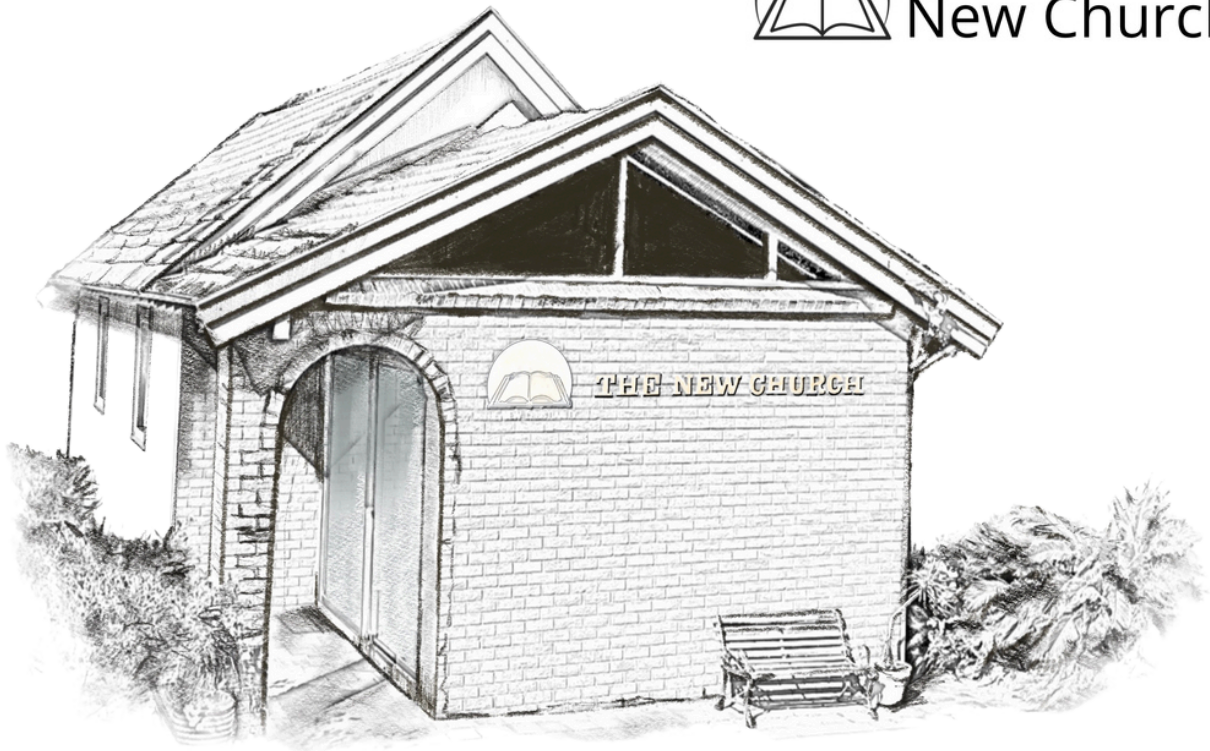




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New Church



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# The New Church Newsletter

## Hurstville Society September 2025

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### **Is Empathy Dangerous?**

By Rev. HyunJin Yang

*“Mercy and truth have met together;  
Righteousness and peace have kissed.”  
(Psalm 85:13)*



Would you believe that this topic went viral on different online platforms and has been hotly debated. Besides, the idea of ‘empathy is dangerous’ seems to have gained public agreement on some level. Some of us will say, though, ‘what kind of question is this?’ ‘It isn’t worthwhile even to think about, and the answer is simply no. Period’. If you find it so, I am with you. My initial reaction to the topic was, ‘this idea wasn’t even worth a second to think about.’

But later on, I did further research, having found out that we may be able to hold ‘some’ valid points from the conversations. Trying to speak fairly for some of its underlying arguments, the idea and its voice seem to point that empathy alone is dangerous, not ‘whether or not empathy itself is dangerous’. So, I would like to call us on to reflect on it, if the main argument lies in the former, not the latter.

