



## SCYL Almont Winter Retreat



### SCYL President's Report

BY NINA SASSER

Almont '08 was utterly amazing—pretty much the third best retreat-type thing I've ever been to (after Convention '08 and Memorial Day '08). This retreat was much bigger than all the others I've attended (29 teens!), and we still managed to fit practically everyone on the coma couch! I really loved having so many people there and still being able to really connect with the other teens, even in such a large group. It was truly fabulous. I also very much enjoyed this Almont's topic—the sev-

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### Chaplain's Reflections

BY DAVID J. FEKETE

“When I'm at retreats, I think I'll never use what they talk about, and then when I get home I find myself doing exactly what they talked about.”

“I can do more with my mom when she asks me.”

“Let's go! I'm ready!”

“You mean if I find a job I like I'll be in heaven?”

Remarks like these spontaneously erupted from that blank wall of 29 teen faces I confronted as a minis-

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### 2009 SCYL Officers

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2009 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) officer and chaplain elections took place at the Almont Winter Retreat this past December. The results are:

- President:  
Nina Sasser,  
Portland, Maine
- East Coast and public relations officer:  
Rachel Madjerac,  
Portland, Maine
- Midwest and service officer:  
Sam Mactavish,

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### In This Issue:

A Response to “The Deep Darkness” • National Council of Churches Annual Convention  
The Great Knitting Accident of 2008 • A Testament of the Fifth Dispensation  
Puget Sound Gears Up for Annual Convention

## The Editor's Desk



The job of editor is engaging, rewarding, and challenging. It can also be difficult, as I have learned since publishing the December issue of *The Messenger*. The difficulty comes in making good editorial decisions.

My role is twofold. I must provide a balanced mix of news, reports, theological articles, scholarly articles, personal reflections, creative pieces, and reader feedback. At the beginning of a month, it often seems I will not have enough material for a full issue, but by press time I usually must make a decision about which articles to hold for the next issue. When soliciting and evaluating material for inclusion in *The Messenger*, I must consider a variety of viewpoints and opinions, assessing the content of submissions for appropriateness. I must be careful not to let my personal views influence what I believe is appropriate, but rather use the lens

of the Swedenborgian Church to guide my decisions.

The article in the December *Messenger* titled "The Deep Darkness that Was Dispersed by Christ's Life" has generated more mail than I have seen in my entire tenure as editor. These communications appear in this issue, in "Letters to the Editor," and in an article, "A Response to 'The Deep Darkness,'" both beginning on page 19.

The article's focus on Jewish culture and religion at the time of Christ, and its numerous references to "the Jews" in the context of evil, can lead a reader to perceive a prejudice against Jewish culture and religion.

At various times throughout history, Jews and Jewish culture and religion have been vilified and scapegoated for the ills, real and imagined, of the world. Hitler's murder of six million Jews in the name of Nazi Germany was only one chapter in a long history of persecution.

Because of that history of persecution, I believe we have a special responsibility to be sensitive to how language that references Jews might be perceived. In a larger context, we have a responsibility to ensure our language does not lend itself to the denigration or marginalization of any group or member of a group.

The article appeared in *The Messenger* at my invitation. At my request, the

## Church Calendar

**April 4:** General Council web-conference meeting

**April 11:** SHS Board of Trustees web-conference meeting

**April 18:** Earth Day Youth Retreat • Kitchener (Ontario) Church of the Good Shepherd

**June 25–28:** Annual Convention • Seattle, Washington

author excerpted and condensed the article from a much longer paper under a short deadline. As editor of *The Messenger*, it was my responsibility to react to language that could offend and

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## Corrections

In the January 2009 *Messenger*:

On page 6, William Ross Woofenden, co-author of "The Reader's Guide" to *Secrets of Heaven, Volume I*, was incompletely identified as Ross Woofenden.

The term of office of the recording secretary of the General Convention is one year, not three years as stated on page 10..

## the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America  
Published monthly except July and August by The Communications Support Unit of The Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America).

February 2009

Volume 231, No. 2, Whole Number 5337

Editor: Herb Ziegler

Design and production: Herb Ziegler

Editorial assistance: Robert Leith

Printing: Town and Country Press

### Editorial Address:

Herb Ziegler, *The Messenger*  
2 Hancock Place  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Tel: 617.491.5181

Email: hziegler@springmail.com

### Business and Subscription Address:

The Messenger, Central Office  
11 Highland Avenue  
Newtonville, MA 02460

Email: manager@swedenborg.org

Subscription free to members of the Swedenborgian Church; nonmembers: \$12/year; foreign: \$15/year; gift subscription from a member: \$5/year; single copies: \$1.00.

**Deadline for submissions** is six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Communications Support Unit, or represent the position of the Church.

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

I personally want to say a warm THANK YOU for your thoughtful and heartfelt coverage of our church's and Eric's progress in the November and January issues of *The Messenger*. Many people have contacted us about your excellent articles. They have helped readers share a deeper understanding of our healing path—not only Eric's, but ours as a couple—and our congregation as the strong soulful group that we are. Blessings to you and your work.

*Lisa Grace Allison*

*Samammish, Washington*

Lisa Allison is the wife of Rev. Eric Allison and a member of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound.

To the Editor:

Congratulations on your December issue! I was particularly struck by the article by Steve Sanchez. Not only does he provide interesting background information on his subject, but, more importantly, he weaves the teachings of the New Church into his article quite beautifully. It was also nice to have a photo of the author as I thought about his article.

I also enjoyed reading your story about the Halifax explosions. It's quite a big bit of history, really, and you drew a nice Christmas message from it right at the end.

And then Rev. Erni Martin's piece on Inness (or rather his critics) was quite interesting, too.

Nice work!

*Mike Gladish*

*Dawson Creek, British Columbia*

Rev. Mike Gladish is pastor of the General Church Society in Dawson Creek and visiting pastor to the Calgary Society.

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## A Response to "The Deep Darkness"

BY KIM HINRICH

In his front-page essay in the December *Messenger* entitled "The Deep Darkness that Was Dispersed by Christ's Life," Steve Sanchez tackles important theological questions. For all Christians, Swedenborgians included, contemplating the incarnation of Christ is central to a life of faith. However, I was deeply disturbed by the methodology used and the conclusions at which Steve arrived. I object to it for at least three reasons: its inherent antisemitism, its flawed critical thinking, and its epistemology.

