

December 2019

# ECHO

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## Newsletter of the Washington Church of the New Jerusalem

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### From the Pastor

On November 22nd, we had a Society Meeting during which I shared my vision for the Washington New Church. Not everyone could make it, of course, so I'd like to share some of the same ideas we spoke of then, here, in the *Echo*.

First, let me start off by saying that I love being here. I've only been pastor of the Washington New Church for five months, but so far I am really enjoying my time with all of you. I hope that the experience so far has been mutual. I really appreciate that this is a congregation that is stable, and at the same time ready to consider taking on some new directions.

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With that in mind, I want to encourage you to spend some time considering what it is that you yourself value about this spiritual community. What about life in this congregation do you find uplifting, supportive, or valuable? And, at the same time, it's worth looking at the aspects of this society that are no longer working for you, even if they may have been more useful in the past.

I ask you to think about these things, because we are beginning to consider possible changes here and there. Whenever a new pastor comes on board, it is an opportunity to update the way a church community operates, so naturally there have been a lot of people wondering what might be changing in our near future. Some wonder with excited anticipation, others with a little bit of concern, and many perhaps with some of both. So on that note, let me share with you one aspect of how I am approaching change.

The model for change I am using can be thought of as a “crawl/walk/run” approach. For each new or changed program, the first question is, “What would it look like if this idea was really flying?” In other words, what is the most optimistic vision one could have for it? Then, scale that back to something that seems perfectly reasonable to achieve, although only after a good bit of work. Then, from there, define one step that would represent a basic first step on that path. My focus for right now is on these early “crawl” attempts. Until we



crawl, we won't fully know what walking will look like or what it will take to achieve, let alone running. So to begin with, any change we look at will begin with a single "crawl" step just to see what it's like and to prove to ourselves and one another that we are capable of moving in that direction.

Paired with this crawl/walk/run approach, is the "church systems" model I wrote about last month. I have looked at some of the past efforts to describe the order and organization of this society, and am mapping those earlier structures onto this new system based off of the image of a church as being in human form. So for each of the six "core" systems, here's what I see...

First, let's talk about the school. In the history of the General Church, New Church elementary schools began as primarily a way of evangelizing the "most fruitful field", members' own children. The goal was to grow the church through our children, and to do that by means of church schools.

Over time, as family sizes shrank and church members became more geographically dispersed, school enrollments shrank. This brought economic pressures to bear on enrollment policies such that over time most of our schools shifted from being almost exclusively for the children of members to also enrolling students from the surrounding community outside of church membership. As part of this transition, some churches came to look at their schools as a means of evangelizing, still, but now those being evangelized were the students of non-members' families, and those students' parents. This is a strategy that the Washington New Church adopted. And over the years there has been some success at adding to the church membership through our schools. At the same time, if we were a church that didn't already operate a school, it would not make good financial sense to spend the money to start a school purely for the purpose of this sort of evangelization. For the same number of dollars spent there are far more effective ways of bringing people into our worship space on Sunday mornings.

This is one reason that I would like us to shift how we think about the school. Let's not use the school as a tool of evangelism, but rather approach it as a service we provide for our neighbors. If we

are to operate a school, we should do so as a “benefaction”, a good deed of charity we provide to our neighbors. An additional reason I want to encourage this shift, is that, over time we (like all churches in North America) are certain to experience additional pressure due to a growing culture that is hostile to religion, which will stress any system we are using for evangelism. If we continue to see our school as an evangelism tool, then eventually that pressure will start to alter how we operate our school, warping our policies and approaches that will harm the basic good we are already doing.

And it is that basic good that I want us to focus on. I see our schools as a positive good done for others, full stop. Every student who goes through our grades is exposed to ideas, spheres, attitudes, values and beliefs that they will be able to draw on for the rest of their eternal lives, regardless of formal religious affiliation. Every day we are doing *permanent* good that cannot be erased. We may never again see the majority of our students after they grow up and move on into adulthood, but what they experience in our school will follow them forever. I do not believe it is in any way an exaggeration to say that our school is doing a concrete positive good for our surrounding community, our nation, and the human race by producing eventual adults who have the awareness and options that are uniquely provided in a New Church school. So if we are to have a school, I propose that that should be its mission.