One of the primary sources that elaborate on this issue is *The Sin of Empathy: Compassion and Its Counterfeits*, a book written by Joe Rigney, Minnesotan pastor and theologian. Aside from the contents of the book, I will first argue that the title of the book is misleading, divisive, and unnecessarily provocative. Also, I have not had a chance to read the book. But I watched his sermon on this specific topic several times and some other talks.

Here is my offer. I reckon that we can still find a couple of crucial remarks and ideas such as empathy is dangerous ‘when feelings are in charge, but truths are out of window’, and such as how ‘untethered empathy’ can be dangerous. An example for the ‘untethered empathy’ may be where one reaching out with empathy for another who is in need of help rather loses his or her objective of what is ultimately good for the person, and thus being drifted together. Rigney offers an illustration for the ‘untethered empathy’ as follows: “if someone’s drowning, empathy wants to jump in with both feet and get swept

away. Empathy jumps in. Whereas compassion says, I'm going to throw you a life preserver. I'm going to even step in with it and grab you with one arm, but I'm remaining tethered to the shore.

Is the compassion's saying of 'I'm going to throw you a life preserver' selfish? Is the well thought-out and disciplined mindset of working from a goal of getting them back to the shore too heady or somehow off the mark? Does it sound one party thinks and acts from moral supremacy over another?

I can't speak for everything said about, nor do I agree with everything said in the book and his sermon.

And yet, I reckon that the 'tethered empathy' as compared to the 'untethered empathy' can be wise and saving. It certainly has a strong and valid point that we can't ignore and call for deeper reflection.



## **When Mercy and Truth Are Met Together**

From here on, I would like to offer a brief run-down on the class given on this topic in August and additional thoughts, which will be concluded on the importance of marriage of truth and goodness. I also recently preached several sermons on the brotherhood relationship of goodness and truth as described and represented by the stories of Cain and Abel, and Esau and Jacob, if you may find them interesting.



First, I share some of the passages we discussed in the class, the first being on the two essentials that constitute the church:

There are two essentials which constitute the church, and hence two principal things of doctrine—one, that the Lord's Human is Divine; the other, that love to the Lord and charity toward the neighbor make the church, and not faith separate from love and charity. Because these are the primary things of Divine truth. (Arcana Coelestia 4723)

This makes perfect sense because this mirrors back the two great commandments. Besides, we are most likely familiar with the teaching that 'faith separated from charity' in fact is not faith. But also, it is noteworthy that charity as love towards the neighbours and should look to the right faith of how to love and help our neighbour best.

If we look at charity in this term, we can see that allowing and endorsing undesirable thoughts and behaviours is not charity. We might see it as charity, and they might feel it as charity. And yet, charity is spiritual love that not only requires love and compassion for the neighbour but also requires prayers and prudence in seeking what may be the best goodness for them and for their eternal life.

The underlying promise of charity and work of charity is for its warmth and love to be the soil, from which their life of usefulness and its vision can be planted and conceived. It is where spiritual growth of the people who we love and try to serve is hoped. Charity or compassion for others being such, it is by default, by design, and in itself, to look to the best possible goodness for their spiritual life,

not just their physical well-being and their temporary satisfaction.

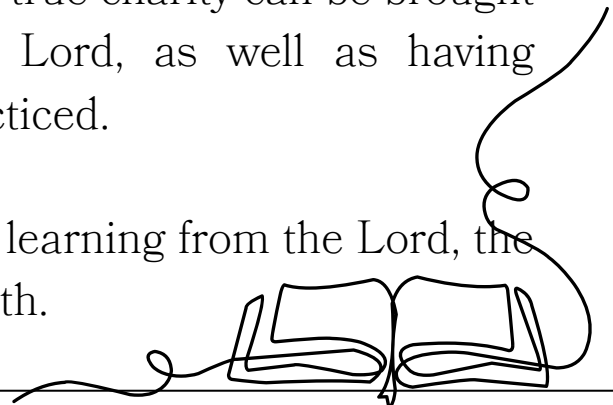
Without doubt, the best example of heavenly compassion is the Lord. We can't possibly imagine the Lord to love us with bountiful mercy alone without guiding and bending us towards His truth, His life, and heaven, not towards hell. His guidance, provision, and providence always look to our salvation of souls and to our life of heaven in Him. That is His end in view. So does and should our charity or compassion for others strive towards that end in view.

