the Messenger

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Rev. Ken Turley Takes Reins at 186th Convention

By Herb Ziegler

Delegates from across North America (and one from England) met at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota, June 20–27, 2010, for the 186th Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. The convention was hosted by the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church of St. Paul and the Illinois Association of the New Jerusalem.



Outgoing president Chris Laitner and the chair of the Council of Ministers, Rev. Jonathan Mitchell, welcome Rev. Ken Turley (center) as the new president of the Swedenborgian Church.

The Committee of Ministers (COM) met on the first two days to conduct its business (page 110). The General Council met on Wednesday, June 23 for its pre-convention meeting, followed that evening by opening ceremonies for the convention. In his welcoming words, the Rev. Eric Hoffman explained the backdrop of hundreds of paper cranes hung over a curtain (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thousand_origami_cranes) and invited delegates to add their own. Eric Lange, president of the Virginia Street Church; and Bud Phillips, president of the Illinois Association, offered words of welcome as well. The Rev. Frank Rose gave the keynote address. The opening concluded with Chris Laitner offering her last address as president of General Convention (page 99). The President's Reception, which followed, offered newly arrived delegates, ministers, and their families an opportunity to greet old friends and meet new ones.

Beginning on Thursday morning, each day's activities were preceded early (pre-breakfast) by a short worship service led successively by the Reverends Kit Billings, Catherine Lauber, David Brown, and Susannah Currie.

After breakfast there was a longer worship service each day. Thursday's was the annual memorial service, led by the Rev. Sky Paradise and assisted by the Reverends Freeman Schrock, Eric Hoffman, Sage Currie, and Jennifer Tafel. Friday's was a service created and led by the young people in the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL). Saturday's was the annual convention service, led by the convention preacher, the Rev. John Maine (page 100), and Sunday's was the closing worship service, led by the Rev. Renée Machiniak. The SCYL service was, as always, memorable in the creativity and thought that went into it, and in the heartfelt and open sharing offered by the teens. Rev. Machiniak gave an inspiring sermon, relating her experience of opening herself to the Lord as a young adult, which had the conventioneers on the edge of their seats.

The business sessions were filled with reports, elections, recognitions, special presentations, and in this transition year, the consecration of the new president, Ken Turley. Reports were received from the officers of General Convention, the secretary of the Council of Ministers, the Nominating Committee, the editors of *The Messenger* and *Our Daily Bread*, the business manager of Wayfarers Chapel, Betsy Coffman for the board of Urbana University, the denomination's ecumenical officer to the National Council of Churches, the youth director of General Convention, and the Women's Alliance secretary on the Mite Box. The reports will

continues on page 103

In This Issue:

President Laitner's Address to the Convention • Teens at Convention
2010 Convention Sermon: "Seeking and Being Found" • Gathering Leaves 2010
Ordination Sermon: The Blessing Of Shining • SCYL Retreat
President Turley's Address to Annual Convention • General Council Meetings

The Editor's Desk



Community

The Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church is much more than just a convention. It is a community that assembles once a year to conduct business, worship together, reconnect, make new friends, and simply feel the warmth of sharing something special with one another. The venue changes annually, and the members of the community slowly change as some new ones join and some depart, for a while or forever. I have tried to provide a glimpse of the community in action in this issue.

This convention was special in that we celebrated the passing of the gavel of the president from Chris Laitner to Ken Turley. Chris has ended a six-year run as president in turbulent times. She served with grace, aplomb, and good humor, finding ways to resolve problems that left all parties on good terms. She provided leadership in a time of shrinking budgets and increased expectations, finding creative solutions to problems and helping us understand their usefulness. We will miss her leadership and we thank her for it even as we turn to welcome Ken.

—Herb Ziegler

Contents

Rev. Ken Turley Takes Reins at 186th Convention 97
The Editor's Desk 98
DC Society Receives Preservation Grant 98
Letters to the Editor 98
President Laitner's Address to the Convention 99
2010 Convention Message: "Seeking and Being Found" 100
Ordination Sermon: The Blessing Of Shining 101
President Turley's Address to Annual Convention 102
Sunday School Association Annual Meeting 103
SHS Corporate Meeting and Graduation Ceremony 104
Teens at Convention 105
Council of Minsters Meeting 106
Teens Live Heaven and Hell at SCYL Retreat 107
Gathering Leaves 2010— "Sharing Our Stories: A Feast of Friends" 110
Passages 119
General Council Meetings 120

DC Society Receives Preservation Grant

The Washington Society of the New Jerusalem (the Church of the Holy City) was awarded a $5,000 grant by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, matched by the Mid-Atlantic Association. This seed grant will be used to assess the extent of water and termite damage to the structural integrity of the church's 1895 English Gothic Revival bell tower.

"Without organizations like the Church of the Holy City, communities and towns all across America would have a diminished sense of place," said Stephanie Meeks, president of the National Trust for Historic Preservation. "The National Trust for Historic Preservation is honored to provide a grant to the Washington Society of the New Jerusalem dba Church of the Holy City, which will use the funds to help preserve an important piece of our shared heritage."

Church Calendar

October 8: Pacific Coast Association Annual Meeting • Duvall, Washington

October 8–10: SCYL Columbus Day Retreat • Duxbury, Massachusetts

October 22–23: Swedenborgian House of Studies fall board meeting • Berkeley, California

November 5–6: General Council fall meeting • Duxbury, Massachusetts

Letters to the Editor

The San Francisco Church

Thank you for publishing the delightful piece (July 2010 *Messenger*) by Georgia Hesse on the Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco. Along with Wayfarers Chapel, the Lyon Street church is one of two quite famous Swedenborgian shrines on the West Coast, which draw thousands of visitors every year. As the San Francisco Church is

continues on page 118

the Messenger

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President Laitner's Address to the Convention

Ten days ago I was beginning to panic because I hadn't yet decided on a focus for the president's address. Nine days ago I woke up remembering the phrase from *Divine Providence* (§4.4) that was the theme for an event we called Camp 2003, a gathering of young adults ages 17–21 from Swedenborgian groups around the world for a four-day spiritual growth experience at Temenos. Eight days ago the definition of the musical form called fugue crept into my mind and wouldn't go away. It was accompanied by the remembrance of a chapter from George Dole's *A Thoughtful Soul* about the community of spirit. But there was still no specific idea for the president's address in all of these disjointed thoughts.



Seven days ago I decided to create a back-up plan by reviewing the president's addresses I've given over the past five years to highlight important points which I hoped might magically connect as a new creation that could be used this year. Six days ago, I thought I'd find out what happened if I tried putting the ideas and thoughts from the previous four days together.

In my freshman year at the University of Michigan, I was required to take a music appreciation class for my major. My instructor had the opinion that composers tended not to write fugues until they were well into the maturity of their careers. By then, he said, they were learned and secure enough in their craft to work in the complex structure of the fugue form.

Fugues are written for groups of individual voices (vocal or instrumental). There is a short melody called the theme or the subject which is stated at the beginning by one voice alone and then repeated individually by the other voices in close succession. This process is recurrent throughout the entire piece in all the voices according to clearly defined rules. As the presentations of the theme melody are played or sung against each other, they are in strict counterpoint with each other. This means that while each voice is important on its own, the way the notes fall in with the notes of the other voices, correct harmonies are maintained throughout. Thus, while each individual melody presentation is important on its own, the melody is occasionally modified so that when the voices sound simultaneously, all the notes work well together. Sections of a fugue containing the main melody are called expositions. Sections of music in between the expositions are called episodes. Episodes don't use the main melodies, but they still must employ good counterpoint (harmony) between and among the voices. A basic outline of a fugue would include the first exposition, an episode, a second, more complex exposition, another episode, and a final exposition. The composition usually ends with a coda, which is a short passage that is neither exposition nor episode but is an obvious conclusion to the whole composition. The coda's musical lines are often layered over a continuous single long-held note called a pedal point that points everything to a final ending chord.

The strict counterpoint of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries, where melody notes moved simultaneously with other melody notes that were always structured to be in good harmony—in consonance—with one another, gave way in the twentieth century to a more dissonant counterpoint where the melody lines became supreme and how the melody sounded with all the other notes became almost meaningless. But even though the melodies were more important and the harmonies they created together were less so, still the conclusion was harmoniously reached.

What if we were to look at our larger church as a fugue? We are an organization of far-flung ministries, programs and people, and yet there are several themes that we all share:

- Honor and worship of the Lord
- The Lord's Word
- Theology informed by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg
- Love to the Lord and to the neighbor
- Living lives of charity

These themes might be the exposition sections performed by each and all of us, and the various programs that specific ministries have might be the interspersed episodes.

In earlier times in our denominational history there were clear guidelines of how to say and do things. Prayers, the *Adoramus*, orders of worship services, catechisms and music were pretty much the same among all of the churches, rather like the strict rules of the earlier fugue style where

continues on page 112

2010 Convention Sermon: "Seeking and Being Found"

The Rev. John Maine,
Convention Preacher

Readings: Psalm 34: 1-10 and Matthew 7: 7-11

I want you all to know that being here has a very special, personal significance for me. Because it was right here, on this campus, nine years ago almost to the day, that I was ordained into the ministry of our church. It was all rather a blur at the time, but nonetheless, I recall being very aware of the irony conferred by my surroundings. There I was, a proponent of the New Church, being ordained at a school affiliated with the old, and in a city named for the apostle whose letters are foundational for the old faith, both catholic and protestant, but of little account in the new.

