

new church

Lifeline



Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

John 12:24

March 2010
Number 383

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

Unless a grain of wheat falls ...

The story of Palm Sunday encompasses a great deal of activity on the part of the Lord, the disciples, the Jewish leaders and many people who were preparing for the Passover feast in Jerusalem.

In Matthew's account we read of the selection of the donkey and the colt, the greetings of the people with their palm branches and Jesus entering the temple and clearing out the money changers. Jesus follows this with healing the blind and the lame and then returns to Bethany to the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus.

Mark sees it as a shorter series of events with Jesus going to the temple but not taking any action. He leaves and goes to Bethany with the twelve.

Luke also covers the detail of the colt and the triumphant entry but he adds a short piece about Jesus crying over Jerusalem. Jesus also enters the temple and drives out the sellers, but then the account ends with no return to Bethany.

In John's gospel the account is different again. No emphasis is given to the donkey or colt and the story starts with the entry itself. There is no mention, as in the synoptic gospels, of the cleansing of the temple. Instead John gives us a picture of Jesus teaching his followers and answering some important questions.

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We should not be concerned by these differing stories, as they are simply the accounts of a critical event in our Lord's life viewed from different perspectives, just as we would re-count a common experience in several ways.

John's gospel places a great deal of emphasis on the life and death struggle going on in Jesus' humanity. It is no co-incidence that John chapter 11 focuses on the death and raising to life of Lazarus. And John chapter 12 starts with Jesus at the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus when Mary anoints Jesus' feet and washes them with her hair.

This incident at their home in Bethany shows Jesus briefly at rest before the week ahead when he knew that his temptations would be almost unbearable.

But in looking at this life and death struggle, which to a much lesser extent we must all undertake, I would like to concentrate on John chapter 12 verses 24 and 25 because in these verses Jesus summarises the whole purpose of his life, death and resurrection.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. John 12:24-25

From time to time I plant a variety of seeds in my garden. They are all different shapes and sizes and all take varying times to germinate but one thing they all have in common is an outer hard seed coat and an inner embryo or kernel, which is the future young plant in a dormant state. As the seed grows to maturity on the parent plant the outer seed coat protects the inner kernel. Only when the seed coat has softened and cracked and fallen away does the new life growing from the kernel within establish itself. Put very simply the outside of the seed has to die so that the inside can come to new life.

We can see this in ourselves. Our real self, our soul, is the kernel within, the outside is our physical body. Whilst we live in the world our body provides for and protects the soul within as hopefully we develop spiritually. When our physical bodies die then we can become truly alive in the spiritual world.

Or we can look at the seed coat as a picture of our hard impenetrable outward natural selves, always prone to selfish thinking and actions and the kernel as our soft inner spiritual being. Only when our selfishness begins to die can we really develop inner spiritual life.

When God came into the world he took on human form with all its weakness. For Jesus as he grew up the 'kernel' within was the Divine itself and the outside seed

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coat, the humanity received from his mother Mary. It was this humanity that was tempted and faced a life and death struggle so that the power of the hells could be overcome.

The Lord could not be tempted as to the Divine, because the hells cannot assault the Divine, wherefore He assumed a human from the mother, such as could be tempted. His last temptation and victory, by which He fully subjugated the hells, and made His Human Divine, was in Gethsemane and on the cross. Heavenly Doctrine 201

For the Lord this was a gradual process completed only by his physical death at the crucifixion. Only when his finite human body had been completely put off could his Divine Humanity exercise its full power. Because he lives we also live. As Jesus entered Jerusalem he knew that this final struggle was upon him. He had made the decision to go forward to the very end.

He knew that '*unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.*'

If we recognise the Lord as the true King in our lives then he will enter into our hearts and minds just as he entered Jerusalem 2000 years ago. But the moment we receive him, a real life and death struggle for us will begin. We will face a conflict, a conflict to the death, the death of the heavenly life or the death of our worldly selfish life.

And in this conflict **we** have to choose, although even then we can be certain that the Lord is with us in his saving power.

