



The New Church Newsletter

Hurstville Society December 2024

The Future

By Rev Todd Beiswenger

One of the features of the Sydney Mind Body & Spirit Show is a section that is dedicated to psychic readings. They rope off a big area, and have about 30-40 different readers there, but the most impressive part of it is just how many people are getting readings. All of the readers are busy, and there's a huge queue of people waiting for their turn.

I was at the show several years ago, talking with a vendor, and he pointed out to me with some disbelief at how long the line was to get a reading.

He said, with a sad tone in his voice, “There’s a lot of scared people over there.”

I hadn’t thought of it that way before, but the more I ruminated on the thought, the more I realized he was right. Basically his point was if you’re getting a psychic reading, you’re scared of what the future holds. Am I going to find love? Will I get the new job or promotion? Does my loved one who passed away still exist? All of those questions that would be commonly asked of a psychic all have some underlying fear about what the future holds – or doesn’t hold.

These days I think there’s a lot of church people who are scared, even if they’re not out getting psychic readings. Hurstville isn’t the only church where attendance is on the decline, mostly because the younger generations have failed to show up. As a result there’s fear and worry about what will happen to the church that we’ve loved so much over the course of our lives.

I suspect that at this point we know the teachings about the future of the New Church as we go back to them at least once a year for New Church Day celebrations. The woman clothed with the sun will give birth to a son, and the dragon is going to try to destroy it. The dragon will be unsuccessful, and after the final battles are done, the new Jerusalem will descend. The Lord guarantees the success of the New Church.

But our fears aren’t really about the failure of the New Church, but rather more about what will be happening at 22-24 Dudley Street in 10 years time. The Lord never did guarantee the success of individual churches, so failure is indeed an option. What I’d suggest to you though is that no matter what happens to the church on Dudley Street, it was

not a failure. It served a use for over 100 years. In fact, it has served many uses, and countless people over 100 years.

However, I'm not wanting to write a memorial service for the church just yet. The fact is that it wouldn't take much to shift things in a positive direction. Every time I walk out of Hurstville Station I look over the valley and see all the houses and think, "Surely there are 10 people here that would love what we offer." If just ten new people showed up, it would transform our little church.

While that can feel like an impossible wish, it really isn't! After all, is there really anything the Lord can't do? Is His arm too short? All we need is just for two families to start showing up, and bringing some new energy to the church. HyunJin and I have been talking about some opportunities, including something as basic as creating a new website for the church. After I updated it 12 years ago, it did generate visitors for quite a while, but now it is due to be redone.

There are other ideas too, but I wonder if perhaps he'll find some Koreans that would be interested in a Korean pastor, with a service in Korean. Of course, it's also possible – maybe even likely! - that some people will just like HyunJin better than me, and therefore be more willing to come.

All of this is to say, don't give up on the church on Dudley Street just yet. When you go to sleep at night, pray for it. Ask the Lord to send people. Ask the Lord to grow the church. And when those people show up, make sure you remember to talk to them, and pray for them. After that, it's up to them and the Lord. In the meantime, don't fear the future.

It's Been Real. It's Been Fun. It's Been Real Fun. By Todd Beiswenger

Well... it's time to say "good-bye." I can still picture it quite well... I was about to start theological school, and Jenn and I were looking at all the General Church locations around the world. We said, "Well, the farthest away they could send us is Australia!" We laughed, because it just seemed crazy, but in our amusement we agreed, "Yeah, we'd go there! That would be awesome!" We were right.

We never took the idea seriously though. I started school, and met Robert Cooper, and I remember coming home and saying to Jenn with a laugh, "Well, we're not going to Australia." From the time I started I was completely convinced they'd send us to Canada if for no other reason that we'd be easy to export there with my Canadian wife.

But Canada would have to wait, because much to our surprise we took a nearly 13 year detour to Australia. After we received word that I got the assignment, Jenn & I went to lunch with my former boss and his wife, and I gave them the news that we were heading down under. They said that they spent five years working in Germany, and that they regarded those years as some of the best of their life. Those words really stuck in my head over the years, because I could see that these were indeed some great years.