Well ironic maybe, but also, I think, a perfect metaphor for every human life. All of us are this mix of old and new at one and the same time, the person we were and the places we've been and the person we may yet be and the places we hope still to go. We carry both with us, and the regenerative life we seek to live is all about *integrating* the two, bringing our past into the light of God's present, that we might both journey together into a new future.

But "old" and "new" are loaded words, aren't they: new is fresh and exciting and good; old is stale and boring and bad. New ways versus old ways, New Testament versus Old, New Church versus old—in this neat, black/white, us/them kind of formulation, it can become so easy for us to forget the One in whom we, and all things, live and breathe and have our being, the One who works to bring all things into the light—and usually in surprising and unexpected ways.

With this in mind, I'd like to tell you a story. This happened years ago, when I was completing an internship as a hospital chaplain and assigned to the ICU, the intensive care unit. One morning my supervisor called me in to attend my first, so-called "family conference."

These, I quickly discovered, are always difficult meetings, a mixture of dread and hope as the doctor lays out the options and risks for the relatives of the patient. Questions are posed, answers are given, and decisions aremade. People struggle to understand and to find the words but ultimately there are no words, for what is felt in those moments, the anguish and longing and love for someone so intimately known, so precious, and yet so terribly far away.

On this particular morning, it was a weary, middle-aged woman who was the lonely witness to this truth. She'd come in from far, far out of town only to hear from the doctor that the prognosis for her elderly mother continued to be very poor. Whatever happened, her mother wasn't going home again.



However, there was a faint possibility, a procedure that would first require that all her mother's medications be temporarily suspended while certain tests were done. If the daughter agreed, would she then please come in to be with her mom to help keep her calm during those difficult hours when her mom would be without the aid of any drugs to allay her pain and anxiety?

At this, I recall how all eyes shifted to the woman, so silent, looking

continues on page 116

Ordination Message

The Blessing Of Shining

Sherrie Connelly

You are the light of the world.
A city built on a hill cannot be hid.
No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket,
but on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house.
In the same way, let your light shine before others,
so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

—Matthew 5: 14-16

The reading from Matthew's Gospel insists that we let our light shine, the light of truth and passion that comes from God and is not of ourselves. Shining, in the *Dictionary of Swedenborgian Correspondences*, is: "What is exempt from falsity; what is pure by reason of truth." [AR §814] There are 606 document references to "shining" at www.heavenlydoctrines.org. In Swedenborg's writings, letting our light shine signifies the outpouring of Divine Truth. This sounds like a very good thing, doesn't it? But, alas, not everybody thinks so.

In Germany in the 1940s and 1950s enthusiasm was considered to be a sin. The Puritans and Protestant reformers lived stoic lives, and avoided fancy symbols, colors, and anything that sparkles. *Shining Soul* is the name of a biographical film about legendary Swedenborgian Helen Keller. Yet it is well known that her family has suppressed the history of her religious faith and her passionate interest in social causes.

This is a topic that is very close to home for me, and sometimes painfully so. An advisor in another denomination, responding to the energy of my enthusiasm, said one time, "Sherrie, you take up too much space." For me, it would have been less bruising had she said, "I'm an introvert. For my sake, please lighten up!" Later when I shared with her, "I'm interested in Swedenborg," she simply said sharply, "Oh, he's so weird!"

The word enthusiasm comes from the Greek *en–theos,* and suggests being infused with the light and spirit of God. It also is associated with people who love their work, and have found good uses for their God-given gifts. Frederick Buechner says, "The place where God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Isn't this what our theology teaches and what our lives and ministries should be all about?!



Needless to say, I feel happy and blessed to be a part of the Swedenborgian Church and today to become a part of this hearty and rugged pastoral community. I so appreciate that you understand that enthusiasm is not necessarily arrogance, and that passion is something to be fostered rather than feared. I thrill at the idea of "Building a Community of Uses." Of course, we all can fall prey to self-interest, or *proprium*, and forget our dependence on the Lord; so it is crucial to remind each other that our light is from God and not of ourselves.

I'll not forget an April discussion with the Committee on Admission to the Ministry:

I said to CAM, "It seems odd to be the only person getting ordained this year."

Mareta Tafel responded, "Yes, Sherrie, it's all about you!"

"But Mareta," I said, "my years in seminary have been about getting over its being all about me."

Then Ken Turley wisely replied, "Sherrie, it's about making something that is all about you, not about you."

I have carried this exchange in my heart in preparing for this day, knowing that the power to minister is not about me but is God's Divine truth, wisdom and love flowing through me, as it is through each of us. This is a felt reality when I serve as a chaplain providing spiritual care and companionship, baptizing a stillborn twelve-ounce baby boy, or guiding a ritual

continues on page 113

Profile

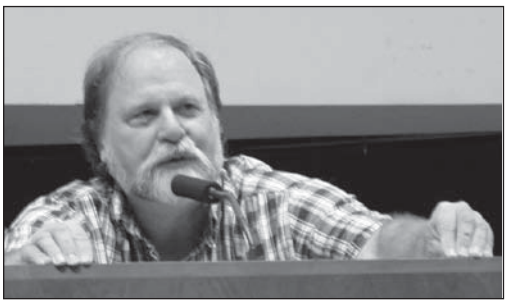
At the ordination service conducted at the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul on June 26, 2010, Sherrie Connelly was ordained as a Swedenborgian minister.

Before coming to ministry, Sherrie worked in organizational development, earning a Ph.D. in human systems at George Washington University. She was a lay minister in Sonoma before coming to PSR in 2003. She earned a M.Div. at Starr King School for the Ministry in 2008.

President Turley's Address to Annual Convention

The 2010 Annual Convention occasioned the consecration of a new president—Rev, Ken Turley. Departing president Chris Laitner and Council of Ministers chair Rev. Jonathan Mitchell conducted the inauguration and consecration. Rev. Turley's mother, Marilyn Turley, and his sister, Rev. Susan Turley, joined him for the ceremony. Rev. Sue Turley offered a prayer (sidebar), after which Rev. Ken Turley gave his address.

One thing I've learned from watching Chris [Laitner] over the last six years, but especially in these last months and weeks, is that this job comes at you from all sides. You may have a schedule and a calendar and a very orderly agenda, but things pop up and create all kinds of chaos and randomness that you have to deal with. And that pretty much describes the way I'm going to approach this talk!



The Rev. Ken Turley, president of the Swedenborgian Church

To begin with, over the years, and much to my surprise and increasing delight, this church has proven to be my spiritual family. And there are some real parallels between my relation to this church and relations to my biological family. As I was raised in my family, I was raised in this church, and I have some deeply fond memories of my childhood in Sunday school, youth group, and church camp. I also have memories of twitching my way through my dad's doing what can only be described as an emergent church worship service back in the sixties, sitting in a circle—listening to folk singers like Odetta played on his reel to reel tape recorder that he started and stopped no hands with a foot switch that he was so proud of. I thought the music was cool but didn't really understand how cutting edge it all was, and as soon as I could, I ran home to watch Sunday afternoon football. All I knew was that he made me go to church, and I bridled under that then but, of course, will be eternally grateful.

At eighteen I left home and I left the church and I never looked back. I think my mom's memory is that they let me out of the car at college and I went skipping off down the walkway and left her standing there in tears. As a father, I now know what that was like for her, although I had no idea at the time. What is important to get is that from the time I left home until I was in my thirties and went back to seminary, I never went in a church—maybe a wedding or two. I abandoned my Santa Claus version of God and I abandoned the Christian Church. In fact, I just couldn't take most Christians. But in all that time, I never abandoned God. In fact, most of those years were spent as a spiritual seeker, particularly in my younger years as, I'll confess it, a hippie in San Francisco. I pursued every spiritual discipline and every guru that came along. Yet I never got very far with any of them because they just didn't make sense or asked me to abandon my individuality and submit myself to what I could only see as another human being.

I also want to share with you that the reason I ended up in San Francisco was realizing that being a college student in the midst of the Vietnam War years, however long I put it off, upon graduation I would most likely be drafted. As you might expect, mine was a very complicated reaction, but it was one of those crises that force you to make a decision that changes your life forever. Looking at my options, I considered shooting my toe off. I considered going to Jamaica and joining a reggae band. I considered bounding over the border to Canada. I considered going to jail. I *knew* I was not going to take up arms and go to Vietnam. In the end, I went to the American Friends Service Com-

continues on page 114

Dear Mother Father God, Creator of the universe and beyond,

We present to You at this hour, our brother, colleague and friend, the next president of the Swedenborgian church, Rev. Kenneth Owen Turley.

As he assumes this mantle of leadership, may You guide him with Your wisdom, soften his heart with Your love, lead him by Your instruction and let him walk within Your Divine Providence.