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. John 12:24-25

Alan Misson

We can know the path to heaven to some extent simply by considering what the people who make up heaven are like, realising that no one can become an angel or get to heaven unless he or she arrives bringing along some angelic quality from the world. Inherent in that angelic quality is a knowing of the path from having walked it and a walking in the path from the knowing of it.

Divine Providence 60

The Missionary Society of the New Church

The following letter has been sent to Members of the Missionary Society and is reprinted here to enable wider understanding of the position that has now been reached. Editor

Dear Member of the Missionary Society,

We are writing to notify all the Life and Annual Members that the Missionary Society of the New Church has been wound up.

In the 187th Annual Report of the Society (which was circulated to you last year) the minutes of the Annual Meeting on 14th March 2008 recorded the decisions taken then to transfer the assets of the Society to The General Conference of the New Church and to satisfy the requirements of the Charity Commission for the Society to be dissolved and the membership of it annulled.

A copy of the accounts for the final period is enclosed. This was a very active time for the Society with larger than usual amounts spent on publishing and grants. The accounts show how the General Fund has been reduced to a final nil balance.

All the assets have now been transferred to the General Conference and are held in a restricted fund to be used for the promotion of the teachings of the New Church, primarily by publication and the printing and distribution of books and pamphlets in accordance with the object of the Missionary Society. The formalities required by the Charity Commission have been completed and the name of the Missionary Society has been removed from their list of registered charities.

The new fund is entitled 'Publishing Fund'. The Governing Council of the General Conference has appointed a small team to manage the use of the fund in accordance with guide-lines agreed by the Council.

Since its foundation in 1821 the Society has been involved in many activities seeking to spread the knowledge of the Heavenly Doctrines. Many pamphlets, 'tracts' and books have been published. Notably, nearly 150 years ago the Society published commentaries by the Rev William Bruce on the Gospels of Matthew and John and the Book of Revelation. Although long out of print, they contain material still of use to worship leaders today. In the second half of the last century Reg Lang's *Daily Readings* was a particularly popular title. In 2006, the Society took over the cost of publishing *Outlook*.

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The Society has also supported other activities, including the delivering of lectures in different localities around the country and in connection with various New Church congregations. In recent times it has supported the attendance of the Swedenborg Movement at several festivals.

Perhaps it is invidious to single out specific books and individuals who have worked for the Society, but it is appropriate at this time to mention the devoted contribution of Roland Smith as Design Consultant and President during the last four decades.

We wish to take the opportunity to thank all the members of the Society for their support over the years. If any of you have made a bequest to the Society in your will, may we suggest that you change the beneficiary from the Missionary Society of the New Church to the General Conference of the New Church so that your legacy can still be used to spread the teachings of the New Church.

It is right at this historic and inevitably somewhat sad moment to reflect on the hard work of the many Officers, Committee members and writers since the formation of the Society nearly two centuries ago and to be grateful for influx from the Lord which has made all this possible.

But let us look to the future. We wish the General Conference well in its trusteeship of the funds formerly administered by the Missionary Society, and in its efforts to make good and productive use of them in the face of the challenges of the twenty-first century, to bring the special Christian guidance and spiritual wisdom from the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg into the lives of more and more people.

Thank you again for your contributions to the work of the Missionary Society of the New Church.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Kuphal
Patrick Johnson

Colin Skinner
Michael Hindley

Officers and Committee appointed at the 187th Annual Meeting to serve until the closure of the Society

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Doreen Metcalfe, 29 Turney Crook Mews, Ivegate, Colne, Lancashire, BB8 9DH.
Rev Mary Duckworth, Woodside, 421 Whalley Road, Clayton-le-Moors,
Accrington, Lancashire, BB5 5RP.

Rev David Lomax

North of England New Church House

I was recently invited to attend a board meeting at North of England New Church House. Before I did so, I browsed through the history of “the House” (as it tends to be known), written by Mabel and Ken McCallum. It has a proud history, from its origins in the late 1700s as a publisher of translations of Swedenborg and of New Church pamphlets and other literature to the bookshop still in existence today in central Manchester.

