

All Age Gathering Theme – The sense of touch

Saturday 21st April – Bournemouth New Church

You are invited to an all age day. Drinks and biscuits will be available from 10.30am and an opening service will begin at 11am. The day will end with a concluding service to finish approx. 4pm.

The morning will be based on the sense of touch and will include craft sessions and discussion time. There will be a shared lunch and time for games in the afternoon.

Please bring your friends and/or family and something to contribute towards a shared lunch.

Please contact Lara Nicholls for more details and please confirm your attendance no later than April 7th, by phone 0203 441 8773 or email laranicholls@talktalk.net

new church

Lifeline



**The regeneration of a person
is represented in the rainbow.**

New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine 186

Lifeline

Lifeline is published in the first week of the month by the General Conference of the New Church. Articles and notices should reach the editor by the end of the second week of the month prior to publication.

Editor: Alan Misson,
Tel: 020 8777 5098 Email: alanmisson@btinternet.com

Distributor: Howard Turner,
Tel: 020 7229 9340
Email: howard.turner@generalconference.org.uk

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**Our mission is to express, share and
experience with others in life an inclusive,
non-judgmental vision of God's kingdom.**

Editorial

In the January 2012 issue of Lifeline a short statement from the Committee of Ministers, appended to a report of the Council, described the circumstances in which Helen Newton had withdrawn from the time being from her pathway towards Ordination within the New Church. The statement indicated that a fuller statement would be issued in the near future and I am pleased to say that this is printed on page 5 of this issue. I have also printed three letters on the subject written in reaction to this situation on page 7.

I do not think it proper or appropriate that any further articles in Lifeline, including this Editorial, should comment on the very personal issues involved in this situation which necessarily ought to remain confidential. Nevertheless I strongly feel that the issues of principle highlighted by this case ought now to be discussed and debated in the wider body of the church and not just amongst the Ministry.

The two issues involved, as it seems to me, are these:

1. Can a person be ordained a second time without first relinquishing their earlier vows or are there circumstances in which this is an entirely acceptable position?
2. To what extent should the Church review and change its current policy on ceremonies to enable a wider ministry to people no matter what their sexual orientation?

(Continued on page 3)

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For the current issue of Lifeline, back issues and other resources visit:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Committee for Auxiliary Ministry Service Plans

CAM is pleased to announce the publication of a set of ten service plans for the Easter period produced by Rev Clifford Curry. They contain introductions, prayers, readings and talks as well as suggestions for suitable hymns. Some of them also contain ideas for suitable music to enhance the service. Worship Leaders are free to adapt them to incorporate their own ideas and style.

The set costs £5.00 if you require printed copies. If you prefer to receive copies by email these are available at a cost of £1.00 per set and CDs are also available at £2.00 per set.

If you would like to receive this new collection please send your order to:

Mrs Jan Millar

Tel: 01484 401910

Email: jan.millar@generalconference.org.uk

Cheques should be made payable to 'The General Conference of the New Church'.

New Facility on Lifeline Online

An experimental service for providing access to films and videos has been set up on the Lifeline web site. It can be found by going to:

www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

and selecting Resources then Films and Videos.

There is one film available so far - the wedding of Ann Chadwick and Colin Skinner in December 1961 followed by Holiday Centre 1962 at Langdale in the Lake District.



Circle Dancing at St Paul's Cathedral

'*Encircling the Land with Sacred Dance*' was founded twelve years ago by Suzy Straw. She sought to bring dance back into the churches of England, where it was once accepted as an honoured part of worship. Suzy and a small group of friends decided to follow an ancient pilgrimage route around Britain dancing once a month in a different holy place, encircling the whole land in a twelve month period. Suzy died suddenly in October 2011 but her vision has inspired dancers to continue the project she initiated.

Five of us from our Sacred Circle Dance group at West Wickham joined about 60 other dancers for the St Paul's Cathedral Eucharist Service on Sunday 8th January 2012 to celebrate Suzy Straw's life. We had a live band, a Welsh harpist and Two vocalists. We did four dances interspersed in the Service.

