



# Bryn Athyn Church

## ANNUAL REPORT

July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020

**Because indoor gatherings of more than 25 people are prohibited, we will not be having an in-person Semi-Annual Meeting.**

### HEAD PASTOR'S REPORT

Rev. Eric H. Carswell

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FY 2019-2020 began uneventfully but then dramatically changed with a shelter-at-home order in early March due to the coronavirus pandemic. For the first time in its history, as best I can tell, the Cathedral closed its doors for worship and tours. It just recently reopened the 9:30 am family service for in-person attendance. Fortunately, the Cathedral already had an impressive camera system to continue livestreaming worship services online. Dr. Graham Bier, Director of Music, was able to organize a quartet of singers within a few days who could sing the hymns and special music, and speak the congregational responses while adhering to the recommended social distancing guidelines. We received many words of appreciation for providing a continuity of worship for those tuning in both locally and far beyond. Nevertheless, weddings had to be postponed and memorial services were held in person allowing for just a few family members in attendance. Not what we would wish for.

For several months, the entire Bryn Athyn Church School campus and grounds sat empty while the faculty worked diligently from home to adapt to remote learning for the students. This was a daunting challenge for teachers, students and their parents. Similarly, the Pastors Office staff also worked remotely from home. Most of our programs were able to continue using video conference through Zoom and by phone.

Erik Buss and I did a series of 15 videos addressing the spiritual needs and questions that were in many people's minds during the pandemic. These videos circulated on the Bryn Athyn Church website, Facebook, and YouTube. With a modest advertising budget, Erik Buss oversaw the "boosting" of these videos. Facebook statistics show that each of these videos had 10,000 to 35,000 views and garnered comments, many positive and some negative, from people new to the New Church.

Our annual June 19<sup>th</sup> Pageant is a wonderful tradition of celebrating New Church Day. When it became obvious that

we would not be able to have the pageant/picnic this year, an inspired group of women organized a drive-by pageant in the upper Cathedral parking lot. They spent countless hours planning, casting and arranging a series of scenes for an outdoor presentation. After driving through the scenes, families with children were guided down to the lower parking lot to collect their June 19<sup>th</sup> presents. This turned out to be a tremendous success and a testimony to the idea that "where there is a will, there is a way."

We had also planned to host a General Church Retreat/Assembly in June. The agenda included an impressive set of offerings on many topics for a variety of age groups. Kaylene Glenn, together with a support team, focused on the organization, logistics and planning. However, soon after registrations started coming in, the public became concerned with safety and travel restrictions due to the pandemic. It also does not seem feasible to hold this event in June of 2021 so the current intention is to look towards June 2022.

Back in the fall of 2017, we began a methodical process of assessing the strengths and weaknesses of our buildings and facilities. We hired an owner's representative and an architect to support our planning process. A committee consisting of board members, parents, teachers and Pastors Office staff had met with the architects for nearly a year and came up with some inspiring building plan. Plans included updating the buildings that have good structure and strategically removing and replacing the least valuable parts with newer facilities that would better serve our purpose. Unfortunately, the shelter-at-home orders and the subsequent economic uncertainties led us to pause this effort. I look forward to when we can resume the process for this project.

As I announced several months ago, I have decided to retire from my position as Head Pastor of Bryn Athyn Church effective at the end of June 2021 (see page 2 for an update from the committee to counsel the bishop on the next head pastor). This will be shortly before I turn 68 and will conclude eight years that I have served in this role. I have been grateful for this opportunity to be of service to this congregation.

**ASSISTANT PASTOR**

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What a difference a year makes! Nobody could have predicted 2020! I am so impressed with how much this community has risen to the challenge. Although we are not able to worship together, worship services have continued, sometimes with unexpected benefits such as the amazing choir Graham Bier has pulled together. Online attendance at our services indicates an overall engagement that is similar to what it was before the Covid pandemic started. And I have been impressed with how people in the community have pulled together to support others in need, showing the life of charity which the Lord teaches.

A result of the shelter at home orders that came in March is that not only did services move online, but we also had to find ways to reach out to people in ways we'd never had to before. Many of our ongoing classes moved online, though some could not. Eric and I started creating videos addressing spiritual themes related to the pandemic, racism, and the like. We also started posting the sermon portion of the Adult services on YouTube as well as on Boxcast, our livestream platform. (Music copyright licensing rules prevent us from posting the worship service with music included on YouTube.) We have promoted these videos, both on Facebook and YouTube. Some have had 20,000 views and generated hundreds of comments, many of them very appreciative of the message. It was exciting to see the New Church message getting out into the area around us, and to our own members.

One of my duties is to supervise the New Church Day pageant. Because of the government restriction on large gatherings, doing our normal pageant with 1000 people crowded together was not an option. Luckily, a very creative and dedicated group of individuals gave enormous hours to develop a drive-by pageant that was very successful. Thank you Annina King, Alison Cole, Rachel Martin, and Nicole Frazier.

As part of our strategic plan, we hired Joy Cole to manage our presence in social media. We had received some negative feedback that our website and social media presence were not up to par, particularly to young adults. Joy's first duty was to create an Instagram account for Bryn Athyn Church for which she has been posting quality content, as well as updating our Facebook page. She has worked on streamlining the content in our website and making it more user-friendly. A major upgrade of our website is in the works, so stay tuned in the coming months!

I have been struck, again, by how much we really are spiritual beings living a material existence for a time. People have been separated physically, but have come together in so many ways to support the church we love. I feel honored to work here.

