



BRYN ATHYN COLLEGE



FOUNDED IN 1877

A Message from our Chaplain

Welcome! Thanks for your interest in Bryn Athyn College. As the college chaplain, I am very interested in stories—especially those stories that capture defining moments in the lives of the students I serve. In this regard, I am often reminded of my own college days, and some of the memorable experiences that took place during that time. One of those experiences is particularly relevant to the spiritual mission of Bryn Athyn College, and may help you understand why I am so delighted to serve as your chaplain. It's a story that took place during the summer following my junior year at college. Let's call it a story about life insurance . . .

During my junior year in college, I was recruited by the Connecticut General Life Insurance Company to spend a summer as a student intern in their Personnel Department.

At the end of the summer, the chairman of the personnel department, an elderly gentleman named Henry Dawes, invited me to have a closing interview with him. The idea, I sensed, was to encourage me to join the company after graduation. Mr. Dawes, however, acted more like a mentor than a recruiter. It was during that interview, that Mr. Dawes gave me the following advice: "Believe strongly in what you believe; but subject those beliefs often to careful scrutiny; and be willing to alter them when better evidence is offered."

I did not become an employee of Connecticut General, but I have never forgotten Mr. Dawes' wise words.

Today, as chaplain of Bryn Athyn College (with responsibilities for helping students to develop a solid faith), I can assure you that you will be encouraged to believe strongly in the good tenets of your faith. At the same time, you will be asked to subject your beliefs to careful scrutiny, not only in the light of world religions, but especially in the light of the teachings revealed through the theological writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. And, if you come to believe that better evidence has been offered, we hope that you will have the courage to alter, modify or deepen your beliefs accordingly.

While admission to, and graduation from Bryn Athyn College is not contingent upon an acceptance of Swedenborg's teachings, it is assumed that everyone who applies for admission to this college, and seeks to graduate from it, will retain an affirmative attitude not only towards Swedenborg's teachings, but also towards the teachings of world religions in general. For, as Swedenborg puts it, "Every religion has teachings similar to the Ten Commandments, and everyone who lives according to the commandments is saved."

Please take note: If you believe there is only one right religion, and whoever does not follow that religion will be condemned, Bryn Athyn College is probably not the right place for you. But if you believe that God is the Father of us all, no matter what we call Him, and no matter what religion we belong to—or do not belong to—then Bryn Athyn College may be the ideal place for you to enjoy your college experience.

Even though we are intellectually liberal in our appreciation of all religious paths, we are also morally conservative, following the teachings of the Lord Jesus Christ, cherishing marriage, and striving to live according to our best and deepest understanding of His commandments. In this regard, we are a devoutly Christian college with a unique and universal perspective. *This means that our spiritual focus is upon the Lord Jesus Christ—His words, His actions, and His power to save.* At the same time, we do not see Him as the narrow God of a sectarian Christianity, but rather as the shining God of all souls, encompassing multitudes in every faith, and showering all with unceasing love, wisdom and power for useful service.

That's really the heart of spiritual life at Bryn Athyn College. It's nothing other than a life according to the commandments, along with the acknowledgement that we need both the power of God and the support of each other to do so.

In the end we emerge as changed beings, focused on others rather than self, and on useful service rather than creature comforts. Beyond life insurance, we come into the blessed assurance that we are in God's hands now and forever. In some traditions this is called being "born again," a gradual process that occurs quietly as we strive to keep the commandments. As Helen Keller, a lifelong Swedenborgian, puts it, "We are not born again suddenly, as some people seem to think. It is a change that comes over us as we hope and aspire and persevere in the way of the Divine Commandments."

We hope that this will be your experience, too, as you enjoy your studies, your "defining moments," and your "new birth" at Bryn Athyn College.

With best regards,

Rev. Ray Silverman
College Chaplain

