

October 2020

# ECHO ECHO

## Newsletter of the Washington Church of the New Jerusalem

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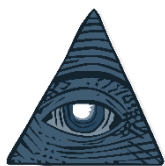
### From the Pastor

*“You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden.” (Matthew 5:14)*

Apologies ahead of time. This will get a little long, and slightly (though hopefully not too) political. Buckle up.

I have had several interactions with people over the past month on the topic of “conspiracy theories”. Without getting into the weeds

about any specific belief about any particular purported conspiracy, I have to say that the phenomenon itself of political movements driven by conspiratorial thinking fascinates and concerns me. This is not something exclusive to either side of the political aisle. There is something about the idea of a deep and complex conspiracy among powerful people that has a powerful appeal to a significant portion of humanity. This has always been true, but over recent years it seems to have intensified.



One of the more interesting observations I've come across is that conspiracy-theory-based movements share many characteristics with traditional religions. But I'll go one step further: it appears to me that many conspiracy-free political movements also

share many qualities with traditional religions. Not all political movements and not all conspiracy theories do, but those that do tend to be unusually persuasive. They tend to have apocalyptic views of the near future, with an expectation of both an impending catastrophe if things are not turned around right away and also of some sort of salvation, typically by means of specific individuals. They rely heavily on felt experience over abstract reason. They respond to "non-believers" with a mix of hostility and contempt. They have phrases that get passed around and repeated as part slogan, part mantra. And they tend to view all world events around them, regardless of domain, as somehow tied in with the primary focus of their belief.

Why? Why are these new "micro-religions" growing in popularity? What's the appeal?

I think the rise of conspiratorial beliefs and fanatical political movements are likely a symptom of a larger problem, and one I have no clear solution for.

People need to believe in some sort of narrative that explains life, the universe, and their place in it all, but traditional narratives are failing and being rejected by society at an accelerating rate. Also, we are witnessing the ongoing "death of authority". This is partially because some traditional authorities on truth have repeatedly

abused their office. It is also partly because the democratizing effect of today's technology undermines and flattens the whole concept of “trusted experts” and “trusted reporters”.

In the end, I wonder if “mainstream culture” is done-for--not just the current culture that has been labeled “mainstream” over the past long while, but the entire *concept* of a “main stream”.

We seem to be heading into a future in which the current political system falls apart--not necessarily “officially” but at least *de facto*--leaving us living as a dozen or more geographically commingled tribes that do not like or even understand one another on the most basic level.

Meanwhile, over the span of my entire life, it seems that we have been more and more making a god out of the office of the presidency. And so the stakes are now simultaneously far higher than they ought to be, but, given time, more pointless than they have ever been. The last few presidents have repeatedly reached for powers they ought not to have, largely because we keep encouraging them to. At this point I don't see how that gets reversed.

There is also the problem that we have each unwittingly crafted our own personal digital hells. Algorithms designed to encourage “engagement” have led each person down a path that sculpts what (and therefore how) they see. Seeing a conspiracy amounts to our brain's pattern-recognition routine getting a “hit”, following up on it, getting more positive hits, and so eventually confirming the suspected pattern is real. But the lens we are now looking through is custom tailoring the next bit of data we receive with the very specific goal of guessing what patterns we (and by that I mean each of us, separately) are seeing, and then finding something to fit it. So once we suspect a new pattern, our digital servants eagerly construct it for us without telling us that's what they're doing. And so what we might brush off as coincidence ends up being confirmed as truth.

What's more, we are not all in the same hell of curated patterns together as a society. Rather, we each are offered a personal lonely

hell hand-crafted to our very specific clicking and searching behavior. So the pattern you see may be totally invisible to your neighbor, because they have been taken down a different path by the same means. Worse, your two patterns are not just incomprehensible to one another's world patterns, they are threatening and intolerable sometimes.

Yes, we do get clumped into tribes. Partly this is because the algorithms have discovered that it's easier to pursue their given goals when they can group individuals together. And it's also partly because human neurology, psychology and spirituality has a short set of very deep fundamental ways of coding experiences, so any organic process we are subjected to will put us into semi predictable clumps.

