

## 185th Annual Convention

# Swedenborgians Meet in Seattle

Representatives from across the US and Canada (and the UK) gathered in Seattle in Late June, 2009, for the 185<sup>th</sup> annual convention of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian Church in North America), titled “Sailing the Spiritual Sound,” as guests of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound and the Pacific Coast Association.

Ministers arrived Sunday, June 21, to convene the annual two-day meeting of the Council of Ministers (See article on page 105). At the conclusion



The procession of Banners.

The convention opened Wednesday evening at the University of Washington with the procession of banners of societies and other constituent bodies.



The host society's Puget Sound Revue welcoming performance.

bly with an historical note on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Alaska-Yukon Pacific Exposition (page 107).

Members of the Puget Sound Society performed a welcoming skit wherein they portrayed aspects of Puget Sound through a procession of characters and wonderfully creative props, accompanied by the aforementioned musical duo.

The featured speakers were two members of a trio that bills itself as the Three Interfaith Amigos, Rabbi Ted Falcon and Sheikh Jamal Rahman



Ministers' communion service before entering the tepee.

of their meeting on Tuesday evening, they gathered at the home of Eric and Lisa Allison to take part in a communion service in the tepee Eric and Lisa have in their back yard, concluding the evening by sharing fellowship and refreshments provided by host committee volunteers.

Members of the General Council arrived Tuesday for their pre-convention meeting on Wednesday.



L. to R.: Musical duo Steve Mason and Lisa Allison, and Emcee Paul Martin.

The host committee entertained with a welcome show hosted by Paul Martin and the musical duo of Steve Mason and Lisa Allison.

Erni Martin offered an address on the meaning of “the spiritual sound” (page 110) and gave an introduction to the ministers of the Northwest (page 106). Lon Elmer addressed the assem-



Rabbi Ted Falcon Sheikh Jamal Rahman continues on page 104

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## The Editor's Desk



### Sermons

The annual convention presents a daunting challenge to me as the reporter, photographer, editor, and producer of *The Messenger*. Catching the perfect moment in a photograph requires having the camera ready at all times and taking lots of photographs. (I have yet to catch the perfect moment.) Reporting on convention requires attending every event and taking notes at the moment or shortly thereafter. (My notes are spotty.) Editing and producing require a lot of time and attention to fit a lot of material into a limited space in a pleasing way that accurately reflects the events.

At my age, having outgrown the natural curiosity and delight in learning of youth, it is good to have these challenges to prod me. I was reminded of this once again by the challenge of

presenting Junchol Lee's sermon in this convention issue of *The Messenger*.

Sermons are a unique form of communication. Ideally, they are informative, provocative, engaging, inspiring, pithy, intellectually challenging, and accessible. They should be tightly organized and draw to a conclusion with a lesson that supports scripture and Swedenborgian theology. And they must be serious, but peppering them with a touch of humor always helps. They share something with the presentation of an academic paper, a political speech, a dramatic performance, and a stand-up comedy routine. A given sermon, delivered from a given preacher, displays a unique mix of these elements.

As the editor responsible for reproducing Junchol's convention sermon in print, I discovered a new challenge. Junchol does not write down his sermons. With the help of Bob Tafel's video of the event, I transcribed Junchol's sermon and quickly realized that a direct transcription would not accurately convey the experience of those who received the sermon live. So I had to find a way to reproduce faithfully Junchol's words while adjusting them to reflect how Junchol's presence and delivery were an integral part of the message. With Junchol's help I composed a hybrid of reporting and transcription that captures the essence of his sermon. But as with all sermons, to receive its full impact, "you hadda be there."

For those who missed it, I encourage you to read it—it's good—and then resolve to attend next year's convention in St. Paul so you can receive John Maine's sermon live with Swedenborgians from across North America.

### A Job Well Done

I heard countless comments at the annual convention praising the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound host committee and volunteers, under the leadership of Nancy Apple, Lisa Allison, and Steve Mason, for

their preparations, presentations, and assistance that made the convention comfortable and memorable. Renée Helenbrecht did an excellent job of administering her first convention. (She had, of course, a talented and experienced mentor in Martha Bauer.) Ken and Laurie Turley prepared a wonderful musical program, and Steve Mason and Lisa Allison provided memorable musical interludes. The convention choir, Janice Earl, and many others contributed their considerable song writing, singing, and instrumental talents. President Chris Laitner conducted well-organized meetings with a variety of interesting presentations interspersed with business. I congratulate everyone who contributed to the success of a memorable, stimulating, and smooth-running convention.

—Herb Ziegler

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## the Messenger

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## The President's Address: Convention 2009

# Reflections over Tea



In 1993, a mountaineer named Greg Mortenson drifted into an impoverished village in the Karakoram Mountains

in Pakistan after a failed attempt to climb K2 (8,611 meters). Moved by the inhabitants' kindness, he promised to return and build a school. Ultimately, over the next decade, with the help of substantial financial gifts and the establishment of a non-profit organization, Mortenson built not just one, but 55 schools—especially for girls—in the forbidding terrain.

The chief of the village where Mortenson had been nursed back to strength imparted wisdom and sage advice to him, one piece of which provided the title of the bestselling book, *Three Cups of Tea*. Haji Ali said, "Here in Pakistan, we drink three cups of tea to do business: the first you are a stranger, the second you become a friend, and the third, you join our family, and for our family we are prepared to do anything—even die."

Over the past five years, I have been honored and humbled by the hospitality extended to me as I've traveled to so many of our churches. I've certainly enjoyed hospitable cups of tea and excellent conversation, so my message today is based on the fact that we have stopped being strangers, that we have established friendships, and that we all are connected by the people and ministries that comprise our denominational community.

## State of the Church

Just before the 2004 annual convention at which I officially stepped into the office of president, my predecessor, the Rev. Ron Brugler, wrote an article in *The Messenger* that was a letter to me—a kind of passing of the torch of presidency on to the next president with some helpful thoughts and insights. One of the things that he said was that the president needed to be a "cheerleader" for the church. I know what he meant. It's important to affirm people and programs as they work with love and care for their local churches and in their local communities. It's important to support useful ideas and offer encouragement. It's important to notice points of pride and to celebrate excellence.

On the other hand, it's also important to be aware of when something needs to be changed. It's healthy to notice things that need improvement, and it's caring to honor those things that have reached their fullness, and to allow them to retire into memory to become part of the rich soil that nurtures something new.

## How Do We See the Church?

Each of us views our Church through an individual lens. My lens is defined by several things including the unique perspective of serving as president of the denomination, through which office I've been able to travel to meet so many of our members and share in church and association activities. Two other parts of my viewing lens are my age, 62, and my personal relationship

with the Swedenborgian Church.

I grew up going to the Church of the Holy City in Detroit. While I may have gone through phases of questioning, I never thought seriously about *not* being a Swedenborgian. From the time I received my degree forward, I have not lived anywhere near my own—or any other—Swedenborgian Church, so I've spent many years as a very sporadic attendee. I've been to church more regularly over the past five years of my presidency than at any other time since my mid-twenties. However, there have been many other Church connections over the years; I've attended church camp and association meetings, I've been a delegate to annual conventions a number of times, and I've served on denominational boards and committees where community is built in, gathering and sharing with other church mem-

**... it's caring to honor those things that have reached their fullness, and to allow them to retire into memory to become part of the rich soil that nurtures something new.**

bers from around North America—and a Sunday service is attended if we happen to be meeting near one of our churches.

The focus of my church-viewing lens is that of a life-long member.

The Swedenborgian Church of North America is not the same as it was when I was growing up in it. We are smaller in number. When I was a teen, we had "house parties" where groups of teens would travel to a selected church and spend a long weekend. Some of the churches I visited as a teen no longer exist. Some of the kids that I went to church camp at Almont with came from churches that no longer exist. My Detroit church youth group, the Senior League, had around a dozen teens in it annually. My church had eighty members or so and five Sunday school class groups, including adults.

Denominationally, our structure was

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At a ceremony on Friday evening, July 25, 2009, Cameron Scranton Linen and Alison Smith Longstaff were ordained as ministers of the Lord in the Christian Church by the Swedenborgian Church in North America (General Convention of the New Jerusalem). After receiving their commissions, the ordinands each gave a short sermon to commence their service to the Lord.

## Cameron Linen: Putting Others First

### Philippians 2:1–4

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup>then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

**G**ood Evening. It truly is an honor to be speaking to you here tonight. I am humbled and grateful that I am about to join the ranks of your ordained clergy. That being said, let me preface this short sermon by letting you know that when I told people I was planning on using a Pauline Epistle for my scripture reading (Philippians 2:1–4),

I was met with a rich gamut of facial expressions—none of which were remotely close to what would be considered encouraging or positive. However, I feel better knowing that Rev. Kathy Speas and Rev. Erni Martin did it first . . . so blame them.

I chose the passage for the simple reason that it speaks to me. After all,

I'm standing before you, seeking ordination in order to serve the Lord. The entire premise of my ministry is based on putting others before myself. That is, in essence, my job.