When we look at charity this way, we may realize it is a much more dedicated act of loving as it not only entails acting from our compassion for others but also learning and thus being able to guide the loved ones and our neighbour to what the Lord says about His goodness, not to our own sense of what is good. To simply put it, loving compassion equally accompanies 'right' guidance (See Divine Love and Wisdom 37).

This asks us for a heavy responsibility to learn from the Lord and from His Word on how He might have done in His Wisdom and Love together. We can also humbly reflect for ourselves on how ignorant we are of the goodness that is married with truth.

Much more can be said and discussed about the subject of marriage of goodness and truth in this regard. But here, I would like to leave us with two passages for reflection on how our true charity can be brought about when offering guidance from the Lord, as well as having compassion, thus in their marriage, are practiced.

The first passage speaks of the necessity of learning from the Lord, the second one of marriage of goodness and truth.





Those who are being regenerated first of all do good as matters of doctrine direct them, for they do not of themselves know what good is. They learn to do good from matters of doctrine concerning love and charity; from these they know who the Lord is, who the neighbour is, what love is, and what charity is, and so what good is. (AC 3310:3)

Where truth resides, so does good, and where good resides, so does truth. Truth without good is not truth, and good without truth is not good. For good is the essential being of truth, and truth is the manifestation of good; and the situation with a person's understanding and his will is the same, in that the understanding is dedicated to receiving truth and the will to receiving good. From this it is evident that when a person is being regenerated the Lord gives him a new understanding through the truths of faith, and a new will through the good of charity, and that both must be present and also joined together if the person is to be regenerate. (AC 9055:2)

## **The General Church's Clergy Meetings (23-28 June)**

The last few months have been quite busy for meetings. As you know, I attended the General Church's clergy meetings in late June which took place at Bryn Athyn, PA, USA. I have found the meetings to be very useful to me. My favourite part in general was being able to talk with other colleagues. To hear about what they are trying and how things go in different parts of the broader church was refreshing and learning.

Some may wonder how the meetings went in terms of the discussions. First off, I will say that part of the discussions and papers for the meeting can't be publicized or distributed. This policy, which is not new, is put in place, so that it can prevent a certain doctrinal position or a partial understanding of a subject from misrepresenting its right understanding for the church.

The subjects of the papers presented among the ones that can be publicly shareable are the Rev. Scott I. Frazier's *The Call to the Priesthood: Personal, Societal, Priestly, Mystical*, and the Rev. Derrick A. M. Lumsden's *Not as the World Gives*.

I served as one of the four panels for Derrick's presentation. I enjoyed the premise of his paper that the social status of Christianity moved from positive (Pre-1994), to neutral (1994-2014), and down to negative (2014-present). In our monthly class of July, I discussed this topic further based on my reading of the book, *Life in the Negative World* by Renn, Aaron. I also briefly touched on the topic for our August 3rd Sunday service.

## **A New Dean of Bryn Athyn College of the New Church Theological School**

During the meetings, we formerly saw the stepping down of Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb as the dean of the Theological School. And yet, he is not retiring. He will still be teaching some courses at the Theological School and serving as an itinerant preacher.