- A 14thcent. Dance composed for pilgrims going to Montserrat.
- Joc de Leganea, a Romanian cradle song.
- Ma Na Vu-a, a prayer shawl dance from Israel.
- Laudate Dominum, (Praise the Lord all people. From the Taize Christian Community in France.)

We all felt very honoured to dance in such a place. The Welsh harpist played quietly, while the Congregation lined up to take the Sacrament, which created a very special, meaningful atmosphere.

Suzy Straw had begun the project for the Millennium in 2000 and wishing to bring peace, healing, joy and prayer. The project has danced in Salisbury, St Edmunds, Brecon, Ely, Norwich and York Cathedrals as well many parish churches. Our circle dances beneath the circular dome of St Pauls was a fitting way to celebrate her life's work.

Hilda Johnson - From the West Wickham Newsletter



Since in ancient times the glad feelings excelling all others were spiritual ones, that is, feelings springing from affections belonging to spiritual kinds of love, which were affections for goodness and truth, people were allowed, when they engaged in singing and musical harmony, to dance as well and so in dancing also to bear witness to their joy.

From Arcana Caelestia 8339

Second Ordinations

Anybody who has experienced watching an Ordination ceremony, whether at Conference or elsewhere, knows it is a deeply moving and very important occasion full of profound meaning for those taking part. And how much greater must these feelings be if you are the person being ordained and the one making their vows before the Lord.

I imagine that if we were, for example, to compare the vows across a number of Christian denominations we would find a fair degree of commonality but also some marked differences arising from the varying theology and practice involved. It is because of these differences that traditionally someone moving from a ministry in one denomination to another needed to relinquish their earlier vows. But is this 'relinquishing' essential or can vows be held in common across two ordinations? One of the problems appears to be that there is a risk of devaluing ordination for some people. If a person has to relinquish their existing vows in order to be ordained again that person might well feel a great loss at the devaluing of their earlier vows. But equally, if it is accepted that vows can be held in common then there is a real risk that those already ordained may feel their ordination to have been devalued.

It seems to me that we ought to have a policy on this in the General Conference of the New Church or failing that, we ought to have at least a thorough debate on this subject so that everyone can be more aware of and understand the issues involved.

Human Sexuality and Church Ceremonies

This subject has been debated within the Ministry for some years and progress has been reported from time to time in Lifeline, most recently in the issue for March 2011. The *Statement by the Ministers' Committee* in that issue included this paragraph:

For some ministers the prime emphasis is on the need to accept all people, whatever their sexual orientation, in a spirit of charity. For others it is to uphold the teachings and principles of conjugal love because these are the basis of human sexuality and essential to true heavenly joy. Whilst these emphases are not mutually exclusive, tensions can arise between them. The divergent approaches that result require careful listening and sharing to reconcile. It will inevitably take time to work through this dialogue, requiring mutual respect and patience. The prize will be a deeper and more mature understanding of human sexuality and a more compassionate and wise ministry to all, no matter what their sexual orientation.

The further statement from the Committee of Ministers in this issue of Lifeline

also refers to *differing responses to these issues*.

Now I can appreciate that for this subject there will inevitably be divergent approaches and significant differences of emphasis. This situation reminds me of words spoken by the late Rev Paul Vickers, then President of Conference, at the 1970 New Church World Assembly. During a talk on 'Our hopes, our problems and our policies' he said:

*I reminded the General Conference only this week of Goldsack's first law: "No two New Church ministers ever agree about anything". Although you have also to remember Goldsack's second law, I think, that all New Church ministers **strive to think from divine revelation**. [my emphasis]*

I feel that these words fit very well the discussion taking place currently within the ministry. But the problem I perceive is that whilst the *prize of a deeper and more mature understanding of human sexuality* is being pursued by the ministry we in the body of the church are being left in the dark to some extent about what the *divergent approaches* might be and what their basis is in divine revelation.