First, the article has an offensive antisemitic undertone that does not represent the Swedenborgian Church's respect of other religious traditions. Steve attempts to assess the spiritual state of the Mediterranean world at the time of the incarnation of Christ. While such an attempt is inherently flawed to begin with (see below), the author concludes—with Swedenborg's help—that the incarnation of Christ was necessitated by the fact that the entire Jewish people had become mired in evil. Without interpretation or comment, Steve lifts antisemitic statements from Swedenborg like these to prove his point: "It was certainly not anything internal which affected them, for they did not know at all, nor indeed wish to know, what was internal. . . ." (AC 4293); or, "the Lord had no choice but to vastate all internal things out of the Jewish nation so that they would not profane the Word."; or, "the Lord gradually



removed from the Jews all internal knowledge of the Word, by allowing their external form of worship to gradually become a hereditary [evil] trait."

Swedenborg did indeed write these things. Antisemitism among eighteenth-century European thinkers was common, unfortunately. But to appropriate these kinds of statements in a twenty-first-century post-Holocaust world without any hint of interfaith sensitivity is unacceptable. Equally so is the lack of appropriate inquiry into the socio-historical complexities of the diverse Jewish communities of first-century Palestine and their relationship to the nascent Christian movement.

Unfortunately, this essay evidences a tendency that is not new. Christian churches have for centuries been wrestling with the peculiar religious heritage of Christianity being born out of the pre-existing Jewish tradition. For much of this time, antisemitism was a convenient and logical way to explain the incarnation of Christ and the supremacy of the Christian tradition. After the Holocaust, however, many Christian churches engaged in formal reparations with the Jewish people, and revised their theological interpretations, liturgical language, and spiritual sensitivity in light of increasing understanding of the shared histories of the traditions and the complex relationships between them. As Swedenborgians of the twenty-first century we must likewise engage in

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## Response to "The Deep Darkness"

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theological reflection that seeks to understand the fullness of the Jewish-Christian relationship. And we must do so with the care, respect and integrity that it requires.

Second, I find that Sanchez's article displays flawed critical thinking. He attempts to assess the spiritual state of an entire civilization with historical evidence. One may certainly engage in historical or sociological analyses of past time periods, but the attempt at a spiritual analysis of an entire region of the world—not to mention one that is two thousand years out of reach—is unreasonable. Taking a spiritual inventory of an historic community is simply impossible. The poor critical thinking of this essay is evident in the fact that Sanchez attempted to prove something with historical evidence that simply cannot be proven. In this attempt he does damage not only to the Jews, but to the very ideas in Swedenborg he is trying to lift up. I note below how the literalizing of Swedenborg's statements freezes them in time and constrains their meaning.

We are sometimes cautioned not to take the spiritual inventory of another person, with the humble acknowledgement that only God can know the full complexities and paradoxes of a human person. How much more true this would be for considering an entire civilization. It is infinitely too complex and too ineffable for us to know.

This leads me to my third critique: the author's epistemology. I find the way Sanchez constructs his knowledge of the topic to be problematic. He relies on a literal appropriation of Swedenborg that precludes interpretation or contextual grounding. He assumes that Swedenborg's statements are to be taken at face value and that they can be proven using methods that he believes

are scholarly. Essentially, Sanchez's essay is attempting to prove things that simply cannot be known. This move to literalize and prove statements of spiritual and theological insight is what I believe is most misguided.

The statement from Swedenborg that Steve attempts to prove is that "Christ's advent into our world prevented a cosmic imbalance toward evil that would have caused humankind to be lost forever in darkness." This statement holds great meaning, but I contend that it reaches its most powerful and personal meaning on a paradigmatic rather than literal level. Yes, we Christians believe that the incarnation actually happened in history. But the dearth of spiritual intention is a paradigm that happens over and over again in history, and over and over in our own lives. It is into this vacancy that Christ is born, and reborn, again and again. That is the miracle of the incarnation—that it happens in the most inhospitable conditions, and it happened once and happens again for us.

The problem with Sanchez's literalism is that it would seem to isolate the loss of internal spiritual knowledge to a particular time and place, and a particular people (the Jews). In fact, the Christian story only has meaning for us when we recognize that these paradigms are active in our own lives. We

too have the capacity to lose all sense of interior spiritual knowledge, and we too have the opportunity to witness Christ being born in spite of it.

To his credit, Steve brings up important issues that all of us Swedenborgians need to wrestle with: how we understand the incarnation of Christ in the midst of the Jewish religion from which it sprang, and how we read Swedenborg today. These issues need to be dealt with sensitively, critically and with great care—much more than was evident in this essay. Our Swedenborgian theological reflection must not be ignorant of the massive shifts in human knowledge and understanding that have taken place in the 250 years since Swedenborg's writings were published. We must read Swedenborg through twenty-first-century eyes, upholding the beauty and power of his spiritual vision nonetheless. We must acknowledge that there is far more about the world that we cannot know than what we can, and approach our theological reflections with humility.

I hope that these issues can be fruitfully discussed in the denomination in productive ways in the future. ☩

Rev. Kim Hinrichs is director of outreach at the Swedenborgian House of Studies and a doctoral student in Christian Spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

### Steve Sanchez Responds:

I have read the responses to my article about the state of the church at the incarnation. First I would like to say I apologize for the phrase, "mired in evil." That phrase was actually written in by one of my editors, but I saw it, and I take responsibility for it.

Let me try to explain how I read the parts of Swedenborg writing's where he is saying difficult things about various peoples, because it is often uncomfortable for me too. I find It is a little like

looking at others' dirty laundry, so I try to remember that he wrote in the past, and I try to take the stance of looking for the lesson for humanity in it. I remember that Swedenborg is reporting this to us under the auspices of the Lord, so it is in a way privileged information, and we should treat it as such. I seek to let the Lord judge it and hold it, and I try to understand it. I look for the purpose and lesson the Lord has for us in it.

Kim Hinrichs is correct in show-  
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## SCYL President's Report

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en deadly sins. I believe I learned numerous things during the sessions that I will be able to apply to situations I encounter throughout my life. I found the topics of sloth, which I have decided is the worst sin of all, and lust to be most interesting. I also realized during this retreat how much of a glutton I am! So basically, this year's Almont was magnificent. And I made a list of my top fifteen Almont '08 memories. I was going to just do ten but there are too many wonderful memories!

1. Creating new friendships and strengthening old ones

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## Chaplain's Reflections

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ter presenting a spiritual topic at the SCYL Almont Winter Retreat. Our theme was the seven deadly sins, and the goods that correspond to them. At this retreat, ministers and a Swedish House of Studies seminarian



Retreaters Melissa Anderson and Megan Madden

presented a spiritual session for each of the seven sins.

This is my second year as SCYL chaplain, and over the past year I learned more about the issues teens live with and about how to reach them. Positive interactions develop later in the retreat as teens get to know and trust adults. Teens talked to me about important matters actually going on in their lives, like drug dealers, drug abuse, alcoholism, and slothfulness. I have learned that in order for me to hold a teen's attention, I need to be authentic, and I need to be direct and honest.