Give Ken the power to listen so that he may empower others. Make him, and I mean make him, take sacred time to refresh, renew and reconnect with You.

As members of the Swedenborgian Church, his tribe and his family, we pledge to support, appropriately utilize and to protect him.

Most of all Dear God, we ask that You keep Ken near You that he may be given all he needs to fulfill his call as our president. Bless him and keep him. For this we ask and let it be so. Amen

—Rev. Susan Turley

Sunday School Association Annual Meeting

*GATE*way* (*Growing Angels Through Education)

By John Maine

The 138th annual meeting of the Sunday School Association was held at this year's annual convention in St. Paul. Time was at a premium (the meeting ended up being "sandwiched" between lunch and an outing), but delegates and clergy showed their commitment to our children's ministries by their attendance—a very good turnout!



Sunday School Association officers John Maine, Barb Halle, Lori Steinhiser, and Missy Donaldson

Two issues received a lot of attention. The first had to do with the wide variety of lesson plans being used by our Sunday Schools, everything from "liberal Protestant" curriculum packages to the Vineyard materials produced by the General Church. Our denomination does not have a comprehensive and up-to-date set of lesson plans of its own. The Share the Story campaign—an effort to have local churches generate simple lesson plans according to a common template—has not taken off as hoped. The Association will do a more in-depth review of available curriculum packages, including Vineyard. We will also continue to explore options for developing lesson plans that reflect the values and teachings we want to pass on to our children.

The second issue at the meeting was more strategic in nature. It concerned the relationship of the Sunday School Association to the rest of Convention. Basically, the Association's constitution gives it a kind of quasi-independent status, such that it exists at arm's length from the denomination. Ministries to children and families exist at the periphery of how our church is organized and how it does business. There is a functional disconnect between the Sunday School Association and the work of our National Youth Director with tweens and teens and the work of the Education Support Unit (EDSU) with adults.

It was therefore decided that the Association will carry out a complete overhaul of its antiquated and overly-complex (nineteen-page long!) constitution. The aim will be to streamline and update the rules which guide the operation of the Association and, above all, to integrate its mission and mandate within the broader purposes of the denomination.

This means that the Association will continue to exist as the focus for child ministries, but we will propose that it become one part of a comprehensive program and strategy for serving children, tweens, teens, young adults ("Transitions") and adults. As your Association president, I continue to believe that nothing could be more revolutionary in its impact, or more stimulating for its growth, than for our church to put young people and families at the center of its concern and commitments.

One final note: elections were also held at this meeting. Rev. John Maine (president), Barb Halle (treasurer) and Missy Donaldson (secretary) continue in their roles. Lori Steinhiser stepped down as vice-president, and her place has been taken by B. J. Neuenfeldt. Please contact any of us in the coming year if you would like more information about Association activities.

186th Convention

continued from page 97

be published in the *2010 Journal of the Swedenborgian Church* along with other reports that the delegates received in booklets.

In a ceremony that occurs only every three or six years, outgoing president Chris Laitner and COM chairman Rev. Jonathan Mitchell consecrated the Rev. Ken Turley as the new president of the Swedenborgian Church (address on page 102).

Minicourses were offered in the afternoons on Thursday and Friday. The choices were "Talking about Swedenborg with Non-Swedenborgians," led by David Fekete; "The Organic Relational Church," led by Sky Paradise; "Six Steps to Successful Spiritual Development," led by Rich Tafel; "Svaroopa® Yoga and the Swedenborgian Church," led by Sage Currie; "Seven Angels—Beauty Within, Beauty Without," led by Susannah Currie and

continues on page 104

SHS Corporate Meeting and Graduation Ceremony

The annual corporate meeting of the New Church Theological School (the Swedenborgian House of Studies [SHS]) convened in St. Paul on June 24, 2010. After an invitation for delegates to join the corporation, the financial report, and reports from Chairperson Jane Siebert and Dean Jim Lawrence, the board presented a tribute in images and words to the late Rev. Dorthea Harvey, whose legacy will partially fund the Dorothea Harvey Chair of Religious Studies at SHS and the Pacific School of Religion.



Dean Jim Lawrence, Chairperson Jane Siebert, and Sherrie Connelly

Dean Jim Lawrence reported on the current study body of seven ordination-track students studying in various locations, including Pacific School of Religion, Earlham School of Religion, and in the vicinity of Bryn Athyn, and spoke to the new challenges of teaching capacities in serving students in such diverse contexts and using a variety of distance learning vehicles, such as intensive courses, video-conferencing technology, and online platform courses, in addition to traditional "bricks-and-mortar" classrooms.

In looking at the age and career trajectories of the current faculty in combination with the increased demand on teaching resources in the current environment, the board of trustees embarked on a plan of long-term faculty development.

The Dean was pleased to announce the successful conclusion of a worldwide search for a new Swedenborgian faculty member in Dr. Devin Zuber, a newly-minted Ph.D. from City University of New York, whose dissertation, "The Science of Beauty," which examines the ways that Swedenborg contributed to nineteenth century environmental aesthetics, received the Alumni and Faculty Award for Most Distinguished Dissertation of 2009–2010. Dr. Zuber grew up in the General Church and obtained significant Swedenborgian training at Bryn Athyn College, and then earned his masters degree in philosophy, which focused heavily on Swedenborg, at CUNY. At present an assistant professor of American studies and literature at Osnabrück University in Germany, Dr. Zuber will be joining the SHS faculty in Berkeley sometime in the upcoming year.

Following the meeting, Sherrie Connelly was awarded the certificate of Swedenborgian Studies by Jane Siebert and Jim Lawrence, marking her graduation from SHS.

186th Convention

continued from page 103

members of the In Company with Angels board of directors; "MINSU and PUSH Funding Programs," led by Barb Halle and Barb Boxwell; "The Arcana Group: Reading the *Arcana Coelestia* as a Shared Experience," led by Eric Hoffman, Liz Zeno, Jim Erickson, Kathy Needle, and other participants from the Virginia Street Church; and "Personal Growth as a Factor in Church Growth," led by Frank Rose and Anna Woofenden. The courses were well attended, and participants emerged with lots of information and ideas to take back to their societies.

Elections were held according to the bylaws. Elected were Betsy Coffman, vice-president; Susannah Currie, treasurer; Susan Wood-Ashton, secretary; Polly Baxter, David Fekete, and Matthew Fleming, General Council; Freeman Schrock, Committee on Admission to the Ministry; Leah Goodwin, Communication Support Unit; Sue Ditmire, Education Support Unit; Lana Sandhal, Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit,; David Brown, Information Management Support Unit; Doug Moss and Susan Hemmerich, Support Unit for Ministries; Sage Currie, Lorraine Cuthbertson, Carla Frederick, Ron Frostestad, and Tom Neuenfeldt, SHS Board of Trustees; and Renée Machiniak, Nominating Committee.

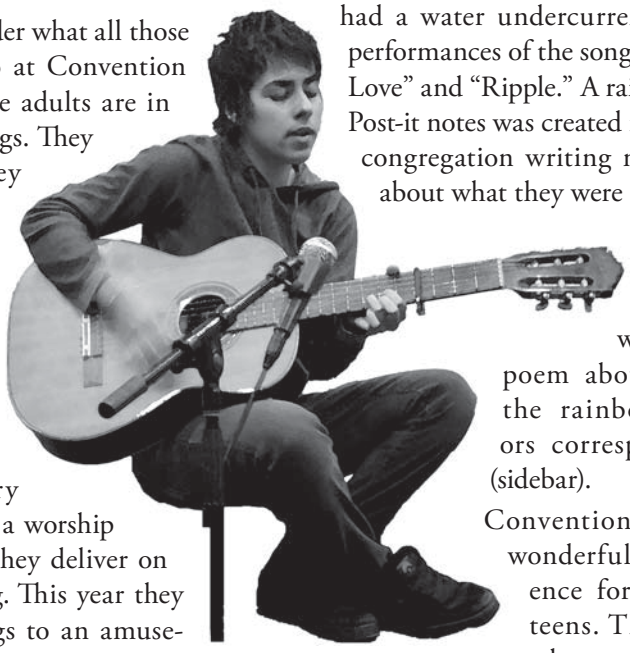
Treasurer Susanah Currie introduced the Box for Bucks, a vehicle for contributions to the denomination. The LaPorte Church donated $1589.62 for appreciation of the funds they have received over the years to keep the church alive. The Kitchener Church donated $1,700 for all the support received as a church over the years. The Pacific Coast Association presented a $1000 check, and the Michigan Association donated $2000 for the youth program, *The Messenger,* and Central Office. President Laitner announced that eight churches and five associations give regularly to the denomina-

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Teens at Convention

By Kurt Fekete

Ever wonder what all those teens do at Convention while the adults are in business meetings. They have fun! They also have some amazing discussions, have meetings of their own concerning the business of the SCYL, and work very hard preparing a worship service which they deliver on Friday morning. This year they went on outings to an amusement and water park called Valleyfair and to the Mall of America.