A few years later, it was April 3rd, 2015 and I turned 40. I was on the phone with my Dad, and after he got done teasing me about being old and over-the-hill, he said, "You know, in all seriousness, I look back on my 40s as the best years of my life." He said that during that decade the

kids were at home, Mom was alive, and his parents lived down the street. It really was pretty idyllic.

I've only got a few months left of my 40s, and I really get what Dad was saying all those years ago. As we leave Hurstville, it's not just leaving a country or a job, but rather it feels far more substantial. This is the end of a big chapter of my life. I wonder is if this is the end of the *best* chapter of my life? It feels a little depressing to write that, but at the same time I'm not saying the years ahead will be *bad*, just that they're not going to be the *best*. I have a hard time imagining that there's a better decade ahead than the one I just had.

While we only had one little kid, we got to share in the joy of the kids of our friends too, and that certainly had a lot to do with all of the fun that I've had over the last 10-12 years. Speaking from the role of a preacher, it was heaps of fun to show up on a Sunday morning and watching the boys all try to cram in together on the first pew next to the projector. Even more fun was starting the kids talk by asking them review questions from the previous week and seeing them be competitive as to who could provide the right answer. But I also just enjoyed getting to know them and their personalities. Those were good times. I hope that they carry some of the lessons learned forward in life.

Of course, that fun extended to the family camps as well. I know I've written it before, but up until COVID, camps were the highlight of the year for me. Getting to know church folks from around the country was a real treat, and I really appreciated the commitment of time and money that people made in order to be there. That commitment from others was always an inspiration to me to try to give my best with my sessions at camp. I wanted you to feel like it was worth it, and come again the next year.

As much as camps were an unexpected joy for me, the difficulty of growing the church was unexpected as well. To my mind, the fundamental reason churches didn't grow was because church was boring. I figured that if I made the sermons interesting, relevant, and with a simple message that everybody could understand, then people would get value out of coming to church. I also thought modernizing the music would help too, because believe it or not, good church music had been created since 1880.

Twelve years later, I'm super grateful for how accommodating the church here has been with me, letting me change things without complaint. We sang new songs, changed up the order of service, incorporated pictures and video into the service, and I did my best to keep things interesting. And yet, it didn't seem to really get new people to come back. We've had plenty of new people come through our doors over the years, only to not return.

What I've come to realize is that most people come to church for the sense of community, not so much for the doctrine. They want to see other people like themselves here, and if they don't, there's probably not much we can do to convince them to stay. However, I'm content in the fact that we tried, and through it all we stayed true to teachings despite cultural pressures to the contrary.

Which isn't to say that we didn't do some good work along the way. The ability to have guests stay at Baringa opened up an opportunity that I certainly didn't anticipate. I don't know how much you realize it, but I absolutely loved having Baringa guests. I felt like they added a lot to the church with their presence, and the church was providing a useful service to them... a win for everybody. It really warms my hearts when I think back over all the various people that stayed at Baringa because it

just speaks to how the Lord may not have grown our Sunday service attendance, but He did send people to our care and we answered the call by looking after them.

However, I want to finish this up with trying to express how grateful I am to you looking after us all these years. When we first arrived, we were filled with stories of other pastors who had run into issues with their congregations, and how we needed to be careful to not upset people. Yet, everybody here was so nice... I remember quite clearly Margaret Heldon saying to me, "We want to make sure you're happy here." I was stunned because it was all of you being more concerned about us and our well-being than what we were doing for you. It was such a relief.

I'm also so grateful to the NCIA - the ministers and members - they have been so gracious to me over the years. I thought I was going to be the only New Church minister in Australia! Hardly! I've greatly benefitted from the friendship, mentorship and comradery. Over the years I've felt that I actually fit in better with the NCIA ministers than I do with the GC Clergy. We're much more practically oriented here, and that suits me well. I hope that I've been able to give back to them in some meaningful ways.