**BOARD OF TRUSTEES REPORT**

May 18, 2020 Meeting

Rachel Glenn, Board Secretary



- Due to the postponement of the Annual Meeting, including voting for new board members, the board voted to accept the resignation of retiring member Dave Deibert and appoint Kayne Lermite to fill the post until voting can occur.
- Voting on the board members will occur at the fall semi-annual meeting. If it is not possible to hold that meeting, the board will decide on an alternative plan at their September meeting.
- Rev. Eric Carswell will be retiring at the end of June 2021. A committee to counsel the bishop on choosing the society's next head pastor will be selected by mail-in ballots.
- The FY2020-2021 Society budget was approved as circulated.
- The FY2020-2021 Cathedral budget was approved as circulated.



**COMMITTEE TO COUNSEL THE BISHOP  
ON THE NEXT HEAD PASTOR**

Rev. Kurt Hy. Asplundh	Meg Keegan
Brooke Brown	Peter Mergen
Stephen Conroy	Renee Mergen
Hannah Dewees	Stephen Morley
Barbara Doering	Grant Odhner
Nicole Frazier	Meg Rohtla
Shannon Good	Ken Schauder (secretary)
Hayley Gunther (chair)	Dan Synnestvedt
Greg Henderson	Greg Synnestvedt
Janna King	Mara White

The committee has had a couple of meetings over the summer to start the process of selecting the next head pastor. **The committee expects to have a candidate to present at a special society meeting on November 11.** Please feel free to reach out to any of the committee members listed above or myself directly to start a conversation.

Rt. Rev. Brad Heinrichs

**CATHEDRAL DIRECTOR**

Meg Rohtla

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**Services, Special Events and Visitors**

From July 1, 2019 through March 2020, the Cathedral welcomed 5,670 visitors greeted by our devoted volunteer tour guides. December was our busiest month with 6,730 people attending worship services and events.

The Cathedral celebrated the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its dedication on October 5, 2019 with an enlightening day. Our dedicated experts – Warren Holtzman (metalsmith), Jens Langlotz (stone mason) and Kenneth Leap (stained glass artist)--led tours highlighting the craftsmanship that makes our Cathedral unique and world renown. Dr. Graham Bier gave a fascinating talk about our organ while Terry Schnarr played musical selections. Rev. Eric Carswell’s worship service that Sunday included a rededication ceremony with special music sung by the choir featuring hymns from the original dedication service.

Because of the government-mandated closure of all gatherings and social distancing, the Cathedral closed its doors to the public. Fortunately, we were able to continue our regular Sunday services via livestream throughout the closure. Vocalists, special musicians and enhancements to our sound systems improved the livestream experience for viewers at home. With the upgraded sound system, we were able to welcome the community to bring their own chairs and listen to the live broadcast of the service outdoors. Through the creative efforts of the June 19<sup>th</sup> pageant committee, we were able to host a June 19<sup>th</sup> drive-by pageant (including pickup of June 19<sup>th</sup> gifts for the children). It was a huge success--over 200 cars did the drive-by! The traditional Cathedral lighting with music piped outdoors were enjoyed by many. Baptisms, weddings and memorial services have all continued in various formats to comply with the changing state guidelines. Dedicated staff worked hard to keep everyone safe, following CDC and government guidelines.

**Projects**

*Stonework:* Work on the restoration of the upper chancel exterior wall as well as the north side of South Transept was completed. This involved repointing, replacing 15 granite pieces, installation of two buttress terminators, removal of two finials which (will later be re-carved). For preservation of the limestone, the many cracks in the tracery were injected with a latex-based product and the stones were treated to inhibit biological growth. Nearly 600 hours of labor was spent on re-carving six pieces of limestone, standing over

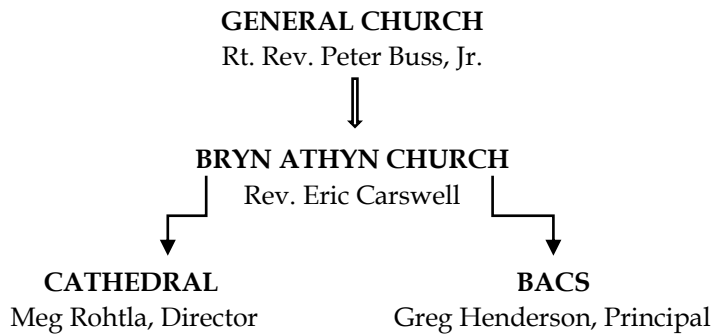
eleven ft. tall and weighing about half a ton. Passing on the craft of stone carving has been part of the Cathedral’s fabric since the beginning. Our head mason, Grayson Zuber, trained two interns this summer. They worked on repointing the granite pathways and assisting in masonry roof repairs.

*Pathways:* Through a grant from the Glencairn Foundation, another project was the replacement of the flagstone paths on the northwest side of the building – using over 5,000 square feet of flagstone. Luke Betz (building manager) oversaw this project which was done by Waggle Masonry. Repair work began in February, but work was completed in August (the project was put on hold briefly due to the pandemic). This path is constructed with thicker stone and without mortar joints allowing for easier maintenance in the future.

Ongoing maintenance of the buildings and grounds kept us all busy all year long. While this year presented many challenges, it was a pleasure being part of a wonderful team to navigate new territory to manage the continued operations of the Cathedral. Thank you for your support and participation.