To adapt a quote from one of my favorite childhood movies, *War Games*, modern digital society seems to be "a strange game" where "the only winning move is not to play". But if we choose to avoid Facebook and Reddit and YouTube and 4chan and twitter and network news and talk radio and newspapers and forwards from relatives...well then we collapse as a society nonetheless, because the "death of authority" inevitably brings with it the death of civilization itself.

So what's the solution? And why are you hearing this from your *pastor* of all people?

*Some tribal behaviors are positive, while others lead to hatred, racism, and authoritarianism.*

I believe that the human desire for a meta-story that explains everything is not going to go away. But some meta-stories are extremely harmful, while others actually lead to more love and less suffering. What's more, some meta-stories are more true than others, and some

are outright lies actively designed to mislead people. I also believe that the human tendency to group into tribes and then participate in group thinking is not going away either. And again, likewise, some tribes are lovely, while others are harmful, both to their members and to their perceived "outsiders". But the best of tribes are those

that not only encourage love among their members but that also see neighboring tribes as lovable too.

So it matters to me what meta-story people listen to. And it matters to me what kind of tribes people participate in. At this point, if you know me, it should come as no surprise that I believe that church communities, framed by a story founded in real truth, dedicated to relieving suffering and doing good--for one another and for outsiders--are a vital force for good in the world. I feel blessed that I am able to serve a community such as Washington New Church. I see in you all great potential for doing important good in the world in countless small and mundane ways. I see it happening every week. So I hope that we are able to add to our tribe, and to share our story. I really do think the world needs what we have to offer.

What someone believes and who they connect with have direct impacts on how they act upon the world around them. I know that COVID makes everything crazy and difficult. But let's not lose sight of the preciousness of what we have, nor of our obligation to invite others to enjoy our blessings with us.

Mac Frazier, September 24, 2020

### **From the Principal**

For those who haven't noticed, there is still a pandemic on. It's not very much fun. Over the summer WNCS reached the difficult conclusion that we would follow the lead of our surrounding county schools and only offer a distance-based program. This has been hard on teachers because of the disruption to their normal approaches to teaching. It has also been very hard on the students and families who long for the benefits of in person and relief from the extra communication and supervision responsibilities that fall back on parents using a distance-program.

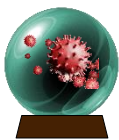
That said, most of our families have soldiered on, and the students are hopefully enjoying some of the perks of skipping uniforms and waking up a little later than usual. My hope is that they are also getting a crash course in typing and navigating software. Even though this wouldn't have been my first choice, these students are learning skills they will use for their whole lives.

The teachers have faced the challenge with energy; working to learn new systems for delivering the program from a distance. One change between last spring and this fall, is that the teachers have expanded the amount of live-teaching time they offer, hoping to reduce the burden of direct supervision that falls to parents. This seems to be fairly effective for the older students, but still a tall order for the younger ones.

Jana Sprinkle is in a new role this year as she leads the White Horse Academy High School, with four students (double the number we had last year). Her teaching team includes Erin Stillman (art), Mac Frazier (religion), Gillian Frazier (history) and Carole Waelchli (Algebra 2).

Brenna Sweeney is brand new to the WNCSS team as a full-time faculty member having taken on the 7/8<sup>th</sup> grade homeroom. (Though she has been a part-time help for many years). She comes to us well qualified with BA and MA in education. But still, first year teaching is first.

Over the summer the school board and faculty also developed plans for re-opening the classrooms. The General Church schools around North America are split between those teaching from a distance and those with open classrooms. This allows us to compare notes and watch as our sister schools bring their plans into contact with reality. This leaves me hopeful that when we re-open the classrooms, it will be with a plan that is well developed and reviewed in conversation with similar schools who have already faced the challenges of teaching with masks and social distancing.