Janice

Discussions centered on what we are seeking and how to find what we are looking for, and this theme was reflected in the youth-led worship service. The SCYL worship service also had a water undercurrent, with performances of the songs "Sea of Love" and "Ripple." A rainbow of Post-it notes was created from the congregation writing messages about what they were seeking.

The teens later wrote a poem about what the rainbow colors correspond to (sidebar).

Convention was a wonderful experience for all the teens. They felt welcome, loved, and a real sense of belonging. Thank you to everyone who helped the teens attend this year.

Rainbow

Red is for the Lord's love which pushes and empowers all.

Orange is for the charity of helping others on their journey towards their call.

Yellow is for the truth and faith which guide our way.

Green is for your strengths and talents to help you grow each day.

Blue is for intelligence, the light that directs your love.

Purple is for the wisdom, God's gift from up above.



Teens with the worship service rainbow. (l to r) Jon, Liz, Celie, Daisy (Nina), Audrey, Rachel, Holly, and Cody

continued from preceding page

tion. The final tally for the Box for Bucks was $12,232.21.

The Reverends Harvey Tafel, Jonathan Mitchell, and Dave Brown presented a check from the Wayfarers Chapel for $5000. Rev. Tafel reported on progress in the restoration of the chapel tower.

President Laitner bestowed honors on the Rev. George Dole for fifty years of ministry and the Rev. Ken Turley for twenty-five years of ministry. She recognized Barbara Cullen and Renée Machiniak for six years of service on General Council, Carla Friedrich for six years on COMSU, and Susannah Currie for service in multiple roles. She recognized John Perry and Mary Crenshaw for many years of faithful service.

On Friday evening, in a torrential downpour, the Illinois Association shuttled conventioneers to The Caves, a prohibition-era speakeasy built inside caverns mined for silica in the nineteenth century and revived as a modern nightclub for an evening of fun. Revelers enjoyed a seventeen-piece band playing classics from the big band era,

continues on page 117

Council of Minsters Meeting

By Kevin K. Baxter

During the two days preceding the start of Annual Convention, the Council of Ministers (COM) gathered at the University of St. Thomas for its annual meeting.

We were pleased to welcome Tony Jones, a leader and author in the emergent church movement. He presented some core tenets of the emergent church movement and challenged us to examine the future of the church relative to shifts in our culture. The Council deliberated and reflected on this issue and asked itself the question "What does it mean to do ministry?"

This year was the first year in which we enacted the new Council of Ministers Internal Standing Guideline. A few years ago the Council created the clergy categories of active, inactive, retired, and not in good standing. This year the Council voted on moving ministers to the inactive, retired, and not in good standing statuses.

The revision of the Roll of the Ministers of the Swedenborgian Church is a process that starts with the Council of Ministers. In contrast to the abovementioned categories, there is only one Roll of Ministers in our church—no differentiation is made in regard to ministry status on this list. Moving ministers on or off of the Roll requires the vote of General Convention after a recommendation from the Council of Ministers. This year we celebrated the lives and ministries of the Rev. Marlene Laughlin and the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, both of whom passed fully into the spiritual world this past year. We were also pleased to recommend to Convention the ordination of the now Rev. Sherry Connelly.

We heard an update from the Committee on Admission into the Ministry (CAM), which reviewed the five people currently on the path toward ordination. One of these candidates, Jenny Caughman, presented her Vision of Ministry to the Council (a requirement toward ordination).

We also discussed an international ministries proposal—a significant conversation. The question of how our denomination works with people professing Swedenborgian ideas outside of Canada and the United States is a significant one. Do we want to encourage them or support them? Is so, what does that mean?

> The General Convention created and empowered the Council of Ministers to fulfill very specific purposes, including training in and the support, supervision, and maintenance of professional standards of ministry and exercising responsibility for matters pertaining to the doctrine and worship of the Swedenborgian Church. This charge is central to the purpose of the Church and what it means to be a denomination. The Council understands this annual two-day clergy meeting as central to the health of the Swedenborgian Church, and for this reason believes that regular attendance at this meeting is an essential part of the ethical responsibilities held by our ordained clergy. Put simply, it is the Council of Ministers that creates, cares for, and oversees the heart of our church. For the good of that heart and the good of our ministers, ministers need to be present. This year, about forty-five percent of the clergy of the Swedenborgian Church gathered for its annual meeting.
>
> —*Kevin Baxter*

We were also able to discuss our involvement in the National Council of Churches (USA). The NCC is an ecumenical organization of Christian churches. The Council decided that our involvement in this organization is an essential tool for giving voice and respectability to our tradition.

Our denominational officer to the United States military, the Rev. Rich Tafel, was pleased to report on our military chaplaincy's statement to the United States Secretary of Defense regarding the "don't ask, don't tell" policy adopted by the U.S. military. Paraphrased, the statement is that we encourage people to live honest and genuine lives, and that the policy as it stands hampers our chaplain's ability to minister to soldiers; we therefore are opposed to it.

Aware of the stress placed on congregations by ministers being absent for two Sundays in a row when attending the annual convention, the executive committee of the Council is working on determining whether there is any way to shorten our meetings without undermining fulfillment of our charge from the General Convention.

We closed our meeting by honoring the quarter-century-long ministry of the Rev. Ken Turley and the half-century-long ministry of the Rev. Dr. George Dole. We also celebrated the work of the Rev. Andrew Stinson, who concluded his term as chair of the Council of Ministers, and welcomed the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell as our new chair.

These annual clergy meetings determine not only who is a minister in the Swedenborgian Church, but what it means to do ministry in the Swedenborgian Church. They are two solid days of meetings and discussions that are directly relevant to the life of our tradition. The time required for the meetings presents challenges for our ministers. For ministers not serv-

continues on page 117

Teens Live Heaven and Hell at SCYL Retreat

By Kurt Fekete

The teens attending the 2010 SCYL (Swedenborgian Church Youth League) Memorial Day Weekend Retreat at the Fryeburg (Maine) New Church Assembly camp did more than just listen to and discuss heaven and hell, they lived it. And soon you will be able to watch the result. How? The teens made a movie! Making a movie might have been one of the best things we've ever done at a retreat. Teens have made movies at retreat before, but as far as I know, they have never made a movie that was the center of their religious program. Instead of our usual sessions, teens worked together to create an original story that reflected an aspect of our Swedenborgian faith. Then they set up and filmed scenes. Some teens may not have been into it as much as others, and some people may have missed our regular sessions; but, I think this was one of the most creatively exciting things the SCYL has done in a long time.



Photo: Kurt Fekete

The Memorial Day Retreat Group

The main movie theme that the teens worked on centered around love and relationships (including same-sex and abusive relationships), and how the decisions you make here on earth effect your soul after you die. The main character, played by Nina, reflects on her past in her diary as she nears the end of her life. Scenes dramatize characters here on earth who later die and reappear in the afterlife. The scene of the ladies in hell vividly depicted the allure of evil.

Adults may find the movie edgy and controversial. Some in the church may even find it a touch offensive, but it does represent the best of heaven and the worst of hell (both here on earth and in the next life). It is deeply personal, emotionally charged, and it reflects how teenagers look at, struggle with, and envision relationships. Most importantly, it is uniquely teen and is not something that adults created or coerced. Teen energy and life force drove the production, and it shows in the result. I also think everyone gained real spiritual insight into the nature of heaven and hell.

This retreat helped me remember how real and seductively dangerous demons and hellish influences can be. The decision to choose hell over heaven is very tempting, which the teens did a wonderful job of capturing in their movie.

Celie and Cody took the video clips

continues on page 119



Photo: Kurt Fekete

Emily and Nina in "heaven"



Photo: Kurt Fekete

Teens in "hell"














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Gathering Leaves 2010—

"Sharing Our Stories: A Feast of Friends"



Roslyn Taylor

By Sue Ditmire

The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Revelations 22:2

The fourth biennial meeting of Swedenborgian women, Gathering Leaves, was held in July at Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, and hosted by the women of The Lord's New Church. The mission statement for the gathering stated,

> We are gathering to promote harmony among women who are associated with the various Swedenborgian organizations around the world. We are coming together again to acknowledge our common beliefs, explore our differences, develop a respect for one another's contributions, create an atmosphere of healing, and celebrate our spiritual sisterhood. It is our intention to promote a sense of charity and good will so that we might say, "No matter what form her doctrine and her external form of worship take, this is my sister; I observe that she worships the Lord and is a good woman.

The opening event at the Mitchell Performing Arts Center on the Bryn Athyn campus was a panel discussion called, "A Feast of Friends." The panel comprised Nancy Schnarr Bruell (The Lord's New Church), Linda Odhner (General Church), Chris Laitner (General Convention), Joanna Hill (Swedenborg Foundation) and the Rev. Kathleen Gilhooley (British Conference). They all answered the same questions, giving us a chance to hear about backgrounds and ideas from the different New Church organizations. Following was a reception and a chance to tour the beautiful campus.