Service to others is a constant theme throughout my life. One area of my life where I have found myself serving others is the Fire and EMS Service, where I have been both a firefighter/EMT and a firefighter/paramedic for fourteen years. Until now, working in stressful environments with people who are not having a very good day has been my ministry. It's a humbling experience to know that the Lord's influx allows me to serve those who are sick or dying,

and my intentions are to continue to do so as an ordained minister. I will be ministering to those in need in a more overtly Christian manner, as a chaplain.

Fortunately, serving others is not just the responsibility of the clergy—it's your job as well.

We are all commissioned by the Lord to shun selfish ambition and vain conceit in order to humbly serve others. Our shared life experience shows us, however, that this is often no easy task. Humility is often in short demand. Selfless service is seemingly discouraged nowadays more often than it is encouraged.

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Cameron Scranton Linen

## Ordination: Alison Smith Longstaff and Cameron Scranton Linen



The laying on of hands. Top L. to R.: Vida Jaugelis, Pat T., the Rev. Andy Stinson, the Rev. Wilma Wake, the Rev.



# Alison Longstaff Cameron Linen

## Alison Longstaff: Welcoming the Stranger



Tukos, the Rev. John Maine, Phil Longstaff, Chris Laitner, Ken Turley. Bottom: Alison Longstaff, Cameron Linen.



### Matthew 25: 34–40

<sup>34</sup>Then the Sovereign One will say to those on the right hand, "Come, you blessed of Abba God, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: <sup>35</sup>for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; <sup>36</sup>I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me."

<sup>37</sup>Then those honorable ones will answer, saying, "Teacher, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? <sup>38</sup>When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? <sup>39</sup>Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?"

<sup>40</sup>And the Sovereign One will answer and say to them, "Truly, I say to you, every time you did it for one of the least of my sisters or brothers, you did it for Me."



Allison Smith Longstaff

discrimination in every form. We all know injustice, not just women, not just blacks, not just immigrants. Every one of us in this room, at one time or another in our lives has felt marginalized, singled out, or picked on. From playground bullying, to being the last one picked for basketball, to being refused service or support because our income is too low, we have all experienced that feeling of the door slamming in our face—of being deemed unworthy. We all know the emotional experience of having the pack withdraw from us and look at us with dislike. It feels rotten.

If an infant experiences the withdrawal of the pack, it faces certain death. Such abandonment communicates profound dehumanization. That child is considered a waste of time and resources. How can the most helpless and innocent of all human beings comprehend such a rejection? Perhaps that is why all forms of rejection cut so deep. It communicates to our "lizard brain" that we are singled out to

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In ancient Rome and Greece, newborn baby girls were regularly abandoned by the roadside and left to die. Girls were considered a liability. They cost money to marry off, and they couldn't carry on the family name. By the time of the Lord's birth on earth Roman society was experiencing a severe shortage of women because of the neglect and abandonment of baby girls. But it didn't stop the practice.

There are parts of the world where girls are still treated this way. Indeed, the practice of subjugating and devaluing women continues in many subtle ways in every corner of our world. Our culture has come a long way, but we've still got a long way to go.

However, this isn't meant to be a "women's lib" talk. It is a cry against



## Convention Sermon

## Seeking and Finding

BY JUNCHOL LEE

Each year, a Swedenborgian minister is selected as convention minister for the next year's annual convention. The convention minister plans the concluding communion service and delivers a sermon. The Reverend Junchol Lee was selected as convention minister for 2009, and delivered his sermon at the service held on Saturday morning, June 26. The sermon has been edited for publication, with transitional notes in italics.

**T**he Rev. Junchol Lee has a relaxed, conversational manner. He connects directly with the worshippers by speaking without notes, looking directly at individuals. His message is laced with self-deprecating humor and wry observations about his life.

*In his opening, Junchol explained that he does not write out his sermons; he conceives them and then speaks from his mental notes. He also explained that he is a highly organized person, preparing for future events and commitments long before the event. Naturally then, he prepared not one, but two*

. . . good rational, intellectual, well thought-out sermons, one based on the Bible, another on Swedenborg. I thought, "I'll just choose one."

*Explaining his daily practice of meditation, he related how he was meditating the day before arriving in Seattle.*

. . . and something almost like a thunderbolt hit my heart, and I felt those two sermons I had prepared disappearing from my memory—now they're gone, so I have nothing to say! Well—no; God doesn't work that way, right? So, God was telling me, "You should tell your friends, your brothers and sisters, about your life."

You may wonder how an Asian guy ended up standing here. I was born in

South Korea. I hated English throughout my entire school life in Korea. Did you know that? In all my classes in English, from middle school through college, I never got higher than a C minus—solid C minus all the way. Doesn't that tell you something? And I'm here preaching in English. Odd—God really works in odd ways, but that really brings us miracles. It changes our attitudes, and you'll never know where you'll end up.

*Junchol shared that the first time he thought, "Why was I born?" he was only six years old. But why this thought at such a young age? His parents had divorced when he was three. They were too involved with themselves to pay attention to him, so he spent much time with his grandparents. But he was stuck between two families pointing at each other and blaming the divorce on each other's child.*

So one family told me, "Your dad is horrible." while the other said, "Your mom is . . ."—I can't repeat it. I found myself trapped between those angry, sad families. I was just trying to say I didn't choose to be born here. And so, I was six years old, sitting on a hill in the village where my grandparents were living. I felt no love—just looking at the sky—and I thought, "Why am I here? Why was I born? What should I do?" Honestly, I wanted to stop existing at that moment—and I was only six. But that was the beginning of my spiritual journey.

I've read a lot of books. If you check out my bookshelves, you will not know what my profession is. I read business, literature, history, psychology, science books about the human brain, and even books written by atheists. Why? My subject has been and still is the hu-

man. Growing up in such a dysfunctional family and encountering so many self-destructive adults persuaded me to pursue study of the human. Why do we do things in certain ways and why don't we do what we're supposed to do? And why, sometimes, can we not love the ones we should love? Life seems so complicated, but it is so simple. All the leaders of all religions tell us, "Live your love and love one another." Is it easy . . . no, it's hard. And there's another consideration: you can live your love, but are you sure you're not hurting anybody by doing so? Amazingly, we assume so many things to be true simply because, "It is true in my head." I tried to avoid being trapped in such misery, but later I had to discover that I too am merely human.

When I was nineteen, after studying Confucianism and Buddhism, I decided to become a Taoist. I was determined to eliminate every conscious, emotional feeling because emotions seemed to be totally useless. Why? They seemed to bring only one thing: pain. And all the emotions I felt seemed to work in negative ways. So I worked hard to transform my mind into a machine by using meditation techniques that I had learned from Buddhism. It took me many years, but I was quite successful at the end. I felt invincible and somehow peaceful. How sad. That's when I came to America.

I started to read Swedenborg at Bryn Athyn College, and he gave me something strange—he showed God. This God does not judge, and does exactly as he says, and—this is the best part—this God simply welcomes you and accepts you wherever you are. You don't have to prove anything. You don't have to be better to be loved by God. And I thought, "Wow." And I got in trouble.

I had this well-built defense system that was protecting and defending me, and Swedenborg was telling me that

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I had to tear it down. I was scared to death. Why? I didn't know what's out there. What I knew was it's safe in here. It took me many years of sorting, meditating, and praying to be willing to try to trust just one person. The Old Testament says, "I brought you up from Egypt, brought you into the land that I had promised to your ancestors." See? A personal connection: God was telling me, "I brought you here; I want to liberate you from your dungeon." But I was saying to God, "Who are you? Do I even know you? Can I really trust you?" It took me five years.

The turn-around occurred during my second year at the Swedenborg School of Religion. I locked myself in my room—I'm extroverted by the way. So, an extroverted guy was sitting in his room meditating all day every day for a week. Why? There was a task that I had been working on very hard. Then, one day after meditating for perhaps two hours, I felt like I was in a dark, narrow tunnel. It seemed I had been walking in the tunnel for a while. A voice kept whispering, "You have to keep walking." I said, "Why? I'm tired. I want to go back." This was not fun. I had to continue walking through the long and dark passageway. And who knew whether what was at the other end was better than where I started? However, as I neared the end of the tunnel I saw light and I felt very strange and uncomfortable. At that point I turned around and went back to my safe haven.

You know, our spiritual growth does not happen like it does in novels or movies. It doesn't happen overnight—you read a book, then you are a dif-

ferent person—it doesn't happen that way. It takes a long period of conscious effort, not to change to be someone else, but to change who you are, more precisely, your perception of what you are. That's what God was telling me, "Junchol, you deserve better than this. You're hiding in the cave for too long. Come out."

After a few months I finally made it out. Wow! The world looked different. Bright and shining—amazing. And I felt peaceful, very peaceful. I cannot describe all the wonders that I felt, but that's the reason I'm standing here to-



day as a Swedenborgian minister. If that hadn't happened, I'm quite sure I would have quit that "boring school" and done something else. What happened to me was I read Swedenborg, prayed with it, and God came to me. Wow. It's real, not just a story in books. Of course, God cannot be found in books. Books serve only as a connector. What is essential in those books is not what's written in them, but what we hope to gain from them. In other words, we are the igniters of miracles prepared by God since the beginning.