I am unwilling to attempt to predict the future – neither the virus, development of vaccines nor the political climate surrounding it. For now, we know that PGC schools have said they will be distance only at least through the first half of the year. We also know that Governor Hogan is pressuring the county school systems to finish their planning for re-opening. He has specifically suggested that by the time new, daily cases per 100k population get below 5 and that positivity rate of testing gets below 5%, which schools should be actively working on re-opening. These are not the only measures that can

be used and there are already public and GC private schools opened in areas which don't meet those particularly measures. But the framing from our governor and the decisions of our local county schools do provide the context within which WNCS makes its judgment call.

Finally, among the things that we miss is the presence of visitors and community members in the building and interacting with our school programs. For each of our readers, we are eager to see you around again in person. We don't know when that will be, but we do want you to know that you are missed.



### From the White Horse Academy (WHA) Art Class

Two or Three Gathered Together... to Do Art!

In these COVID times it is really nice to find something truly good and happy. White Horse Academy is pleased to welcome five students from Kempton, one from Oak Arbor congregation and two adult auditors into our Drawing and Painting class.

It has been my dream for many years to share my art classes with students around the church and now because of COVID, here we are! The LORD definitely everything toward something good!

Erin J. Stillman

### Announcements

**Free for the taking:** Janna Zuber is looking for an old fish tank that is still useable, and also has about 10 baby redbud trees about a foot tall that she would love to give away before she pulls them for compost. Please call or text her: 240 393 1043.

**Remembering:** Please remember, with cards and prayers, those folks like David Glenn and others (see news notes).

**WNCS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary:** Still no date set for the celebration, but hopefully not too long from now.

**Save the bubble wrap:** I would love to ask people to save their bubble wrap and bubble mailers for me. I can pick up or they could drop on my porch. ~ Kathy Johns - kcjs swim@aol.com.



## AMAZON SMILE DONATIONS TO THE WASHINGTON NEW CHURCH

During the pandemic, when many of us are ordering every imaginable thing from AMAZON or other online stores, did you know that you have a unique and 100% painless way to contribute a little extra to the Church every time you place an order?

It's TRUE! You just open your web browser to Amazon Smile, at [www.Smile.Amazon.com](http://www.Smile.Amazon.com), log in as you normally would and look for the tab at the top that takes you to "Account & Lists," and from the drop-down menu select "Your Account." Then scroll down one screen to the place where it says, "Other Programs" and click on the line that says "Change your Amazon Smile Charity." There in the middle of the page you will see **"Or pick your own charitable organization."** Type in **Washington Church of the New Jerusalem** and **BINGO**, up it pops and you are ALL SET.

Amazon Smile works *exactly the same as Amazon, including Amazon Prime*, and it has all the same stuff. The difference is that with every single purchase you make on Amazon Smile the company will donate  $\frac{1}{2}$  of 1 percent of that purchase price to the charity of your choice, i.e., the Washington New Church!

Think about it. Let's say there are 50 members of the church who use this program, each one ordering on average, say, \$25 worth of stuff a week. That would add up to \$1,250 a week, .5% of which would be \$6.25 a week, or \$325 a year – for doing NOTHING that you're not already doing anyway!

OK, maybe that doesn't look like a lot of money, but it beats giving all that money to Jeff Bezos, doesn't it? HE sure doesn't need it, but WE DO. In fact, why don't you send this article to ALL YOUR FRIENDS, no matter where they live, and invite them to join us? With many ordering more than the average estimated above, it wouldn't be long before we were generating \$1,000 a year for this church!