We were housed at the homes of our wonderful Swedenborgian sisters, giv-

continues next page

Reflections on Gathering Leaves 2010

The wonderful atmosphere of acceptance between women of the different denominations pervaded the whole weekend, even more then the last Gathering Leaves I attended. The sister groups were very effective. And we talked about our strengths and weaknesses as denominations, even laughing at our own foibles.

There were many more women involved in being worship leaders than there had been at Gathering Leaves at Temenos in 2006. Also, the workshop presenters came from all the denominations. I was amazed at how many of the women could quote not only from the Bible, chapter and verse, but from Swedenborg, book and number. It was amazing.

Although I live within a two hours of Bryn Athyn, I had never been there. At Gathering Leaves in 2006, I met wonderful women and really meant to visit them. This time the level of sharing felt much more personal and the welcome between the groups more open. I look forward to a visit in September and hope we will all keep our hearts and minds open with our increased level of communication and respect for each other.

Do I think the denominations will ever join each other? No, there are too many differences, not only in beliefs, but in style of governing. Still I think it is wonderful to gather together and share where we can. As it says in our mission statement: "These are my sisters; I observe that they worship the Lord and are good women!"

—Sue Ditmire

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ing us another opportunity to get to know each other better.

Friday activities were all at the Lord's New Church Hall, where we heard a great keynote address given by the Rev. Wilma Wake, who shared her story of coming to the ministry and how important other women's stories had been to her. She greatly encouraged us to share our stories with each other. It was an inspiring start to the gathering and taken to heart by all of us.

We shared group activities and workshops. The twelve workshops included "The Spiritual Role of Women in the Church and Beyond," "Facilitating Healing in Patients Who Are in Crisis," "Dr. Kristine Mann's Influence as a Swedenborgian on Jung," and "Sacred Circle Dancing." Another choice during workshop times was to "Be a Butterfly" in a shared quiet space. In the butterfly space you might find people sharing massages, conversations or simply napping.

Meals were fresh healthy foods served buffet style and then eaten under a huge tent dining room.

The organizers did a great job of getting us to mix. At one meal we received random colored flowers and sat at the table of our flower. Another great opportunity to get to know each other was in our sister circles. We were assigned to groups that included women from each organization. We met together to get to know each other and again to share our experiences; then we ate together for our banquet on Saturday evening. In my sister group, we were so involved in discussion at our first gathering that we missed the start of dinner. At our second gathering, we had an open discussion of how our churches worked as organizations and our roles in them, including great joking at ourselves. It was a wonderful sharing experience.

Saturday afternoon we chose outings that included touring Philadelphia, singing for a senior housing complex, making prayer beads during a tour of the Art Center Complex, touring Bryn Athyn Cathedral, and of course, the ever popular butterfly space.

By the time, we gathered in our sister circles for our banquet, we had truly made new friends. We had shared many stories, enjoyed meals, shared worship conversation with our hostesses, and found women like ourselves in the other organizations.

Our Saturday night speaker was the Rev. Jane Siebert. She gave us a very moving talk on "Justice for Women." She talked about domestic violence, regional conflict violence, human bondage, and other injustices to women. She included what she had learned as a member of the National Council of churches as well as her own stories. She included some ideas on what we could do as individuals and perhaps as a group. It stimulated serious thought about how we could be of use to our fellow women in our communities and throughout the world. There was discussion of modifying our mission statement to include doing a project together, such as fighting human trafficking or domestic violence education.

After the program, we got to share our thoughts about and feelings from the weekend, followed by a vesper service and then dancing. Then the goodbyes began.

Sunday morning, a lot of us gathered to share a worship service at the chapel of the Lord's New Church. It was led by Roslyn Taylor, with other readers and communion served the by Rev Alison Longstaff. Some women attended the services at Bryn Athyn Cathedral, Temenos or elsewhere.

Sue Ditmire is a part-time writer and a full-time grandmother living near Atlantic City. She is member of the on line Swedenborgian Community and a member of EdSu.

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President Laitner

continued from page 99

not only the melodies were important but so were the harmonies where the notes lined up vertically in chords.

During the twentieth century we too, as a denomination, began to open up to varieties of creative expression in our ministries and in our practices. In fugal terms, the various melodies were allowed the freedom to be themselves and were not strictly molded so that the vertical harmonies always came out exactly right. Our life as a church continues to expand its work and outlook to be able to support unique programs, projects and practices that, together with others, might seem a little out of tune at certain points, but the entire composition is stronger and truer and more real because each theme is allowed its own fullness.

This is not to imply that the stricter, more rule-filled process was in any way wrong. It has its own beauty and integrity of structure. Without the strict practices honed over the years, there would be no strong framework in which to explore, nurture, and enact new ways of doing things. In either method, a fugue is still a fugue, a composition in which themes are passed from voice to voice and back again in a format that allows for variation of musical key, length of notes, and melodic lines in order to create a complex composition of the whole.

Emanuel Swedenborg's writings contain many explanatory passages about the nature, breadth and being of church. In the center of the scale is the definition that most closely resembles the common Christian understanding of church:

- The church is a congregation.
- The church is the corporate body throughout a nation or a particular tradition that shares the same faith.
- The church is also the body of all in the world who share, and those (now in the spiritual world) who have shared that faith.

Thus, church is congregation, denomination and the communion of saints. Each of these is the church and all of them are the church.

The distinctive aspects of Swedenborg's definition of church lie in the concept of church on the largest and smallest scales. On the largest scale, the church is the entire heaven—the angels of every church in the whole universe. On the smallest or most particular scale, the church is the individual person in whom the church is a reality. In order for the church to be manifest, three things must be true in either belief or action:

- The Lord is equally and simultaneously divine and human.
- The Holy Word is the Lord's truth and presence.
- Loving the neighbor, that is, doing good for the neighbor for the Lord's sake, is the all of life.

In *A Thoughtful Soul,* Dr. George Dole identifies the importance that Swedenborg in his writings placed on the community. Although it's true that the salvation of each single person depends on the character formed by the decisions that individual makes, there is never any doubt that these decisions are made in the context of relationships. The church exists solely for the purpose of supporting the processes that nurture heavenly community. These are the processes of individual spiritual growth and of thoughtful, loving interaction.

Emanuel Swedenborg's writings state that disagreement in matters of doctrine does not prevent a church from being united if only there is a unanimity about willing well and acting well (HS §3451). There is a single doctrine when all people have mutual love or compassion. Mutual love and compassion make them one, even though they are different, since a one is made up of different components (1285).

So this is our fugue. It is the composition of our denomination with its main themes being presented by a variety of voices and with many different episodes or events taking place among those themes. The presentations employ creative, inventive, ever-open-to-new-possibilities techniques as they unfold in this wonderfully rich composition we call the Swedenborgian Church. We recognize the strength that comes from the diversity of presentations—and this can be a good thing, as Swedenborg wrote in *Divine Providence* (§ 4.4) that a form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different and yet united.

To Dr. Robert Kirven, the church in a material or natural sense is the good and truth of human lives in which love and wisdom are concretized and enacted. On June 15, my "Kansas calendar" of daily quotations from Swedenborg and verses from the Bible read: "The life which leads to heaven is not a life of retirement from the world but a life in the world. (HH §535)" Being church is being active in the world.

Recalling that the backup plan for this talk was a collection of points from the previous five years' worth of president's addresses, I decided to see how that group of thoughts looked when they were brought together. A quick overview shows that we celebrate and affirm our church's many ways of being present in the world—through the gifts and skills of ministers, congregations, and all who are connected with the Church as they work at living the life of charity and supporting the life and presence of the New Jerusalem. Locally and denominationally we continue to listen for and to follow the Lord's leading as we explore new ideas and techniques regarding how to be and do church in this day and

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Blessing of Shining

continued from page 101

process when an aged mother's life support tubes are being removed. I seek to provide love and comfort very much with God's help and grace.

Another aspect of my ministry is more about enthusiasm and passion. In both secular work and explicit ministry, my vision is that all of us will discover and honor our God-given gifts and find joy in their good use to the benefit of neighbor and the world.

The Divine light within each of us is a precious gift to be honored, nurtured, and put to use. Like Greek goddess Hestia, who kept the sacred hearth fires burning, it is my fervent prayer to encourage us all to shine, as God would have us shine. The future of our denomination may well depend on it!

A favorite little red leather book, *Heavenly Blessedness: What it is and How Attained*, was published in London in 1872 by Chauncey Giles of Massachusetts. Giles served as Swedenborgian pastor in Cincinnati, New York, and Philadelphia, before he became president of our very own General Convention 135 years ago in 1875. His book is about the Beatitudes, and he adds a few more. The blessedness of mourning, and the blessedness of shining are two examples. I am moved by his chapter on shining. Quoting him,

> Ye are the light of the world." Men and women who become the embodiment of . . . heavenly principles are light shining in a dark place. The Lord Himself is the sun; the Bible in its letter is as the moon; and those who receive their truths into their minds, and try to live according to them, are the stars, and the glowing fires and the shining flames which give light to human minds.
>
> We become spiritual lights in the degree that we receive light from the Lord and transmit or reflect it. We must get the light before we can shine, and we must shine before we can become a light to others. (pp. 189–190)

If I leave you with just one thought, please do not be afraid to shine! It is a command and what God intends for all of us. We gather as church in con-

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age. We support and encourage useful ideas, notice points of pride, and celebrate excellence. We honor those things that have reached their fullness and are ready to retire to become part of the rich soil of our history that supports new life. We work on continuous evaluation and the creation of new methods and avenues to live the life of charity in the world. There is truth in the statement at the end of Kirven's epilogue to Dr. Marguerite Block's book, *The New Church in the New World,* that "the shape and future of Convention remains a process of formation."