Much has changed in that period. There have been many changes in the church which New Church House has served. Some of these have not been easy. Whereas once the area around Manchester had a great concentration of New Church societies and groups, many of these have now closed. Consequently, there are many fewer New Church folk who regularly “drop in” whilst in the centre of Manchester than would once have been the case. There have also been many changes in the world at large. Some of these directly affect the work of New Church House. For example, sales via the Internet now make up a significant part of the book trade (around 15%). The religious landscape of the country has also changed enormously, especially in the last twenty or thirty years.

The purpose of our getting together in this way was to look towards the future and some people known to have ideas about this were invited to this meeting. We were thinking very much about change. A number of ideas were floated about the way the House works and the way in which its building is used. No firm decisions were taken, because it feels as if a time of exploration of possibilities is needed. A desire was expressed to let people know more widely in the church through *Lifeline* that New Church House is seriously thinking about the future and would welcome the contribution of ideas that anyone else has about what it might be able to do. Those reading this article are welcome to pass this on to others who might not be aware of this. There was an awareness that the desire to bring ideas to this meeting needs also to be reflected in opening this up further. Even more, to bring ideas to fruition is likely to need input from people who want to take this opportunity to get involved – is there anyone who wishes to take this up?

I came away from the meeting into the streets and squares of Manchester, the latter populated in the weeks before Christmas by stalls selling everything from sweets to slippers, from toys to tankards. I hope and pray that we can find a place for the nourishment which we have to offer to continue to feature alongside other more material fare. If you would like to send any ideas that you have for this to the Secretary or President, their addresses follow:

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Pledges of help towards Conference costs

It is with grateful thanks that I can announce that the promises, pledges and IOUs made at Conference last year have been more than realised.

At the Governing Council meeting at the beginning of December I was able to confirm my figures with Nigel Sutton, our treasurer. Since then I have been notified of an additional donation. The full amount received to date, including Gift Aid is £2615.68.

Additionally I have been notified that some of the people who are entitled to funding for their Conference costs have decided to pay for themselves this year. Other people, I know have made this gesture before but I am not including those donations as new money.

Whilst I am delighted with this generosity, I must caution that we all need to dig even deeper during the next few years. In addition to the financial support we must seriously consider the need for more volunteer workers across the work of the church. At local level we are aware that the dedicated few are maintaining the work of local churches but falling attendances have meant that the stress and strain falls on a few people who themselves are showing signs of advancing age.

This is also the case with the national organisation. Governing Council members have an additional work load as we are now one member short. We are also looking at other ways of cutting costs by seeking volunteer workers.

Please can you consider friends and family members who have been connected with the church in the past who may have the enthusiasm and expertise to volunteer some time to help the church in all the various functions it supports?

There are some wonderful ideas being suggested for our church's future but the labourers are few.

Kathie Brooks

It is a law of the divine design that the closer and closer we come to God, which is something we have to do as if we were completely on our own, the closer and closer God comes to us. True Christian Religion 89

Victims or Witnesses

Have Christians become a persecuted minority in modern Britain? To hear many speak you would think that discrimination against Christians was now commonplace and that at times this even escalates into persecution. In support of this view the Christian media can usually find some local authority that no longer celebrates "Christmas" but prefers instead to invent some other alternative such as the "Festival of Light". Cases are also regularly quoted of employers who discipline or even dismiss workers for wearing the Christian cross or offering to pray with a patient or client. With such evidence the charge is made that the feelings and rights of Christians are now routinely ignored and even trampled upon, putting them at a disadvantage in comparison with people of other faiths.

I have to say that none of this evidence convinces me and I do not for one moment believe that Christians are now a persecuted minority in this country. Christian churches are not burned down, nor is the Bible banned; the clergy are not imprisoned, nor is the Christian press censored; Christians still have full freedom to worship in public and to associate with other believers in the practice of their religion. There are countries around the world where violations of religious freedom are commonplace but this is not one of them. What I find much more worrying is the insecurity of many British Christians and their unwillingness to rise to the challenges and opportunities of living in a multi-faith society.