Jean, Bob and Mike



## NEWS NOTES:

### *Only The Newest News (usually):*

That was just to get your attention. In reality, we are all tempted to focus on what has become really old news: the quarantining of life as we used to know it. It is really tough to deal with life in a bubble of worry about a nasty virus that we cannot even see, but which has the power to change our lives – and has already done so. If you have ever wondered what Hell might look like, just look around. The only thing missing is brimstone (except our west). But we can overcome the temptation to look at the gloomy side of things by turning our minds to the good things that are going on in our families, in our church, and in our country – yes, there are a lot of good things happening. Take the time to think of a few of them and think about how you can be of use to your friends and neighbors. Maybe even start with this thought:

**Good News:** “...each of the things which take place in the world, as well with the evil as with the good, are of the Divine Providence.” (DP 240)

But on to the new stuff:

**New Friends:** Welcome to Acton Park to **Ryan and Amanda Mitchell**, new residents at 11910 Progress Lane (formerly the Simon’s house)

**Newest Friend:** Congratulations to **David and Sara Undeutsch** on the birth of their baby boy – Bastien, born August 17, 2020

**Future New Friends:** Keep an eye open for the arrival of **Craig and Laura Cooper** sometime in October.

**Old friend, New Address:** **Becca Smith** reports: “We moved!” to their previously reported new house at 12119 Mackell Ln in Bowie, but are still navigating piles of boxes in between working and schooling from home. Fortunately, there is still time in the day to enjoy the great biking weather by discovering more places in Bowie via back roads and the WB&A trail.

**Old friend's Retirement News:** **Michael Ferrell** is now fully retired, for he will not be teaching at WNCS this year. The kids in the school will miss his kindly presence. It will be a bit of a struggle for him to enjoy his new status for a while, for he will be undergoing a radical new treatment in Baltimore to finally rid him of his cancer - a six-week treatment program that requires him to live near the hospital for its duration. We wish him success and a return to full health.

**Old friend's Lousy Health News:** We are sad to report that **Pat Sweeney** has suffered a recurrence of his cancer and is girding up to renew his battle after several years of remission. We wish him success and a quick return to health.

**Old Friend's Better Health News:** **David Glenn** has been successfully transferred from hospital care to the Western Maryland Center in Hagerstown for rehab and is making good progress recovering from GBS (Guillain-Barré Syndrome), a rare effect of COVID.

**Another Old Friend's Temporary un-Retirement News:** Mike Gladish will be traveling to the Pittsburgh Society a week at a time (plus or minus a few days) for the next few weeks to serve as a temporary Pastor there. Various retired ministers will be doing the same thing until a permanent Pastor is selected.

**More Un-Retirement:** Not sure what WNCS would do if **Bill Kunkle** had not retired last spring. He is no longer retired (don't tell Bill this) and has been putting in a full work week as WNCS/WCNJ IT volunteer [if you work a 40+ hour work week as a **volunteer**... are you still retired?]. Thanks for all you do! Distance learning would not be as possible without your help.

**Another faithful volunteer:** Slowly but surely Mac & company have been amassing the necessary components so that church services can be live streamed directly from the sanctuary. A few weeks ago, **Eric Genzlinger and Bill Kunkle** spent their Saturday running many cables from the server room to the "sound" booth and then to cameras they have mounted. Won't be long before

those who were not able to join our “social distance” Sunday services will be able to join with us again from the safety of their homes.

**“Old” News:** “Old” is a term of endearment.

**Phamily Phun:** The **Phil Zuber family** reportedly (via Janna) had a grand time energizing North Bethany, DE for two beautiful weeks at the beginning of September. In Janna’s words: “We got to see all of our East Coast family multiple times while there. Lots of reading, eating, game nights, bike rides and chilling out times. (And Grandma Nanna got to hold baby Connor Justin Zuber multiple times!) Nothing tops that!” Janna is also spending time practicing Trust while trying not to worry about family members caught up in the West Coast ongoing disasters. (We sympathize!)

**Phurther Phun:** **George & Mary Cooper** spent some bright and shiny late summer days at their cabin at Deep Creek Lake. It was a necessary visit since they planted some grass seed earlier in the month and they needed to watch it to make sure it was growing fast enough. They report that this was best done from lounge chairs placed carefully in the afternoon sunshine with coffee or tea nearby. They (the grass seeds) are doing well.