Serving as president of the Swedenborgian Church is an honor. It is a challenging and fulfilling position. There is a scope and overview that invites a new understanding and awareness of the interconnectedness of all who make up this church: its members, friends, ministers, programs, camps, gatherings—the variety of experiences both good and not so good . . . and the strong connecting beliefs. There is no complacency connected to this office. It is filled with joy, excitement, sadness, hope, and frustration. It contains administrative work, paperwork, interaction with a myriad of different people, and travel, which occasionally brings its own challenges and possibilities. But it's also absolutely engaging. It is a position of support, of potential assistance, and of helping to nudge, push, lead, and pull the church on its journey. It is an experience of prayerful discernment, of being open to the Lord's leading. As we see our next president move into office this year, we recognize that this is part of the ongoing stream of our history—another theme to add to the fugue of our life as a church.

We are united at our core, yet uniquely individual in our spiritual paths. Like the fugue form, we are a collection of shared melodic themes with other events interspersed. Whether the harmonies we build are always correct or whether they sometimes move into dissonance, we come out together in a coda that's grounded by our shared love to the Lord and to the neighbor and by our commitment to the life of charity lived in the world.

Our Convention theme this year reminds us that the Lord is always present for us; we need only to seek with all of our hearts.

With less than five days left in my term as president, I'd like to close with a passage from a small book called *Together We Walk* to honor the combination of themes that we all bring to the life and work of our church:

> . . . and though the path divides and sometimes we must move in and out of different doorways of the world and cross other vistas of experience, still we are together in the heart of things; patient as seedlings till they bloom again along the same flourishing byway. Then together we walk onward into the unknown where the path may be steep or narrow, wide or straight, in sunshine and rain. It matters not because we are secure and move toward greater wisdom, blending the glory of life and the promise of tomorrow.

—Chris Laitner

President Turley

continued from page 102

mittee, got counseling, and applied for conscientious objector status. Believe it or not that was the source of some amazingly contentious discussions with my dad, who eventually (after My Lai hit the news) came to understand what I was doing. Pushed to explain why I was doing this, I could only say that throughout my childhood I had been taught to do unto others as you would have them do unto you; turn the other cheek; love your enemies. We got in trouble for fighting at school. As young kid I was severely punished for whacking my sister Sue on the back after she had punched me in the face. (I love you Sue!) All my childhood teaching, most of it rooted in the Bible and the teachings of Jesus, was to be a servant of peace. And when pushed to make this decision, that was the only thing I could come to. So I made the commitment to apply for conscientious objector status fully prepared not to get it and spend my time in jail. Be it known, I had no trouble serving my country, but I did have a problem with having to go out and try to kill other people and put myself in the position of being killed for, well, any reason. Being white, well educated, relatively articulate, and having a minister for a father and another for a neighbor who was a lifer in the Navy saying he thought I was crazy but sincere (which was true), I was granted C.O. status. And so I did my alternate service in San Francisco working with the handicapped and eventually with an organization called Mother Goose, Inc., which took the arts to kids confined in institutions. That was the most dramatic formative experience in my life and probably the reason I am who I am and doing what I am today. I don't mean to get too carried away here, but it is a big part of why I am standing here before you today.

All right, next, I have a confession: I play video games—well, actually only one. I play Freecell. Anybody play Freecell? Only a few willing to admit it? Well it's not that Freecell is that great, but I have to explain something about it. It's relaxing, it helps me make transitions, it gives me something to do with my hands and my mind. It's a little bit like prayer beads in the sense that just doing this "thing" can help focus you and bring you back to where you need to be. All this is probably just rationalization because ultimately it is just a silly game that is mostly a waste of time. But not entirely. I've learned a few things from this silly little card game, and I'd like to share them with you because it relates directly to how I approach this task of being president.



President Ken Turley, his mother Marilyn Turley, and his sister Sue Turley

When you first look at what's in front of you, it is absolutely overwhelming, and there is no clue where to start or what you're supposed to do. So you just have to start. And often what must be done does not become apparent until after you start. What you are supposed to do does not become clear until after you do something!

You have to take your time and not rush things. And you have to pay attention to the big picture even as you are working with the smallest details.

When you do identify something that must be done, often you have to do something else before you can do that first thing. And just as often you have to do something else before you can do the second thing and sometimes even something else before you can do that, all in order to do that first thing you saw needed to be done. That is because all things in what you have before you are interrelated and what must be done here affects and is affected by what is over there.

Often it is these seemingly insignificant and annoyingly mundane steps that have to be done first that make it possible for you to even see, let alone accomplish the important thing you originally set out to do. So ultimately it is extremely important not to discount the little things and to do things in their proper order.

There is often more than one right way to do things, more than one way to achieve the same goal. So it is important not to get bogged down debating over which way is better, simply pick the way that seems right to you and then do it.

When you solve a problem, take a moment to rejoice in it! For there is

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always going to be another problem. And you can win a lot. You can even win most of the time. But you are not going to win them all. So remember what Harvey Tafel is so fond of saying, "You don't have to be perfect to pursue excellence."

There are a lot of problems throughout Convention—new one's surfacing along with problems we have been living with for decades. I know that and I don't want to dismiss that. In fact a lot of what the job of president is about is solving problems. But there are also a lot, and I mean a lot, of really beautiful, wonderful inspiring things happening and there are a lot of really beautiful, wonderful, inspiring people that make up this organization. It is my intention that, while we are solving our problems, to focus on and encourage and nurture the beautiful things that are happening in this church. If I come to visit you, or call you on the phone, I am going to ask you to get clear about what it is that you love about this church; what it is that you love that keeps you coming back and staying involved. And that is where we are going to start in whatever task or problem is before us.

What I forgot to mention about all that spiritual seeking in my time away from the church is that I never found anything as intellectually satisfying as the teachings of Swedenborg, and it is Swedenborg that has allowed me to call myself a Christian, and even do it without cringing. By the way, it is my life's goal to be at a professional football game, preferably the Super Bowl, and be right there where the TV camera is going to see me and hang a banner that says Matthew 25:31.

I came back to the church because I believe, and I will acknowledge that belief is a choice, but I believe in and have chosen to base my life on the fundamental teachings of Jesus Christ. On top of this, I owe a debt to Swedenborg for allowing me to see the Bible in a way that actually means something for me in my life process, that allows me to understand that book, that holy book, as portraying the life process of spiritual regeneration, not just a literal history of things that happened over two thousand years ago, many of which could never have happened. I am a Christian, and I believe in the teachings of Jesus Christ, and I believe in salvation as a process of spiritual regeneration. And because of that, when I look at Convention, I see of equal importance the children of our Sunday schools, the youth under the leadership of Kurt Fekete, and our Transitions-age young adults (and Transitions needs to be revived and needs help and leadership). But just as important are our adults and our families. And by families I don't just mean a man and a woman and two and a half children. I mean any grouping of people who choose to have a close and ongoing relationship and the many layers in which that extends, and certainly in this church, overlaps and intertwines. But also the elderly, of which I have to admit I am getting to be! All of these phases of the process of life are essential and uniquely important in their own way. And as a church we are made up of people from all of these, and they are all important. And we have to find a way to support and integrate all aspects of spiritual regeneration.

I'm very aware of the need for new ministries. We are in a new age, a new century. It has been my goal as a minister to drag this church kicking and screaming into the twentieth century . . . and we are almost there! We need chaplains in the world. We need an internet ministry—for many people that is their chosen way of connection. We need ministries that are yet to be discovered, and I will support and encourage development in all of those areas. But if there is one thing twenty-five years as a parish minister has taught me, it is not just respect but honor for the traditional forms of church and ministry that have brought us to where we are. Do not think that because an internet ministry is essential to our life in the future that parish ministries with their women's alliances, and their ushers on Sunday, and even their pews are not important to our life as a church. They are. It is part of honoring the process of regeneration that we honor all forms of ministry. We may relate to one form of ministry personally, but we must honor and support the others just as much.

Having gone through the life process and being in the final home stretch, watching this church, watching the world change around us in ways that are hard to comprehend, it is also important to me that the essence of why we are here and what holds us together is a constant. The manifestations of the Divine may change, but the source, the foundation from which all things spring, remains the same. That is one of these paradoxes that we must come to grips with, in fact is a joy to come to grips with.

Now I bring a few things to this job. One of them is perseverance. I never expected to be here, but just hanging around for this long the task has come to me.