What I had been doing was trying to forge my own god out of my intellectual search. I needed my version of God instead of finding the real God. And if you find yourself in the same circumstances, my recommendation is to do a very simple thing: pray to the real God. That might sound kind of lame, I know, but pray. It works, but only if you believe in it.

I felt peace, and can you guess what happened next? "Hey, I get one step up—I'm good"—ego. This thing almost never dies. Whenever there's an opportunity, it rises, sneaks up, and tells you, "You're good, you're better." So, I was in a peaceful place, but my ego was coming up and . . . I got married.

I was 35 years old at that point, and I had conducted over 100 weddings and counseled over 50 wedding couples; I had read I don't know how many books about marriage and . . . see where this is going now? I thought, "Hey, I

know everything about marriage. I won't have any problem in my marriage." Wonderful, isn't it?

The married life has taught me

a lot of things in the past five years. Above all, what I have learned and am still learning is what love is, and what it means to love somebody else. Today, and probably almost every Sunday morning, we read together the Affirmation of Faith as it is written in the program: we love each other as ourselves. "What a lie," I thought after the marriage. A truth unsealed in my mind that I was not even able to love my own wife as myself. If that is my limit, how true would it be when I say that I love you as myself? However, the beauty of love is that it's non-controlling and accepting—and above all, it's just there. Sometimes you don't have to do anything. I observe many times that my American friends seem to be scared in relationships, probably feeling that they are constantly being pushed to do something—just keep moving and thinking. Do you feel that

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## Convention 2009

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(Pastor Don Mackenzie was unable to appear.)

Since September 12, 2001, the Amigos have organized interfaith gatherings and engaged in interfaith conversations and activities in Greater Seattle. They host the "Interfaith Talk Radio Show," meet weekly for mutual spiritual direction, and have recently published a book together, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi & a Sheikh*. They spoke directly and warmly to the audience about the universality of faith and love, and the power we each have to contribute to understanding people of different faiths. Both men illustrated their points with humorous stories that made their points with pithy directness.

The opening session concluded with a benediction pronounced by the Rev. Eric Allison, who is learning to speak again after experiencing a stroke at this time last year.

Friendships were renewed and made as participants gathered for a reception afterward.

Each day's business session was preceded by a worship service. On Thursday it was a memorial service to remember Swedenborgians who have passed fully into the spiritual world. On Friday the teens of SCYL created and conducted a moving service, and on Saturday, the convention communion service was highlighted by convention minister Junchol Lee's sermon and the worshipful performance of the convention choir, under the direction of Laurie Turley.

The first business session opened

with the traditional (and constitutionally required) reading of the rules of order for the meeting, performed this year as an interactive narrative by Susan Wood-Ashton and Susannah Currie.

Reports were delivered by President Chris Laitner; Treasurer Susannah Currie; Kevin Baxter, secretary of the Council of Ministers and co-editor with Leah Goodwin of *Our Daily Bread*; Matthew Fleming, chair of the nominating committee; Herb Ziegler, editor of *The Messenger*; Harvey Tafel, business manager of the Wayfarers Chapel; Kurt Fekete, director of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League; the board of the online Swedenborgian Community; and Lon Elmer, chair of the credentials committee. Reports will be published in the annual *Journal of the Swedenborgian Church*.



Recognition for service: (l. to r.) Chris Laitner, Lee Woofenden, Matthew Fleming, Jane Siebert, Sandi Degi, and Nancy Apple.

President Laitner asked volunteers stepping down from service to the church in official capacities to come forward and be recognized. The following received thanks: Jim Erickson, vice president of Convention, 5 years, General Council, 4 years; Sandy Degi, General Council, 6 years; The Rev. Donna Keane, General Council, 3 years; Nancy Apple, Communication Support Unit (COMSU), 6 years; Katie Shelley Brown, Education Support Unit (EDSU), 6 years; Rev. Lee Woofenden, Information Management Support Unit (IMSU), 6 years; Bruce Hemmerich, Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU), 2 years; The Rev. Jane Siebert, Wayfarers Chapel Board of Mangers, 6 years; Mi-

chelle Vincent, Nominating Committee, 4 years; Matthew Fleming, Nominating Committee, 1 year.

In addition, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence was recognized and thanked for 25 years of service as an ordained minister of the church.

Elections were held after Andy Stinson and Ken Turley spoke on behalf of their candidacies for Convention president, the only contested office other than the nominating committee. The results were as follows: Ken Turley, president; Lori Steinhiser, vice president; Susannah Currie, treasurer; Susan Wood-Ashton, recording secretary; Carl Helm and David Vigas, General Council (layperson); Kit Billings, General Council (minister); Sue Ditmire, Education Support Unit (EDSU); Barbara Boxwell and Junchol Lee, Min-

istry Support Unit (MINSU); Beth Harvie, Communications Support Unit (COMSU); Andrew Sciarretta, Information Management Sup-

port Unit (IMSU); Robert Leas and Herb Ziegler, SHS Board of Trustees (representative class); Karen Conger, Nominating Committee.

The Rev. Sue Turley showed a film she has been producing and directing over the past two years, *Broken Hearts—Lifted Spirits*, which documents interviews with mothers of soldiers who died in military service.

Barb Halle and Lori Steinhiser showed a film they created for the Sunday School Association at the LaPorte New Church documenting the importance and success of their Sunday school program.

In a change of pace from business sessions, two sessions of mini-courses  
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# The Workings of COM

BY KEVIN BAXTER

For the most part, it is rare for the average member of the church to hear about the Council of Ministers, or COM as it is commonly referred to. Outside of its annual report to the floor of the Swedenborgian Church at the annual convention, the COM is a body that flies under the radar. It does not do this for any substantive reason; rather, as the profession-

al association for the ministers of the Swedenborgian Church, it provides a venue for face-to-face communication and joint action. Under the leadership of the chair of the Council of Ministers, the Rev. Mr. Andrew Stinson, and the Rev. Mr. Eric Allison before him, the COM has been a bit more visible in response to the shifting ecclesiastical needs of the church brought about by the election of the first lay president of

the Swedenborgian Church.

What is it that we do? Well, each year we gather as a council to examine the ecclesiastical issues of the Swedenborgian Church, which are issues that cover the gamut of a minister's professional career, from requirements for ordination to transferring a minister to the roll of former ministers. It is also a place for the ministers to gather and share new ideas. Through both programs and discussions of ministries, ministers can gain new insights to help lead the church.

This year, the COM heard from two speakers. Jeffrey Cheifetz, the interim minister of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, spoke to the council about the importance of the interim process for keeping churches healthy and vital. Anna Woofenden, a member of the General Church in Colorado, presented the Journey Project, a congregational resource for outreach developed and produced by the New Church (the General Church of the New Jerusalem). These two speakers, along with the opportunity for the ministers present to share with fellow ministers, made this year's meeting a

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## Seeking and Finding

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you cannot sit still, but you have to do something either to make your relationship work or improve it? My suggestion is that one day you may want to just sit by your loved ones relaxing your brain and mind, and simply enjoy the presence of them and their love for you. Also, if you can, try to bring out your love to be present with them. When this happened to me, I felt that my heart was actually moving (I mean being alive!), and that was for me the second big step.

*Junchol illustrated how his normal emotional state is a flat line. He explained that what sometimes sounds like passion from him is just passion of the voice, reminding us that he has read thousands of books. His wife, however, experiences peaks and valleys of emotions,*

“... and I like it.”

*At first he wanted to fix her by smoothing out the peaks and valleys, and she tried to fix him. Together they found a balance.*

I call her my heart. Her joy is my joy. That's why I am saying this amazing power of love is real. It is good to love and to be loved. I thought, “It is wonderful.”

And then, a son was born to us. I

call him my miracle. I never pictured myself a father. The first happy and loving family I ever experienced was Barb Halle's family, with whom I stayed when I was 26. Think about it—I hadn't seen a single good family until I was 26 years old! I had no plans ever to have children or even to get married. I had no idea how to be a father and still am not sure how to be a good father. I saw my father only four times after I was four years old. Nobody wanted me as a son.

When my son was zero days old, I held him in my arms and looked at him, but somehow I wasn't scared. I felt that something big was just added to my heart. He was and still is a living miracle from God. And my wife is the best gift my God has given me.

Think about it. Where do you think you find love? Don't try the Bible. It's not in there. Don't try one of Swedenborg's books either, because it's not in there. Where? It doesn't happen in your brain either. So seeing it doesn't matter, your heart has to feel it and be moved by it. And if it happens to you for the first time, you will be scared to death; you don't know what it is. “Oh my goodness, am I dying?” was my first reaction to it. God is calling all of us in that love that you can find in your heart because of others.