As I look over this article, I feel like what I've written doesn't really capture just how grateful I am for our time here, and how much I've loved living here. I think you know that I don't really want to leave, and yet I feel a clear calling to move on. There are plenty of examples where the Lord gives us temporary blessings, and He tells us to not cling to the past because there's a better future that awaits. I actually believe most of that sentence, but am having trouble with the "better future" part. Yet I do believe that if you're not growing, you're dying. So with that, we're moving forward, taking a leap of faith, knowing that the same God

who gave us this blessing is the same God who continues to look after us.

You will always have a special place in my heart. There's really no doubt: these have been the best years of my life... and it's all your fault. Thank you so very much.

"How lucky I am having something that makes saying goodbye so hard." Winnie the Pooh

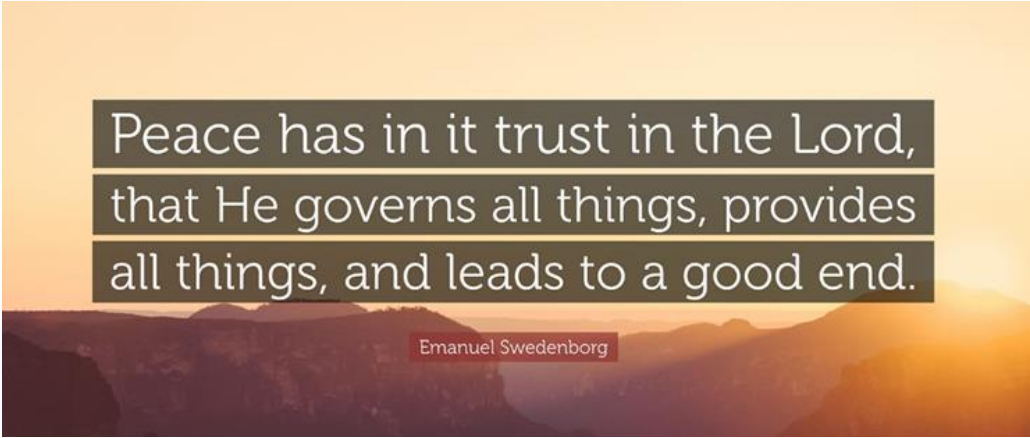
Dear HNC Friends by Jenn Beiswenger

....Goodness, where to start?! As our time in Australia draws to a close, I find myself reflecting on the life we've shared with each of you – from worship services, Sunday School, pageants, piñatas and pot lucks to visits in each other's homes, coffee out, women's weekends, church camps! Our family has been in Penshurst for nearly 13 years, and we've covered a lot of ground with you in that time. (Oh, and covid lockdowns, too! Ugh.)

Each of you has had an impact on each of our lives, and, speaking for myself, I really want to thank you for the role you've played in mine, whether big or small. This being Todd's first pastorate, this was my first time as pastor's wife, and you initiated me so gently, so kindly, for which I'm forever grateful. As much as I'm looking forward to being near my mom and sisters again, making new friends in our new church society and exploring my native country, Australia and its people have made a HUGE imprint on my life, and it's going to be really hard to leave it behind.

We are so fortunate to have the technology to keep in close touch, despite the miles! Although I'll literally be on the other side of the world from you, it won't need to feel that way – the way it was for my foremothers – thanks to the internet. And, while change is hard,.... it's good, for all of us. I'm sorry to miss out on getting to know YoungHee and HyunJin as well as you will! (I'm a bit jealous, frankly.) I hope that you'll discover new and interesting things about them, and about yourselves, once the Beiswengers are out of the picture.