I'm a pretty smart guy, but by no means the smartest in the room. I am a very loving guy, but I can be a real jerk sometimes. Most of you who have known me for any length of time know that and have your own personal stories to attest to it. I think what has allowed me to survive and succeed to whatever degree I have has been my ability and willingness to say, "I'm sorry." And to realize a fundamental truth, that again I got from Jesus: If you are going to lead, you do it by serving.

As your president, that is what I hope to bring to you in the next three years.

—Ken Turley

Convention Sermon

continued from page 100

down at her hands. Finally, she nodded slightly and said yes, yes she wanted the procedure for her mother but then, no, and here the tears came, she just couldn't possibly come in on the day in question, and there wasn't any other family member around to take her place. In a pleading voice she said, "All my mom really needs is someone to say the rosary with her. She believes in God, and if she was ever upset about anything, I'd pray it with her and then she'd be okay."

Well, my supervisor and I exchanged glances, and I was promptly introduced as the ICU student chaplain who'd be glad to pray the rosary with her mom. The woman looked at me a bit uncertainly and asked, "So, you're Catholic?" "No, I said, "I'm Swedenborgian!," at which, of course, her face went completely blank. "Sweden-what?"

So I did my best to explain. Swedenborgians, I said, were sort of "universalist Christians." We recognize the presence of God in all churches and religions, all paths which honour the truth of God's love and share that love for the well-being of others. So of course I'd be more than happy to pray the rosary with her mom. All she needed do was write out the words of the prayers to be said, and I'd take it from there.

Well, it was immediately agreed, and, with relief and gratitude flooding her face, the woman took her leave and the meeting ended. Needless to say, I felt great to have this chance of making such a positive difference in someone's life. In fact, truth to tell, I felt a little like the Lone Ranger coming to the rescue. He had silver bullets as I recall, but, thanks to a purchase I made that very evening, I now had a lovely, silver cross. It came attached to a string of highly polished beads, made of real cedar wood from the Holy Land, at least according to the package—and only $24.95. With my shiny new rosary in hand, I was good to go.

However, things began to unravel the next morning when I dropped by the chaplaincy office to pick up the daughter's instructions for what I was to say. My eye was caught by the one prayer most associated with the rosary, the famous "Ave Maria" or "Hail Mary."

For those of you who don't know it, it goes like this: "Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with thee. Blessed art thou amongst women and blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen."

> **. . . I felt a little like the Lone Ranger coming to the rescue. He had silver bullets as I recall, but, thanks to a purchase I made that very evening, I now had a lovely, silver cross.**

Well okay, look: for us as Swedenborgians, there are some big problems with this prayer. For a start, we don't pray to Mary. In the writings, Swedenborg reports how he once spoke with Mary in heaven. She was this radiant, young woman, he said, who was distressed and amazed that people on earth would venerate her as some kind of quasi-divine being. And why? Because the fact is, Mary is not "the Mother of God" but the mother of the human child Jesus, who wasn't simply born God but who grew to become one with God, in all the ways that make his life a model for our own. Then there's that part about "us sinners." As evangelists of the New Church, we know that we're not helpless sinners, abject and unworthy, but the free co-creators with the Lord of our spiritual destinies.

It was with these objections turning over in my mind that I then made my way to the intended recipient of my good deed. There my sense of unease only deepened, as I looked upon the elderly lady before me. She was very small lying there on this big, raised bed, wires and tubes leading from her to the usual array of machines and bags of fluids on poles.

I remember wisps of iron-grey hair framing this small, round face, the features somewhat distorted by this big breathing tube pushed into her mouth. The eyes looking back at me spoke plainly of her distress and fear. They'd fastened straps across her body to keep her from moving or tearing out any of the tubes. She was utterly helpless.

This was the moment to which life had brought her and also brought me. It was time to pray. I moved as gently and slowly as I could, smiling and carefully showing her my new rosary. She nodded ever so slightly and so I began.

But here's the thing: the more I recited that Hail Mary, the harder it got. Because I knew I was saying something that I didn't believe and what's the good of mouthing words you don't believe?

Soon I was berating myself for letting my doubts and selfish concerns get in the way of my praying. When that didn't work, I began to condemn myself for my inadequacy as a spiritual guide and support—because I certainly wasn't helping this lady. Every so often she'd suddenly twist and turn against the straps that held her down, her cries muffled by the breathing tube into soft gasps and groans. It made me want to call the nurse but of course they couldn't give her anything—after all, that's why I was there. So I began to feel terribly alone, filled with a sense of shame and unworthiness, unable to find God anywhere and not knowing where to look.

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continued from preceding page

How long this sorry state of affairs might have continued I don't know, but fortunately for me, as for us all, God is merciful and God is good. Just when I felt most completely helpless and lost, a word suddenly formed itself in my mind, as clear as a bell, as clear as I see you now. That word was simply "pray." Not think or analyze or judge—just pray.

So I did. "Hail Mary, full of grace . . . Holy Mary, Mother of God . . ." over and over and over again. That's all I did, all I could do—for five minutes? Twenty-five minutes? More? Less? I don't know. All religions have prayers like this. Their real purpose is to help get us past our big, noisy selves, our need for control, our notions of what's right and proper. Get all of that to one side, so we can let ourselves simply be and be open to the Mystery beyond thoughts to know or words to describe, the power of love present in the depths of our being.

So I prayed, and then, at some point, I opened my eyes—or perhaps, rather, I had my eyes opened. Because I looked down, in amazement, to behold the miracle accomplished: this lady, hands folded over her heart, breathing slowly and evenly, eyes closed, looking utterly at peace—in fact, serene. No pain was troubling her; where, and in whom, she was resting, no fear could reach her.

In today's lesson, Jesus says to us, "Seek and you shall find; knock, and the door will be opened for you." Yes. Here is the truth I have learned from my nine years of ministry and that I continue to learn: that our task is not so much to seek for God as to let ourselves be found; that all the forms our religions take—whether as a string of prayer beads or thirty big volumes of theology—these things serve as useful but only very partial attempts to point us toward the Mystery. They are not the Mystery. The love which surrounds you and me, flowing through us and breathing us into life at every moment, willing everything good for us, is of an order of grace and wonder and saving power beyond all our limited ways to comprehend.

And here is my final witness to that saving power. The best memory I have of that student chaplaincy long ago came on the final day. I paid a last visit to that same elderly lady, only this time she was sitting up in bed, a regular hospital bed, her daughter by her side. I remember they both had these huge grins on their faces, from ear to ear. Because that lady had made a complete recovery, to the utter astonishment of the doctors, and, that very day, she was going home!

We, too, are pilgrims on our homeward way, our hearts often anxious, doubting, distracted, but nonetheless always seeking the love for which they were made. Let us always remember that, whatever may happen, love has already found us. Home is wherever we are, in whatever moment we are, and in that love all things are possible and our way is sure. Amen.

The Rev. John Maine is pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario.

COM Meeting

continued from page 106

ing congregations, finding time away from work for both the COM meeting and personal vacations is difficult. For ministers serving congregations, being away from their congregations during these meetings is difficult for both the ministers and their congregations. We implore our ministers and congregations to understand that these meetings are an act of charity to a larger neighbor: our denomination.

The Rev. Kevin K. Baxter, is the secretary of the Council of Ministers.

186th Convention

continued from page 104

two dance floors (and swing dance lessons) flanked by tables for conversation and refreshments, and a tour of the caverns from a wise-cracking "moll."

On Saturday afternoon, many joined a trip to the Science Museum of Minnesota to view two exhibitions. Fragments of the Dead Sea scrolls were exhibited with historical and scientific exhibits explaining the context of the scrolls. It was a moving experience for many to witness the actual parchments containing the Word written down over 2000 years ago. The St. John's Bible is the first illuminated Bible to be produced in five centuries. Saint John's Abbey and University commissioned renowned calligrapher Donald Jackson to produce this hand-written, hand-illuminated Bible. The pages displayed were stunning in their beauty and power (view at www.saintjohnsbible.org).

The ordination service at the Virginia Street Church on Saturday evening celebrated the ordination of Sherrie Connelly (page 101).

Throughout the services at the convention, Laurie Turley and her dedicated volunteer Convention Choir provided beautiful and uplifting music. Music was also provided by Jeremy Rose, the teens of SCYL, Lisa Alison, Eric and Sylvia Lange, Jenny Caughman, Paul Deming, Sandy Greiner, Renée Machiniak, and others.

General Council

continued from page 120

Messenger, and scheduling time at annual conventions for discussion of controversial issues on the floor, and communicating that GC meetings are open to members.

The Council approved appointments to boards and committees. [These will appear in the October *Messenger*.]

Letters to the Editor

continued from page 98

now much written about and plays not an insignificant role in the history of architecture not just in California but in the United States as the vanguard of the now hallowed Bay Region Tradition School, and which was furthermore profoundly informed by Swedenborgian theosophy.

I feel it is important to make sure the information and historical claims are as valid as can be ascertained by the extant evidence. I served on the pastoral staff for a total of thirteen years at San Francisco in two different stints and was heavily involved in the historical research on the building of the church and the principals involved. I loved Ms. Hesse's piece and found it in the main to be well-written and accurate, but there are a few small points in the article which I believe are not quite right and would like to offer my response. Perhaps people might be interested to read more about the San Francisco Church because of this conversation! An excellent book, *Building with Nature*, by architectural historian Leslie Freudenheim, covers the San Francisco Church story with great skill. It can be obtained on Amazon or from Gibbs Smith Publishers.

