women this year: Brynna Carswell Smith (Boston, MA), Nicole Peppelman and Nancy Deibert (Huntingdon Valley, PA). Welcome ladies!

Senior Event

On May 13, President Jenn Beiswenger met with the senior girls at the Academy Girls School to speak to them about Theta Alpha. The girls were treated to light refreshments while she spoke about the history behind Theta Alpha and

the many uses it performs. At the end of the program, each girl was presented with a copy of *Coincidence Viewed from Above* written by the late Rev. Donald Rose.

Gift to New Teachers

Teachers new to General Church schools or the Academy in 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 were presented with \$100 checks to help them set-up their classrooms or assist with unexpected school-related expenses. General Church recipients of this gift were the following: Emily Adams, Gail Neukum, and Nathan Odhner (Bryn Athyn Church School), Emily Horigan (Glenview New Church School) and Eloné Heilman (Kempton New Church School). Academy Secondary School recipients were: Megan Allen, Ian Cole, Sarah Gladish, Tony Griffin, Dan Hultgren, Beth Nehlig Lutz and Mimi Spreadbury.

Laws of Life Essay Contest

This is a contest sponsored by TAI for sophomore girls at the Academy and for 15 to 16 year old New Church girls worldwide. Winners from the Girls School this year were Jackie Shihadeh – 1st prize, Jency Boyce - 2nd prize, and Britta Genzlinger – 3rd prize. There were no essays received this year from girls outside of the Academy.

Theta Alpha Awards

In recognition of a positive attitude towards New Church philosophy, contribution to the life of the Girls School, and academic achievement, Theta Alpha pins were awarded to the following high school graduates: Ivy Daum (gold), Marijke Kahle Bau Madsen and Rebecca Lynne Uber (silver). Bryn Athyn College recipients were Lydia Smith Synnestvedt (Associates in Arts) and Annalisa Synnestvedt (Bachelor of Arts).

This year, in a historic move, the executive committee voted “to include Bryn Athyn College’s Master of Arts in Religious Studies program in our end-of-year awards programs.” In recognition of their achievements, gold pendants were awarded to Hilary Bryntesson (Bryn Athyn) and to Jane Vida Edmunds (Westville, RSA). Because she was unable to travel to the United States for her graduation, Jane’s degree and award were presented to her before her home society by Rt. Rev. Peter Buss, with all the pomp and circumstance appropriate to such an occasion.

Assembly Meeting

As required by the TAI bylaws, an assembly meeting of Theta Alpha was held on June 22 concurrent with registration. At that time, Jenn Beiswenger, President, announced that the Theta Alpha annual meeting and luncheon would take place in Heilman Hall on Friday, October 7, 2011, at twelve noon. During the meeting elections will be held for the position of treasurer. Tina Halterman Bartels has been appointed to finish Doreen Scott Rambo’s term, as ill health prevents her from continuing. Unless there are additional nominations for this position, it’s

expected that Tina will be elected at the annual meeting. Doreen was thanked for her years of faithful service, for successfully pursuing tax-exempt status and for obtaining incorporation for the organization.

TAI is also searching for a new president to replace Jenn, as she will be moving to Australia with her son and newly ordained husband once their visas are granted. Until that time she has agreed to continue to serve. If a nominee is found in time, an election will be held at the annual meeting.

Another subject requiring a vote at the annual meeting is the proposed raise in Theta Alpha dues to \$20. This would be the first increase in at least 12 years and would help offset rising costs in all areas of TAI uses. Jenn reminded members that dues cover such things as the *Journal*, the luncheon, scholarships & awards and various gifts. *With regret, she stated that if dues or explanatory letters were not received by December 31, 2011, membership would be cancelled. At this point, only 1/3 of the membership pays their dues and carries the burden of supporting Theta Alpha International uses.*

Jenn asked that contributions to Theta Alpha be sent to Theta Alpha and not to the General Church. In addition, she proposed that presidents or treasurers of international chapters collect dues from their members and then work with their society's treasurer to send them as a single contribution via electronic transfer through the General Church. Unfortunately, individual contributions from outside the United States cost more to cash than their value when exchange rates and bank charges are included.

Jenn then introduced a new fundraiser to support Bryn Athyn College of the New Church – the sale of hand-dyed silk ladies' scarves and children's silks. These were available during the assembly for a donation of ten or more dollars. They will also be available to purchase during the annual meeting.