**More Retirement News:** In other Church news, the **Rev. Eric Carswell** has announced his retirement beginning next summer, and a process is now in place to identify a new pastor for the Bryn Athyn Society. A decision about that will be made on November 11th, and then a number of other pastoral moves will begin to be negotiated throughout the church.



## *September Anniversaries*

*“Truly conjugal love regarded in itself is a union of  
souls, a conjunction of minds, and of bodies.”*

*~ Emanuel Swedenborg ~ CL 179*



*Oct. 22<sup>nd</sup> ~ Eric & Suzanne Genzlinger ~ 23 yrs.*

*Oct. 7<sup>th</sup> ~ Joe & Kira Jenkins ~ 3 yrs.*

*Oct. 16<sup>th</sup> ~ Pat & Paige Sweeney ~ 27 yrs.*

*Oct. 19<sup>th</sup> ~ Eugene & Nancy Cole ~ 24 yrs.*



## ON DUTY ~ OCTOBER 2020 ~ ON DUTY

| DUTY                  | OCT      |           |         |          | NOV       |          |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|---------|----------|-----------|----------|
|                       | 4        | 11        | 18      | 25       | 1         | 8        |
| Preacher*             | GMF      | GMF       | BDS     | GMF      | GMF       | GMF      |
| Chancel               | Hailey H | Sophie H  | Sohaila | Ariela H | Shaunti S | Hailey H |
| ORGAN                 | Jenny S  | Carole W  | Jenny S | Carole W | Jenny S   | Carole W |
| FLOWERS               | Erin S   | Janna Z   | Mary C  | Erin S   | Jana Z    | Mary C   |
| 1 <sup>st</sup> Usher | Steve B  | Lincoln   | Mike G  | Ian L    | Glenn F   | David R  |
| 2 <sup>nd</sup> Usher | Elias H  | Marcellus | ----    | Elias H  | ----      | ----     |

# OCTOBER 2020

| SUN<br>27                       | MON<br>28                                                                | TUE<br>29                            | WED<br>30                           | THU<br>Oct 1                                   | FRI<br>2 | SAT<br>3                                                      |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|----------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| <div>● 11am Worship (GMF)</div> | <div>● 7pm Back to School Night</div> <div>● 8pm Monday Night Read</div> | <div>● 7pm TAG Exec. Meeting I</div> | <div>Wednesday Email Arcana G</div> |                                                |          | <div>● 1:30pm Chair Yoga</div> <div>● 2:30pm Yoga Class</div> |
| 4                               | 5                                                                        | 6                                    | 7                                   | 8                                              | 9        | 10                                                            |
| <div>● 11am Worship (GMF)</div> |                                                                          | <div>● 7:30pm School Board Mt</div>  |                                     | <div>Charter Day</div> <div>WINGS Closed</div> |          | <div>● 1:30pm Chair Yoga</div> <div>● 2:30pm Yoga Class</div> |
| 11                              | 12                                                                       | 13                                   | 14                                  | 15                                             | 16       | 17                                                            |
| <div>● 11am Worship (GMF)</div> | <div>● 8pm Monday Night Read</div>                                       | <div>● 7:30pm Trustees Meeting</div> | <div>Wednesday Email Arcana G</div> |                                                |          | <div>● 1:30pm Chair Yoga</div> <div>● 2:30pm Yoga Class</div> |
| 18                              | 19                                                                       | 20                                   | 21                                  | 22                                             | 23       | 24                                                            |
| <div>● 11am Worship (BDS)</div> |                                                                          |                                      |                                     |                                                |          | <div>● 1:30pm Chair Yoga</div> <div>● 2:30pm Yoga Class</div> |
| 25                              | 26                                                                       | 27                                   | 28                                  | 29                                             | 30       | 31                                                            |
| <div>● 11am Worship (GMF)</div> | <div>● 8pm Monday Night Read</div>                                       | <div>ECHO DEADLINE</div>             | <div>Wednesday Email Arcana G</div> |                                                |          | <div>● 1:30pm Chair Yoga</div> <div>● 2:30pm Yoga Class</div> |