If Christians in this country seek to pose as victims of religious discrimination then I think they are in danger of making themselves risible. Perhaps there has been some loss of status due to the dramatic decline in church membership and attendance, but what others might ask is why Christians should want or expect privileges that are greater than those enjoyed by other minorities in Britain. A Christian has no more right than the next person to impose his religious beliefs and symbolism on a wider society which by and large does not share them and which may even find them offensive.

Rather than posing as the victims of unjust discrimination and persecution, perhaps we Christians might gain far more sympathy and respect if we gave our aid to those people that are suffering real discrimination and persecution in the world today. Jesus calls us to stand alongside the hungry, the stranger, the sick, and the prisoner (Matthew 25:35-40) and we do not have to look far to find many individuals and groups in modern Britain who are the victims of genuine unfairness and persecution. Wherever there is discrimination against fellow human beings of whatever colour or creed, Christians ought to be speaking up for tolerance, justice, respect, and peaceful outcomes. Such a witness would be

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much more in tune with the Gospel than any special pleading for our own rights.

Instead of berating local authorities for taking the "Christ" out of "Christmas" perhaps we might make a better point by reminding them of their responsibilities to provide decent accommodation for the homeless. Instead of complaining when employers ban the wearing of the Christian cross in the workplace we might be more effective in calling for standards of honesty and public service throughout our businesses and industries. Rather than focusing on the right to wear Christian symbols, or posing as "hard done by" martyrs, we would be much better employed calling for the universal application of spiritual values in our society and world. The way we treat our fellow human beings and respond to their needs says far more about our faith than any symbols or slogans that we might adopt.

Real charity is dealing fairly and faithfully in whatever position, business or work one is engaged in, and with those with whom one comes into contact.

True Christian Religion 422

Christianity is no longer the predominant religion of this country and we need to adjust to life in a multi-faith society. In such a society there is an ever-present danger of prejudice and discrimination against minority groups. This can sometimes boil over into outright persecution with its violence against individuals and communities. Christians would be wise if, instead of being fixated on our own problems and grievances, we stood alongside those suffering real persecution with a call for justice, respect, and peace. True, such a stand might generate some real anger against us but it would be a much more genuine witness to the Gospel than demands for recognition of our own rights. Moreover a little persecution for living the Gospel may be no bad thing, for history teaches us that faith grows stronger and burns brighter when tried and tested by threat and attack. Those who live out the Gospel in love and service to others will always win out in the end.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Matthew 5:10

Rev Robert A Gill

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Editor's Note

The location for the Gathering Leaves 2010 is at the Lord's New Church, Bryn Athyn, PA, USA. Gathering Leaves 2010 is on Facebook and if you are not already connected you can easily sign up to access more information.

Gathering Leaves Conference 2010

This years Conference, a ' Feast of Friends' will be held in July from the 8th to the 11th, here at the Lord's New Church. Meetings of the Steering Committee have been happening regularly, addressing the different workshops that will be available, meals, housing, and speakers.

The far reaching effect that these 'Women's Gatherings' have had over the years is undeniable, igniting an ever increasing openness between the different branches of the New Church and bringing to life the teaching out of the Third Testament that, "Where there is Charity, doctrinal differences do not divide" ...

This does not mean the different branches will ever want to become one organisation, but in charity one Church before the Lord. It is the past generation that emphasizes the differences between the branches, and the new generation that wants to emphasize our similarities.

The Lord's New Church still has had the dream and plan of a large Convention centre- being built in our upper field, where all branches of the New Church can be invited to meet and discuss, like the "Conference of World's Religions". Instead it will be a Conference of the New Church people, from throughout the world.

Now there is the discussion, why should we wait for that building to be built? Can't we plan the Conference for the near future. We can use tents like the Women's Gathering does and an invitation can be sent out, a call for 'papers', to people, ministers, from all branches of the New Church who all worship the Lord as one God, to share our doctrinal beliefs and tell how they are applied to life. This would be a wonderful beginning of something that has never happened before, an expression of living charity between the branches, where there are no longer road blocks of misconceptions, resentments, misunderstanding but instead where there are opened new paths of communication and a way for the leaves of the trees to truly be the healing of the nations ...