**ORGANIZATIONAL CHART**



***Assistants to the Pastor of Bryn Athyn Church***

- Rev. Erik Buss
- Rev. John Odhner (part-time)
- Rev. Jeremy Simons (Cathedral Chaplain – part-time)
- Rev. Phil Schnarr (Young Children’s Church – part-time)
- Rev. Solomon Keal (Informal Family Service, BACS Pastor)

**DIRECTOR OF MUSIC**

Dr. Graham T. Bier

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This year is a tale of two circumstances. Prior to the pandemic, we enjoyed a strong choral season. The Choristers ran two sections this year, an older and a new group of younger singers that came along nicely. The Cathedral Choir enjoyed singing hundred-year-old selections for the Centenary of the Cathedral's dedication, and a very enjoyable "Carols around the World" exploration of Christmas from different countries in which the General Church has congregations. The Cathedral Choir is finding itself lacking in male singers - a trend we hope to reverse in the coming years so that the strong soprano and alto sections don't need to sing "down" to help balance. The Shepherd's Choir was the "best yet" and although I feel that way every year, I genuinely see an improvement every year in teamwork and quality.

Frustratingly, the pandemic has been very hard on communal music-making, thanks to the general public's view of singing as high-risk behavior and cause for spreading the virus in group settings. To maintain the musical portion of the livestreamed worship services, we arranged for a quartet that can gather inside the Cathedral following the recommended social distancing between each individual. We've also taken advantage of opportunities to reach out in different ways. Keith Genzlinger has been a huge help raising the quality of our online audio, something we hope to improve permanently coming out of this situation. Several recent music graduates have found the quartet a great development opportunity for their own musicianship. Through a generous donation by Dana Gruber, Pete Boericke crafted quality music stands out of hundred-year-old oak leftover from the original construction of the Cathedral. The Informal Family Service in particular has been able to continue connection to a wider musical community through virtual band projects. Some 50 musicians (with more each week this summer) sent individual recordings that we combined into one recording to make a final "performance" embedded in the worship service video. It's nothing like how we usually make music together, but it created a creative outlet and a sense of community through music.

My sincere thanks to this community of worshipers, musicians and listeners, for their strength, creativity, and support during a difficult season. It isn't over yet but it continues to present some opportunities among the challenges and frustrations of this pandemic.

**YOUNG CHILDREN'S CHURCH**

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Things had been going along swimmingly until Covid-19 appeared on the scene. So in March we began creating video services. We have now produced over 20 video worship services with the help of John Odhner, Jeremy Simons, Erik Buss, Scott Frazier and Kurt Asplundh. We have averaged 33 unique views per service since the pandemic began. Our poll of viewers showed strong approval of these humble broadcasts. And, at the same time, everyone wants to be back at church.

One approach to re-entry would be to try an outdoor worship service. This is a very real possibility. However, we also feel a strong obligation to serve families who wish to continue worshipping at home to stay safe and healthy.

This past June we passed a major milestone with the final Marionette worship service offered by Lori, John, Aurelle and Hope Odhner. The Odhners assumed this use in 2011. Since that time legions of children have been captivated by the floating silks, tender movements and gentle portrayal of stories from the Lord's Word. We are deeply, deeply grateful for the loving and kind spirit they have brought to this innocent, moving form of worship.

Terry and I have worked together leading an open doctrinal reading group presently using Zoom. This past year we read three three short works. We would love to have you join us on alternate Tuesday evenings. Also on alternate Tuesdays, I have been leading an open men's doctrinal reading group via Zoom. Last spring we finished *True Christian Religion* and began *Apocalypse Revealed*. Please feel free to join us. You can contact me at 215-360-5298 or [pschnarr@gmail.com](mailto:pschnarr@gmail.com).

Another life-raft situation has faced me in teaching 5<sup>th</sup> grade religion. Being present with children helps so much to actively involve them in bringing the Word to life. Doing this via the internet has proven to be quite difficult. So this fall I will be immersed (hopefully not too deeply!) in learning how to teach with Nearpod and Google Classroom.

Though our world is incredibly out of sorts, I hope you have discovered something new and special in your life through all of this. I have found a special joy in the time Terry and I have been together. Who knew we would see so much of each other for this many months? And of course all the children I know and love would shout the answer, "THE LORD KNEW!!!"

**SMALL GROUPS COORDINATOR**

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**Where We've Been**

We began this fiscal year with uplifting offerings and ended the year, like so many others, with people searching for a sense of community during a period of isolation.

Small Groups continue to support people in deepening their understanding of faith, living New Church principles, and building community and connection for the joy and struggle of it all. There continue to be small groups who study the Writings, or focus on service and community (wisdom, use, and love).

Last September, we offered a series on "Angels." The opening event was a show featuring Anthony Lawson re-enacting "The Great Divorce," a book by C.S. Lewis. More than a hundred people attended this event. Over 20 small groups participated in this series. There were two groups consisting of Bryn Athyn College students. There was a group of Cathedral livestream viewers who met online, and a group that focused on creativity.

**Finding Hope**

Finding Hope has been in action since 2015, which focuses on community offerings on sensitive topics not often talked about--domestic violence, suicide, addiction, sexual abuse, and mental illness. This initiative is a collaboration by Bryn Athyn Church, Bryn Athyn College, NewChurch LIVE, Gloria Dei Church, Growth Opportunity and Abington-Jefferson Health. The planning team consists of representatives from these organizations. This year, instead of featuring a single event as in the past, we offered three small events entitled "Finding Hope - Storytelling." The focus was on providing resources, skills for deep listening and an opportunity for people to share their stories impacted by these topics. Bryn Athyn College hosted the first event in November as a supportive offering to students. There was approximately 30 attendees.