The presenters were Rev. Jenn Tafel, Rev. Junchol Lee, Alison Longstaff, continues on page 22

## 2009 SCYL Officers

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Waterloo, Ontario

- Canada and activities officer:  
Jake MacTavish,  
Waterloo, Ontario
- West Coast and fund-raising & finance officer:  
Cody Steinhiser,  
Michigan City, Indiana
- Editors, *Clear Blue Sky* and communication officers:  
Alex Dyer,  
Fryeburg, Maine  
Holly Bauer,  
Portland, Maine
- League chaplain:  
Rev. Dr. David Fekete,  
Edmonton, Alberta

Some of the SCYL Officers return to another year of service, while we welcome some new teens to the league. We say farewell to 2008 officers Sola Thorhallsson, Naomi Anderson, and

Kristina Madjerac. Both Sola and Kristina are 18 now, and are ready to move out of the SCYL. Sola did a great job as president of the SCYL last year, and Kristina was an inspiring writer and editor of *Clear Blue Sky*. We will miss them at our retreats and gatherings. Naomi can run for office in future years, and we encourage her to do so. Thank

you Sola, Naomi, and Kristina for your excellent leadership in the SCYL.

We have a fantastic group of officers elected to serve in 2009. We welcome continues on page 23

## My Top 10 Almont Winter Retreat '08 Memories

BY JAKE MACTAVISH

- Alex and Sola's face-off at "Baby, I love you"
- Seven deadly sins Snakes and Ladders
- Fitting everyone on the coma couch
- Kurt's excellent bedtime story
- Hippie roller skating
- Ultimate Frisbee in the mud
- Spending half an hour in the walk-in freezer during the all-nighter
- Jen and Dave's awesome worship service
- Playing Apples to Apples and other fun games
- Meeting all of the new friends I've made and seeing the old ones

Jake MacTavish is the SCYL Canadian officer.



Scott Bray attacks dishes with a vengeance.

## SCYL President's Report

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2. Story time with Alex Dyer
3. Creating a giant mess of Cap'n Crunch and sugar packets while playing "Baby, I love you" (and of course, Alex and Sola's epic face-off!)
4. Our victorious winning of the super intense Ultimate Frisbee game (Holly caught it off a tree, and then I took Sam out and caught it in the end zone!)
5. Matching with Holly for the skating party with our snazzy sequined dresses and striped leggings!



Top: Cassie Young, Holly Bauer, Rachel Madjerac, Audrey Gray; Bottom: Nina Sasser, Jake MacTavish

6. Singing the Journey classic "Don't Stop Believing" (and listening to David sing the parts no one else knew) during Jenn and Dr. Dave's marvelous worship service
7. Singing Grace ("Johnny Appleseed") at a rest stop in New York

8. Making brownie batter out of hot chocolate mix, brown sugar, and vegetable oil (and it tasted surprisingly delicious!)
9. Giving Cody another makeover
10. Forcing Jake to try on my bright pink skinny jeans
11. Dance parties in the kitchen!
12. Bubble Beards!
13. Winning a free dinner (Alex bet that I would not be able to read a chapter in a dreadful book I was assigned for history, and we agreed that if I finished before dinner he would have to buy me dinner, and I did finish so he bought my dinner!)
14. Witnessing Alex mistake barbecue sauce for ketchup!
15. Becoming president of SCYL! ✚

Nina Sasser is SCYL president and attends the Portland, Maine New Church.

## Chaplain's Reflections

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and I. Each presenter had his or her own style. Jenn used media such as video and music. Junchol asked questions and drew the teens out. Alison prepared case studies from current events. I prepared handouts the teens could read and talk about. The teens were remarkably attentive. I was really impressed at the roller skating activity on the last night, when a teen that I thought was entirely disconnected from the spiritual aspects of the retreat talked about things he learned in our sessions. It was clear the teens would take something home with them.

The group dynamics were interesting to watch. It was touching to see the teens grow into a supportive community. It is gratifying to see teens that struggled with the decision to attend this retreat find such a welcoming and com-

forting environment. Outsiders soon felt like they belonged. By the end of the retreat teens who didn't know each other at the beginning were all holding hands in a long chain as they skated around the roller rink.

The final communion service was a moving experience for me. Teens got the opportunity to contribute to the service in many ways, like playing guitar or reading from the Bible. I encourage teens to participate, but offer them a way out if they don't feel up to it.

Many teens are not involved much in church at home, so seeing them participate in a worship service is quite meaningful to me. They practice, and

when they get to do their part during the service, they have everyone's attention. It makes a big impression on the teens when they see their friends actively involved in leading worship.

Some of the teens brought music they wanted played during the service. Rev. Jenn and I worked it into our liturgy. The final song of the communion service was an old rock song called, "Don't Stop Believing." The teens knew the words, and after listening to a few lines burst into singing along with the CD. When the chorus came with the words, "Don't stop believing," I could feel that they thought about believing in God.

They knew I meant it when I gave the benediction "May the Lord bless you and keep you." I asked the group to bring God home with them when they left. I feel strongly that the Lord will bless and keep each of them until next time. ✚

Rev. Dr. David Fekete is SCYL chaplain and pastor of the Edmonton, Alberta Church of the Holy Word.



# General Assembly of the National Council of Churches and Church World Service 2008

BY: DOUGLAS MOSS

As members of the New Church, we often find ourselves these days in something of a dilemma. We strive to "be doers of the Word and not merely hearers"



(James 1:22), believing that "faith without charity is not faith at all, but only knowledge about faith" (AC 7778). At the same time, the small numbers in so many of our congregations make it difficult for our churches to establish an identity in our communities as places where the good work of the New Jerusalem goes on.

Of course, each reforming, regenerating soul among us carries out the Lord's purpose in our personal lives as best we see how; this has traditionally been the New Church's way. But as so many of our local societies struggle for survival (to be quite candid), lack of the critical mass needed to offer mission work in our neighborhoods (preparation of the occasional meal for a local shelter, after-school programs, sponsoring a mile of clean highway) can lead seekers to find other, nearby churches that do offer such opportunities for service. I think Emanuel Swedenborg himself would say that consoling ourselves that our theology is superior regardless constitutes delusional thinking.

Do we expect to grow where we are not doing the Lord's work, where we render it only lip service? Has this heavenly church no earthly obligation to lead by example? Do we really spread the Good News of the Lord's New Church merely via reading groups?

This past November, I was privileged to join Mary Ann Fischer of The New Church of Montgomery (Ohio) in representing the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church at the General Assembly of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC) and the Church World Service (CWS) on the outskirts of Denver, Colorado.