And speaking of serving others, I believe that it is vital for every church society to be of use to those outside of itself. This is the model all heavenly societies are formed around, and it ought to be the model the General Church uses to guide church societies on earth. To that end, I would like to see more discussion around the ways in which we as a church can be a more active and even vital member of our community. This doesn't have to be grandiose. A church can be useful in many simple ways. As a starter, I would like us to become more of a resource and gathering place for our neighbors. There are many ways of going about it, but things like the proposed gazebo project, and a possible revitalization of our soccer field can be some starting points.

And beyond being useful to our neighbors, let's get even more intentional about having fun with one another. We already do a number of things that are primarily recreational. I think perhaps now is a good time to review what we do and then find ways of making it better. And not just because it's fun, but because the Lord in His Word actually tells us to! (Yes, the Lord is good.)



In the realm of communications, we are now looking at ways of sharing our Sunday morning experience with people who are not yet attending or not able to attend our worship. This means

setting up a live video stream of our worship experiences. This will be of value not only to people who are homebound, but also to the newcomer who is looking for a safe way to prescreen us before taking the socially challenging step of trying out a new church in person. Along with these live streams, I am also working right now with the General Church Office of Outreach on a pilot program of theirs that involves producing video content for the straight-to-Internet "market". More on this in the new year.

Moving more to our internal operations, I would like to look more closely at the various small groups we have going. These include the various book reading and discussion groups, but also groups with a more social focus, dinner groups, support groups, and others. On this front, the primary limiting factor is people willing to host, facilitate or lead such groups. If you or anyone you know is curious about starting a church group for any purpose, but don't know where to start, please come see me. I will help get you going.



Finally, let's talk about our "worship system". Sunday morning worship is our "marquee event", as it is for every church community. Our worship services are a primary way we provide truths that satisfy people's needs for meaning. At the same time, worship is also meant to be an affectional experience of the divine. This is why humility and praise are vital, alongside instruction, when we gather together for worship. A big part of how worship is meant to accomplish this is through our use of music.

Unfortunately, many have expressed to me that our current wor-



ship music is not working as intended. Speaking as the primary “song picker”, and on behalf of our two organists, I can tell you that we as the current “music team” want nothing more than to provide music that contributes to

worship, helps people express joy, praise and gratitude to the Lord, and so approach the Lord not just with minds but with hearts as well. The criticisms I have heard are not of the work that our musicians do, but rather of our overall use of music. This primarily shows up in song selection, but also in stylistic choices.

To address this, I am seeking someone willing to take on the role of music team leader, and I am also looking for people willing to join the team as musicians. This includes both instrumentalists and singers. Until we have a regular team leader, I will be temporarily holding that position myself. I love playing music, know several instruments, and know a fair amount about music, and yet I already have a primary role to play. So as much fun as it might be to also lead the music team, my goal is to eventually help someone else pick up that mantle.

In the meantime, though, I will be introducing some new music here and there, first in a gentle “crawl” sort of way. We will start by trying some things out in our preludes, interludes and postludes. From there we may try introducing a new congregational song here and there. We will go slowly and carefully.

Care is needed, because music, like all art, is experienced differently by different people, and because it is such a powerful expression of affection. So there is no way to have a music program--to make changes to it or to maintain it as it is--without touching on different peoples’ sensitivities. I respect that. I also ask that each of you recognize that your personal preferences are exactly that: preferences. They differ from those of others in the congregation. Whether you are someone who is happy with the status quo or someone anxious for something new, please know that we are

dealing with things that are matters of personal taste and so we all need to be patient with one another.

I want to be very deliberate in how we go forward in this area. But because worship is so important to our overall mission as a church, I am prioritizing the changes we make in worship over any other updates we might be considering to our other systems.

