

“All religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good”.

Swedenborg

# The New Church In Victoria Newsletter

December / January 2018

## Locations

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## A Pastoral Message from Rev. Glenn Alden *Christmas in Australia*

Mary and I are looking forward to our fourth Christmas in Australia! What a blessing those Christmases have been. Though we were apart from our own biological families, and from many of the traditional things that make up Christmas in the Northern hemisphere, we were embraced by new families, families who enthusiastically embraced us and wished to share Christmas as they have celebrated it in the Southern Hemisphere.

*Christmas in Australia's hot.*

*Cold and frosty's what it's not.*

*When the bloom on the jacaranda tree is here,*

*Christmas time is near.*

(‘Christmas Where the Gum Trees Grow’ - Leslie Davies)

This is the chorus from one of 18 Christmas songs on an album of Christmas music by Peter Kearney titled ‘How Far to Bethlehem.’ We have enjoyed playing this every Christmas since we have been home.

Christmas in Australia isn't just jacaranda trees and hot weather, or even prawns on the ‘barbie’, or dinner outside on the deck, or going to the beach. It isn't just the fireworks, or even the Annual Boxing Day Sydney to Hobart yacht race. In my limited experience, although many are not as outwardly religious as many North Americans, Australians don't forget the spiritual, or ‘real meaning of Christmas. Another song on the same album is ‘Violet in the Snow’ by Don Mayhew:



*When it all began, God was so very far away:*

*A mighty King whom man must honor and obey.*

*But we went astray, And God said: "My people need a friend".*

*So many years ago, in Bethlehem a Baby came like a violet in the snow.*

*He was wrinkled and red, and he cried just the same as you and I.*

*And as she held her son, Mary's secret filled her eyes.*

*Yes, she thought of us, and knew that His peace could fill our lives.*

*So many years ago, in Bethlehem a Baby came like a violet in the snow.*

*O, the shepherds came, and the angels sang throughout the night.*

*And the light of the star banished hopelessness and fright.*

*Yes, our Brother has come, and now we know that God is love.*

*So many years ago, in Bethlehem a Baby came like a violet in the snow.*

What is the difference between Christmas in OZ and Christmas in the Northern Hemisphere? For me it might be that Australians feel a certain freedom from tradition, a freedom to re-examine and re-visit, a freedom to make Christmas anew. After all, the fir trees, sleigh rides, and reindeer don't work so well in a land of jacarandas, surf, sand and wallabies.

All this got me thinking about whether there might be a difference between a traditional Christian Christmas celebration and a New Christian or New Church Christmas Celebration. I honestly don't have an answer. So much of the real meaning of Christmas seems to find its way into the sincere attempts of people of this age to understand how what has been viewed as holy for so many hundreds of generations is still holy to us today. Peter Kearney sings *Come all you unbelievers now, I'm glad to see you today*, and in the chorus the unbelievers reply *we can't believe in a miracle two thousand years away*. But the song ends with the words *Show us where the Son of God is being born today*. The message is that the real miracle of Christmas is the rebirth of God in the hearts of people today.

There is freedom even for the doubters and unbelievers. It is OK to doubt and question and a way through that doubt is now given. *Now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith*. As a person informed by the Writings of Swedenborg, I feel like I can grow in an understanding of how the infinite loving God not only manifested in the life of Jesus Christ but that Christ became one with God through His life of faithfulness. Through the example of the love of Jesus I can begin to understand the immensity of God's love for all people throughout creation. Through His advent He has freed people all over the world to discover anew the eternal truth: *That so many years ago, in Bethlehem a Baby came like a violet in the snow, and that Baby can be born in us today*. In something of the way distance and weather have given Australians freedom to celebrate the Christmas story in the land of the gum trees; identifying as a New Christian person gives me a freedom to re visit and re imagine these old stories and understand how they are still true today.

So in preparation for this New Christian Christmas I invite you to consider how the good news of the Lord's Second Advent might inform your celebration of His First Advent. *Is there anything you might feel called to share with others about this?*

Glenn

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## Spiritual Growth Workshops

The spiritual teachings penned by Emanuel Swedenborg have been available for well over 200 years and presented in various ways to help readers to understand the message they contain for appreciating the purpose of life in this world, the afterlife and becoming the most happy to eternity. In more recent times, techniques have advanced to directly apply the understanding of the concepts in everyday life.

One such system was developed by the Arizona Spiritual Growth Foundation in the late 1990s for guiding people to nurture the spiritual dimension to make their lives more loving, peaceful and effective. It recognises that in our worldly existence our lives are goal-orientated even in its most mundane aspects and we spend much of our time and energy moving towards these goals. Yet obstacles get in our way requiring changes of direction. The more we become immersed in material goals, the easier it is becomes to ignore the spiritual dimension of our lives where we should be dealing with the important issues such as our core values, our dealings with others, our inner feelings about ourselves and most importantly, our relationship with the higher power in our lives – the issues that will transcend our death.

The system essentially involves working in small groups to discuss and implementing through tasks particular New Church teachings for enriching and strengthening personal spiritual growth and the sense of community. It is a non-judgmental sharing scenario with guidelines which a facilitator ensures are strictly adhered to. While New Church/Swedenborgian concepts are introduced, individuals from other backgrounds can participate just as readily.