....And, when the going gets tough – with any upheaval in life – I'm reminded that the Lord's got our backs! He's looking after us. Look at the birds: they don't plant or harvest or store food, because the Lord takes care of them; aren't we even more valuable to Him than they are? (Matthew 6:26) Won't He surely take care of us?? It's easier said than done, but what it comes down to, really, is that we just need to TRUST in Him, seek His input, be open to His instruction (i.e. heed what He teaches us in His Word (the Bible and the Heavenly Doctrines), not ignore it when it doesn't tell us what we want to hear!). When we trust in Him, everything else melts away; for peace has in it trust in the Lord,



Peace has in it trust in the Lord,
that He governs all things, provides
all things, and leads to a good end.

Emanuel Swedenborg

that He governs all things, provides all things, and leads to an end that is good. (Arcana Coelestia/Secrets of Heaven 8455) God is good, all the time.

I look forward to connecting with you again in the future!.... In the meantime, best wishes with everything you do. Be kind. Think before you speak – “What would Jesus do?” Approach everyone with love, including yourself. I'm so eager to see what you get up to, in the years to come! We're all keen to come back to Australia some day; hopefully that opportunity will arise, and we'll see you then. 😊❤️ ~jenn

Call for Kogarah Store House Donations

The Christmas season is right around the corner, and again we look forward to sharing the wealth with the wider community by collecting donations for Kogarah Storehouse.

You are invited to donate NON-PERISHABLE FOOD ITEMS and TOILETRIES to help folks doing it rough.

We'll gladly accept donations throughout the Christmas season, which means that you can drop off items at our Christmas class and all of our December worship services, including the caroling service on the 22nd and the Christmas Day family service on the 25th. [This collection is effective immediately & will run through December, but FB will only let us designate a 2-week span, hence the nominated dates. 😊 We'll accept donations into the new year, too, although we won't be having services on Dec 29th nor Jan 5th.]

What a great way to launch a new year for folks in need: receiving a hamper full of desperately-needed items! Please note that we request regular old-fashioned non-perishable food & toiletry items, *NOT*

Christmas- or holiday-specific. Donations can be brought to services, left on the front verandah of Baringa (#22 Dudley St) or appointments can be made upon request; DM us to arrange.

(...Here's an idea: do you do advent calendars leading up to Christmas? You could try a new twist on the advent calendar, this year: set aside an item per day for donation! e.g.:

Dec 1: a can of soup 🥫

Dec 2: a toothbrush 🪥

Dec 3: a bar of soap 🧼

etc. -_ then bring it all in on Christmas morning or to the carols service!)

Thanks so much, in advance, for your generosity; your gifts will really help someone out. ❤️ Merry Christmas!! 🌟🙏🌲😊

Want to Keep Getting My (Todd's) Articles?

I've heard from a few people that they would like to keep getting my articles after I've moved to Canada. If you would too, let me know (todd@hurstvillenewchurch.com) and once I get there I will add your name to the Olivet New Church newsletter mailing list. Their newsletter is called "The Chatterbox," so you'd get a monthly email titled, "Olivet Chatterbox."

Christmas Readings

Want to keep the "Christ" in your Christmas season this year? How about trying a daily reading program? Rev Mark Pendleton has been creating a new booklet of daily readings to be done throughout the month of December. Each day there's usually two or three quotes, something from the Bible and something from the Writings, but the

total amount of reading isn't particularly long: about one A5 page, with another paragraph that provides a daily reflection on the reading. Rev Howard Thompson has taken these booklets and reformatted them for use here, and would be more than happy to mail you a booklet if you're interested. We also have a few copies here at the church if you want to just pick one up. Otherwise, email Howard revhathompson@gmail.com and he'll sort it out for you.

Calendar Notes

As per our tradition, we'll have a "Christmas Carols and Readings" service the Sunday before Christmas (December 22nd at 7pm). You'll notice that Christmas is on a Wednesday this year, and we will have a 10am family service on Christmas morning. However, please note that there is no church the following Sunday the 29th, or Sunday January 5th as HyunJin and many of us will be attending camp at Stanwell Tops. Regular services will resume January 12th.