Jenn presented the college president, Dr. Kristin King, with a scarf as a token of our support. Kristin thanked the group and spoke of her confidence in the future of Bryn Athyn College. She spoke of the need for moral and financial support from alumni and friends, and briefly talked about the college's goals for the future. There are six goals which address the following areas: financial stability, academics, student life, strengthening enrollment, developing new facets and programs, and providing an environment that will accurately represent who and what Bryn Athyn College is.

Finally, members and friends are always encouraged to share suggestions, concerns or ideas for future Theta Alpha uses with the president or any member of the TAI executive committee. Names and contact information are listed inside the back cover of the *Journal*.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Charles Doering, Secretary

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CHAPTER REPORTS

ATLANTA

Greetings from Atlanta, GA! This year we had our annual fall rummage sale. At our October meeting we voted on new by-laws for our group: inclusive membership, semi-annual meetings and a two year term for the president. At our April meeting, it was wonderful to discuss the inspiring articles in the new *Journal*. We read Katya Gordon's piece and then tried to express what makes each of us feel "New Church."

Lauren Kuhl Rose, President

BOYNTON BEACH

Our Guild activities are no doubt as predictable as the seasons! In November, we have our one significant fundraiser, a one-day rummage sale, to which everyone in our small society contributes time and great effort.

At Christmas, we decorated the church sanctuary and social hall in time for a Tableaux service, and the lovely dinner and sing provided by Pastor Kenneth Alden & Kim Alden and family.

At Easter, in cooperation with the Social Committee, the Guild organized a brunch following the 8:00 a.m. service with an Easter egg hunt following.

On June 19th we celebrated this special day with refreshments after church and gifts from the church for the children.

In April, we held a baby shower for Devon and Rachel Heinrichs. This year, there were no young people leaving for school, but in past years, we hold a shower to honor the occasion.

In between our more noticeable projects, the Guild ladies provide flowers for church services, refreshments to be served after church, and on occasional Saturdays, we meet at the church and work to keep up appearances.

For the next two summer months, we are on vacation, but look forward to picking up the thread in September, when we will start planning for the next rummage sale.

With warm greetings to all our Theta Alpha friends!

Gale Arnoux, President

BRYN ATHYN

Bryn Athyn Theta Alpha Guild always has supported the Red Cross Blood Drives. We have been very fortunate to have both Janina Stroh and Gillian Frazier as co-heads of this project; it certainly is a two-person job. In June of 2010 Gillian moved to Austin, Texas with her husband Mac to help establish a New Church society. Janina stepped up to fill the gap and ran two successful blood drives while trying to find another co-head. We are working to revitalize this use with the Bryn Athyn College service organization and Laura Nash. Janina and Louise Stevens will help and coordinate with Laura.

Our December meeting tried to self-destruct, but Tom Kline came to the rescue! He gave a fabulous talk which involved us all totally. We now know which Christmas events are described in Luke and which in Matthew. I won't go any further with this as Bishop Kline should have the freedom to prepare an article for New Church Life or the Theta Alpha Journal. Tom also played the piano to accompany our Christmas carol singing while Carol Henderson's committee served cookies and punch. This was a great start to the holiday season!

We gave the Bryn Athyn Church School teachers monetary classroom gifts and added an additional gift to the children's library for the three class levels. The Girl Scout and Boy Scout troops each received a monetary gift, as well. December business continued as we presented gifts of poinsettias, cheese balls or bread to retired Bryn Athyn Church staff and teachers, all town residents 85 and older, those who were ill at the time, and the spouses of those who passed away during 2010.

Jane Frazier continued as our president while desperately trying to find a volunteer replacement, as she was very ill. Sadly, Jane entered the spiritual world in January, 2011. Fortunately, the board had approved the schedule for the rest of the year, and so we are able to carry on without any missteps.

New and younger volunteers have stepped in and revitalized some of our uses. Nora Alden Cooper has become the head of the Chancel Guild. She is working with the younger girls in

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an effort to increase their numbers. Liz Childs has taken on responsibility for the distribution of the red balls for infants.

We continue our “Good Neighbor” uses: telephoning with funeral information and sending flowers to hospitalized women and cards to hospitalized men. A big thank you goes to Mimi Gunther (posthumously) and all the volunteers involved in these efforts.