In the Women's Gathering Leaves Mission Statement it says, "We are gathering to promote harmony among women who are associated with the various Swedenborgian organisations around the world. We are coming together to acknowledge our common beliefs, explore our differences, develop a respect for one another's contributions, contributions, create an atmosphere for healing ..."

Dawn Potts
Steering Committee Member

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Where was God?

Whenever the world experiences major disasters, man-made or natural, we can be sure that questions will be asked about God's involvement - or lack of it! Very often leading religious figures are wheeled onto the media to provide explanations.

This was certainly the case recently when an earthquake struck the republic of Haiti. Archbishops and the like were invited to give explanations. The devastation and trauma in Haiti have been almost unspeakable. We struggle to imagine what life must be for the people, bereft not only of loved ones and friends, but also of homes, food, medical help, and all the support systems of modern life. Scenes on our TV screens leave us breathless and speechless.

In some respects, disasters caused by human action are easier to deal with. We can usually make a fairly clear connection between the event and its obvious cause. So, if an aeroplane is blown up, or a bomb is detonated in a crowded place, we can easily see that it is a human responsibility that has brought about terrible consequences. Some people still ask why God if there is a God - couldn't have prevented the action so as to save innocent people from suffering. Such an argument has a superficial appeal and an apparent justice about it. Unfortunately, it fails to have any proper grasp of who and what God is, and how He is able to care for us. More of that in a moment.

Natural disasters provide greater dilemmas for theologians and philosophers. Who is to blame when an earthquake strikes? Who can be held responsible when a volcano blows up? Who can be held answerable when a hurricane destroys everything in its path?

One of the major stumbling blocks to making sense of such situations is our inability to see life from the same point of view as God. Almost inevitably we see life from a worldly, earthbound position. The years we spend here are what appear to be reality, possibly all there is, so our horizons are strictly limited and our perspective completely distorted. God's view, in the other hand, is totally different. His regard is for what is eternal, what lives for ever, what we take with us when this earthly span comes to an end. So far as the temporal things of this natural life are concerned, everything - yes, everything, however apparently tragic - is used to provide for our spiritual development.

From His Love, the Lord seeks and desires only our joy and peace and happiness. On the other hand, He cannot force us to do or be anything against our will and judgment. To do so would be to go against His Love. Love between men and women has to be given and received freely if it is to be genuine, and

it's the same between ourselves and our Creator. He has to work within the laws of His love and wisdom. Constantly intervening and adjusting things so as to prevent harm and sorrow would interfere with our human freedom. And human freedom is absolutely paramount, together with our God-given faculty of thinking and making judgments for ourselves: these are what make us human, and He will nothing, nothing whatsoever, to overwhelm or remove them. Behind the scenes, of course, He moves to encourage, motivate and inspire us, enabling us to deal with major disasters as well as all the day-to-day events that befall us. But our freedom is intact. It's in and through this ferment that our eternal character is being formed.

One other thing in this short commentary. We have to remember that we live in the world of effects. That's a philosophical way of saying that what happens here is caused elsewhere. Everything that happens in this natural dimension has its source in the spiritual world. In that sense, humans are ultimately responsible for what transpires because the collective impact of human evil, here and in the other world, eventually finds outlets here in diseases, disasters and the like.

The challenge for us is to become aware of the eternal dynamics, to begin to make better sense of them, and to work ever more closely with our Lord. Then, whatever happens to us, His providence will lead us forward on our journey to the heavenly kingdom where there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. (Revelation 21:4)

Rev Bruce Jarvis



Annual Meeting of the New Church College

The Annual Meeting will be held at The College on Saturday, 10th July 2010 at 14.30.

The work of The College continues to develop, and we would like to invite you, whether or not you are a Governor, to join us for the afternoon. Further details will follow later.

David Haseler
Secretary
0121 440 8070

david.haseler@generalconference.org.uk

Letters

Dear Editor,

When considering the effectiveness of New Church out-reach efforts at the local society level, the highest degree of success is usually judged in terms of whether or not an increase in membership has been achieved. If there is no increase in numbers, despite the attempt at out-reach, an enquiry into the failure of the project is usually arranged to see what can be done better in any future out-reach project. There is a tendency to focus on those truths of faith unique to the New Church, as a means of interesting local residents enough for them to want to find out more, and hopefully join the society. Another motivating factor in New Church outreach efforts is based on the good of love, which predisposes members to focus on being of good use to the local general community in whatever way they are able to.