So let me talk about our overall system for evaluating, choosing and rejecting, and eventually implementing changes. The Board of Trustees has established a Strategic Planning Committee made up of myself, David Radcliffe, and Derek Hyatt. I will be working with this Committee, along with the Board of Trustees and the Pastor's Council to develop a strategic plan over the coming three months. To do this, we will need to occasionally call in interest groups from among the membership as we address different aspects of how we do things. In addition to any group discussions, I anticipate that it would be best if I also had one-on-one conversations with every member about some of the things coming up in our future. Yes, that will be time consuming, at least on my end. But I have found that it can be invaluable to get the kind of input that is only available through one-on-one discussion, and I want to make sure to do this right. So be ready: it is only a matter of time before I get around to pestering you personally.

So there it is. My vision as it stands so far. I would like to see us take some small risks, do some extra work, and try to become a more outward-focused church congregation with a vibrant worship practice, a full community life and a sense of purpose. However, I don't get to just decide. I believe you all have a choice to make. I see two possible futures for the Washington New Church, and I honestly believe either choice is a perfectly valid one for you to make, despite the fact that I personally hope that you choose one in particular.

One path is to keep doing exactly what we are doing. To not risk ruining a good thing. To let the current generation enjoy what you already like about this church, and play it out until you are done with it. I can see this path lasting another ten years without any

major difficulty. And I would understand people saying that's what we should do. What we all have here is very good.

The other path is to take risks, make changes, and hold the past and present more loosely for a possibly new future. It's uncertain. Maybe a little frightening. Maybe also a little exciting. If we are willing to make changes now, we can possibly help build a church not just for the current generation but for the next few generations that are coming up. And not just for ourselves, but also for our neighbors. But we also might fail.

Either way, let's be intentional about this and do it in a spirit of trying to follow, serve the Lord, and not just ourselves. I believe we have a fun and interesting future together. I can't tell you what it will look like for certain, but I trust that the Lord will work with us so long as we are faithful to Him. If you want to be a part of this, step on up. Come talk to me. Let's see what we can discover together in the next chapter of the Washington New Church's story. - Rev. Mac Frazier, 2019-11-25

***From the Principal,***

I enjoyed our fall society meeting which had a great turn-out. Our pastor's introduction and outline of the strategic planning process which he and the Board are leading was strong and prompted me to think both more broadly, but also with detail about the next 5 years in the congregation and also in the school. I look forward to the school team being involved in supporting the congregation's planning process.

My school remarks at the meeting touched on the following themes:

- 1) We are now firmly in the next phase of the school, in which the sizable majority of the student population is not from families who are already in the New Church. This illustrates a shift both in purpose and in effect for WNCS. The primary founding purpose was to educate the children of New Church families in New Church doctrine, within a New Church social sphere. I believe strongly that this was a good and worthwhile purpose. The purpose today has more to do with

offering a high quality, New Church education to families in the community who are only just being introduced to the New Church. This makes the school program a “benefaction of charity” offered by the congregation to the surrounding community. The fact that the public schools continue to struggle with cultivating academics and values makes our offering a very important alternative for families in the area who would like to see religion be a part of their children’s education. WNC and the General Church have a strong history which has made us well suited to deliver this type of service to the community.

- 2) I also highlighted that it is only through the maintenance and building of our heroic staff of New Church educators that we can continue to make this offering. This remains our most important area of focus going forward.
- 3) I also shared several examples of students (very new to the school) engaging with me and other teachers on religious questions, outside of normal chapel and religion class times. I love to work in a school where an 8<sup>th</sup> grader can spend time after school asking his teacher questions like “why did the Lord make the universe?”
- 4) The White Horse Academy High School has now completed its first quarter, which, among other things, had us working through our first progress reports. This meant figuring out how to gather up and communicate progress and results from a disparate set of courses. (Online, independent, experiential as well as conventional classroom format).
- 5) We’ve been pleased to see some early successes of the Experiential Learning (EL) component, which pairs a student with a mentor in an area of mutual interest. A recent example is student with a new dog working with Kathy Johns on dog-training. Another learning experience led a student to tell her parents that the EL program makes her “really want to be useful.”
- 6) We’re also enjoying the opportunity afforded by our “Life Skills” class to connect students with a range of skills. An example currently in development is to work with Pat

Sweeney and Dave Cowley on home electrical systems; offering a very brief introduction ranging from an engineer's perspective of design to the hands-on tasks of stripping wires to wire a light switch.