The second event was held in January featuring the series "Growing Through Challenges." More than 40 people attended the event. Eleven small groups formed to explore this series, which wrapped up in early March, right before the pandemic.

In response to the stay-at-home restrictions in March, I communicated with small group leaders weekly to provide

guidance on ways to continue their group meetings by video or phone conference.

In April, the third offering focused on mental health/wellness and coping with stress/trauma/loss surrounding the pandemic. We invited front line workers in the medical field to present their experiences in dealing with the coronavirus pandemic. Many people inside and outside our community attended this presentation.

In May, another offering focused on relationships to support people experiencing stresses in their life, whether from illness, job loss, and/or the uncertainty of their future. A representative from Nicole's Place (a women's shelter) talked about healthy/unhealthy coping strategies. This was a virtual gathering with nearly 50 people connecting online.

In the spring, based on interest from newcomers to the New Church, we launched an online group to study the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

In August, in response to the rising awareness and movement around racial injustice, we held a two-part presentation/discussion on racism, oppression and privilege. The guest speaker was Dr. Jade Logan, Assistant Professor of Psychology of Social Justice and Ethics at Chestnut Hill College. She shared insights on how to understand and help dismantle racism. Over 90 people participated in this virtual gathering.

**Small Groups: Where We Are Going**

During this time, the need for community is more important than ever. We hope to continue promoting small group gatherings for people to connect, deepen their faith, and/or find support in following New Church teachings in life. With the uncertainty of when public gatherings will resume, we will offer more virtual gatherings/events for connection and support. Stay tuned for details of our upcoming fall Journey series, "Resilience."

**Join us!**

There are many ways to get involved in a small group including co-hosting, joining, spreading the word, or planning events. Please get involved and help us in creating opportunities for people to feel the nurturing presence of community, the comfort of a loving Creator, guidance from the Word and the fulfillment of serving. Thank you!

**BRYN ATHYN CHURCH SCHOOL****Greg D. Henderson, Principal**[Greg.Henderson@bacs.org](mailto:Greg.Henderson@bacs.org)

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The 2019-20 school year will be remembered for its spring term. Zoom meetings, Seesaw assignments, and video messages will be some of the first images that come to mind when we think back to this year, but there was plenty of school before our program was drastically affected by changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Each year we select a school theme and this year we had selected "Arise, begin your journey" from Deuteronomy. The first two terms of the year saw students growing academically, emotionally and socially as they journeyed through our program. The faculty continued to fine tune their curriculums and focus our professional development on topics such as bullying and anxiety. The winter term concluded with its usual flurry of projects and we departed for what we thought was going to be a week away before beginning a typical spring term.

As we now know though, the spring term became anything but typical. As spring break wound down, our state governor mandated school closures for two weeks and we quickly made plans for all grades to share schoolwork remotely, something that we had never done before. After a week, it became apparent that teaching remotely would extend for longer than the initial two weeks and so we began to build a virtual version of our school program. Lessons were shared with students directly through one of two online programs--Seesaw or Google Classroom. Lessons sometimes included reading materials and/or watching videos created by their teachers. Students then submitted their completed assignments online. As the weeks went by we eventually learned that online learning would continue through the end of the school year. On our final day, the teachers stood in the parking lot six feet apart to wave to passing students and to cheer the graduates in their decorated cars. It was a graduation day like no other in the history of our school. It culminated a year that had turned unique, and while I'm sure there was disappointment that expected traditions didn't happen, I saw a lot of smiling 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduates.

There are countless lessons we can take from our experiences in the spring. Throughout the term, I was impressed again and again by the faculty's creativity, perseverance and care for their students. Teachers learned how to operate the online platforms and other programs, and mentored their colleagues with their new skills along the way. The remote learning process was hard as it could not provide the same level of teacher-student connection that is present in an onsite classroom, something that means so much to the teachers. The students, after all, are why the teachers are here and a day not spent together in the classroom can never feel quite as rewarding.

Another lasting impression from the spring term is an appreciation for the parents. This remote learning program could not have been successful without the countless hours parents spent overseeing their children's schoolwork. Often these parents were also working from home or trying to solve the stresses of life in the midst of a quarantine. The hours they spent, along with their positive support and understanding were regular reminders that the school and home are working together as one team for our students.

Looking in on all the virtual classrooms this spring provided me an opportunity to see the students embrace the challenges of the situation and shine. I saw science experiments in kitchens, obstacle courses in basements, reproductions of famous paintings, a virtual religious pageant, an online Country Fair webinar, homemade tutorial videos for younger students, and so much more.

The world has changed in many ways since March and priorities have shifted. BACS and the Bryn Athyn Church had been working on plans for a major renovation of our school and community facilities. However, this project is now on hold because of the shifting economic environment. While this is understandable, it is disappointing as the work of the building committee and the architects were leading us in an exciting direction.

As is often the case in the spring, we had to say goodbye to departing staff members this year. Linnea Heinrichs spent the past two years as a teachers' assistant in the primary unit but will not be returning this fall. In her time here, she supported four homeroom teachers, dove into new challenges, and built connections with the students. Janna King also retired this spring after a lifelong career as a teacher, of which 14 years was spent in the Student Support Center working with students. Anyone who has had an opportunity to talk with Janna about education knows how much she cared about the individual students she worked with, their learning, and the larger spiritual journey of these students.