NCC, originally founded as the  
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## 2009 SCYL Officers

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Nina Sasser, our newly elected SCYL president. This is Nina's first year as an officer. She lives in Portland, Maine, where she enjoys brownie batter, skiing, and musicals (Nina got a lead in her high school production of *Anything Goes*). She is very involved in church retreats, camps, and Convention and has been quoted as saying, "I need to get a job so I can have money to travel to more retreats." Nina is very sociable and has an exuberant personality. These attributes combined with her ability to energize, engage, and motivate others will help her to be an outstanding president.

We greet two first-time officers working together as a *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) editor team: Alex Dyer and Holly Bauer. Alex lives in Fryeburg, Maine, and has been actively involved in the Fryeburg New Church (he assisted his grandmother, Martha, with the prima-

ry Sunday School class), youth group, retreats, and Fryeburg Assembly. Holly resides in Portland, Maine, and has also been very active in Fryeburg church activities, Convention, and retreats. They are very enthusiastic about CBS and hope to get exciting new issues out soon.

Sam MacTavish returns to the SCYL after a year off to serve as our new Midwest and Service Officer. Welcome back Sam! Jake MacTavish starts his third and final year as Canada and activities officer. Along with encouraging Canadian teens to participate in the SCYL, he will assist in planning our Convention outings in Seattle this summer. Cody Steinhiser begins his fourth year of service to the SCYL, returning as the West and fund-raising/finance officer. Rachel Madjerac returns for her second year as East Coast and public relations officer. We are happy to see Jake, Cody, and Rachel coming back to another year of service.

Rev. Dr. David Fekete was re-elected to his second year as the league chaplain. David did a great job last year, traveling great distances to attend and lead sessions at both the Memorial Day Fryeburg, Maine, and Almont, Michigan, winter retreats. He also attended Almont Summer camp and was the teen boys' dorm dad (I hear he makes up great Mad Libs). He wrote monthly chaplain posts for the youth league blog ([youthleague.blogspot.com](http://youthleague.blogspot.com)) and was available at all times to all teens in need.

Please congratulate all of our 2009 SCYL officers and our league chaplain. This is an exciting and talented group. I look forward to lots of new and wonderful SCYL happenings this year. I'm thrilled to be working with this team, and I hope that you get to know them better in the coming year. ☙

Kurt Fekete is the Youth Director of the Swedenborgian Church. He can be contacted at

## National Alliance of New Church Women

## The Great Knitting Accident of 2008

BY NANCY LITTLE

In November of 2005, I started to knit a blanket that was intended to be a baby blanket for my not-yet-born niece, Chloe. Today, as I write this, Chloe turned 3. Is that blanket finished yet? No! In mid-December I took out the blanket and decided I was going to finish it. I told myself that if I just kept working on it I'd finish it by Christmas. Just knit a row or two every day, that's all it would take, then I'd be done with it.



The very next day, I had what I refer to as "The Great Knitting Accident of 2008," a mistake so bad I hadn't a clue how or the skills to fix it myself. If there were such a thing as a knitting 911, I would have called it right away. I was in way over my head; I was in deep doo-doo. The nearest knitter I knew of that could get me out of this jam lives an hour and a half away. I was on the verge of tears. I might have actually *been* crying. I was threatening to pull it all out. My husband Trevor (a very patient man and the son of an avid knitter), was pleading with me *not* to pull it all out. I put it aside for a week and meditated on the blanket.

What do I do now? I was wondering. And then, at some strange hour of the night (this is often when I get answers), it came to me, "Pull it all out. Start over. *Crochet* a blanket. You are a crocheter, not a knitter." So the next morning, I pulled it all out. Three years (give or take months of not working on the blanket) were pulled out and wound on my new yarn winder (thanks to Trevor). I've started over, *crocheting*, using the very same yarn and maybe

it'll be finished by Chloe's fourth birthday. I'm also enjoying working on the blanket much better this time around.

Going through this whole process of pulling out the blanket and starting over got me thinking about how, so often in life, we just keep plugging away using the same method and not getting the results we want or expect. Yet we're just convinced that we "have to do it this way." Does this sound familiar to anyone?

Last summer at our annual convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, I had an opportunity to talk at length with Rev. Jenn Tafel, who was awarded last year's Mite Box, and Rev. Sky Paradise, the recipient of the 2008/2009 Mite Box, about their experiences starting new churches. It was so great to sit down and chat with both of them. I've known Rev. Jenn since she was five or six, when I was a baby sitter at the 1980 Annual Convention at Wellesley College (I'll let you do the math). I met Rev. Sky at Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) in 2006 when she was still a student at the Swedenborgian House of Studies and came to FNCA to fulfill her camp experience requirement.

At convention, I learned that Rev. Sky had a very similar experience to my "pull it all out" knitting experience. She first went to El Paso, Texas, with plans to start a church there. After six months of effort using a certain method of church planting, she was not getting the results she expected. After a "near meltdown" and lots of praying, she "pulled it all out" and went to New Mexico. Things are working out won-

derfully in New Mexico. She had almost 40 people at her first service in April. The community has contributed greatly to growing her church. Rev. Sky takes very little credit for most of this and says that it is the Lord at work. The Swedenborgian Church of the Southwest is the 2009 recipient of the Mite Box. When you have a chance, visit their website: [www.southwestswedenborgians.com](http://www.southwestswedenborgians.com).

Have you had that kind of experience too? Sometimes there's a huge sense of relief when you realize that you don't have to continue doing it the same way. This past year I lost my job, let go of all of my financial goals, did some soul-searching, and decided that this was an ideal opportunity to take some time off and revisit the idea of graduate school. As I write this, in a little more than a month I'll begin courses in a Masters in Library Science degree program at Simmons College Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Is starting graduate school in my mid-forties scary to me? A little. But I *love* a challenge and I'm confident that it will lead me on a wonderful journey. Am I willing to "pull it all out" if it's not working? You bet!

In past years, the Women's Alliance has mailed this fund-raising letter to hundreds of women and got a limited response. Last year at convention, the Executive Committee decided to print the fund-raising letter in *The Messenger* and eliminate the mailing, thus saving hundreds of dollars in postage costs. So, we too, as an organization, are "pulling it all out" and starting over.

When you contribute to the Women's Alliance, the money goes directly to support new churches, such as those in Lansing, Michigan, and Sil-



ver City, New Mexico. We also support the youth league, our summer camps, Kei Torita in Japan, and the Swedenborgian House of Studies. The Women's Alliance has a long history of supporting our church programs. Will you please help us continue this tradition by sending your donation today?

