

# The New Church



by Lisa Thomas Laury

February 9, 2007 - For over a hundred years there's been a religious community that has truly, been hiding in plain sight, in the Delaware Valley. For the first time, Action News has an inside look at this unique faith.

The New Church has branches all over the world, but the one located in this area makes up the faith's largest congregation. The church believes now is the time to open its doors and let outsiders look in.

Nestled in Montgomery County, a blink from Lower Moreland Township and Huntingdon Valley lays little Bryn Athyn, a community created around The New Church.

The members built a picturesque Cathedral which stands-out in the area. But their faith is so secluded, neighbors just a mile down the road no little to nothing about it.

"Don't know anything about this one."

"Oh yeah the beautiful church no I don't know anything about it."

"I know it's a beautiful church."

"I think it's Catholic."

"It is a tight knit community."



The New Church welcomed Action News inside so its Delaware Valley neighbors could learn more about its members and faith.

The Sunday service largely resembles those at a Catholic Church but the beliefs are very different. While following the teachings of the Old and New Testaments, the New Church interprets them through the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. They are used, along with the Bible, to educate church members about the word of God.

The New Church believes his 30 volumes of writings marked the "Second Coming of Christ". Other faiths envision the "second coming" as Jesus someday walking the Earth again. But New Church members believe that in 1744 God began talking to Swedenborg and explaining the after life to him in detail. That correspondence between God and Swedenborg represents their "second coming".

"For a period of 20 or 30 years he, daily, was able to see in the next life and explore it and write down things that he observed there and ask questions of people there," said Reverend Jeremy Simons.

Their belief is that Heaven is very much like life, only better and at the core of the after life is marriage.

"The teachings are that everyone in Heaven is married," said member Eden Lumsden.

"The teaching is what every young couple wants to believe, that if you truly love each other you can be married forever," said Simons.

However, the belief is if you are single on Earth you will be paired with your true love in Heaven.

If you do attend, you'll also notice the absence of crosses. While they believe Jesus died on the cross, they don't believe it as to atone for the sins of the world.

"Rather he came to liberate us and to give his life in the same sense that a soldier gives his life for his country," said Simons.

But because for decades the church community was so tight, rumors emerged about what was really going on.

"We'll get people coming in on tours and they'll want to know if people really do have six fingers," Lumsden said.

Simons said, "that people inter marry and that really isn't true."

In the last few years the church has begun to reach out to its surrounding communities. Last September, the church welcomed hundreds area residents who came to pay their respects to 23 year old Tristan Smith, killed while fighting in Iraq.

The biggest message the New Church has for the area ....

"It's a wonderful community we love to have visitors," said Simons.

Some famous New Church members throughout history have included Johnny Appleseed, Helen Keller and Abraham Lincoln.

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