I therefore think the time is right for some form of presentation by the ministry on this issue so that there can be greater and better informed understanding of the thoughts and feelings that lie behind the divergent approaches and their basis in divine revelation and I urge the ministry to tackle this request.

A closing comment

One of the dangers in debating both the issues identified above is that we can sometimes give much greater weight to what we think about the issues than what we feel about them. But on the other hand, there are times when we give much greater weight to what we feel about the issues than what we think about them. However what we really need above all at this time is an approach to these issues where the 'heart' and the 'head' go hand-in-hand.

Editor

Asking the Lord a question is done by consulting the Word; for the Word has the Lord present within it. He is present there because the Word consists of Divine Truth that comes from Him and He resides with angels in Divine Truth that is His, and also with members of the Church who receive Him.

From Arcana Caelestia 10548:2

truth; your word is truth ... For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. *John 17:17,19*

Pause again - and reflect on what holiness means to you now. What truths do you live by? What words of the Lord do you turn to most? How do these affect your life? How are you holy?

Bible focus

Ourselves – as the Lord's dwelling

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me... My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. *John 14:21,23*

Remain in me, and I will remain in you... If a person remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. *John 15:4-5*

If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. *John 15:10*

Fortunately we are not simply what we inherit from our parents. The Lord created us. We have a heavenly parentage. The Lord is in the inmost of our being giving us life constantly. We come to know this as we learn about him and live his way. His presence, his love, 'grows' as our 'holiness' increases. This is a new self that we are to love and live from, a new heart that he has given us, one in which the Lord dwells, where he delights to be, he in us and we in him.

We have always been the Lord's dwelling. The wonder and joy is in becoming aware of it and remaining in it.

Prayer

Connect with the Lord within and speak with him in your own way. This may be a beginning:

Lord, may I keep you at my centre. Remind me that you are in my inmost being, that you are my steadying. I don't have to go anywhere to look for you, simply within, letting go of distractions and focussing, to find peace and guidance, direction, a real knowing. Amen

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Five Essentials - Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church
4th Essential: Part 1: Loving ourselves - as the Lord's dwelling
Published by The General Conference of the New Church.
Downloadable from www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

And yet the Lord created us and loves us, so we need to accept and love ourselves as he does. If we don't love ourselves, we stifle the love in us and we shrivel up and have little to offer others.

Teaching focus

Two distinct loves

In heaven there are two distinct loves, love to the Lord and love towards the neighbour ... They both go forth from the Lord, and they both make heaven ... To love the neighbour does not mean loving a companion in respect to his person, but loving the truth that is from the Word; and to love truth is to will and do it. *Heaven and Hell 15*

So the neighbour we are to love is the truth within a person, truth from God's Word, God's holy Word. We are to love the truth in them as we are to love the truth in us. 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' This is different from loving yourself above everyone else, which is what we have to learn not to do, being contrary to the Lord's way.

Holiness

I, the Lord your God, am holy. *Leviticus 19:2*

Since divine truth proceeding from the Lord is meant by 'holy', therefore the Lord is called in the Word 'the Holy One'... and it is also from this that angels are called 'holy', and also the prophets and apostles; and ... that Jerusalem is called 'holy'...

Divine truth proceeding from the Lord is called 'the Spirit of truth' and 'the Holy Spirit'.

Those called 'holy [saints]' are those who are in Divine truths.

Apocalypse Explained 204:5,6e,7e

'Be holy ...' Learning to know the Lord's way and loving to live that way gives us this living truth within, which makes us holy. It is a gift from the Lord.

Consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am the Lord your God. Keep my decrees and follow them. I am the Lord, who makes you holy. *Leviticus 20:7-8*

No-one is holy from himself, not even the angels... but from the Lord, because the Lord alone is holy. *Apocalypse Revealed 586e*

When praying to the Father, Jesus says: Sanctify them [make them holy] by the

Statement from the Committee of Ministers

The interim statement from the Committee of Ministers in the January 2012 Lifeline gave some information relating to Helen Newton and her training and ordination. It did not go into detail about the discussions behind the two proposals put to Helen in late November. This further statement attempts to do this.