Checks should be made out to: North American Alliance of Swedenborgian Women and mailed to our treasurer:

Jeannette Hille  
4240 Larch Place N.  
Plymouth, MN 55442

Please include your name, address, email address, church affiliation, and indicate the amount of your donation directed toward the General Fund and the Mite Box. Also, please join the Women's Alliance by donating an additional \$5.00. ☒

Nancy Little is the president of the National Alliance of New Church Women. She lives in the Pioneer Valley of Western Massachusetts with her husband, Trevor Woofenden. When she's not crocheting so much that her hand hurts, she's catching up with friends on Facebook, updating her blog and the Alliance blog ([www.womensalliance.blogspot.com](http://www.womensalliance.blogspot.com)), and generally enjoying her time off until grad school starts in late January.

## Spring Online Courses from SHS

Would you like to enhance your understanding of Swedenborgian spirituality and how it relates to your life? Then come and learn with us! These seven-week online courses are designed as enrichment courses for lay people with a variety of backgrounds. No prior knowledge of theology or Swedenborg is required. They are a balance of head and heart, intended as experiences where you will deepen your understanding of spirituality, create friendships with like-minded folks, and find ideas that will enrich your life!

### ***Making Sense of It All: Swedenborg's True Christian Religion***

Rev. Dr. Inese Radzins  
April 13–June 1, 2009

What is Swedenborgian theology? If you have long wished you had a succinct answer to that question, or if you are exploring Swedenborg for the first time, this online class will give you a clear and systematic understanding of his thought, using his book *True Christian Religion* as a resource. The class will be divided into two sections. The first, called "Who is God?" will deal with the following topics: Creator, Redeemer, Holy Spirit and the Word. The second section, entitled "Who are we?" will discuss faith, charity, free will, reformation, and regeneration. The goal of the course will be to provide you with a theological overview that can enhance your spiritual life.

### ***Fostering a Personal Relationship With God***

Rev. Dr. David Fekete  
April 13–June 1, 2009

How do we find God in the midst of our busy 21<sup>st</sup> century lives? This online course will explore ways to let God into our lives and to bring our lives into God. We will consider Eastern and Western approaches to this issue in both active and contemplative lifestyles. Topics will include mystical union with God and its consequences for identity; visualizing God and icons; spiritual community, sacred space, and mandalas; prayer, chants, and mantras; sacred literature; the body, Tai Chi, and Yoga; and finding God in the ordinary activities of daily living.

For more information, please go to [www.shs.psr.edu](http://www.shs.psr.edu).

## Call for Nominees to Elective Offices

The Nominating Committee is seeking one or more candidates for each of the offices to be filled by vote at the 2009 Annual Convention in Seattle. For full descriptions of duties and responsibilities, read the Constitution and Bylaws of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the *2008 Journal of the Swedenborgian Church*, beginning on page 140. For more information, or to submit a nomination, email Deane Currie at [deanecurrie@gmail.com](mailto:deanecurrie@gmail.com), or con-

tact another member of the Nominating Committee (Denyse Daurat, Mary Ann Fischer, Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen, and Michelle Vincent).

**President** (3-year term)

**Vice President** (1-year term)

**Treasurer** (1-year term)

**Recording Secretary** (1-year term)

**General Council: Minister**  
(3-year term)

**General Council: Lay Member**  
(3-year term)

**Communications Support Unit (COMSU)** (3-year term)

**Financial And Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU)** (3-year term)

**Support Unit for Ministries (MINSU)** (3-year term)

**Education Support Unit EDSU**  
(3-year term)

**Nominating Committee**  
(5-year term, two candidates must be nominated)

## NCC Report

continued from page 23

Federation of Churches, celebrated its 100th anniversary at this event. This

... is a community of Christian communions, which, in response to the gospel as revealed in the Scriptures, confess Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word of God, as Savior and Lord. These communions covenant with one another to manifest ever more fully the unity of the Church. Relying upon the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, the communions come together as the Council in common mission, serving in all creation to the glory of God. (the preamble to NCC constitution)

At present, 35 member churches ("communions") make up this august body, including (for more than 40 years) the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church. The Council's greatest moments came, arguably, in activities during the Civil Rights movement of the '50s and '60s, and in bringing about the fall of the apartheid government in South Africa twenty years ago by leading millions of people to divest themselves of investments in that nation. In our widely diverse times its efforts may appear less focused but only because they cover such a broad spectrum—environmental issues, a just minimum wage, rebuilding the Gulf Coast, relations in the Middle East, health care reform, peace and justice in Darfur, and ministry to farm workers.

The Church World Service (NCC and CWS together constitute this General Assembly [GA]) originated in 1946 to provide direct aid to a war-torn world. While the NCC commits itself largely to advocacy and education here at home, CWS provides on-the-ground efforts—"acting on God's call to help neighbors in need"—wherever needed: emergency disaster relief, refugee assistance, training and education to alleviate hunger and poverty

throughout the world. For many years, our own churches have responded to disasters in the world by funneling financial contributions to CWS.

In the New Church, we cannot fail to notice that "service" is the hallmark of both organizations. Hence, a Swedenborgian should feel right at home here.

Yet, for a newcomer this assembly can be initially intimidating. Mary Ann Fischer is a "veteran" of many Assemblies, but this was only my second attendance in three years. A humble parish minister cannot help but be somewhat bedazzled amidst so many bishops, primates, and eminences, many in

**They enthusiastically accepted my suggestion to speak more in terms of "goodness and truth" and of "the Lord's kingdom on earth" rather than "Christian values"**

vestments and insignia appropriate to their office, but my feelings went quite beyond merely being star struck. Some of these people, I knew, represented denominations with more congregations than General Convention has members; many can boast of single churches with larger membership than we muster coast to coast.

How could our tiny voice matter? Surprisingly, I found that it did—that we could be heard and that New Church ideas could make a significant and welcome contribution to the deliberations and efforts of the community as a whole.

The primary item on the agenda of this year's GA was to hear, consider, and vote on a resolution, two years in the making, concerning US immigration policy. And yet, in November 2008, the "elephant in the room" was our reeling economy—the same worries and concerns that had so affected

our national election only one week previous. To ignore this grim reality—the wolf at the door—and the greed and corruption (that was once celebrated!) that brought it about threatened to render our deliberations irrelevant. So it was that a motion came from the floor that a statement should be drafted to take back to our churches calling for careful and prayerful consideration of a remodeling of our economic principles to reflect our Christian faith.

I quickly latched on to the group that formed to work on that draft and soon found myself at the heart of it, moved from observer status to working participant. The core of the committee came from one mainline, liberal denomination—and they already had a draft in hand. More signatures were needed, though, to have it brought to the floor as official new business, and I quickly found support from acquaintances in five other denominations; perhaps one of the advantages of being with such a small delegation is that you have to meet new people!