As mentioned above, our theme for the year centered on taking a journey. The year turned out to be a very different journey than the one we began with but that is often the case in life. I have no doubt that this year taught our students many important things, some not originally intended. They became proficient at many new aspects of communication and technology. They were given new challenges to overcome. They learned to adapt and adopt skills that could serve them for the rest of their lives.

The 2020-21 school year brings with it many uncertainties but we carry with us what we gained from our journey this past year: how to teach in a different way, a new sense of priorities, and an appreciation for the things we took for granted. School will most likely be different than it had been for a while but not all of the differences need to be losses.

**INFORMAL FAMILY SERVICE  
BACS PASTOR**

Rev. Solomon J. Keal

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I've been the pastor of the Informal Service community for seven years now. The Informal Service has a focus on affectional life application, relaxed ritual, congregational informal singing, pageants, and an interactive worship experience. Our intergenerational community ranges in age from newborn to 90. We've continued to have many volunteers contributing their talents to music, acting, altar-building, audio recording, lay-reading, testimonials, and ushering.

Throughout most of this year, we continued to have quarterly brunch and community meetings after church, in which the congregation was invited to stay and participate in planning the direction of the Informal Service worship experience and community. We also continue to hold weekly planning meetings for each Sunday service every Tuesday at 10:00 am. Since the pandemic started, these meetings have been held online through Zoom.

We've been fortunate to have a team of regular guest preachers at the Informal Service. This year, we welcomed Rev. Kurt Hyland Asplundh to our team.

We had our second annual "Feast of Charity," which is an alternate format for Holy Supper, modeled after the "feasts of charity" described in the Writings (see *True Christian Religion* 433, 727).

Before the pandemic began, we had plans to have monthly after-church offerings such as gatherings for fellowship, potluck meals, community meetings, service projects, holiday projects, study groups, etc. Once the pandemic is over, I look forward to making these plans a reality.

The last in-person Informal Service we had back in March included the baptism of Elizabeth Savino, a new member of our community. We are grateful to have had that service before we had to switch to a video format.

Because of the pandemic, we transitioned to offering pre-recorded videos of the worship service available on our website. In order to approximate some of the interactive element of the service, we also instituted a live discussion/fellowship time via Zoom on Sunday mornings at 10:00 am.

During the normal part of the year, regular church attendance averaged nearly a hundred people. Since the transition to video services, the average number of views is near a hundred. Since two of the largest services of the year - Palm Sunday and Easter - could not be held in person indoors, we had to get creative. For Palm Sunday, we had a drive-by palm procession and for Easter, people sent in pictures of flowers to be used for the video.

Graham Bier has been doing an amazing job of recruiting volunteers to participate in virtual bands to provide music for our service. I'm also grateful to the members of our video recording and editing team: Lucas Mergen, Keith Genzlinger, Cirdan Ewan Keal, and Kurt Hy. Asplundh.

This was officially my second year as the school pastor. As such, I am the head of the Religion Team who oversees the spiritual mission and determines the school theme for the year. My duties include creating the chapel schedule, overseeing the religion curriculum, and teaching 4<sup>th</sup> grade Religion. I also participate in special worship services in the primary grades.

The first two-thirds of the school year went fairly smoothly. The pandemic in the spring term was extremely challenging for students, parents, and faculty alike. All school buildings had to close so classes had to switch to remote learning. But, it was wonderful to see everyone rise to the occasion to create an environment where New Church education and aspects of the school could continue via remote learning.

During most of the spring term, we offered videos of chapel for the students and faculty, to continue giving a sense of what makes our school uniquely New Church.

Our theme for the 2019-2020 school year was about "journeys" using the quote: "*Arise, begin your journey.*" (Deuteronomy 10:11) The theme for the 2020-2021 school year is about "courage," using the quote, "*Be of good courage, and the Lord shall strengthen your heart.*" (Psalm 31:24)

Despite the many challenges that this pandemic has brought, I think we've seen that spiritual community is capable of existing even beyond physical community. Yet, we also look forward to when we can return to the in-person community that is such an important foundation for spiritual community.

**VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR  
COMMUNITY CONNECTOR**

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This past year has been one to remember! It is hard to recall life before the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, but it is refreshing to reflect back to "the good old days!"

In August 2019, Pay-It-Forward Crew had a joint cook day with Baker Tilly Associates for their annual Stewardship Day. This was a delightful team effort that added delicious food to our collection of frozen ready-made meals, available for anyone when they are struggling with life's challenges. Since the pandemic, we have hosted two "virtual" cook days, meeting on Zoom (video conference platform). We cook from our own kitchens, then contribute what we make to the PIFC freezer. It's been great that we continue to have this food available. We call it "love in the form of food." Since 2018, we have participated in the Food Donation Connection that has partnered with Wawa. LynnEllen King distributes frozen breakfast sandwiches weekly to recovery houses, homeless shelters, and families in our community. This is another valuable form of outreach.

At Thanksgiving, we had another lovely worship service, put on by means of nearly one hundred volunteers. Setting up in the Asplundh Field House for church takes many, many hands, and it is certainly worth the effort to have our whole congregation all together in one place for this service. It is always a highlight of the year for me to witness the many willing volunteers who pull together to make it happen so smoothly.