The two specific areas of concern which had been raised prior to the Committee of Ministers' meeting in November 2011 in relation to Helen Newton's ordination were "double ordination" and the conducting of same-sex partnership ceremonies. The background to both of these is Helen's ordination by the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation in July 2011 after a two-year training with the Interfaith Seminary.

Helen's article in the December 2011 Lifeline talks about this issue of double ordination and explains her feelings about the compatibility of being both an Interfaith minister and a minister ordained by the General Conference of the New Church. Notwithstanding this, some feelings have been expressed that there could be tension between these two ordinations and that the teachings underpinning a Conference ordination could come into conflict with some of the policies accepted by the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation. This position lies behind the second of the two proposals which were put to Helen. Both this and the other proposal published in the January 2012 Lifeline were arrived at after lengthy discussion and considerable soul-searching in an attempt to acknowledge and indeed integrate widely differing assessments of this situation. The implications of recognising someone ordained by an organisation other than a New Church organisation were not discussed in detail before deciding to include this as one of the proposals we asked Helen to consider.

One particular example of possible tensions which has been raised is in the area of partnership ceremonies. The One Spirit Interfaith Foundation has a policy of non-discrimination including on the basis of sexual orientation. Any offer of conducting partnership ceremonies as a One Spirit Interfaith Minister, something which Helen very much sees as part of what she wants to offer in ministry, therefore has to include the possibility of conducting such a ceremony for same-sex couples or couples where one or both partners are bisexual or trans-sexual. This is because Helen is committed, through the position taken by the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation, to not refuse to conduct such ceremonies on the grounds of the couple's sexual orientation.

The Committee of Ministers has been considering the issue of conducting same-sex partnership ceremonies for some time, along with the question of whether

Conference should ordain anyone in a same-sex relationship. There are differing responses to these issues, some people feeling that New Church teachings based on the Bible and Conjugal Love make pursuing either of these options impossible, whilst others feel that our teachings are not a barrier in this area.

Because of this lack of consensus and the emotive nature of some of our discussions, the Committee of Ministers has chosen not to put these matters to a majority vote.

Returning to specific discussions relating to Helen Newton and the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation, there has been some feeling that because Helen's ordination by the One Spirit Interfaith Foundation implies the potential conduct of same-sex partnership ceremonies, this was deemed by some to be incompatible with an ordination by the General Conference. It was felt that asking Helen if she was willing to suspend conducting any form of partnership ceremony as an Interfaith Minister might enable her ordination within General Conference to go ahead in 2012. Although we discussed this, no time-limit was put on how long such a suspension might last. This was because we felt that our recent experience has shown that it is very difficult to put a time-scale on resolving the relevant issues. The hope of achieving some resolution was nevertheless part of this approach. This is the background to the first proposal.

The Committee regrets that the discussion of these two proposals led to Helen Newton deciding not to continue as an ordination student, as our intention was not to prevent Helen being ordained by General Conference. We are conscious of the difficulties that this process has presented for Helen and wish her well in her future work both within Conference and beyond.

People who are being regenerated and becoming spiritual are led initially by means of truth to good; for they do not know what spiritual good is, or what amounts to the same, what Christian good is, except through truth, that is, through teaching drawn from the Word. This is the way they are introduced into good. After that, once they have been introduced into it, they are led no longer by means of truth to good, but by means of good to truth; for at this point good not only enables them to see the truths known previously, but also brings forth new ones not known before. Good holds the desire for truths within itself because it is so to speak nourished by them; indeed they make it more perfect. These truths – the new ones – are very different from the truths they knew before; for these truths possessed little life in them. But those received afterwards possess life coming from good.

Arcana Caelestia 5084

4th Essential: Part 1 - Loving ourselves - as the Lord's dwelling

Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy ... love your neighbour as yourself.
Leviticus 19:2,18

Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me ... My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.
John 14:21,23

'Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy...' A stunning statement! Yes, God is holy. The Bible is holy. Jerusalem is a holy city. But 'Be holy' - me? How can I be holy?