More significant, though, was the way the group responded to my suggestions for broadening and refining our statement. As originally composed, it reflected doctrinal vestiges of their particular church that I felt might not be acceptable in the spirit of ecumenism that defines NCC. They enthusiastically accepted my suggestion to speak more in terms of "goodness and truth" and of "the Lord's kingdom on earth" rather than "Christian values" (although, admittedly, some found the term "kingdom" objectionable, and settled for "realm"). Certainly, I suspected that New Church theology fit the ecumenical model well, but I had not expected such an enthusiastic embrace.

As we moved the statement through the various committees that steered us to the appropriate parliamentary approach for its presentation, I found

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## A Testament of the Fifth Dispensation

BY LARS-ERIK WIBERG



Visitors who approach our place in Rockport from the South Street entrance can't help but notice that there are two fields, small as fields

go, on either side of the driveway. They are quite weedy, but I do keep them mowed so that they look respectable from a distance. I was out mowing the right-hand field in the early summer of 2004, and walking deliberately behind the mower in that state of suspended mental animation which so often accompanies a routine chore, so I don't remember thinking about anything in particular as I went round and round, following the mower along the neat new swath it was cutting.

As I finished mowing I was astonished to have in my mind the collection of statements, plainly identified as a testament, that you read here. What you see was in my head in its entirety, and all I had to do was to write it down. I did that right away. I had to tinker with it just a wee bit to get the grammar and format straight, and when I finally had it in the form you see here, I printed a few small samples and passed them around at Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel. They were well received.

### Testament

We believe that:

- God's most significant gift to mankind, apart from his own physical presence, is the Bible;
- The Christian Church, being based on the Bible, occupies a special

place among the world's religions;

- The Christian Church, being the Lord's Fourth Dispensation, has advanced the status of mankind, both spiritually and naturally, in a way that is unique among the world's religions;
- The Lord's second coming, as foretold in the Bible, has already occurred in the form of the divinely inspired writings of Emanuel Swedenborg;
- Emanuel Swedenborg's writings are fully consistent with content found in the Bible;
- The Lord's second coming heralded the advent of a New Church, it being the Fifth Dispensation;
- The New Church not only maintains the spiritual and natural progress effected by the Christian Church, but also recognizes the holiness of all divinely inspired religions;
- The New Church routinely emphasizes the kind of knowledge that combines Divine Love with Divine Wisdom, which are expressed with perfect equity in good and truth;
- Inasmuch as, in New Church interpretation, the male was created to be truth in form, and the female was created to be good in form, that this knowledge fosters the practice of women and men acting more usefully and helpfully together;
- The New Church continuously encourages women and men to share with each other more nearly perfect equity in every way.

It may be noteworthy that for several years I have been dismayed at the extent to which much of Christianity has failed in its overall attitude toward the relationship of the sexes. What Swedenborg has called the Fourth Dispensation has thereby limited itself. The males among us have been in the

ascendant, and in the Swedenborgian outlook this is much like holding truth to be superior to good.

Truth and good are by no means equal; however, their relative importance deserves the most nearly perfect equity that we can devise. To achieve this demands equity between men and women. That's the chief message in the Testament. My sense is that the Testament came to me, as a sort of confirmation, in response to this firm belief that has been in my mind for so long now.

We have discussed the Testament often in Uses Trust meetings, speculating on what to do with it. No clear answer has been forthcoming. However, it seems plain enough that I didn't "receive" the Testament as something to sequester. So I have finally had a supply of wallet-size Testaments printed with the idea that I'd simply hand them out hither and thither, and try to get started at consciousness raising on a grass roots basis (something to do with my field?) in regard to what the Testament is telling us. (If there are readers of *The Messenger* who would like a few, please let us know, and we will oblige, at no charge of course. Send a self-addressed, stamped envelope to The Uses Trust Ltd., 90 South Street, Rockport, MA 01966.)

It is my belief that, if the Fifth Dispensation is to be effected, we will have to be instruments for its assimilation. It is also my belief that, although more nearly perfect equity between the sexes by no means circumscribes the scope of anything as vast as a new dispensation, nevertheless, the Fifth Dispensation requires it. Otherwise I would be at a loss to account for why, given my prior mindset, the Testament was ever given me at all. ☩

Lars-Erik Wiberg is a member of the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem and vice-president of the Uses Trust. He lives in Rockport, Massachusetts.



## Steve Sanchez

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ing that the Jewish people have been persecuted century after century, and that we need to examine ourselves for remnants of racism in our hereditary evil. I apologize if my hereditary evil has leaked out in an inappropriate way. Letters from Kim and others have taught me to be careful in the way I express myself and use language, or make statements that can be interpreted as racist.

My primary objective in writing "The Deep Darkness," as with everything I write, is to nurture a more intimate relationship with, and knowledge of, the Lord and His story.

One of the most powerful aspects of the Christ story is that it happens in history, and I believe we need to be free to examine history according to its own time. The birth of God on earth in the person of Jesus Christ is a historical occurrence that we can study and confirm. This historical occurrence is powerful because it combines the reality of earthly existence with the infinite love and power of the Lord, and by so doing makes the life of the Lord accessible to us.

Similarly, Swedenborg's writings span the meaning of the corporeal and the spiritual state of things. The two must always go together because the earth is the foundation of heaven. So, I believe, as Swedenborg says, that the very essential of religion is to understand and have affection for the divine-human nature of Christ. I emphasize this nature to demonstrate the source of my motivation, and because I believe a similar light can be shone on Swedenborg's writing if, in fact, the events of history verify it.

Also, my objective is not to be a scholar, but to be a person who writes responsibly on subjects that increase people's faith, knowledge, and love for the Christ story, and secondarily, for

the ways Swedenborgian theology supports that.

When Kim calls for us to look at Jewish identity in the light of twenty-first century sensibilities, what are the implications of doing so? Are we to disregard the difficult and challenging things Swedenborg says about certain peoples because they upset us, and because they disagree with our idea of compassion? I believe Swedenborg is always describing spiritual processes that were revealed to him by the Lord himself. He is not condemning the Jews or anyone else; he is assessing their spiritual state and the process the Lord is using them for.

It is true that he says very severe things that most of us would never say, but he says them about all peoples according to his mission; he says them in service, not for inflammatory reasons. If what he says is not true, then it is antisemitism, or anti-Papism, but if it is true, then it is from the Lord as he claims, and we must deal with the reality of it.

To discover the treasures in Swedenborg, one has to dig for them. I find that to read him and understand him is a sort of meditation because perception is a meditative state. The spiritual nature of his writing stimulates the internal part of our mind to be active; otherwise it is impossible to understand. I am sure that it is similar for most people. If I am not in this receptive stance, the words just bounce off and are not absorbed at all.