My wife did not hand over love to

me, nor did my son. Something happened in my heart: walls were broken; I was pouring this thing out—and it was not from me, it was from God. I believe in my God, who is explained by Swedenborg, and I'm proud to be a Swedenborgian minister. And I hope you are proud of what you believe in. Why? It is a real thing. Believe—it will come. ☩

The Rev. Junchol Lee was pastor of the Cleveland Swedenborgian Church (2000-2009) and is now pastor of the Calgary New Church and the Western Canada Conference.

# Ministers Of The Northwest

This address was given at the opening ceremony of the annual convention.

BY ERNEST O. MARTIN

**T**his evening we will introduce ministers of the Swedenborgian Church of the Northwest who are still living in the Greater Seattle area.

But before we present them, we want to honor the memory of the Rev. Calvin E. Turley and the Rev. Owen Turley, who served the church so admirably in the 1960s, and who were on the faculty of the Swedenborgian School of Religion supervising an intern program. They were instrumental in building a fabulous glass and concrete church, cantilevered over a hillside in Bellevue, Washington. Calvin later got his doctorate and moved with his wife, Marilyn, to Newton, Massachusetts where he was a member of the faculty of the Swedenborg School of Religion, and also served as president of our denomination. Calvin suffered an untimely death in 1984. His brother, Owen, retired to Oakland, California, and died this past year.

The Rev. David Powell Johnson served with Calvin and Owen Turley as part of a team ministry, and after the Turleys left, Dave continued to serve the local church community on a part-time basis until 1982. At the age of 96, Dave is our senior minister, and as you might expect, did not feel up to hiking the Washington University campus and joining us this evening. Dave sends his warm greetings to us all, and asks the Lord's blessing upon us. As an indication of his age, I will point out that in 1917, Four-year-old "rud-

dy-faced" David Johnson participated in the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the General Convention. Anyone else who attended that convention—82 years ago—and remembers it, please stand, if you're able.

The Rev. Paul Wickham Martin, my son and heir, succeeded David Johnson in 1982, and has served his 27 years of



ministry in the Northwest. In 1985 he incorporated the Swedenborg Spiritual Growth Center and established a bookstore at the historic Stone House in Redmond. The center grew rapidly and moved three times to larger quarters. With his wife, Sandra, Paul also established the

Mosswood Hollow Retreat Center at their 40-acre home in Duvall, in the foothills of the Cascades, and they continue to expand the programs there. Last weekend the General Church held a marriage retreat at Mosswood. Our local church will hold a special service there in August.

As the church and bookstore grew in the 1990s, they were awarded a grant by the Los Angeles Church, which was used to employ the Rev. Stephen Pults as the full-time minister of the church from 1994 to 1996. At the end of this term, Steve and his family stayed in the Seattle area, and he took a staff position for the YMCA. Steve is a native of the Seattle area but traveled east for his ministerial training at the Swedenborg School of Religion. Upon ordination, he served our church in Detroit, Michigan, before beginning service back in the Northwest.

To insure accuracy and objectivity, I will introduce myself. I'm the Rev. Ernest Martin, a fifth-generation Swedenborgian, with 57 years in the minis-

try. I retired in 1999 and moved to the Northwest. Three weeks later I came out of retirement, and volunteered to serve as full-time assistant to my son Paul, at a salary of \$1.00 per year, and was paid two years in advance. Besides working at the bookstore, I also preached from time to time at our local church and at Kelowna, British Columbia, to keep my hand in, as it were. I served on the Wayfarers Chapel Board for six years, and was privileged to write a book on the Chapel.

It is now my honor to present my good friend, the Rev. Eric J. N. Allison. Eric served pastorates in LaPorte, Indiana, and Kitchener, Ontario, and then became Convention's consultant on church growth. He was intrigued by the possibilities for growth here in the Seattle area, working in conjunction with Paul and the Stone House Bookstore. Eric came to the Northwest at the beginning of the year 2000, just after the Pacific Coast Association purchased a 15,000 square foot complex for the book store and church on Rose Hill in Kirkland. Church attendance grew rapidly, and we seemed to be sailing with the wind. But a recession set in, the stock market plunged, and officers of the Association faced the threat of a real estate foreclosure. The property was sold, and the new owners asked the church and the bookstore to leave. Through his charm, Eric attracted the attention of a dance studio owner who offered us free use of her studio on Sunday mornings. With a new lease on life, the church community grew. With floor to ceiling mirrors on two walls, it appeared that our attendance was two or three times the actual attendance.

Dreams for the future were most optimistic under Eric's inspiring leadership, and that of his wife, Lisa. For twenty years Lisa and her twin sister, Linda have been involved in the music program of the church, which has been an essential part of our church life. Eric

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# Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition Centennial Celebration 1909–2009

This address was given at the opening ceremony of the annual convention.



BY LON  
ELMER

If you were one of the approximately 240,000 people in Seattle on Sunday morning of

July 25, 1909, who was not sleeping off a Saturday night drunk, or waking up in an opium den in Chinatown, or in one of the houses of ill-repute located closer to the waterfront, then you were on your way to church. And, there were plenty of churches to choose from: almost 100, including one New Church, where the Rev. Dr. Frank Sewall, of Washington D.C., would be the guest preacher at the divine service

being held in Rainier Hall, located at 1420 2<sup>nd</sup> Avenue, starting at 11 A.M.

The front page of your morning newspaper announced, “First Aeroplane Crosses The English Channel.” But, the feature story—complete with large lithographic portraits—was “Hotel Scene of Double Tragedy: Burt Rumsey, of Colville, Washington, shoots woman who deserted him, then ends his own life.”

However, the big excitement in town was the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition located out in the country on the University of Washington property. You could get there by boat, by train, or on foot. But the much publicized way was the newly constructed trolley-line linking downtown with the Expo’s front gate.

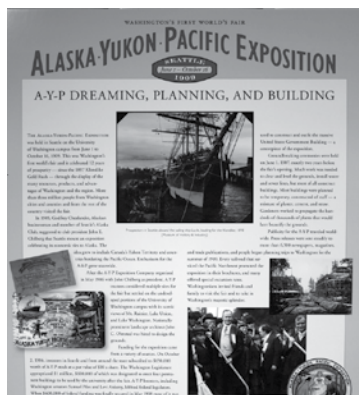
For 25 cents, you entered a world of wonders and curiosities. It being Sunday, the gates would not open until 1 P.M. The

Olmstead Brothers of Boston, Massachusetts, designed the Expo to save

many of the untouched old-growth trees remaining on the property. The centerpiece was Geyser Basin—a large, round fountain fed by a terraced waterfall cascading down from the Government Building—which offered an unobstructed view of Mt. Rainier. The fountain and view are still here, as are some of the old growth fir trees which the Olmstead Brothers saved.

At 2:30, Liberati’s Band played popular tunes in the Music Pavilion, and at 3:30, the Seattle Symphony Orchestra performed in the Washington Building. At 4 P.M., the Rev. Dr. Frank Sewall gave a lecture on Swedenborg in the Auditorium, because Sunday, July 25, 1909, was Swedenborg Day at the Alaska-Yukon-Pacific Exposition. ☩

Lon Elmer is a member of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound.



## Convention Report

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offered convention participants an opportunity to choose from topics presented by leaders from both inside and outside the church.

Tom Johnston, from Seattle, led two workshops. “Create Your Inner Sacred Space” taught participants how to create inner sacred space any time, any place. In “Create Your Total Health Lifestyle,” Tom led participants in locating individual motivational keys for crossing bridges.

The Rev. Karen Lindquist, Yana Vinko, and Michael Douglas of the Interfaith Community Church of Seattle led “The Sacred Circle,” a practice grounded in a universal worship that celebrates the unity and equality of all religious faiths on one altar.

The Rev. Junchol Lee explored “How to Grow a Swedenborgian Church,” Inspired by the book, *The Churching of America 1776-2005: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy*, by Roger

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and Lisa have indeed been a fabulous team. But a year ago, on the first day of last year’s convention, Eric suffered a massive stroke which caused him to retire from his active minister’s life. He has shown extraordinary courage and determination, and in the face of tremendous challenges, and with the indomitable support of Lisa, has pursued a rigorous recovery program. Under the blessed leadership of board president Steve Mason, the church has contin-

ued services throughout the last year, with the contribution of guest speakers from the Pacific Coast Association and the community, and is committed to employing new ministerial leadership and continuing the dynamic ministry initiated by Eric.

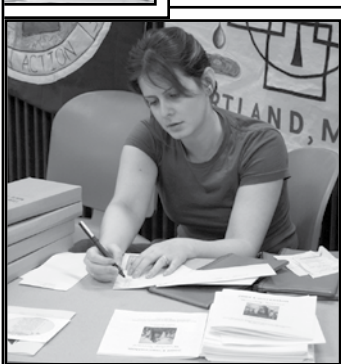
May we all stand in our personal tribute to the ministry of Eric and Lisa, and to all those other ministers and lay people who have served the Swedenborgian Church in the Northwest so faithfully in the last 50 years? ☩



Photo credit: Nancy Apple







# Sailing the Spiritual Sound

This address was delivered at the opening of the annual convention.