Pause - and reflect on what holiness means to you and what you associate with it. What would you be like if you were holy and the Lord made you his home or dwelling place?

Might you love your neighbour as yourself? This is another command given in Leviticus 19, which is also challenging. Who is your neighbour and can you love them as you love yourself?

Loving ourselves

You might find it hard to love yourself having been put off by teaching that those in hell are motivated by a love of self and the world. You might not want to live in a hellish way. The heavenly way for us is to love the Lord and the neighbour as oneself.

Also you might find it difficult to love yourself if you have been taught that there is no good in you. You can't seem to be lovable if that is the case. If people call us names and we have difficulty in thinking well of ourselves, we may not see ourselves as lovable - Mercifully the Lord allows us to do good things **as if** of ourselves. When later we learn that all good is from God, not ourselves, we can acknowledge that it is the Lord acting in us that does the good and thank him.

A person cannot begin to think about good or to will it, and so cannot do good, unless the Lord is the source. *Arcana Caelestia 39*

No-one is good - except God alone. *Luke 18:19*

Five Essentials - Aspects of Loving - a focus for the Church

This issue sees the start of the next Essential in four parts:

Fourth Essential: Loving ourselves

- Part 1: - as the Lord's dwelling
- Part 2: - caring for ourselves
- Part 3: - our angelic self
- Part 4: - in relationships

Some people are meeting together to share their thoughts and reflections on the focus for the month. Have you considered doing so? If you meet currently, how about letting the Church know how your group is getting on? We'd love to hear.

Part 1 can be found on page 11 of this issue. And please remember that the whole series can be found online on www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk

Mary Duckworth

"With what shall I come before the LORD,
and bow myself before God on high?
Shall I come before him with burnt offerings,
with calves a year old?
Will the LORD be pleased with thousands of rams,
with ten thousands of rivers of oil?
Shall I give my firstborn for my transgression,
the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?"
He has told you, O man, what is good;
and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness,
and to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8 ESV

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ I know there are times when I don't deal justly with those around me, when I don't show kindness to those in need, when I am proud of my self and humility has been forgotten – please forgive me for all these times when I have fallen short of what you require of me. Give me love, strength and confidence, Lord, to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with you.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

How sad I was to hear the news that the Committee of Ministers felt unable to support Helen's ordination. The issue is that Helen offers a blessing on same sex relationships as part of her Interfaith ministry. I look forward to the situation being explained more fully in the further statement which is to be issued in the near future. I understand that some individuals have expressed concern about how Helen's ordination as an Interfaith Minister could be combined with ordination as a Minister of the General Conference of the New Church, and that certain aspects of this can be deeply challenging. I also know that there are many like me who have no concerns about this and who find her approach deeply inspiring.

One of the gems of New Church ideas which I particularly treasure is the belief that there are many pathways for sincere seekers of the one true God. I love our mission statement which commits to expressing, sharing and experiencing with others in life an inclusive, non-judgemental vision of God's kingdom. I therefore fully embrace the concept of a New Church minister also being a member of the Interfaith ministry. It has ever been the case that individual Ministers are encouraged to debate the interpretation of the message of the Holy doctrines in a prayerful way. As I understand it, this is why we do not have fixed policies on all issues and much is left to conscience. I would like to think that Conference and its current Ministry could bravely embrace differences, not because we are desperate but so that we continue to have the opportunity to develop ways of reaching out with love.

I ask all our members to pray for our Ministers, holding them in love and respect as they continue their deliberations on the issues involved. My own prayer is that a way will be found to lift the conditions which Helen cannot meet, so that she may at some time reconsider completing her training for ministry with us.

Like many of you, I have known Helen since she was a child. I have seen her gentle wisdom grow and I know how committed she is to the truths of the The Lord's New Church. Helen has so much to offer which I would value in a minister. I send her my love for her work in her Interfaith ministry. It would seem that our loss is their gain.