One reason for examining the plight of the Jewish people as described in this paper is that it shows that we need to face and deal with our inherited evil, and not suppress it, and to repent for it, for if we don't, it becomes like poison in our psyche. The lesson is for us is to examine ourselves for inherited evils and to pray for help in overcoming them.

My hermeneutic [method or prin-

ciple of biblical interpretation] is that the Lord always acts from love and mercy—always in all things. I believe it is essential to be convinced of this, especially when confronting things like the severe statements Swedenborg has made about the Jews. He was giving them, as he does all people, every opportunity for salvation.

There is no predestination in the matter; the Lord tried to use the Jewish people throughout the Old Testament as the means of conjunction by internal means, but they continually rejected this, so he resorted to "plan B" and used them by external means, (according to Swedenborg as I describe in the paper). The Jewish people's own inclination was the cause of this, not some kind of predestined manipulation by the Lord. The rest of the world was in a similar state of externalization; the matter is so dramatic with the Jewish people because they were the means of conjunction for the whole of mankind. As I say in the beginning of the article, there has to be one church on earth that is representative with heaven at all times or man would be lost forever. So, saying the severe things he does about the Jewish people is not a condemnation of them; it is Swedenborg's spiritual assessment from heavenly wisdom.

I believe that it is a mistake for the Swedenborgian Church to move in the deconstructive, humanistic direction because this makes us look and feel like a watered down version of ourselves. I believe that there are many progressive ways to make our Church more relevant to the modern person, while at the same time deepening our devotional identity in the Christ Story. This is a challenge we all face, and it is my primary objective, just as it is for many others. Swedenborgian theology is a treasure house for relating to the modern person that I will continue to explore.

*Steve Sanchez*

## Letters to the Editor

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To the Editor:

As a Christian mother of adult children who are Jewish, and whose own mother lived in Berlin and Vienna during the 1920s and graphically described to me the deep darkness that was settling over those cities at that time, I was truly shocked to read in Steve Sanchez's article in December's issue of *The Messenger* about Swedenborg's vision of the state of Judaism in the first century, and about the mechanism of "inheritance," whereby "the Jews were providentially prevented from internal reflection in general, and about the Word and Christ in particular." Did the humble shepherds, the holy family, and the anonymous teachers of the young Jesus truly have no capacity for spiritual reflection; did they really have nothing spiritual to offer our Lord after he was born among them?

Such a thesis, at least to the extent I understand it, seems patently false, and Sanchez's description of the remedies, and his reassurances that "when internal ignorance of the Word by the Jewish nation became a hereditary trait, they could no longer profane it," only add to my immense discomfort at the way the issues in question are addressed in the article. The period was certainly dark, but the miracle of Jesus, to my mind, was that a desperate and deeply spiritual people could, amidst great collective suffering, nurture such an incarnation of humanity and prophesy and, yes, divinity. The historical sources Sanchez cites ignore completely whatever differences in "spiritual receptivity" existed—for there surely were differences—among the Jewish people, most notably between the poor and that portion of their priesthood that stood between them and the Roman Empire. Jesus was a Jew, God's gift to the worthy and the unworthy alike. As "Son of God," he is also a reminder, as

all children are, of the divine "remains" that abide within us, individually and collectively, despite our suffering and whatever our sin.

Since reading "The Deep Darkness," as well as an article by Rev. James F. Lawrence, dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies, titled "All in the Family: Reading a Christian Pluralism in the High Christology of John 14: 1–7," I've been thinking a lot about the whole issue of Christian "exceptionalism" and why it does seem to so easily lead to error, or "missing the mark," as Reverend Jim so often translated "sin" for us during his time as our pastor here in San Francisco.

I found applying the popular question "What would Jesus do?" useful here. When Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except by me," I interpret that to mean that the "I," as we understand it, no longer exists for Him; that in his glorified state he is literally the Way, a transparent gate, so to speak, that has regard for nothing except the love of the Father flowing through him and out toward the rest of creation.

And in calling us "brothers," Jesus invites us to join him in that state. He did not invite us to engage in idolatry. In this I tend to agree with many Jews that Christians are particularly susceptible to idolatry, and nowhere is that temptation stronger than in our struggle to understand Jesus' life and teaching.

Jesus as "the Way" is summed up by the New Commandment. As Rev. Jim states in his article on John: 14, "that you should love one another as I have loved you" is the simple but eternally profound pathway to God."

I would add that everything else is footnote. In this view, Christianity's exceptionalism consists in its absolute self-abnegation and servanthood, nothing else. Only in the full light of the New Commandment can any "ex-

ceptionalism" be claimed at all. Otherwise, even the person of Christ becomes a weapon, as it certainly has often enough over the past two thousand years, years that sometimes have seemed as dark "as when we first began."

So, to people asking the question with which Sanchez begins his article: "Why did Jesus come at *that* particular time?" or, the subtext, "In what way is Christianity necessarily superior to what went before it?"—it seems to me that an initial, and fundamental, Swedenborgian response might be: "Of what use is this question?"

In my case, the ultimate "use" is rather mysterious. The article, which so unsettles me, led to the contemplation above, for which I am grateful. Yes, I still think it's vitally important to put Swedenborg's ideas about "inheritance," as well as his categorical generalizations about (first century) Judaism, into critical perspective. And I certainly do not think that his great gifts to us would be diminished by doing so. But we all have gifts—Steve Sanchez, Rev. Jim, and certainly Swedenborg—and while it isn't always clear where they will lead us, perhaps it's an article of our faith that they will inevitably lead us toward the light, if that is our deepest intention.

That said, I urge *The Messenger* to ask the most respected Swedenborgian scholars it can find to write follow-up articles that address the issues Sanchez raises. I, for one, feel the need for a wider, and wiser, discussion of these matters.

Léa Park,  
San Francisco, California

To the Editor:

I read Sanchez' paper with great interest, but not with immediate belief. I found it stimulating, quite possible, and admired its argument. I appreciate it and his references to statements by Swedenborg, who should have the

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## Letters to the Editor

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deeper access to the nature of what happened in the Incarnation. I find it worthwhile looking into further.

I read it as a very interesting take on the incarnation, with suggestive currents of spiritual change and revelation of what can actually happen to us at such a critically important time in history. Such things, like radical new developments in science, open up new possibilities and insights that need to be studied further. This is how science works: A radical line of thought is laid on the table in order to stimulate other possibilities. We are to merely keep following the new mysteries or surprises to get closer to real insight. Any such thing in a field like this is likely to be informative and renewing.

Swedenborg was one of the great scientists and wouldn't jump to conclusions. In this case, the emerging ideas can seem extreme to the person who is very sensitive to older anti-Semitic rhetoric, but the point is not to go to extremes in relating to it.