BY ERNEST O. MARTIN

I'm sure you all remember the convention themes of the last five years! What about the last three? As a reminder, in 2007 the theme was "Crossing the River Jordan." Last year it was "Shout with All Your Might" and this year it's "Sailing the Spiritual Sound."

Crossing the Jordan and conquering the city of Jericho involved battles. Swedenborgians seem fascinated with biblical wars, representing of course internal struggles. During my Sunday school days, our most popular hymn was "Onward Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus, going on before." This is not politically correct today, and it was considered a *faux pas* when President Bush called for a crusade against Muslim terrorists. The theme this year focuses on a more peaceful scene: "Sailing the Spiritual Sound." Here in the Northwest, the "Sound" refers to the inland waterways of Puget Sound, just off the northwestern part of Washington. It's a rather calm body of water, popular with daytime sailors and weekend fishermen, along with swimmers, wind-surfers, and kayakers. It's dotted with islands connected by ferries. Hovercraft make daily trips to Canada, and cruise ships depart on excursions to Alaska.

Our convention theme is drawn from the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, and Bible critics agree that the words were drafted by an optimist, who wrote:

Things calmed down after that and the church had smooth sailing for a while. All over the country—Judea, Samaria, Galilee—the church grew. They were permeated with a deep sense of reverence for God. The Holy Spirit was with them, strengthening them.

They prospered wonderfully. (Eugene Peterson's version of the New Testament).

Other translations speak of a time of peace and rest. Members of the planning committee liked the phrase "smooth sailing," and if you're a sailor, you can appreciate the attraction.

When we think of the early Christian Church, we are usually struck by accounts of martyrdom, crucifixion, and people thrown to the lions. The church did show remarkable growth for awhile, but later there were many struggles, including the Protestant Reformation and the Inquisition. The Enlightenment challenged orthodox Christianity and the struggle between science and religion continues, between evolution and creationism.

Along with many other Christian churches, our own denomination faces a serious crisis of membership and programming. Numerically we were much stronger 100 years ago. And yet there is little inclination to engage in critical self-evaluation and strategic planning. We're willing to make minor changes in church structure, or revise the by-laws, but apart from the Swedenborgian House of Studies, we don't seem to give much thought to the future. As a church we have celebrated the crossing of the Jordan and the victory at Jericho. We proclaim the Lord's Second Coming and are proud of the publication of a beautiful new edition of Swedenborg's writings. At our convention sessions, we rejoice in our heritage, enjoy uplifting music, honor new ordinands, and delight in various receptions. There surely is a need for such joyous activities, and especially at this time when the world is in economic recession, and wars and genocide continue. We are reminded daily of joblessness, home foreclosures, skyrocketing health costs, and cultural instability. It has often been said that the role of

the church is to afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted. It's generally agreed that the primary purpose of our annual conventions is to grant support and comfort, and to strengthen human relationships within the church.

One of my favorite passages in Swedenborg is his description of being in the stream of providence. In *Secrets of Heaven* (paragraph 8478—as you doubtless remember) he said, "People in the stream of providence are being carried along constantly toward happier things." Rather than bogging down in endless discussions of our problems, it may be more helpful to focus on how we can become more centered in the stream of providence. If we can experience the flow of the stream, we may be better able to enjoy more moments of smooth sailing. If we think of life as a constant retrace or series of battles, we can be paralyzed by our fears and insecurities. As Swedenborgians, we are committed to a life of usefulness; yet certainly there is a place for fun and relaxation, for social good times, especially at church conventions.

I'm convinced that forward steps in regeneration are more apt to occur when we allow ourselves to occasionally go with the flow, follow our bliss, swim with the current, and feel the wind behind us as we sail the waters of life.

Some of you may remember, as if it were yesterday, our last convention in the Seattle area 22 years ago, when we celebrated the Fourth of July on Blake Island in Puget Sound and sailed back into Seattle harbor under a double rainbow, with fireworks exploding from the shore. Surely that was an omen of our being in the stream of providence, even if just for the day.

Please join me, our local church, and the Pacific Coast Association as we seek to sail with the wind together, in the stream of providence, in the spiritual waters of Puget Sound. ☩



## SHS Corporation Meeting

The annual corporation meeting of the New Church Theological School (Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion) was held on June 24, 2009.

After an invocation by the Rev. Kathy Speas, the clerk, Lorraine Cuthbertson, invited members of General Convention who had not become members of the corporation in the past to sign the membership book.

The Rev. Jane Siebert gave an address on finding a new way. In the absence of the treasurer, she gave the financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2008.

The dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS), the Rev. Jim Lawrence, thanked the faculty, staff and students. He noted that we have been resident at the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) for eight years now, and in that time have graduated 21 students. There are nine current students matriculating in SHS-sanctioned degree programs.

He explained that we have had three types of graduates since beginning our partnership with PSR. The first type were "homegrown," coming to us from Swedenborgian churches. The second type were PSR converts originally enrolled in other programs at PSR. The third type are off campus students, studying for their degrees at other seminaries while taking courses from SHS. At present, there are no SHS students studying at the PSR campus. This situation has presented a new challenge.

In response to this challenge, the SHS board, PSR, and the committee on admission to ministry (CAM) have approved a new certificate which will

be available to non-resident students, including students studying at other institutions. It will also be available separate from a degree program to lay persons. The courses will be accredited, and the certificate will be awarded by PSR. The Swedenborgian certificate courses will be taught through video conferencing, online programming, and one-week to two-week intensive seminars at PSR, and possibly other locations.



Jane Siebert, SHS board chair

Another new initiative is a program of online courses for laypersons. The Rev. Kim Hinrichs reported that since the fall of 2007, SHS has offered eight online courses, and two more are planned for the fall of 2009.

She projected an example of online course content and demonstrated how to navigate the Web site. The courses have been well received; enrolment is increasing, and students report positively on their experiences in the courses. Rev. Hinrichs also reported that she has co-led three workshops; a retreat is in the planning stages.

Rev. Hinrichs reported that her efforts in fundraising this past year have yielded a higher level of giving.

Tom Neuenfeldt, chair of the nominating committee, presented the nominations of Lisa Oz and Victoria MacDonald for three-year terms on the Board of Trustees (at-large class). There were no nominations from the floor. The nominees were elected.

The dean and the chair conferred SHS certificates of completion to the Swedenborgian graduates of the PSR M.Div. program, Alison Longstaff and Cameron Linen.

The Rev. Young-Min Kim led the closing prayer. ☩

## Convention Report

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Finke and Rodney Stark, he shared discoveries, facts, and insights from his research on the issue over the past eighteen months.

The Rev. Kathy Speas brought songs from a group she sings with called the Threshold Choir, women who sing blessings, prayers, rounds, and chants at the bedside of people making the transition from one life to another. In the course "Threshold Choir Songs," she taught some of these songs and explored ways to use them in churches.

The Rev. Jenn Tafel taught a course called "Influx and Emotional Healing." She explored Swedenborg's understanding of influx and how that understanding can be integrated with the healing technique known as "Emotional Freedom Technique."

In "Spiritual Geo-Cacheing—Discovering the Hidden Treasures of Spirit/Living Courageously," The Rev. Carla Friedrich, with Rev. Freeman Schrock and Anna Woofenden shared how churches can journey together for a defined period while studying the same New Church education materials. They shared materials produced by the General Church based on the story of the prophet Elijah.

The Rev. Kim Hinrichs and Barb Boxwell led a seminar titled "MINSU and PUSH Funding Programs." They provided information on the differing missions of these two funding groups and the kinds of funding they offer.

Late Saturday afternoon gave participants the opportunity to tour Seattle and Union Bay in "duckboats," military surplus amphibious vehicles. Participants became performers on Saturday evening with "Swedenborg Abridged," skits based on Swedenborg's writings. The convention dancers ended the program with a dazzling piece using yards of colorful, rippling cloth carried over the audience. ☩

# A Jolt of Love: SCYL Memorial Day Retreat

BY DAVID J.  
FEKETE

I never fail to be impressed with how quickly and how deeply bonds of trust and friendship develop at teen retreats. They meet for only a few days several times a year, yet many feel that the friendships they form at retreats are more meaningful than those they form over years in school. And I found myself imperceptibly drawn into the sphere of mutual love that all the participants are drawn into—staff, ministers, drivers, and the teens. This was made apparent to me when I departed and faced the world again. The sensitivity, the kindness, the openness are all dear qualities that can be so lacking in our interactions with the world.

I find that it is the religious center of the retreats that open up sacred space for such intimacies to develop. There are sessions devoted to Bible and God that form the core and purpose for the retreats. It may appear that theological learning is not as significant as at a whole summer camp or a year of Sunday school, but the teens who come to retreats know why they are there and listen to the presenters, and one feels



L. to R.: Celie, Holly, Nina, Jess, Rachel, Cassie, and Alex.



Janice Earl and Nina Sasser preparing to perform at the Fryeburg New Church Sunday Service.

that in their own minds they are carried up into a spiritual consciousness. They find God in their own way, and that opens their hearts to each other. Teens have said as much privately. They have commented on how much they like the *whole* retreat, meaning the Frisbee games, mutual interaction, and the religious sessions.