The first correction I would like to suggest concerns the claim that Julia Morgan was part of Joseph Worcester's gathered coterie. I have never seen anything that would suggest that to be true and would be interested in knowing what evidence Ms. Hesse is drawing upon for the claim. The fact that Morgan had not even begun studying architecture yet at the time the church was built and was then only about twenty-one makes me suspect Ms. Hesse is conflating time periods and relationships (Morgan being famously Maybeck's protege—yet Maybeck himself was just a young buck in 1893–5 and not at all established as an architect himself at the time of his participation on the San Francisco Church project as draftsman). Also, I have never seen evidence that legendary landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted (misspelled Olmstead in the article) was involved in Worcester's group. The attribution of the massive candle chandelier over the chancel to Maybeck is the first time I have ever heard that claim, and I would like to see the evidence for it. Famously, other than the stained glass (Bruce Porter) and the four wall murals (William Keith), we do not have evidence for any particular piece of the building or the appointments as designed by any particular one of the creating group.

Ms. Hesse mentions Frost being "baptized there," but it is important to note first that "there" was in the long ago razed church near downtown at the corner of O'Farrell and Mason, which was built by a different Swedenborgian congregation. They built a second church building farther west on O'Farrell Street in 1893 (between Webster and Fillmore), and in 1932 that congregation closed that second church building and merged with the Lyon Street congregation. At that time the giant oyster shell came to the present Swedenborgian Church sanctuary. From extant photographs of the interior of the second O'Farrell Street church, we know the baptismal shell came from there, but there are no known photographs of the interior of the first O'Farrell Street church, which is where Robert Frost was baptized, to determine if the shell had been in use there. Therefore, what we can say about Robert Frost's connection to the Swedenborgian church in San Francisco is that his mother was very active in the First Society of the New Jerusalem and had her two children baptized there, and that it is possible but not known for certain that the giant oyster shell was used for his baptism.

I also challenge the playful "rumor" that Phoebe Hearst financed the chairs. I contested that conclusion in a recent history written at the church and feel the evidence weighs heavily against the claim. There is nothing in the extant evidence that identifies Mrs. Hearst, and it would be odd if it were she, because she was famous for her philanthropy and somewhat revelled in all the naming rights that are hers all over the Bay Area, further buttressed by the fact that she openly gave the two metal statues (one of a pregnant Mary and one of St. George) to the church, which she didn't try to hide. Mrs. Hearst was not known as a quiet philanthropist. If there was a wealthy primary or sole donor for the chairs who wanted to remain anonymous, I would nominate the artist William Keith, probably Worcester's best friend who attended every Sunday (and was making as much as $50,000 a year at a time when average salaries were about $1,000). Keith was very discreet about his giving, and he had both the means and the passion for the project. But that is speculation!

Finally, the four Keith landscape murals running the length of the north sanctuary wall are characterized through an old claim now since undermined by research: namely, that Keith painted them as a series to represent the four seasons. I myself repeated that many times before we discovered an 1896 newspaper article written at the time of the tragic carriage accident that killed the church's principal architect Page Brown at the young age of thirty-six, just one year after the church was completed. The article reports that, as a gesture of honor to Brown, Keith and Worcester decided to install a painting that was on Keith's easel that very day—the dark forest scene of old oaks that is installed at the west end of the wall nearest the fireplace. It is of slightly less width than the other three, which we also now

continues next page

Passages

Confirmations

On July 11, 2010, **Jonat Campos, Jr.,** age 16, was confirmed into the New Church. **Rachel Brig, Mary Jane Gibson, Yesenia Jacobo, Martin Ortiz, Carmelita Riverawere**, and **Laura Nia Rivera** were confirmed into the New Church and into membership with the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego.

Blessing of Shining

continued from page 113

gregations—each of us singularly being of good use is a church. And a broad meaning of church is all of us shining God's light and doing good out in the world. I wish this for all of us.

Revelation proclaims, "Behold, I make all things new!" I believe this fervently. Each and every day the Lord gives us another chance to begin again. Let us honor this for ourselves and proclaim it to others.

My mind loves Swedenborgian theology. My heart loves the Swedenborgian community, and you have become a beloved family to me.

Our esteemed George Dole has said, "Sherrie, this is a church that promises to be there for you throughout your life, and we hope that you will be there for us too!"

Helen Keller said, "One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar!"

It is my promise to love you and to love and serve the Lord. I pray that we may all shine and soar together. Amen..

continued from preceding page

know were displayed as a group at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago. Thus, the four were *not* painted as a series, and nowhere is there any suggestion by Keith or Worcester that the four were meant to represent the four seasons or "the unending cycle of nature" as Ms. Hesse puts it. The viewer is free to "see" that cycle in the four paintings (though I never could see how the four paintings represented the four seasons, which is the unending cycle, and I defy anyone to differentiate the winter scene from the autumn scene, etcetera).

None of these details are particularly important. The great message of this history tale in our denomination, which has gotten so much press and which continues to inspire people might be that there is something quite fine, actually, in not knowing who did what on the project. Some of us have gleaned that the whole profoundly outruns the sum of parts and that the whole was a collaboration first and foremost. No names attached to this piece or that idea! A team, a group effort, something very much like the spiritual life of a church at its best—the body together reaching for that which is higher and being taken up together into something fine and beautiful, something that lasts. (This doesn't mean, though, that I would cover up new evidence that identifies who drew up the fireplace design!)

As a historian not only of the San Francisco Church but also of Swedenborg's life and of Christianity in general (I teach in the field of the history of Christianity at Pacific School of Religion), I have become ever more humbled over the years as to what we can really know from the materials of history—to know, that is, "how it really was." It is so easy for us to fill in blanks with storylines that not only make perfect sense but which are pleasing and oftentimes supportive of something that seems meaningful. Yet, that sense of something being the right story is often more a testimony to the human endeavor to interpret for meaning, and "the real" story is so often different and also so often never really known by others later. But the "wrong" story can still impart a sense of learning and meaning. Yet with careful research into the materials of history left behind for us to examine and interpret, sometimes new storylines emerge that make even more sense and are even more abundant in their gifts of teaching to one trying to appreciate what has been. And what continues to be.

—Jim Lawrence, Dean, Swedenborgian House of Studies, Berkeley, California

SCYL Retreat

continued from page 107

home and, as editors extraordinaire, are working to pull the scenes together into something meaningful and understandable. In addition to working on the main feature, they are editing some scenes of the teens discussing religion and retreats, as well as singing and playing guitar.

I can't wait to see the finished products, as I am sure that several different versions will be created for different audiences and purposes. In one version, selected readings from Swedenborg's works concerning choice, freedom, community, and heaven and hell will be added between scenes. I am so proud of all the teens and how hard everyone worked on this project. Everyone did something—writing, directing, acting, coaching, makeup, scene, set design, etc. Thank you to all the volunteer adults who selflessly gave to the retreat effort. Thank you to all the teens for making this a Memorial Day retreat to remember. I am blessed to have been a part of this experience, and I can't wait to share your video vision of heaven and hell with the world.

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.

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About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688 in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death.

American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches. As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

Swedenborg shared in his theological writings a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

General Council Meetings

Pre-Convention Meeting

The General Council met on June 23 in St. Paul for the last time under the leadership of Chris Laitner. In addition to conducting routine and administrative business, the Council took action on several items.

The Council voted to appoint a leadership committee for the on-line Swedenborgian Community to provide continuing oversight and direction for current operations and to prepare a structure, job descriptions, outlines of authority, and accountability to be presented for approval at the November General Council meeting.

The denomination has been working over the past few years to resolve discrepancies and questions in the ownership and legal status of the St. Louis Church property. The Council voted to appoint Chris Laitner to continue this work.

Post-Convention Meeting

Under the leadership of Ken Turley, General Council made appointments and conducted other business.

The Council granted $400 from the Ministers Foreign Travel Fund for the Rev. Hunter Roberts to travel as an emissary to the British Conference Ministers Conference in England and to provide a written report for the Council of Ministers and an article to be published in *The Messenger*.

The Council discussed a proposal from Temenos to sell development rights to a large portion of its property to a conservancy. Reasons for making this move are purely financial for Temenos, but the Council is aware that the denomination holds a mortgage on the property, which requires Council approval of any sale. Temenos pays Convention $6,000 per year, with no interest. Council concluded that it will seek more information before making a decision.

Responding to input from members, the Council discussed several issues of concern. The annual convention has become too expensive for some families and individuals to attend. Ken Turley will explore some ideas for making it more accessible and affordable. Feedback suggests that members feel uninformed about General Council decisions and activities, and unable to have their voices heard on important issues. The Council decided to explore ways to become more transparent and involve members in its process. Several ideas emerged immediately, including sending GC meeting minutes to all societies, publishing meeting agendas in *The*

continues on page 117