Just weeks before the pandemic restrictions hit in March, we were able to put together our Valentine Care Packages to send to Bryn Athyn students who are away at college. Volunteers contributed homemade cookies and other treats, to add to the pastor's message and homemade valentines from their friends "back home." We also sent a smaller care package to the college-aged young adults in our community. This contained a couple treats, and a warm invitation to participate in various church opportunities, and reminded them that we are available with support when needed. The pandemic has really impacted the area of volunteering and community connecting. So much of my job description involves getting people TOGETHER, not keeping them apart! But we have continued with many of our uses through Zoom meetings and creative thinking. The Stephen Ministers continue to keep in contact with their care receivers. Visiting Friends have shifted to phone calls instead of visiting in person. The precious senior blessing service was not possible, so we sent a small inspirational gift to the ANC graduates, with best wishes for their future. I met with other volunteer coordinators in our local area to support each other in adjusting to the limitations of the pandemic. So, we are slowly figuring things out.

**MARRIAGE PROGRAM**

Rev. John L. and Lori S. Odhner

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[John.Odhner@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:John.Odhner@brynathynchurch.org)



The efforts we make to support marriages continue in and around the pandemic. The daily messages called *Marriage Moats* continue to appear in people's inboxes as well as on social media. Moats are short stories, which sometimes include a quote from the Word or the Writings, and always a photograph from one of the generous photographers who allow me to use their images. These have gone out without pause for over ten years, and always spur responses either on a public platform or in private. Hundreds of people read them each day, some of whom have signed up from the New Church website, and many tell me that they make an impact. Giving attention to our marriages and other relationships can be a healthy part of our routine.

The mentoring program is blessed to have 30 couples participate this past year. The format is simple enough. A younger and more experienced couple meet over coffee, or on a walk, or over dinner, or more recently virtually to chat about their lives. It is neither counseling, nor a chance to solve one another's problems. It does not include advice, or directives. But in the space of telling another couple how our relationships are going, the Lord can and does slip in with blessings. We encourage quartets to include time to appreciate their partner out loud, which is a skill we all need to exercise. Most couple groups connect monthly, and some have developed friendships that have continued for years.

Small groups meet via Zoom, and for some people in this time of isolation it provides their only social life. We do check-ins, and express gratitude for specific things about our partners. These are delightful to listen to.

We have not been able to provide a parents' night out since March, which is sad. It may be awhile before such events can happen again safely.

We have books, videos, and other resources to lend to everyone. These can pump new energy into marriage, as well as good information.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve the community in these ways. It is our prayer that it brings both strength and hope to people who are doing their best to grow in their relationships.



**BRYN ATHYN THRIFT SHOP (BATS)**

Nina G. Finkeldey, Manager  
[Nglebef@gmail.com](mailto:Nglebef@gmail.com) / 215-947-7646



This is a hard year to report financially as would be expected. The sense of determination, perseverance, and support in difficult times is another story. Though we were ahead of our goals through February, we lost a full quarter and went \$9000 into the red.

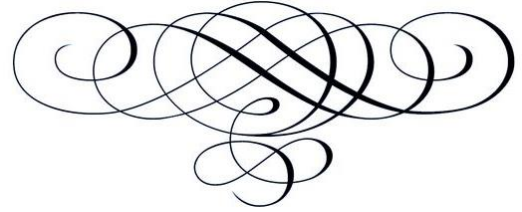
I often think how *nothing* can take away the meaningful service we provided for so many in more than half of the year. Despite the mandated closures due to the COVID-19 pandemic, our staff continued to receive their paychecks regularly for which we are deeply grateful. We kept in touch in varying degrees with our beloved volunteers (we have 90+) and staff. We learned to use video conferencing (Zoom), wrote letters, chatted on the phone, and shared how much the conversations meant to us in those times. We explored new ideas and innovations of our business model. We faced the isolation and anxieties like everyone else. Once the campus reopened on June 7, we began the process of rearranging the facility to comply with proper social distancing guidelines - tight quarters have been our specialty, a situation no longer acceptable.

Take an intricate system of physical processes, scheduling, and use of space developed over 27 years, heave it into the air, and explore new ways -- all virtually overnight. It's the biggest game of Tetris I've ever imagined.

We started accepting donations via drop-off at BACS and stored them in the gym while we worked to restructure the space at BATS. We had volunteers -- newcomers and old timers -- moving things hither and yon, and sorting. More gratitude!! The summer was hot and humid.

We are grateful beyond words for the fortuitous use of the Powell House to process the "downstairs" stuff - inventory that is presently 48% of our business. Consequently, we added another area for drop-off donations, "the new tent." We stopped accepting furniture donations. A check-out counter was added in the upper level, displays were rearranged, removed the holding table and cleared out spaces to allow for social distancing measures. We started opening our doors later to allow time to put out inventory before the customers arrive. We have lost a few volunteers as we expected but we are stunned to see how many were eager to return.

Our doors reopened July 28. August was our first full month back in business and sales have surpassed the figures from last August. Our customers are back and happy to see us, and vice-versa. We are all working hard, figuring it out like everybody else. *Endless* thanks to our volunteers. The precious service goes on.