- 7) Finally, we continue to keep the other broader vision in mind too which is that we build towards a shared platform of New Church courses (available online) allowing a network of New Church students from several different locations to share courses, camps and weekends. Religion and art are the two courses currently under development. – Brian Smith

### **Vera Maria Kluss**

Beloved friend and teacher Vera Maria Kluss ended her journey on this earth Oct. 25 at the age of 96. A memorial service will be held the first week of April.



Vera liked to be called Tante Vera (Aunt Vera in German) because of her love of children. She joined the Washington New Church community through my parents David and Winnie Stebbing. A WWII refugee from East Germany, Vera was sponsored for immigration into

the U.S. in 1952 by a couple who, knowing Vera was a teacher by profession, clipped ads for teaching positions from newspapers. One ad was for Winnie's school. After Vera had been teaching at the school several months, Winnie offered her room and board as part of her salary. Thus Tante Vera became part of the Stebbing family in 1953, first in the home on 30<sup>th</sup> St. in Hillcrest, Washington, D.C., then from the early 70s in the home at 4214 Glenn Dale Road in Bowie, where she lived until her final day on earth.

Vera taught at the Naylor Road School until it was sold in 1972, rising to become Principal, with responsibility for up to 175 students, from two year olds through 4<sup>th</sup> graders. She may have

stayed with that school for a few years after its sale. Vera then became a teacher at the Washington New Church School, from the 70s through the early 90s. Vera saw herself as both teacher and “aunt” to a generation of the young people of our society. She loved to remember her students at Christmas.

Vera also loved gardening. She chose the right family for this purpose, since Dad was also a gardening enthusiast. The house and five acres at Glenn Dale Road provided boundless opportunities for flowers and fruit trees. After Dad’s passing, Vera assumed the tasks of caring for Winnie, the house, and the property. Some of us will remember Vera mowing the lawn into her late 80s, though legally blind.

Another great love was for dogs. Vera, like Winnie, welcomed strays, both at the school and at home. For a while, there were five dogs living at the house. And dogs loved Vera, in part because she loved to feed them. We brought her an unclaimed stray from Georgia once, whom Vera named Heidi, and within six months Heidi had added 50% to her weight. Vera fed visiting dogs “sur-reptitiously” under the table; it was a game to pretend no one saw her do it.

Vera lived this long in part because she was a survivor, a person of strong will and determination. She’s from Breslau, Silesia, now part of Poland, and spent her formative years under the Nazi regime. She lost her entire family in the war. Vera confided to Winnie that she refused to teach Nazi propaganda in school and for that was interned in a camp. Figuring out an escape route, she and other detainees sprinted to freedom, but only Vera eluded recapture. Evading the Nazis, the advancing Russian army, Poles, and Czechs, she made her way into West Germany, where she spent about seven years as a nanny for several families, before emigrating from Germany.

For many of us, Tante Vera was a dear friend, who, with her love and energy, had a lasting positive impact on our lives. May her love of children and of her friends bring her great happiness in heaven. -- David Stebbing

## Announcements

**Christmas Centerpiece:** We will again be offering our candle-and-greens centerpieces, starting in early December, for your Christmas decorating or gift giving. Order forms are available in the Church lobby now. Please deposit them in the basket there, or call Mary Cooper (301-390-6292) to order.