Rev. Glenn and Mary Alden were involved in the Arizona Foundation for 11 years and they will bring their

knowledge and expertise of the Spiritual Growth program as a focus during their stay in Victoria. During December, they will be introducing the techniques followed by two workshops. Each session will be held twice to give a greater opportunity for members and friends to participate – you may attend both should you wish. The Church Board encourages your involvement if at all possible; there is no charge for attending. One real advantage is listening to others talk about their beliefs, and joining in too if wished, as a helpful way to offer your beliefs to others outside the Church when the possibility arises.

<b>December</b>	7.30pm	Spiritual Growth Group work initiation ~ <i>Introduction to Spiritual Growth / New Church Foundations</i>
6 <sup>th</sup> Wednesday		
9 <sup>th</sup> Saturday	10.30am	Spiritual Growth Group work initiation ~ <i>Introduction to Spiritual Growth / New Church Foundations</i>
	1.30pm	BYO Lunch
	2.00pm – 3.30pm	Open session to be led by Glenn and Mary Alden. Topic of a spiritual nature to be advised.
12 <sup>th</sup> Tuesday	10.30am	Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) ~ <i>Spiritual Hunger</i>
15 <sup>th</sup> Friday	7.30pm	Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) ~ <i>Spiritual Hunger</i>
Tuesday 19	10.30am	Spiritual Growth Group workshop (2) ~ <i>Spiritual Thirst</i>
22 <sup>nd</sup> Friday	7.30pm	Spiritual Growth Group workshop (2) ~ <i>Spiritual Thirst</i>

## NEWS OF PEOPLE

The past six months have been particularly difficult for Adam Okienko with periods in hospital where he has been receiving treatment for cancer, including chemotherapy. This has led to periods of feeling quite debilitated and tired. Currently the specialists are assessing whether or not further treatment is required at this time. Adam is feeling stronger in himself and we send him best wishes for an ongoing improvement to his condition; please keep Adam in your prayers.

We have been sorry to hear that Edna Sharp has not been well recently either. We trust that Edna will soon be on the mend and back to full health. Best wishes also go to Edna and husband Gary at this time.



The morning of 11<sup>th</sup> November saw a sturdy group of members gather at the Church for several hours of cleaning both inside the buildings and in the garden. A great deal was achieved and while feeling quite tired after the exertion, everyone left feeling good about the result. The Board sincerely thanks all those volunteers who gave generously of their time.



## Service & Lunch on 3rd December 2017

Invitations to attend both the morning service at Mt. Waverley being led by Rev. Glenn Alden followed by the welcome lunch being catered for by the Church have been sent out either by post or email to members and friends in Victoria. If for some reason you have not received an invitation, please contact Helmut Lopaczk, Church Secretary (0409 184 643) as soon as possible. Also, if you would like to bring other family members or invite friends to the events, get in touch with Helmut so that they can be included for catering purposes.

# Diary of Events from mid-November through December 2017

Activities at Mt. Waverley unless otherwise stated

## November

- Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Service of Worship conducted by Neville Jarvis
- Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> 3.30pm Service/Discussion Group in Ballarat at the home of Len & Judy Robinson, 318 Fussell Street, Ballarat
- Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> Rev. Glenn & Mrs. Mary Alden arrive in Melbourne from USA to begin a 3 month visit to Victoria

## December

- Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> 10.30am Service of Worship conducted by Rev. Glenn Alden followed by a welcome lunch provided by the Church
- Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm Spiritual Growth Group work initiation ~ *Introduction to Spiritual Growth / New Church Foundations*
- Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Spiritual Growth Group work initiation ~ *Introduction to Spiritual Growth / New Church Foundations* followed by BYO lunch
- 2pm – 3.30pm Open session to be led by Glenn and Mary Alden. Topic of a spiritual nature to be advised.
- Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Bible Study led by Rev. Glenn Alden - *Spiritual Needs: The Parable of the Sheep and the Goats*
- Tuesday 12<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) led by Glenn & Mary Alden ~ *Spiritual Hunger*
- Friday 15<sup>th</sup> 7.30pm Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) led by Glenn and Mary Alden ~ *Spiritual Hunger*
- Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Service of Worship conducted by Rev. Glenn Alden ~ *Seeking Guidance* (Readings: Psalm 5:1-4,& 7-8; John 10:2-6; Swedenborg *True Christianity*: 231)  
Service to include the Sacrament of the Holy Supper.
- 3.30pm Devotional Service led by Rev. Glenn Alden in Ballarat at the home of Len & Judy Robinson, 318 Fussell Street, Ballarat. Address based on John 10:2-6
- Tuesday 19<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) led by Glenn and Mary Alden ~ *Spiritual Thirst*
- Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> 7.30pm Spiritual Growth Group workshop (1) led by Glenn and Mary Alden ~ *Spiritual Thirst*
- Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Short devotional period led by Rev. Glenn Alden followed by a Bible Study session ~ *John The Baptist - Repentance*
- Monday 25<sup>th</sup> **Christmas morning service** conducted by Rev. Glenn Alden ~ “*Following the Star*” (Readings: Numbers 24; Matthew 2: 1-2 & 9-11; Swedenborg *Heavenly Secrets* para 2349)
- Note: 9.30am** Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> Rev. Glenn and Mary Alden leave for Brisbane & New Church In Australia Summer School on Sunshine Coast followed by approx. 2 weeks in New Zealand

## Diary of Events 2018

### January

There will be no services of worship at Mt. Waverley during this holiday month of January

Friday 26<sup>th</sup> Rev. Glenn and Mary Alden return to Victoria from New Zealand

### February

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> 10.30am Service of Worship at Mt. Waverley conducted by Rev. Glenn Alden