**CONGREGATION STATISTICS**

Members	:	735
Friends of Bryn Athyn Church (age 20 and up)		1624
Young people (ages 15-19):		267
Children (ages 0-14):		464
Total Congregation:		3,090

**MEMBERS AND FRIENDS  
 who passed into the Spiritual World**

Barbara B. Acton	Berith C. Acton
Kurt Ho. Asplundh	William W. Buick
Helga S. Childs	Geoffrey Cooper
Jeannie Edwards	Elsa (Deev) Murphy
Phyllis B. Pitcairn	H. Keith Rydstrom
Gloria A. Smith	Marlyn F. Smith
Dolores B. Soderberg	Brian Yardumian-Smyth
Mollie G. Zeitz	

**NEW MEMBERS**

Micah A. Alden	Tania Alden
Brandon K. Asplundh	Leanna Boyesen
Derek B. Buss	Freya J. Buss
Ethan Daum	Hannah Dewees
Landon K. Elder	Katelin D. Gunther
TJ Gunther	Brad Heinrichs
Cathy Heinrichs	Glen S. Henderson
Jenna Henderson	Quentin Hyatt
Sarah Jackson	Robert G. Johns
Ayris M. Jungé	Jared Jungé
Tim Kopistansky	Ariel Martin
Erik Martin	Rachel Martin
Emily Posey	Jeffrey O. Smith
Rachel Steen	Gregg Swierczynski
Kerry Swierczynski	

**ANNUAL GIVING COORDINATOR**

Diana M. Mergen

[Diana.Mergen@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:Diana.Mergen@brynathynchurch.org)

215-947-6225 x202



Fiscal Year 2019-20 was an incredible year, hard in many ways but so much to be grateful for. I would like to express my gratitude for the strong support we have had from our volunteers, donors, and school and pastoral staff and administration. Your time, energy, and financial support made it possible for us to continue our church services, many of our programs and New Church education during unprecedented times.

Our community has banded together to care for one another in ways that we could never have imagined. Because of stay-at-home restrictions, worship services continued via livestream or recorded video. BACS switched to remote learning which continued through the remainder of the school year. The school closing ceremony was a recorded video. Teachers stood outside the parking lot to watch the drive-by parade so they could wave goodbye to their students and congratulate the graduates. Pay It Forward held a virtual cook day with volunteers preparing meals from their own kitchen, and we started online groups to provide support to members in our community who are struggling with life challenges.

Our church and community have been blessed with so many good and kind friends. Financially, we met our target goals. Your continued support is needed and appreciated more now than ever. The coming year will be challenging due to economic uncertainties. There are many creative ways to support our organization. If you would like to learn more, please contact me. We hope you will consider a recurring gift in the coming year. To make a gift, please visit [brynathynchurch.org/about/make-a-gift/](http://brynathynchurch.org/about/make-a-gift/).

**ATTENDANCE STATS**

	2018-2019		2019-2020	
	#svcs	Avg.	#svcs	Avg.
Informal Family*	52	90	34	85
Young Children's Church*	42	40	28	36
Family Cathedral: Nave*	52	85	34	84
Livestream**		23		1322
Adult Cathedral: Nave*	52	159	34	151
Livestream**		76		95
Baptisms (Cathedral)*				13
Weddings (Cathedral)*				25
Cathedral Tours*				856
Cathedral Visitors* (walk-ins)				4312
<b>SPECIAL SERVICES</b>	<b>#svcs</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>#svcs</b>	<b>Total</b>
Summer Organ Vespers Livestream	5	1240* 40	2	598T
Thanksgiving - AFH	1	564**	1	865T
Children's Tableaux			1	202T
Cathedral Tableaux Livestream	4	1601* 149	4	1575T 135T
Christmas Vespers Livestream	1	493*	1	259T 32T
Messiah Sing-A-Long			1	180T 11T
YCC Christmas Eve	1	173*	1	147T
Family Christmas Eve Livestream	3	1509* 61	3	1266T 68T
Informal Christmas Eve			1	77T
Christmas Day Livestream	1	146* 31	1	190T 45T

\*Attendance through 3/8/2020 (prior to COVID-19)

\*\*Attendance through 6/30/2020

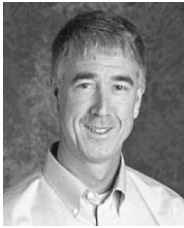
T-Total attendance

**TREASURER'S REPORT**

Stewart L. Asplundh

[Stewart.Asplundh@brynathynchurch.org](mailto:Stewart.Asplundh@brynathynchurch.org)

215-947-6225 x210



Fiscal Year 2019-20 was unusual in many respects. Coronavirus shutdowns, including the preschool and BATS, impacted us financially. We ended the year with a deficit of \$287,623 with both income and expenses down compared to the previous year. Compared to last year, Annual Fund and school contributions were down but above budget and special (earmarked) contributions were lower than budgeted.

Related to the coronavirus shutdown, we did apply for a Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) loan in coordination with the General Church, and are submitting for loan forgiveness to help offset some of the losses associated with this.

Contributions overall were down \$238,897, or minus 18%. However, this was still \$100,000 above our anticipated goal. All giving funds were above budget but lower than last year, except for offertory basket contributions, which was under budget and lower for the year.

Tuition income was lower than last year due to a decrease in students, and we continue to see student financial aid costs increase. Combined, we saw a decrease of approximately \$92,000 compared to the previous year. Preschool tuition income was on target for an increase but due to the school switching to remote learning, the preschool closed early and ended 6% under budget. This has also impacted other income from fees and registration for afterschool programs.

BATS also closed in March, which impacted their income to end with a \$7,923 deficit. However, they have since reopened and are having a great start to the new fiscal year!

Total expenses were down 1.8% at \$5,447,522, approximately \$97,000 lower than the previous year. Society and school expenses were up less than 2% with a decrease in maintenance and building costs.

Looking forward to FY 2020-21, while the proposed budget reflects a salary increase of 3.8% (2.3% cost of living), we are following the General Church's guideline for freezing salary increases due to the uncertain economic outlook. We hope to re-evaluate the economic situation during the year and if conditions improve, reinstate pay increases.