Patricia M Russell

Dear Editor,

As someone who has attended Young Families weekends at Purley and had the privilege of having Helen Newton leading the adult sessions which I have thoroughly enjoyed, I read with sadness the news regarding her from both the Council and the Committee of Ministers in January's Lifeline.

It is hard for me to understand the jargon in the reports in Lifeline and also what has happened to change people's minds in regard to Helen's ordination into the New Church. I wonder why it is now that the problem has occurred. Surely the Council and the Committee of Ministers were happy for Helen to become an Interfaith minister alongside training to become a Minister of the General Conference of the New Church or else she would not have been able to start and then continue with all this training.

In the Keynote address by our Spiritual Leaders in July they mentioned that "new pathways (are) opening up to us – new Ministers, new groups, new attitudes of humility and loving kindness, more willingness to share with other Christians and indeed people of many faiths or none" and also our Mission statement is to "express, share and experience with others in life an inclusive, non-judgmental vision of God's kingdom."

Why, at our 2011 Annual Conference, were we discussing and spending time in deciding the length of the 2012 Annual Conference when we now have to endure a lengthy 5 day conference with no ordination to look forward to?

I feel all of the elements of our Mission statement have been disregarded in this matter to suit those who are expressing concerns in relation to Helen being an Interfaith minister.

Lara Nicholls

Dear Editor,

I have always thought our Church was a thinking, tolerant Church rather than one dominated by dogma. We used to acknowledge that dissimilar views expressed were not 'wrong' but were simply different and therefore tolerated. The most significant example of this is the so-called Tulkian Heresy. Charles Augustus Tulk (1786-1849) was an erudite and very devout Swedenborgian, yet plagued by what can only be described as a flaw of faith. He believed that spirit is spirit and matter is matter, and the two never mix. It follows that, from his point of view, Swedenborg's concept of the Divine human is untenable and wrong.

Not for a moment should Tulk's sincerity or belief be doubted; it is simply that his interpretation of Swedenborgian teaching is at variance with what is normally accepted.

One would think that in this enlightened age ministers would be more tolerant than in Tulk's time, but this is apparently not the case. A protracted discussion amongst ministers has seen some polarisation in the topic of human sexuality. In March 2011, the Minister's Committee wrote in Lifeline: *For some ministers the prime emphasis is on the need to accept all people, whatever their sexual orientation, in a spirit of charity. For others it is to uphold the teachings and principles of conjugal love because these are the basis of human sexuality and essential to true heavenly joy. Whilst these emphases are not mutually exclusive, tensions can arise between them.*

The topic of sexual orientation has again come to a head for two reasons. Firstly, same sex couples are to be allowed to hold civil partnership ceremonies in churches and other places of worship in England and Wales. Secondly, a discussion centred on whether or not New Church ministers should offer blessings for same sex couples arose as a result of a College student's ordination as an Interfaith minister and her undertaking to perform such ceremonies as part of this ministry. Because of this, she was told by the Minister's Committee that she would not be recommended for ordination in 2012 if she could not suspend her interfaith same sex ceremony work. As things stand, by her own choice, she is no longer a College student, despite the fact that she is Swedenborgian to the core and has many skills to offer the Church.

This comes about because the Minister's Committee seems to be prevaricating over a decision on same sex relationships. What has happened to enlightenment and tolerance? Instead, some of them are apparently discrediting the student. Are they being judgmental rather than giving guidance, when only the Lord can be the judge? Surely each minister should be allowed the freedom to decide questions of theology? It's clear that they are already divided over this issue, perhaps irreconcilably so. If the three main branches of the Swedenborgian Church have different interpretations of the Writings, why can't individual ministers have the same freedom?

It could all end in tears. Some have been shed already. My greatest fear is that this situation will cause a split in the Church that will be very difficult if not impossible to repair, at the very time when we all need to be singing from the same hymn sheet. Concessions are required. Just because something is at variance with what is normally accepted why should it be shot down in flames? Mr. Tulk was accepted some 200 years ago – why do we appear to be less tolerant now?

Alan Bowie