Eighteen teens participated in the 2009 SCYL Memorial Day weekend retreat at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. This year we had four ministers who led sessions. Our theme was “The Bible: What’s in It for Me?” The ministers talked about how Bible stories relate to a person’s spiritual development through correspondences.

I presented the first session on the creation story. When I asked for feedback, the teens likened aspects of the story to their own lives. The Rev. Ken Turley presented the story of Samson and Delilah. He held the teens spellbound as he told the story. Some of the comments that emerged addressed why Samson ended up telling Delilah the real secret of his strength after she had betrayed him two previous times. The Rev. Lee Woofenden talked about the story of the flood and related it to self image

and God’s forgiveness and love to everyone. When he asked about story details, the teens were able to answer his prompts—showing attentiveness that one wouldn’t have guessed from the way the teens lounged during the talk.

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## Cameron Linen

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Additionally, we seem to be living in an era of rampant narcissism that our society seems to be embracing rather than discouraging.

As Paul mentions in Philippians, we are to put the interests of others before our own, just as we are to consider others to be better than ourselves. This does not mean that we should dispense with all traces of self-worth or accomplishment, but rather that we should constantly be cognizant of how our actions—or inaction—affects those around us in a negative manner. It's a simple concept, yet one we often seem to struggle with.

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Sunday morning we rode up to the Fryeburg New Church for the worship service, where we listened to Rev. Ken discuss the story in Revelation 14. At the worship service, two teens (Janice and Nina) performed a beautiful acoustic guitar duet of "I Will Follow You into the Dark."

Later that afternoon, Rev. Jen Tafel and Kurt Fekete led a session in which the teens randomly picked a Bible story to interpret on their own through art, drama, or any way they wished. They seemed to really enjoy this part of the retreat, and staff were treated to paintings, a puzzle they created, a song they wrote and performed, and personal interpretations.

During free time I found myself in several conversations with teens about career plans, family life, and concerns about their friends. While it sometimes appears that teens are happy with one another and don't need adults, I found that they still appreciate our presence and an open ear for their life issues.

The retreat ended with a communion service conducted by Rev. Jen and myself. Teens participated by reading

We must look to Christ; he is the example set for us to follow. He considers us better than himself, just as we should consider others better than ourselves. Christ put our well-being before his own, just as we should put the well-being of others before our own, both naturally and spiritually. He humbled himself to the position of a servant, just as we should humble ourselves and strive to serve others to the best of our abilities. He did that for each of us. Ultimately, if we truly want to live a spiritual life, it is our duty to mirror the love and humility of the Lord to everyone we encounter, and only then will we be truly worshiping the Lord. Amen. ☩

the Bible and a poem Rev. Jen brought to the service. They also provided guitar music and vocal harmonies as an introit and during communion. And there were tears. Tears of love and tears from those who would be moving on in life as they passed from teen into adulthood.

The dear friendships that develop at these retreats carry on outside the several meetings held throughout the year. Teens renew their friendships at Fryeburg Assembly and Almont summer camps and stay in contact through the Internet, sharing pictures and words. In every sense, charity comes alive at retreats, and this year was no different. The presence of God filled the retreat participants with affection and mutual care—from new teens to drivers and staff, and in me. While I put considerable time and work into my own contribution to this Memorial Day retreat, I came away gifted with much, much more than I arrived with. I feel truly blessed to join in the spirit of youth retreats as their chaplain in this very important ministry. ☩

The Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete is the SCYL chaplain.

## Alison Longstaff

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die. Though you and I may be relatively mature, and know in our heads that we will survive rejection just fine, experiences of rejection and abandonment can still throw us into a profoundly vulnerable emotional place. Our lizard brain sees the complete withdrawal of our support, resources, and foundation, and it believes we are going to die.

That was essentially what my emotional state was when I knocked on the door of this denomination. I had been cut out of my pack. My spiritual family had left me by the road to die, without a backward glance. I was devastated, kicked out of the only spiritual home I had ever known. After all, the Bishop's decree had come down from the top: "God says women can't be ministers, so shut up and stop your whining." (I think those were the bishop's exact words.)

Oh, I was welcome back, if I kept my mouth shut about the injustice and the sexism I was witnessing. I was welcome back if I gave up my call to ministry and suppressed it as unnatural and unfeminine. I was welcome back if I stopped being me. They wanted my body in the pews, but not my heart, not my intelligence, and certainly not my longing to be a minister.

So I stumbled up to your doors, "bleeding from every orifice" as one friend described me. I was an orphan. I was an unwanted child.

"... for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me; I was in prison and you visited Me."

I began to inquire at SHS, and was astonished to receive heartfelt congratulations and excitement over my call to ministry. Then the local congregation

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## President's Address

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larger and perhaps more formal. We could easily say that our membership numbered in the several thousands.

Over the decades, our church has changed substantially. Membership has decreased and churches have closed. We need to note that we are not alone as a denomination in seeing large changes in the state of our organization. Many mainline denominations have lost significant percentages of membership. There are Internet-based churches of various types, with some even serving as worship centers in cyber worlds such as Second Life. The continuing emergent conversation is impacting worship and church leadership practices in many ways, and the lessons being learned from the program-driven mega churches are providing numerous new methods of religious practice and organization. Knowing that changes are taking place throughout other denominations doesn't necessarily make us feel better or more secure though.

We have huge questions:

- Are we dying as an organization? Are we still a viable church? No, we are not dying, and yes, we are still viable. But we do need to be diligent in learning how "church" works in this post-modern age. This doesn't mean that we need to rid ourselves of our current ministries, but it does mean that we also need to find new ways to bring our message to the world as it now is. We need to embrace our beliefs and our purpose and make those things central to all that we do—whatever form that will take.

- Have we missed out on something by not changing in several ways over the past few years? What is our best use in the world today? These are some of the questions that our denomination is working on right now.

- Can we survive? Absolutely.

## Changes

Over the past five years, we've had two special gatherings from which have come some changes in program and in how we support our various ministries. We've also gathered input from convention delegates and through surveys of target groups. The General Council worked with a professional facilitator to identify more efficient denominational organizational methods.

All of this has been helpful, but it doesn't change the reality that the entire concept of church—church attendance, church membership, church programs—has changed. We no longer live in a society where people have time to volunteer, and churches traditionally have depended on many volunteers. We no longer live in a society where people hold the same job for perhaps their entire working life and settle into a community and stay. People are much more transient. Over the past four decades or so, Sundays stopped being "church days." I just read in a book called *When Better Isn't Enough* that people have begun to define "regular church attendance" as getting to church once in every four to six weeks, and it may not always be the same church.

The changes in the fabric of our lives are profound. The phrase "It's not your father's Oldsmobile" comes to mind, but even that phrase carries two outdated issues: the car is no longer identified as belonging to a male head of household, and Oldsmobiles are no longer made. Ask me. I live in Michigan.

But, using the car as an example, things have changed dramatically. Consider a Cadillac from forty years ago—all heavy steel, fins and chrome, and then consider the Smart Car, which is showing up in my community more and more.

The point is that the parameters against which we create and measure things have changed dramatically, so

that the things we need, the things that work in our lives today, also need to change.

Do we need to throw it all away and just start over? Are we on a journey to our end? I don't believe so.

Currently, we have 35 functioning church groups with 24 ministers serving those churches part or full time. Several other of our ministers are serving as visiting ministers to our congregations, leading online classes, or are working in other fields of public ministry such as professional chaplaincy, pastoral counseling, or spiritual growth centers.

In the past five years, we have established an online church community that is serving many uses in the life of the denomination; we have placed a minister in a young congregation in Lansing, Michigan; we have planted a new congregation in Silver City, New Mexico; and we have seen a significant number of new projects and community outreach endeavors in our local churches.

Our church camps continue to thrive, serving many children, young people, and adults through annual programs.

Our denominational youth director, Kurt Fekete, along with amazing volunteers throughout the denomination, offers excellent regional gatherings for the Swedenborgian Church Youth Leaguers and friends. This past year, a first retreat for "tweens" was held with great success.

The Swedenborgian House of Studies is offering online lay education classes as well as reconfiguring the way the Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies classes are offered, to allow for significant numbers of distance learners and also to create a student community of support and shared formation. We currently have ten students on the ordination path.

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Our denominational Internet ministry offers a variety of forums and chat rooms for discussion, worship and interaction.

The General Council continues to seek the best framework with which to support the work of the various ministries and programs of the denomination.

## Into the Future

Our common ground, our shared commitment to belief and to action, is based on our purpose as stated in our constitution, the essentials of the church, and our variety of active ministries that include our camps and our annual gatherings—all of the practices and events that make up and sustain us and our story. We who are currently connected to this church and those we have yet to meet will carry the work and spirit of the descent of the New Jerusalem into the future.