The Cathedral Fund had a surplus of \$88,607 with a 2.3% increase in expenses, but fortunately close to 10% increase in income. The forecast for the FY 2020-21 budget is just over \$1,105,000, which includes a small surplus.

Overall, thanks to our donors for a successful year of meeting and exceeding our goals. We are grateful for your continued financial support.

**CONTRIBUTIONS COMMITTEE**

Stewart L. Asplundh

Fiscal Year 2019-20 was successful in terms of budget goals but lower than was needed for a balanced budget.

Direct contributions exceeded the goal by \$18,275, but decreased compared to the previous year. Basket offerings were under budget and down from last year by about \$24,000 in both cases. Special contributions were a little higher than budgeted but down compared to last year. School contributions were lower than last year by about \$5,000 but \$100,000 higher than budgeted.


Overall giving was lower than the previous year by about \$239,000, most of the change was due to one-time large estate gifts received last year, taking that into account we exceeded our budget goals in all of the giving funds except basket giving and feel that this was still a good contribution year.

Thank you for all the generous support!

Contributions	2018/19	2019/20	Change	%Change
Direct	810,863	654,193	-156,670.00	-26.8%
Basket	147,887	125,330	-22,557.00	-15.0%
Special	132,000	77,048	-54,952.00	-20.6%
School	240,142	235,425	-4,717.00	-1.3%
	1,330,892	1,091,996	-238,896	-17.5%

Thanks to all who contribute to the many uses of the church. We appreciate your continued financial support of our church and school.

**GIANT A+ SCHOOL REWARDS PROGRAM**

The A+ School Rewards are points that supporters earn with each purchase made using their  Giant BonusCard. The points earned are used in a calculation to determine our school's cash reward, which is then automatically credited to our school's account. **BACS earned \$2,655.03 for the 2019-20 school year.**

NOTE: Giant has since discontinued this program to focus on new charitable initiatives.

**GIANT CASH FOR CAUSES PROGRAM**

This has been quite a successful fundraiser for our organization. For each Giant gift card we sell, we receive 5% of the face value. This is an easy way for everyone who shops at Giant to donate to our church and school without spending extra money. If you are interested in purchasing gift cards, please stop by the Pastors Office at 600 Tomlinson Road, Bryn Athyn or contact Liza Hyatt at 215-947-6225 x200.

NOTE: Gift cards are acceptable payments for groceries, prescriptions from the store pharmacy or gas at their gas stations. **You still earn and keep your Bonus points.**



Return to:

*Pastors Office*

P.O. Box 277  
 Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania 19009  
 Phone: 215-947-6225

**BRYN ATHYN CHURCH STAFF**

Pastor ..... Rev. Eric H. Carswell  
 Assistant Pastor..... Rev. Erik J. Buss  
 Assistants to the Pastor  
     Rev. Solomon Keal              Rev. John Odhner  
     Rev. Phil Schnarr             Rev. Jeremy F. Simons  
  
 Cathedral Director ..... Meg Rohtla  
 BACS Principal ..... Greg D. Henderson  
 BACS Pastor..... Rev. Solomon Keal

*Officers of the Corporation*

Eric H. Carswell ..... President  
 Erik J. Buss ..... Vice-President  
 Rachel Glenn ..... Secretary  
 Stewart L. Asplundh..... Treasurer

Printing and mailing done by *Bryn Athyn Church*

**SUNDAY WORSHIP SERVICES**

**9:20 am** Informal Family (Heilman Hall)  
**9:30 am** Family Cathedral (Cathedral Nave)  
**9:45 am** Young Children's Church  
           (Cathedral Council Chamber)  
**10:45 am** Godly Play (Cathedral Undercroft)  
**11:00 am** Adult Cathedral (Cathedral Nave)

Archived Cathedral livestream and Informal Service videos:  
[www.BrynAthynChurch.org](http://www.BrynAthynChurch.org)

Audio recordings: [www.NewChurchAudio.org](http://www.NewChurchAudio.org)  
 IFS: "Location: Bryn Athyn Heilman Hall"  
 Cathedral: "Location: Bryn Athyn Cathedral"

Sermons (Cathedral services): [www.BrynAthynChurch.org](http://www.BrynAthynChurch.org)  
 Hover the cursor on "Worship," click on "Recent Sermons"

Website: [www.BrynAthynChurch.org](http://www.BrynAthynChurch.org)  
 Facebook page: Bryn Athyn Church (religious organization)  
 Facebook group page: Friends of Bryn Athyn Church

**SUPPORT RESOURCES**

We recognize that many people are seeking to receive care and support during this challenging period in our history. Below is a list of resources that Bryn Athyn Church offers for our community:

**Pastoral Visits:** One-on-one visits with any pastor, at your home or at the Pastors Office.

**Caring for Marriage:** Providing help in person, mentoring and daily emails. Contact [Lori@caringformarriage.org](mailto:Lori@caringformarriage.org).

**Stephen Ministry:** Ongoing, one-on-one, confidential lay spiritual care for people facing life challenges.

**Pay-It-Forward Crew:** Supporting people in times of need with volunteers willing to help in practical ways.

**Visiting Friends:** Informal, occasional visits offered by volunteers in the church community.

**Emergency Financial Aid:** Short-term financial assistance for those currently associated with Bryn Athyn Church.

To learn more or to get involved, contact Nina Dewees at 215-947-6225 x206 or [Nina.Dewees@BrynAthynChurch.org](mailto:Nina.Dewees@BrynAthynChurch.org).