The new Dean is Rev. Scott Fraizer, who taught undergraduate courses at Bryn Athyn College for many years. If should you be interested in staying in the loop of the direction of the Theological School under its new leadership, you can watch a presentation that he

recently gave at Bryn Athyn Church community supper. Here is the link:

 <https://youtu.be/gZ8fcmvqUM?si=V19u1f4fjSCLzqeT&t=3477>

You could also find this video at Bryn Athyn Church YouTube channel. @BrynAthynChurch

## **Acknowledgement to Rev. Dr. Andrew Dibb**

Here I would like to share my personal thanks to Andy. I was one of his students back in 2018 through 2022. His gentle leadership inspired me and carried me along during the years. It imprinted in me a different leadership model to appreciate and follow.

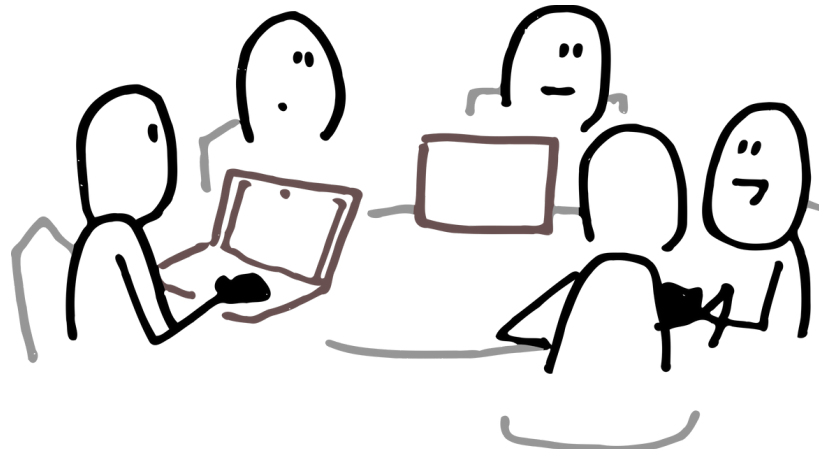


One of the biggest theological legacies that was handed down to me was his course on Christian History. This completely changed the way I read and contextualize how Christianity has progressed (often not positively) and where the New Church lands and fits into that broader narrative. I owed much of my interest in and understanding in the subject to him. Thank you, Andy! (Above: a photo taken of me and Andy during the meetings)



## Next General Church Clergy Meetings

As for the travel part itself, I thought it would be not easy, but it turned out to be quite taxing. I don't think I enjoy the travel part! But the one for next year seems to be a bit easier, as the next clergy meetings are not plenary but regional. What that means is that we will have separate meetings for ministers from a certain region. So, ministers from Asia and Oceania will be gathering for meetings, and the host country will likely be South Korea, my home country! It would be then a much easier travel.



## NCIA Council of Ministers' Meetings (27-31 July)

This year's NCIA COM face to face meetings were held in Brisbane. It was my first time in-person COM meetings. I was well welcomed into the council, and I feel we had a meaningful time over discussing doctrines and other issues. An issue that was brought up to be most common for each society was its future. In my own word, each society is facing the question of where it may be in few years or what the long-term planning may look like. A society may stand slightly brighter than other, but overall, the future issue of society as a community of people is self-evident.

With that being said, we stayed focused on something positive such as the next Retreat in January and online platforms to outreach to people. We had a lot of constructive discussions.



## **What's Coming Up?**

### **Family Service First Sunday of Each Month**

Beginning on the 7th of September, we will have our first Sunday of each month as family service. It doesn't mean much difference from other Sundays aside from two additions to the service. First, I will include a short children's talk, whether or not any children are present or not. The hope is that if a family with children would like to attend service and it has to be one Sunday of the month, then, I would like them to know the first Sunday may be the one. Plus, if you are planning to come with a child or children on any Sunday, kindly let me know. I will have a children's talk ready for the service.

Second, we will be trying to have discussion time towards the end of service between the first postlude and the second postlude. The format can be flexible, depending on how we are moved to do on a Sunday. But basically, the floor will be open, so that anyone can ask a question about the service, share what their thoughts are, or the like. Or we can share our thoughts about discussion questions that I will be offering.