An organization's vision is a by-product of individual visions, a conversation concerning what we are about as a church, how it's different from what happens elsewhere, and why it matters.

We are empowered by our interconnectedness. All who are part of our denomination as members, friends, and visitors are necessary to the life of the church through bringing unique visions, skills, and love to the mix. In this age of instant communication and the ability to share new information immediately, we must recognize how we each impact and support one another in the life and journey of our church. We have the ability to share successes and celebrations so that others can benefit. We have the ability to mourn losses with each other. We have the ability

to be present immediately to help each other change and grow. Distant as we may be physically, we are able to function as a community.

Our purpose, our values, our interconnected community, our visions, and our commitment to being a church aligned with the needs of our twenty-first century world will support us for a long time to come.



At this annual convention, we will elect the next president of our denomination. That person will assume the office of the presidency at the close of the 2010 Convention. This next year the president-elect (that's a title, not an office) will gather information, learn "stuff," and organize the next phase of life for our organization.

In several professional instances in my life, I have worked as a kind of "middle" or "interim" person preparing an organization to move forward in new directions informed by its previous work and led by new possibilities. My experiences in this position have been primarily in educational settings, both as teacher and department chairman. It's a good role. There's a chance to affirm the past, to create something new that builds upon and beyond that, and there's the good feeling of handing off something that's in pretty good order and quite healthy to the next person who will take it on to a new level.

As I close out my term during this next year, we will continue our work toward a leaner organization, embracing the practice of being quickly and knowledgeably responsive to questions, concerns, and needs, and continue to create clear definitions of positions, interactions and responsibility in order to provide the necessary solid structure to support our life as a church moving

forward with new energy in a brand new world.

*(Note: During the following section of the address, a clip from the end of the movie, The Truman Show was shown with no sound. The clip served as a visual background to the last few sentences.)*

Some of you may be familiar with a movie called *The Truman Show*, in which Jim Carrey plays Truman, a character who has been born and brought up into adulthood in a pretty perfect world. Everyone involved in Truman's life except Truman himself knows that the world he inhabits is actually an incredibly intricate and complex stage set and that his life from birth into adulthood has been carried live by television, which the world has been watching.

At the end of the movie, due to several incidents that have occurred, Truman has set out in a small sailboat to try to reconnect with a friend who is no longer in his life. The people who oversee this huge real-life set try several things to deter Truman from the journey—the most major of which is a storm in which he nearly loses his life. The boat reaches the end of the constructed universe and the bow of the boat pierces a hole in the fabric of what Truman has always thought of as the horizon. Truman is disoriented and frightened finding himself in an absolutely unknown situation, literally throwing himself against this barrier. Finally, he figures out a way to begin a new journey, walking carefully on the perimeter of the obstacle until he finds a set of steps leading upward. Climbing them, he reaches a door with the word "exit" on it. As we watch, he opens the door . . . ready to step through.

The parallel for our Church is clear: the door is open. With prayerful consideration and faith in the Lord's good guidance, we'll walk through it. Amen.

—Christine Laitner, president of the Swedenborgian Church



# Women's Alliance Annual Meeting

The 106th annual meeting of the Women's Alliance was held on June 26, 2009, at the annual convention. Elections for the 2009–2010 year resulted in the following:

## Officers

- President: Nancy Little (Massachusetts)
- Vice president: Julie Viges (Michigan)
- Secretary: Pat Sommer (Ohio)
- Treasurer: Gloria Toot (Ohio)
- Mite Box chair: Barb Boxwell (Michigan)
- Round robin chair: Polly Baxter (Massachusetts)
- Publications chair: the Rev. Jennifer Tafel (Michigan)
- Religious chair: the Rev. Carla Friedrich (California)

## Nominating Committee:

- Chair: Leah Goodwin (Massachusetts, 2012)
- Denyse Daurat (Massachusetts, 2010)
- Missy Donaldson (Maryland, 2011)
- Jeannette Hille (Minnesota, 2013)

The president reported:

• The Alliance continues its long-standing tradition of raising money to support programs and individuals within our denomination. In an effort to save money on postage and printing, the annual appeal letter was printed in *The Messenger* this year instead of being mailed to individuals. It was also mailed to churches. The response rate was about 25 per cent of what it was last year. As a result, the executive committee decided to mail next year's annual appeal to individuals.

• The executive committee met via conference call twice, in November and June. We all agreed that this was

a great way to meet and communicate and will likely continue to have conference calls during the year.

• A blog was established at <http://womensalliance.blogspot.com>. I would love to have other contributors. If individuals or local alliances have anything Alliance-related they want to post, please get in touch with me at [litlenancyf@gmail.com](mailto:litlenancyf@gmail.com).

• We are on Facebook! Our group, called "National Alliance of New Church Women" has over 40 members. If you're on Facebook, join us.



L. to R.: Sky Paradise, Linda Browning, Barb Boxwell, and Suzanne Toupin.

• The Executive Committee opened a free Google web group communication between meetings and to share documents.

Sharon Williams noted the absence of a donation to the Paulhaven Camp in Alberta in our recommended donations for 2009-2010. A motion to recommend \$300 for Paulhaven camp in 2010 passed.

The Rev. Sky Paradise, pastor of the newly established New Church of the Southwest Desert in New Mexico, recipient of the 2009 Mite Box Award, along with two members of her congregation, Suzanne Toupin and Linda Browning, accepted a check for \$1,352.74. Suzanne told us that they

plan to use the money for the children's room and library.

Barb Boxwell, Mite Box chair announced that the 2010 Mite Box will be awarded to the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego to assist with their mission work in Mexico with Proyecto Hispanaya. The Rev. Carla Friedrich, pastor of the San Diego church explained that Proyecto Hispanaya is a clinic and learning center that provides health education and psychological support to school-aged children and families (family planning and anti-violence education, drug and alcohol prevention and education, etc). Proyecto Hispanaya is registered in Mexico as a non-profit rather than a traditional church, although daily devotion and Swedenborgian studies are planned as part of their daily practice. Read more about it at <http://womensalliance.blogspot.com>.

The Rev. Renée Machin-iak reminded us that she still has plenty of Alliance pins displaying the Swedenborgian cross for sale. She suggested that they make nice gifts for new members. Renée can be contacted at [revrenee@aol.com](mailto:revrenee@aol.com).

While we all enjoyed a serving of delicious lemon cake, we watched ten minutes of a DVD from last summer's Gathering Leaves in England. Rosalyn Taylor announced that the next Gathering Leaves will be held in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania next summer, and will be hosted by the Lord's New Church.

Carla Friedrich, religious chair, led us in a brief memorial service at the close of our meeting.

We look forward to seeing everyone in St. Paul in 2010.

*Nancy Little, president*

## Alison Longstaff

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in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, adopted me with unbounded warmth, kindness, and enthusiasm, welcoming me as if I was someone worth loving.

"I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you took care of Me. . . ."

You, all of you, whether you know it or not, cared for me, wounded and broken though I was, and nursed me back to health. Though I'm not perfect, you welcomed me with kindness and love. Do you have any idea what that has meant to me?

And now, now that I am strong and well again, and equipped for service, it is my turn to give back to you, with my whole heart and devotion. I bring playfulness and music, a voice of hope and compassion, and a heart full of delight in the new incarnation of God's love that is this second coming. I wish to be an encourager, a teacher, and perhaps even a pioneer into new spiritual territories, discovering and mapping where this church might go in the future.

I have sat in these meetings and I have heard the concerns for our future. I see the frustration and the discouragement over the declining membership.

But maybe we need to reframe our mission on this world. We keep thinking that it is our job to grow the New Church for the Lord, and that that "New Church" is going to look like lots of new members in this denomination.

But look around you. The New Church is popping up in voices and hearts in all sorts of unexpected places. It lives in that rabbi and in that sheikh who spoke so eloquently to us Wednesday night. You saw it and felt it. It lives in the heart and mind of Reverend Jeff, even if he uses different words and has some different ideas. It is showing up everywhere, if we can but realize what we are seeing. It lives in more and more

hearts and minds every day, and God is doing it all by . . . Herself. God is bringing about the Holy City, and a person doesn't necessarily have to have heard of Swedenborg to be part of it.

I don't think we have to worry. We don't own the New Church. We never did. It is God's church, not ours, and comes to each person in its right time. We don't "have it" to give to another. We have it to live, day by day in community with the whole world.

You and you and you and I, simply by loving these ideas and struggling to live them into our ordinary lives, are very much contributing to the descent of the Holy City. We bear witness to it with our lips, yes, but more importantly, we bear witness to it with our quality of being on this planet.

So, we might need to reframe our understanding of our job as a church. It may not be our destiny to grow huge in numbers. It might just be our job to hold the space for love, to keep the flame of the spirit of truth alive while God does the work of birthing the New Church on earth. This tiny denomination has been the mother and the midwife of this new birth for years already. Well done, good and faithful servants. The baby is crowning, and all we have to do is breathe, and relax, and try not to strain. This birth is in the Lord's hands, and therefore, all is well.