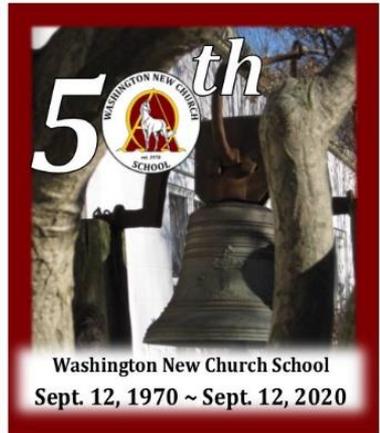


Prices remain at \$10-\$25, depending on size, and all proceeds go to the WNC operating fund.

**Invitation:** This **December 13th**, Rev. Mac Frazier and his wife Gillian are having a **Christmas Party** at the pastor's home at **11801 Chantilly Ln**, and you're invited. Come enjoy cookies and desserts, adult beverages, hot cider, and music. If you play an instrument, bring that along as well! Kids are welcome, too. The fun begins at **7:30 p.m.** Hope to see you there!

**Annual Quintero New Year's Eve Open House:** You are all invited to drop in at Quintero's Dec. 31 any time after 8pm. You are welcome to bring something to nosh or imbibe to share.

**SAVE THE DATE:** The 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the beginning of the Washington New Church School will be here before we know it; so save the weekend of September 11-13. We have lots of planning to do so if you are interested in being on the committee, come to our **first committee meeting – Monday, December 2<sup>nd</sup> at 10am** at the school. If you want to be involved and can't make the meeting, please contact Kathy Johns [\\_kcjswim@aol.com](mailto:_kcjswim@aol.com) or Bonnie Cowley [bonnie.cowley@washnewchurch.org](mailto:bonnie.cowley@washnewchurch.org).



**New Job, new work phone** and new email: Chuck Quintero has taken a new job. His new info is: (wk.) 240-562-3992, email: [c.quintero@alum.mit.edu](mailto:c.quintero@alum.mit.edu).

**New Address:** Jenny Smith is moving into the Col. Smith home for a time until the new owners – Craig and Laura Cooper move to the area to take ownership. Jenny’s new address: 11907 Progress Lane, Mitchellville, MD 20721-2108

### **All the News That Fits:**

***We start off with some sad news:*** A memorial service was held for **Dolores Burnham Soderberg** on November 2<sup>nd</sup>, at the age of 91. Friends and family from near and far attended the service and remembered her long and useful life. Rev. Michael Gladish officiated at the service (also a service Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> in Dale City, VA for family and friends there).

**Vera Kluss** passed away on October 25, 2019 after many years of declining health. She was 96 years old. A memorial service is planned for the spring at a date to be determined (*see more P. 10*).

And **Edwin F. “Sonny” Alford** passed into the other world on November 11<sup>th</sup> after a very long battle with pancreatic cancer. He was 87 years old. A memorial service for him was held at the Church on November 23<sup>rd</sup>, with numerous friends and family in attendance. Rt. Rev. Brian Keith officiated. ~ Our condolences to all of these families.

***On to happier news:*** Welcome to the **Kunkle’s first grandchild**: a Halloween arrival (that would be October 31<sup>st</sup>) for **Madeleine Sylvia Kunkle**, 7 lbs., 1 oz., born to Kristin & Bryan Kunkle in Birdsboro, PA. Congratulations to all authorized personnel.

It was nice to have first-year theological school student, **Calvin Heinrichs**, visiting our school from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> of the month. His job was to shadow our pastors to find out what really goes on in a school society to confirm his choice to pursue a career in the ministry.

Congratulations to **James Cooper**, who celebrated his 50th birthday by running 26+ miles, a marathon task that he actually did on purpose. In Philadelphia. It was his first try at a marathon and he actually finished it in a time that qualifies him for the Boston Marathon.

**Giving thanks:** **Veterans' Day**, and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Armistice ending WW I, was remembered by the Washington New Church School on Monday, November 11<sup>th</sup> by a special worship service followed by an outdoor flag-raising ceremony. Numerous veterans from various branches of the military joined the school in this event.