No pressure whatsoever to step up and speak! Nothing comes to your mind, then, we can move on J. The hope is to encourage more participation from the congregation, rather than putting anyone on spot. I promise I will handle it well! The least thing I want is scare anyone off. So, no worries. Come and join!

Our first family service on the 7th will be perfect in terms of the topic as it will be Father's Day. The next family service will be the 5th of October, the first Sunday of the month.

## Doctrinal Class + BYO lunch (11th)

Our monthly doctrinal class is held at 11:00 A.M on the second Thursday of each month at Baringa, unless otherwise notified. At this stage, we can't tell what our topic is going to be (unless our class is featured with going over one of the Writings, chapter by chapter or subject by subject). But that's part of the fun. We can treat it like a surprise box!



## Outing (September 21st)

Save the date for Field Day on the 21st. After Sunday Service, we will be going on outing for walk. Details have yet to be further discussed as for where we go and how we do lunch. We will target the venue for the outing among Manly walk, Manly, Cockatoo Island, Royal National Park, and Blue Mountains. Happy to get your input, so please don't hesitate to reach out to me to drop a line or two of your thoughts. We hope to see you all then!





## Church News

### Church Premises Update



The installations of solar panels + battery both for Baringa and the manse were completed in July. Baringa is equipped with 15x440W with 6.6KW solar system with battery 14KWh Battery. The manse has 12 solar panels with the same battery. Sometimes pictures can say much and better than words.

### **The Visit of Peter Taylor, his wife Yuhong, and Stephen**

It was Peter's first visit in Australia in 32 years! and first time ever for his wife, Yuhong. Peter and Yuhong have returned to the United States on the 27<sup>th</sup>. We wish their best!

Peter also offers his thoughts on his return to Australia: I woke up on the first morning, seeing beautiful tree and garden behind Baringa – the work of Norman Heldon. I was impressed with the dedication of the society and the kindness of Ralph and HyunJin. Though I was not particularly pleased with the gigantic buildings on the horizon in the back spoiling the garden view from the Richard Morse room. (At night, their lights made me think I was in Brooklyn or Manhattan).



Stephen, Peter, and Yuhong (picture above after service)

Everybody is very helpful in Australian cities when travelling. It was great to see old friends and meet HyunJin. Great to hear that I still sound Australian!

## 2026 Subscription Notice

Current subscribers will be familiar with the renewal process and will receive a separate sheet for the renewal. New subscribers can use the information below to subscribe via mail, email or online.



## **Another Reason to Receive the Newsletter via Email**

A couple of months ago, I noted that you could choose to receive the Newsletter by email if you would like to read every page in full colour. There may be another reason to opt in by email as the basic postage rate has gone up from \$1.50 to \$1.70. If you would like to receive via email, kindly let me know. I will add you to our emailing list.



I want to acknowledge those whose birthday were in August but not mentioned as there was no separate issue of August Newsletter. Belated Happy birthday to Emily Kermond (7th), Rhonda Hall (12th), Rebekah Horner (17th), Larah Walsh (21st), Lily Heldon (29<sup>th</sup>), Ralph Horner (30th).

Happy Birthday to Owen Heldon (6th), Carolyn Heldon (8th), Klaire Horner (9th), Liam Johnson (10th), Sylvia Hicks (13th), Karen Evans (13th), Jeffrey Heldon (15th), Phillipa Horner (15th), Azalea Robson (19th), Phillip Walsh (29th),

## **The NCIA Retreat in January 2026 (15th to 19th)**

It is not too late at all to BOOK it! Please take a look at the flyer below about the NCIA Retreat 2026. If you need help in booking or have questions about eligibility and availability of the subsidy, contact Carolyn at [nciaretrear@gmail.com](mailto:nciaretrear@gmail.com)

# NCIA Retreat 2026

Alexandra Park, Sunshine Coast, Queensland



Please scan the QR code to register to make a booking.

Bookings are not confirmed until a deposit is received.