Steve's thesis does work well. It is not anti-Semitic so much as an honest research paper which needs to run freely, or we may not know it as well as we should later on when it is time to bring in other considerations and meld them into the new ideas. A truly anti-Semitic piece would stand out like the sour rhetoric we find in political campaigns. A new take on the incarnation would require backup studies ranging from the gathering of other research by a number of people to the impulsive theories that many of the rest of us would offer. The charge of antisemitism is a type of name-calling. We do better to stay away from it—just look at the ideas and see how much they offer as meaningful pictures of a new or enlarged point of view.

*Steve Koke  
San Diego, California*

## PUGET SOUND NEXT GENERATION

The Church Board of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound announces a call for a  $\frac{3}{4}$ -time minister, to start on a mutually agreed-upon date.

This minister, who will follow in the commanding footsteps of Rev. Eric Allison, would be an explorer of spirit, a brave soul willing to go where no man or woman has gone before into spiritual galaxies yet to be discovered!

A teacher, leader, friend, and guide, the NEXT GENERATION Minister coming to serve the Puget Sound crew will be met with loving and creative souls who are ready for a SWEDENBORGIAN captain!

Please contact [LisaGraceAllison@comcast.net](mailto:LisaGraceAllison@comcast.net) for more details and to have your email questionnaire beamed up.



## News in Brief

**Rev. Rachel Rivers**, minister of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church for more than 18 years, retired from that post on June 20, 2008. **Rev. Jeffrey Cheifetz** was welcomed as interim minister on September 1, 2008.

The **Lehnen Fund trustees** (composed of the members of the General Council) approved requests by **Rev. Sage Currie** and **Rev. Andy Stinson**

for grants of \$500 each to defray expenses for attending the 2009 Earl Lecture Series at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, on January 27–29. The trustees discussed the need to publicize the purpose of the fund and availability of income from the fund. Susan Wood-Ashton reported that the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU) will be promoting the availability of funds, and this information will be sent to *The Messenger*. ☩



## Passages

### Births

Christopher and Amy Cordani welcomed a baby boy into their family, **Theodore Kim Cordani**, on September 29, 2008. They are members of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, where they were married on October 20, 2007.

### New Members

**John Ventura, Howard Pulliam, Brett Ludwig**, and **Nikhil Gorla** were joyfully welcomed as new members of the Edmonton, Alberta New Church Society by Rev. Dr. David Fekete.

**Marcie Larson, Elizabeth and Greg Sondern, Stacy Binns, George Bennett, EJ Read**, and **Robert and Katharine Franco** became members of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church.

### Death

**Gordon W. "Gordo" Blackmer**, 91, passed away January 1, 2009 after a short illness. Gordo attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Always an avid photographer, he served in World War II with the U.S. Army Air Corps Strategic Bombing Survey. He worked in retail photography, serv-

ing as Vice President of Brandon's for 40 years.

He is survived by his wife of 67 years, Janet C. Blackmer; two sons, Edward M. (Gwen) Blackmer and Gregory W. Blackmer; two daughters, Nancy C. Blackmer and Ginger R. Jacobs; five grandchildren; and two great-grandchildren. A warm, wonderful and generous man, he will be greatly missed by all who knew him.

### NCC Report

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continued acceptance of my Swedenborg-inspired suggestions. In the hallways of the Renaissance Hotel, I was being sought out by the very bishops and prelates that had made me feel so small a few days before. "Did that go according to your expectations last night?" they asked. "Is there anything more you feel that we should do?"

The New Church does have a voice in this body—a voice that can influence what is considered by 45 million members of NCC churches in more than 100,000 congregations. Where else can we find such leverage to bring New Church truths to so many? Our voice has been muted somewhat in recent years, as there has been a lack of

Gordon was a lifelong member of the Boston New Church. His father was Horace Blackmer, a long serving secretary of General Convention and general secretary of the Massachusetts New Church Union. His Mother, Edith, was a daughter of Rev. John Whitehead, who was known for his work with the New Church theological School and translation of some of Swedenborg's writings. ☩

continuity in our participation (Mary Ann Fischer's faithful service notwithstanding). Many "veterans" of NCC still remember fondly the committed service and leadership of Robert McCluskey, Marlene Laughlin, and Dorothea Harvey in the past; at present, no New Church members serve on any of the Council's committees. We have become a feeble presence—but we can regenerate!

As our participation has waned, there has been some question about Convention's continued support of this organization. Based on my first-hand experience, I respond that we should redouble our efforts. ☩

Rev. Douglas Moss is pastor of the Hillside Community Church in El Cerrito, California.

### The Editor's Desk

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to work with the author of the article to rewrite anything that could be construed as offensive. I failed in that responsibility, and for that I apologize to the readership, the members of the church, whom I serve, and the author of the article, Steve Sanchez.

I also believe, however, that my decision to publish the article was appropriate. As a student at the Swedenborgian House of Studies, Steve Sanchez is qualified to write such an article, and the points he makes are within the recognized context of the interpretation

and application of Swedenborg's writings. My personal views of the damage such views can cause were not sufficient reason to reject the article. *The Messenger* is not a peer-reviewed academic journal; it is a multi-purpose publication that provides a wide range of articles for readers to pick and choose from. Theological articles can be challenging for the lay reader, particularly a reader from outside the Swedenborgian tradition.

*The Messenger*, of course, does not necessarily share the views and opinions of authors appearing in its pages. Nevertheless, as its editor, it is my re-

sponsibility to limit false impressions about our church that readers might take away. I do not mean that *The Messenger* should not be provocative, or that it should avoid controversy, but as an official window on the General Convention of the New Jerusalem, that it should reflect the sensitivity to non-Swedenborgians and non-Christians that characterize our church's stance in the world. I will to do my best to provide a venue for stimulating writing on issues concerning Christianity and Swedenborgianism, while editing with great care and sensitivity. ☩

—Herb Ziegler

### 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 15 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.



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**Convention '09**

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**June 24-28**

Hosted by the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound  
Celebrating Heaven on Earth, by Expressing Divine Love  
and Wisdom, Through Worship, the Arts, and Service.

## Puget Sound Gears Up for 2009 Annual Convention

It's not too soon to start making plans to attend the 2009 Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church from June 24–28. The Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound is preparing a memorable convention.

Accommodations and events are located on the beautiful campus of the University of Washington in the University

District of Seattle, with a view across Union Bay toward Lake Washington.

Business sessions will be punctuated with presentations of *The Complete Works of Swedenborg, Abridged* performed by the attendees. Any person or group interested in participating in the performances should contact Nancy Apple at 425.744.6712.

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