Marketing of our cookbook, *Here's to Our Friends*, continues with the help of Carol Henderson. We hope soon to create partnerships with other societies to sell copies there for our mutual benefit.

We held our Easter program at Cairnwood Village. Our new assistant pastor, Erik Buss, gave a stimulating talk. After Easter we helped the pastors with the distribution of the flower offerings from all the Bryn Athyn services.

At the end of May Carol Henderson's committee and friends put on a reception following ordinations of our new ministers. Then, in June, we provided delicious ice cream and sorbet during the picnic at the 19th of June celebration on the cathedral grounds.

As of this writing we still are searching for a new president and vice-president, but together we soldier on.

Respectfully submitted,
Doreen F. Carey, Secretary
Louise D. Stevens, Treasurer

BUCCLEUCH, SOUTH AFRICA

Greetings to Theta Alpha groups across the world. In our society the Women's Group has open membership, but only those who have applied to join the Theta Alpha Guild are included in their tally. All meetings are held in common and we try to avoid any feeling of exclusiveness.

In the last year we have welcomed our new minister's wife, Karen Allais, as she 'returns to the fold'. She spoke inspiringly on the three years she spent in America while her husband Mark trained for the ministry as a mature student, saying that what had sustained her through all the changes was acknowledging the Lord's blessings in her life.

As our primary use is to support New Church Education, we fund-raise for our Children's and Teens' programmes. This year we have sewn fifteen costumes for the dress-up box to enhance dramatisation. The production of hand-made New Church Day gifts is quite a challenge as our Sunday School now numbers about thirty eight children. In addition, we help with catering as well as supporting a foster home, the Village Haven of Buccleuch and providing those children with Christmas gifts and groceries.

At present those of us privileged to have attended the wonderful Assembly in Bryn Athyn are looking forward to sharing our impressions and the knowledge we gained with the rest of our group. Many thanks to all who were involved in spreading the inspiration of the Lord's Word in these needy times.

Appreciatively,
Verna Brown, President

COLCHESTER

We have held three meetings here in Colchester since our last AGM in 2010. Candace Frazee talked to an open meeting after a church service in June about her unique Bunny Museum and the various ways she works to promote the New Church. Our President, Kathy Wyncoll, presented her with an old bunny ornament that had once belonged to her mother - and had written a poem to accompany it.

In October, we held another card-making workshop, at which a large number of cards were created to send out to people in need of a kind gesture, or those celebrating a special occasion.

At our AGM in May this year, we discussed how to best meet our financial commitments and continue into the future with a reduced membership. We had sadly said goodbye to Brenda Bowyer at Christmas time when she moved to be nearer her daughter and family. Brenda had been a stalwart of Colchester Theta Alpha for many years, and had once served as our President. We resolved to carry on as best we can, guided by the Lord as we endeavour to hold New Church education dear to our hearts.

The committee for 2011-2012 will remain as follows:

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President...Kathy Wyncoll
Secretary...Ruth Greenwold
Acting Treasurer...Kathy Wyncoll (supported by
Geoff Wyncoll)

Respectfully submitted,
Kathy Wyncoll, *President*

HURSTVILLE

Our report is a mixture of sadness and joy. Although our Chapter hasn't had a formal meeting since September 2008 our executive, consisting of Lori (Gladish) Heldon, Secretary; Patricia (Heldon) Walsh, Treasurer; Margaret (Horner) Heldon, President; remain in office. Due to a long term personal family commitment of our President our uses have been scaled back but we are still here! The main use we continue is the giving of June 19th Gifts to our local children.

The Hurstville Society continues to be without a permanent pastor so planning for the future has been on hold with energy used mainly to keep things going. In June 2010 there was joy at the return of Robert Cooper and his wife Huiling and son Matthew. He was now the Rev Robert Cooper and our new pastor. The June 19th celebrations at which Robert presented our Chapter's Theta Alpha gifts were also a happy welcome for the family. Sadly, he was with us for only one other Sunday when his maker called him to a higher use in the Spiritual World. We all felt blessed for having him even for that short time. His fresh enthusiastic approach is an inspirational memory.

And now we will finish with some more joy! Our Society and hence our Theta Alpha Chapter are eagerly awaiting our pastor elect, Rev Todd Beiswenger, as he goes through the immigration process to become a permanent resident of Australia, along with his lovely wife, Jenn, and son Zach. We apologise for stealing away your TAI President!