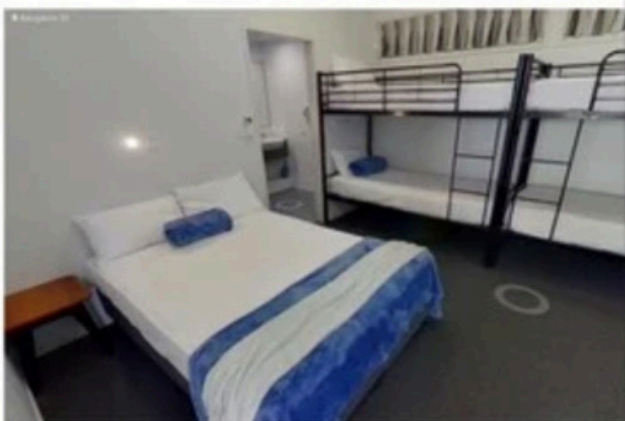
NCIA Retreat 2026  
Booking Form

## Thursday 15th to Monday 19th January

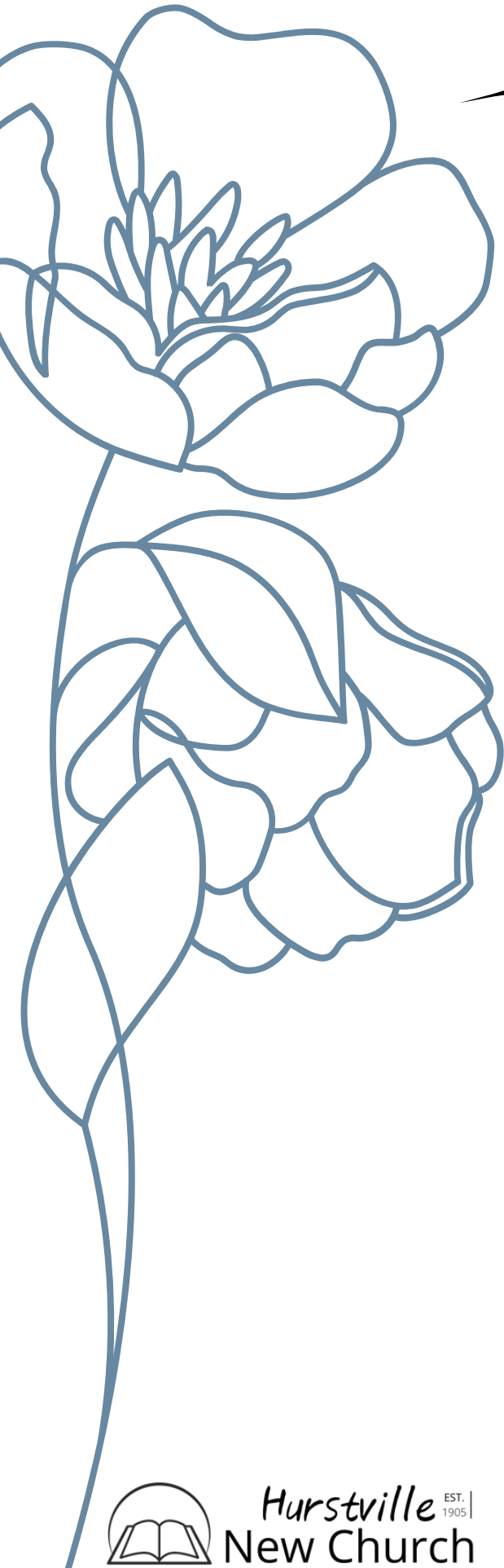
This retreat will be held from Thursday dinner to Monday 10.00am. Alexandra Park is located at Alexandra Headland within minutes walking distance to the beach.

The Bungalow accommodation is all air conditioned with ensuite bathroom, mini fridge, TV and an outside deck. Each room has a double bed, single bunk beds, or single bed and can sleep 5 or 6 people.

Twin share rooms (private room for two) are available but are limited so book in quickly.



Example of bungalow rooms



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