**Simonses** are happy to be having a few peaceful weeks after spending a weekend in the hospital with Owen at the beginning of November. Wylan reports that thankfully, Freya and Keir and Oskar came home to visit that weekend, and they shared a long night supporting Owen in the hospital so mom and dad could get some sleep. Owen is back home, and since then Wylan, Edward and Owen have traveled a bit, looking at places to get care for Owen in Florida and in Bryn Athyn. Still TBD. Meantime it is great to be back in their own home for the holidays!!

Congratulations to the **Crofts**: they were the winners of the HUGE raffle basket as well as all the good stuff in and draped on said basket. Special thanks to all who contributed to that stuff, and who bought the non-winning tickets to create an income bonanza for TAG - \$158.00!

Another bonanza the same day was the Great **Bake Sale** - \$238.50! More good stuff. More thanks to those responsible

**Phil and Janna Zuber** were excited to be able to round up their troops and have a family reunion at Bethany Beach for Thanksgiving week!

**Mike & Ginny's family** gathering over Thanksgiving included: Dain & Anika Kistner and Ian, Derek & Freya Buss, Richard & Sonja Glenn, Dar and his daughter, Rowan, all collected at the family mansion.

Other visitors at Thanksgiving included students home from schools to get nourished in preparation for upcoming finals.

**Agreeable stuff:** At last! An **Acton Park** agreement. The Acton Park Board announced to an AP Corporation meeting on November 22<sup>nd</sup> that after months of negotiations, it has reached an agreement with Alder Energy Development, LLC for the installation of a solar panel array in the open field adjacent the D&S store. The agreement includes an option to Alder to enable that company to get county approval of the solar system, and a 25-year lease when the necessary permits have been obtained.

**House and Home: Brian & Janine Smith** have purchased the former Kinsey house on Sondberg Lane and are beginning an extensive renovation project there.

Congratulations to **Craig and Laura Cooper** on their purchase of “Colonel’s Concern”, otherwise known as Dean & Cathy Smith's house on Progress Lane. Craig, a Lt. Col. in the U.S. Air Force, Laura, and their three children are currently residing in England but expect to be reassigned to this area next summer. In the meantime, **Jenny Smith** will be renting and living in the house, so please note the new address for her.

**Work, work, work! Kira Zuber Jenkins** starts a new job with Goodell DeVries, a Baltimore city law firm in December. Her dad will miss seeing her smiling face the days he is at his firm in Upper Marlboro.

**Amy Odhner** got to visit Anaheim, CA when she attended the annual conference for the Society of Women Engineers. She did some whale watching, toured the local LA Department of Water and Power plant, and met women engineers from around the world. She says it was refreshing to meet so many smart women who are involved in so many different types of engineering projects.

As a senior teacher, **Candy Quintero** has recently traveled to two New Church schools to provide faculty support.

And **Chuck Quintero** has taken a new job with the Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Lab in Laurel.

**Rev. Mike** claims to be retired, but more accurately, he is semi-retired (or maybe semi-working). His current adventures include making pastoral visits on the traveling ministers' circuit to Atlanta and Florida on weekends in October, to Dawson Creek, BC in November (which plan needs better timing), and to Florida again (twice!) coming up in December (better timing).

**But first, School:** **Freya Simons Williams**, who will graduate from the Boyer School of Music at Temple University this January, performed her senior recital on November 15. She performed 5 songs that she either arranged or wrote. The audience was full of family and friend supporters. Brava!

**And Church:** At the well-attended Society semi-annual meeting on Nov. 22<sup>nd</sup>, Rev. Mac (in other places in the Echo referred to as Rev. Glenn Frazier) outlined his vision for the Society. We have accomplished a lot, and we do a lot, which gives us a good platform for moving forward.

Also, at that meeting Rev. Brian (in other places in the Echo referred to as Rev. Brian Smith) outlined the progress being made to develop a new-look high school, making use of on-line courses and hands-on experiences.



In addition, **Lincoln Smith**, chair of the landscaping committee, outlined some of the proposals being considered for planting trees, installing benches and building a friendly gazebo in the lawn between the church and the Gladish home, for improving the school campus and enhancing the Church's community presence. Work parties are in our future.