Affectionately,
Margaret Heldon

KITCHENER

The Theta Alpha Guild in Kitchener holds monthly meetings and sponsors presentations. At the meetings we average about 12 ladies. We

support the uses of New Church education by fundraising and donating. At Christmas we give the children from infants to Grade 8 a gift. Most of the gifts are for a Worship centre, such as candleholders, a Word stand and a Word cover.

The ladies also support our church group and community. We schedule and provide Friday Supper meals monthly. We arrange meals or transportation for the elderly or others in need. In December we set up a large Nativity scene in the foyer of our Church. Theta Alpha is responsible for food at the Swedenborg Banquet each year. We also schedule volunteers for Sunday refreshments weekly. This past spring we held a plant sale fundraiser, and hosted a Girls' Camp for grades 4 – 8 in June.

Respectfully Submitted,
Mary Jane Hill, Secretary

OAK ARBOR

The Oak Arbor Theta Alpha Members and Friends stay dedicated to serving the educational aspects of our church and school throughout the year with its many activities. Beginning with our meeting in October, Kristin Gurney Pitcairn hosted a pot-luck at her home. We had several of our younger women joining us which added new energy and ideas to our discussions and decisions for the coming year's uses and was a terrific way to begin the new season.

In early December the ladies had a wonderful evening at the home of Carol McCardell Curtis for our annual Christmas dinner and ornament exchange.

The following week, we put on our Christmas Craft Family Night which is popular with the children. The women always come up with fun and creative projects for the children to make and take home for the holidays. We continue to feel fortunate that many of our teenagers are willing to help us out with the evening which makes it more fun for everyone!

On the day of the Christmas Tableaux dress rehearsal, we provided food for all those involved in the production since it's a very long day for everyone.

For the Christmas Eve Service, it had been suggested by one of the younger women, Nicole Pitcairn, that the Theta Alpha provide little bell gifts for the children so that Derek Elphick

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our minister, could hand them out before the last hymn was sung. Once all the children had opened their gifts, they rang their bells while everyone sang, "So Sweet and Clear". It gave an especially "sweet" ending to the service and the children loved ringing their bells.

During February we mailed out Valentine boxes to our away students, whether they be at school or in the military. Karen Childs Elder graciously took on that job.

At the end of March the Oak Arbor ladies held a Retreat Day on Lake Huron at the cottage of Susanne Norton Elder. Our theme was Relationships, with 3 organized sessions. The first session was led by Barbara McClow Owens and included a personality test. Then Donna Donakowski Steen presented the second session which covered many of the different types of relationships we find ourselves in every day. The third session, after much good food, discussion, and walks on the shore, was one of Action. With the lead of Kristin Pitcarin, Donna Donakowski and Elise Alden Gladish, we created beautiful greeting cards with a handheld note of our feelings. It was a wonderful day for us all to take those moments to enjoy the fellowship of like-minded women and build on established, as well as new relationships. The food was filling to our bodies and the shared moments were filling to our spirits.

At our April meeting, we again met at Kristin Pitcairn's home for another great pot-luck to begin the evening. Our big discussion for the night was on the scrap booking event that will take place in January of 2012. For the past several years some of our women have put this on for the community to raise money for the school, and it is the second biggest fundraiser of the year. Liane Sandstrom deChazal was the most recent head, but would now like to step down. Consequently, our Theta Alpha group would like to take it on.

June usually brings our uses for the season to an end. Bryn Junge Brock continues to head up the June 19th gifts for the children, and we're especially appreciative for her willingness to do so. With many hands to help, we provide lovely gifts that the children look forward to receiving every year at the closing of the New Church Day Service.

Along with these usual projects throughout the year, we continue to teach our youngest children through nursery programs developed over the last three years, while using the Jacob Ladder's Home Schooling Series for the regular Sunday school classes. We give money as well, to support for our vibrant youth group and its uses.

Respectfully submitted,
Sherry Gauzens McCardell, Secretary

PHOENIX

Theta Guild thrives under the capable leadership of Terry Odhner, President, Barb Fiedler, Treasurer, Carol Cronlund, Secretary, Gigi Burns, Sunday School Head, and Lois Taylor, Hospitality. Theta Alpha Guild organizes activities that support our church members.