Seen by the Lord as one Man, the Universal Church on earth, where the word is read, and one God worshipped, facilitates the necessary link between The Lord, Heaven, and people on earth. In this Divine Providential arrangement, the church functions as spiritual heart and lungs, which conveys spiritual life from the one God to all of mankind. He is therefore able to be present continually with the whole of humanity.

The simple truth is, if it were not for this providential state of affairs,

humanity eventually would cease to exist. Don't become too preoccupied with numbers, size is not so important in comparison to being of practical good use to the neighbour. As the Lord says: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them*".

Yours sincerely,

George Young

Dear Editor,

Homosexuality - the Discussion Continues

I welcome the update in the February issue, showing that the ministry continue to wrestle with a subject that has caused difficulty throughout Christendom. While it is essential to establish the underlying spiritual principles, I believe that there are practical issues that need addressing with some urgency and I would hope that the ministry could give us some guidance on these.

1 In their January 2009 Policy Statement (see June 2009 Lifeline), the ministry declared; 'The issues of church ceremonies for same-sex unions and eligibility for ordination of those in same sex relationships will be considered after this further study.'

If, as a worship leader, I am asked to bless a same-sex union, what response do I give, and what explanation should I give for my decision? Should we have an agreed Conference view on this or should this be the individual decision of each leader? There is at least one example of a heterosexual union outside marriage that was blessed by a minister and it would be interesting to know whether this is viewed differently to the blessing of a same-sex union.

2 Though I can understand that the ministry need more time to consider the implications of sexuality on the eligibility of candidates for ordination, a more immediate question is whether the church welcomes gay worship leaders? As most services are conducted by lay members, this is more than an interesting debating point. The current default policy would appear to be the same as that of the US Military, namely; 'Don't ask, don't tell', but I do not believe that this is a credible policy for a church.

Yours sincerely,

David Haseler

Dear Editor,

I saw the article on homosexuality by the Rev David Lomax in the February issue of *Lifeline*. The subject of homosexuality is a challenging one for the Church.

As minutes secretary to the Ministers' Committee I have the privilege of attending their Committee meetings, although not the annual Ministers' Seminar. I was struck at the last meeting in December by a perceptible change in the atmosphere of the discussions since the previous meeting in Spring 2009. It seemed to me that the understanding of others' points of view was deeper and more widespread. Differences were less stark and less entrenched.

I am sure this is a result of the opportunity to study the issues more deeply, to reflect on them and to listen carefully to the views of others. Progress may be slow, but I wish to pay tribute to the careful and caring way in which the ministers are approaching this matter.

Yours sincerely,

Gordon Kuphal

The Lord our Saviour is Jehovah the Father himself in human form. Jehovah came down and became human so that he could come close to us and we could come close to him, and a partnership could be forged, through which we could have salvation and eternal life. When God became human and then a human became God, he became able to draw near us in this adapted form and, as a human God and a divine Human, forge a partnership with us.

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The Way of an Angel

**A Workshop at Purley Chase Centre
Friday 23rd April to Sunday 25th April**



In this workshop we shall be looking at various situations that often arise in our lives, and consider "How would an angel respond?", "How would an angel see it?", "What attitude would an angel take?"

For guidance, we shall draw especially on the insights to be found in Swedenborg's unfolding of the inner spiritual sense of the Bible, as well as some of the more current counselling approaches to the improvement of personal relationships. In this way we shall endeavour to awaken and energise the angelic level that exists in each one of us, and discover how to perceive and treat each other in a more angelic way - "the way of an angel".

As well as talks and discussion, a central aspect of the programme will be the inclusion of work in small groups using elements of a unique psycho-spiritual counselling aid. It will also include meditations and Sacred Dance.

For more details refer to the Spring Events booklet or contact Anne or David Gaffney on 01827 712370 or email: enquiries@purleychasecentre.org.uk



Leader - Michael Stanley

Lifeline

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