The Shaman and the Cardiac Surgeon an Excerpt from "Mind to Matter: The Astonishing Science of How Your Brain Creates Material Reality" by Dawson Church

The fields of your body can interact with the fields of other people at great distances. A former cardiac patient named Richard Geggie told me this story during my research for a book called *The Heart of Healing* (Smith, 2004):

"In the early 1990s I was in Toronto, Canada. I went to see my doctor because I felt tired and listless. He sent me to have an electrocardiogram. Later that day, when he got the results back, he told me that my heart was at serious risk. He told me to stay calm, not exert

myself, keep nitroglycerine pills with me at all times, and to not go outside alone.

“The doctors administered several tests over the course of the following three days, and I failed them all because my arteries were severely clogged. They included an angiogram, another electrocardiogram, and a treadmill stress test. When I started the bicycle test, the clinic staff didn’t even let me finish. They stopped me partway. They were afraid I was going to die on the spot, my arteries were so clogged. As a high-risk patient, I was given an immediate appointment for heart bypass surgery.

“The day before the surgery, I woke up feeling much better. I went to the hospital and I was given an angiogram. This involved shooting dye into my arteries through an injection in my thigh. The surgeons wanted to discover the exact location of the blockages prior to the operation. I was prepared for surgery. My chest was shaved, and the doctors were about to mark my skin where they planned to make the incision.

“When the new angiograms came back from the lab, the doctor in charge looked at them. He became very upset. He said he had wasted his time. There were no blockages visible at all. He said he wished his own arteries looked as clear. He could not explain why all the other tests had shown such severe problems.

“I later discovered that my friend Lorin Smith [a Pomo Indian medicine man] in California, upon hearing of my heart trouble, had assembled a group of his students for a healing ceremony the day before the second angiogram. He covered one man with bay leaves and told him that his name was Richard Geggie. For the next hour, Lorin led the group in songs, prayers, and movement. The next day, I was healed.”

When I last followed up, 13 years later, Geggie was still in excellent health. The phenomenon of distant healing is well documented, with scores of studies showing its effects (Radin, Schlitz, & Baur, 2015)."

The Secret to a Happy Marriage

A man and woman had been married for more than 60 years. They had shared everything. They had talked about everything. They had kept no secrets from each other except that the little old woman had a shoe box in the top of her closet that she had cautioned her husband never to open or ask her about.

For all of these years, he had never thought about the box, but one day the little old woman got very sick and the doctor said she would not recover.

In trying to sort out their affairs, the little old man took down the shoe box and took it to his wife's bedside. She agreed that it was time that he should know what was in the box. When he opened it, he found two crocheted dolls and a stack of money totalling \$95,000. He asked her about the contents.

'When we were to be married,' she said, ' my grandmother told me the secret of a happy marriage was to never argue. She told me that if I ever got angry with you, I should just keep quiet and crochet a doll.' The little old man was so moved; he had to fight back tears. Only two precious dolls were in the box. She had only been angry with him two times in all those years of living and loving. He almost burst with happiness.

'Honey,' he said, 'that explains the doll, but what about all of this money? Where did it come from?' 'Oh,' she said, 'that's the money I made from selling the dolls.



Birthdays

Happy Birthday to Gai Kennedy (2nd), Beryl Laidley (14th), Ken Horner (16th), Patricia Walsh (19th), Kristen Johnson (29th).

What's "new" about the "New Church?"

A very common question, to be sure. Well, it all started just over 200 years ago... the main branches of the Christian church had become less correct, and one man named Emanuel Swedenborg had written volumes about how Christianity was missing the point. Some readers of Swedenborg realised he was right, and formed a new organisation that would strip away the centuries of politics and tradition and get back to what Christianity was supposed to be about: loving God and loving each other. Everything else could be seen as merely a difference of opinion if those two main principles reigned supreme through this new church.

As a result we believe in a positive Christianity, one where we look to the best in ourselves and others while still holding ourselves accountable to a higher standard and taking responsibility for our lives. Nowadays we're not so much "new" as we are "different." We still keep the name, and yet make every effort to incorporate the ideals that were instrumental in being "new" over two centuries ago.

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Call or come at any time.