We provide Sunday school lessons with wonderful projects using the Jacob's Ladder series and celebrate birthday Sunday each month. We have a bountiful feast one Sunday per month with donations collected for AZ Mountain Camp to support the children in our Society who attend.

Fundraising to support our New Church Day gifts, Sunday school materials, Easter Egg Hunt and other celebrations includes a successful yard sale each year with Barb Fiedler at the helm. Everyone else pitches in with saleable items, organizing and selling the items in the parking lot on a hopefully cool day in late October or early November. Our Outreach in the community this year included making blankets for Maggie's House and forming a team of walkers for the Annual NAMI Walk with our Team Captain, Lois Taylor undertaking a very successful pledge drive for NAMI. (NAMI stands for National Alliance on Mental Illness).

Theta Alpha Guild in Phoenix enthusiastically supports all aspects of our church Society making it a caring and supportive house of worship. We support each other and welcome newcomers. We invite you to visit Phoenix and attend our Sunday service at 10:00 am every Sunday. Our sermons and our coffee are the best in the city.

Submitted by Carol Cronlund, Secretary

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PITTSBURGH

Greetings to all our sister chapters of the Theta Alpha from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

The kitchen is called the heart of the home. Luckily it isn't usually called the heart of the church, especially in Pittsburgh this year. Our kitchen has been part construction site, and part storage area. Nobody really knows where anything is, or if they do, how to get at it. The good news in all this is that we have a gorgeous new multipurpose room nearing completion and, what is almost as exciting, a huge new storage area. This is the amazing thing: the Theta Alpha hasn't missed a beat in preparing food. If you are lucky enough to be on the faculty at PNCS, you have been treated to fabulous lunches, and right now we are all basking in the glow of a wonderful New Church Day banquet and picnic, both staged from the construction site/storage room of a kitchen.

Like many other chapters of the Theta Alpha, in Pittsburgh we are a combination Theta Alpha Guild. It is sometimes hard to keep straight which activities are Theta Alpha and which are Guild, and which are neither, but something looking very like them. We have had some good discussions this year about defining our roles in the society, figuring out ways to support each other, and how to have fun together. We have explored Facebook and Google as tools to help us. As always, supporting New Church education is a primary goal. PNCS is a major part of that effort, and we are very proud of our school and all our students. Graduation at the end of the year gave us a clear reminder of why we support New Church education. You could call it the heart of Theta Alpha.

Respectfully submitted,
Caroline David, Secretary

TORONTO

We've had another useful season at Olivet, performing the many varied tasks that support the church and society. Although a number of our regular events got displaced, due to a flood in the church hall in early spring, we pressed on, in other locations. One of our newer focuses was supporting New Church education in the form of our thriving Sunday School program.

We have a fabulous program that reaches many children, under the dedicated leadership of Katherine Jutras. One of the overriding interests this year has been to re-examine 'who we are' as a group, and "what does Theta Alpha mean to us?" This was partially stimulated by Rachel Glenn's article in the Oct. 2010 issue of the TAJ. This will be an ongoing and evolving process, looking to make our group and our focus current.

Respectfully submitted,
Val Younan, President

WASHINGTON

The Washington area Theta Alpha Guild had a busy year as it always does. Considering the size of our group we accomplish a *remarkable* amount – and so a primary concern this year was to strive to nurture the women of the church, who do so much caring for everyone else! When our relationships are all about JOBS it isn't healthy. In an effort to create a fun vibe at meetings rather than a sphere of drudgery, we tried a pina colada social hour at the September meeting, gave out door prizes at the November one, offered hot cocoa and poetry in January, and finished with potted zinnias for everyone in April. We enjoyed listening to Rev. Lou Synnestvedt and caroling at our annual Christmas program. We added four new padded chairs to the church's supply and plan to continue that. We welcomed Dr. Sherry Cooper's thoughts at the March banquet, and enjoyed a feast by Angela Radcliffe and crew. We agreed to set aside funds to assist teachers in continuing education programs, and thanks to Ginny Gladish and crew, once again the children were given gifts in honor of New Church Day. Washington still mourns the loss of some previously active participants in the group, and yet it has been wonderful to see new women step into these uses!

Here is to a new year of joyous friendships and work for the Lord.

Respectfully yours,
Wystan E G Simons, President

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Would you like to write an article for
Theta Alpha Journal's April 2012 Issue?

Deadline for Submissions: January 15th
Angela Rose
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