I say again: "the new church" may never be one unified natural organization called "The New Church." I think we get stuck on that expectation. The New Church may be just what we are already seeing: rabbis and sheikhs, imams and Pagan priestesses, Lutherans and Presbyterians and agnostics who see that the one God is for everyone. Allah is Yahweh is the Goddess is Jesus is "Goodness embodied in kindness and art and compassion and service" no matter what our holy book or skin colour or country of origin or gender.

Have we failed because we are still so small and so few people have heard of Swedenborg? Not on your life. Every moment that we live our love and our calling, we are doing just what God asks of us. Because it is always and ever about living our love, and not about our status, or glossy brochures, or fancy programming, or packed stadiums and praise bands.

How do I know this? Well, remember those baby girls who were abandoned in Rome to die? Some were found and adopted by a tiny and persecuted group whose mandate was simply to serve the world with kindness and compassion—to feed the hungry and visit those in prison and to tend the sick. Those girls were adopted and raised within the fragile struggling group, learning also to serve the poor and reach out in love to the marginalized. That tiny band was heaven-bent on obeying their radical rabbi's command to remember the widows and the orphans, to welcome the stranger, and to become the least and the servant of all.

Whatever happened to that tiny, poor, struggling group? You can bet they wondered and worried about their future. What were they called anyway? Something like . . . Christians? What did ever happen to them?

Anyway, let's not worry about the future. It will worry about itself. Please, just for tonight, celebrate with me that one little girl who was dead and is alive again. And God willing, thanks to you, I am going to be one mighty power for good in the world. Tonight, celebrate with me the miracle of the newest good news: the absolute trustworthy power of God's love. Of course we will work with all our might for this church because we love it so much. But we don't have to worry. All will be well with the church because it is not really up to us; it's in God's hands—and with God, all things, ALL THINGS, are possible. ☙



# GATEway

## (GATE: Growing Angels Through Education)

BY JOHN MAINE

The Sunday School Association held its annual meeting in Seattle. Plans and ideas were proposed and discussed for working together to increase the effectiveness of the association in assisting societies with their Sunday school programs.

Welcome to this new (quarterly) feature in *The Messenger*, sponsored by your Sunday School Association. Our choice of the acronym *GATE* was inspired by Jesus's famous saying, "I am the gate" to new life (John 10: 7-10) and also by Swedenborg's observation that gate corresponds to "introductory knowledge of what is good and true, from the literal sense of the Word, that leads a person into the New Church" (A.R. 899, 901, 904). Both meanings

reflect our purpose: to provide a forum for exploring the ideas, issues and activities involved in introducing children to the Lord through our Swedenborgian teachings.

### "In the Beginning"

We start with the "Share the Story" campaign, announced last spring in the May *Messenger*. For this 2009-10 church year (September to June), we are asking everyone to focus on Genesis and its many wonderful stories. An email is being circulated to all our churches, inviting each to take on one or more of these stories, and using our standardized lesson template, create some fun and imaginative ways of

teaching them to our children. (Note: this invitation is of course open not only to churches, but also to individual or isolated church members.) The lessons we all create will become part of an online "lesson bank" that all can use.

So please—become a storyteller or part of a storytelling group, and help pass the Word on to a new generation. Help them learn who they are and where they've come from and what happened that they should know about "in the beginning." All submissions will be gratefully received by Missy Donaldson, our Association secretary, at [abra99@yahoo.com](mailto:abra99@yahoo.com).

### "Eyes on the Prize"

At the Association's recent annual general meeting in Seattle, the Rev.



The Sunday School Association meeting annual meeting: (l. to r.): Lori Steinhiser, vice-president; John Maine, president; Barb Halle, treasurer; Missy Donaldson, Secretary.

Eric Hoffman of the Virginia Street Church (host of next year's Convention in St. Paul) announced that the church will offer a special prize for the most lessons submitted.

### Honour Thy Children

Here's a thought: when it comes to conducting Sunday school, a standard model used by many churches is to have a "children's time" early on in the (adult) service and then to dismiss the children to some other location for their lesson. In many churches, that's pretty much the last that's ever seen of them, at least until after the service is over.

But it is worth considering whether "disappearing" the children like this is not a loss for the church. Children are a tangible sign of the church's reality as a multi-generational communion of the saints. They are a sign of the church's future and very evident manifestations of the innocence and delight gifted to us all by the Spirit. Put simply, a church needs its children and needs to honour and celebrate them.

One way to do just this is by making the decision to *bring the children back, before the end of the service*. In our Kitchener church, the children regularly return from Sunday school just before the benediction and closing of the Word. Their teacher leads them down the centre aisle and has them line up along the front of the chancel. We then proceed to have "show & sell"

as the children, prompted by teacher and minister, tell of what they learned in Sunday school and show off their craft work. The congregation always applauds their efforts, after

which the little ones go bouncing back to their families in the pews for the closing of the service.

This little ritual has proven to be very popular with young and old alike, and has invariably provided an upbeat and affirming note on which to end worship.

What special ways do you have to honour and celebrate children in the worship and life of your church? Please email me at [jemaine@rogers.com](mailto:jemaine@rogers.com), and I will share them in an upcoming column. On behalf of all the children—thank you! ☛

The Rev. John Maine is president of the Sunday School Association.

## Passages

### Confirmations

On August 2, 2009, **Tory Henderson**, **Rachael Tukos Sbrocco**, and **Tom Neuenfeldt** were confirmed into the Swedenborgian Church at Almont Summer Camp, the Revs. Kevin Baxter, Sage Currie, and Jennifer Tafel presiding.

### Deaths

The Reverend **Marlene Laughlin**

passed peacefully into the spiritual world August 3, 2009, with her partner Larry Bowers at her side. A memorial article will appear in the October *Messenger*.

The Reverend **Theodore J. LeVan** (Ted), age 79, retired Swedenborgian minister, entered peacefully into the spiritual world May 29, 2009, at Little Company of Mary Hospital in San Pedro, California. A memorial service was held June 15 at Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, where Ted had served as

chapel minister from 1995 to 2001. The Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell and the Rev. David Brown officiated. Ted also served the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana, from 1984 to 1991. Rev. Ted is survived by his three children, Susan, James, and John LeVan, his sister Alice, and several grandchildren. (See memorial article, p. 116) ☩

### COM Meeting

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dynamic and stimulating experience.

Much as on the floor of the annual convention, the major issues the COM discusses are worked out by committees and individuals in advance and brought by them to the larger group. This year, the council made some changes to the ordination process.

First, we adopted a new accredited certificate program in Swedenborgian theology from Pacific School of Religion. This certificate program is taught through the Swedenborgian House of Studies but has the added benefit of being accredited by a highly respected graduate school.

Second, the COM passed a requirement that a student must have a psychological exam before he or she can be admitted to the ordination path. This exam, ideally, is an exam tailored for people perusing ministry, and will be an invaluable tool for helping the student and the Committee on Admission into the Ministry (CAM) better understand the challenges and strengths of the student.

The three-day meeting covered other regular issues that come before it, such as its budget and officer elections. As the meeting was held in Seattle, we had the pleasure of closing the session in worship and communion in a large tepee in the back yard of Eric and Lisa Allison's home. ☩

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

### LaPorte Donates \$1732

The LaPorte (Indiana) New Church donated \$1732 to the General Convention on the floor of the annual convention. The LaPorte congregation donates quarterly for this "gift-back donation." The church's executive board felt it was also important for the church itself to give back as an act of tithing in gratitude for past support from the General Convention. Therefore it established a policy to donate one per cent of the church's revenue annually in addition to the gift-back dollars contributed by the congregation. President Laitner gratefully received the check on behalf of the denomination. ☩

### Church Calendar

**October 10–12:** SCYL Columbus Day Retreat • Blairhaven Retreat Center, Duxbury, Massachusetts

**October 23–24:** SHS Board Meeting • Berkeley, California

**November 6–7:** General Council fall meeting • Framingham, Massachusetts

### Friendship

Rev. Dr. Bill and Louise Woofenden would enjoy calls, letters, and visits from old friends and new, as they turn 88 and 82 this year and remember fondly their many friends in Convention. If you are interested in jazz or classical music, Bill will offer you some gifts from his CD library. Email or call the editor of *The Messenger* for their address and phone number.

He was not afraid of death. Many have such a fear of death, but not Ted. He knew that we are eternal life that simply changes its outside form.

—*Uni de Presno, ministry coordinator, Wayfarers Chapel*

### Theodore James LeVan

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we all wish we had, we can learn patience from Ted.

Ted's peace also reached beyond people. In a *Chapel Newsletter* article, the Rev. Marlene Laughlin observed, "A butterfly once rested on Rev. Ted's lapel throughout the entire wedding." Yes, everyone and everything were affected by Rev. Ted's peace.

Ted had found his peace through his faith and the Swedenborgian theology.



### 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.

## In Loving Memory of Theodore James LeVan

**T**he Reverend Ted LeVan joined the Wayfarers Chapel on July 1, 1995. Prior to that he had served six years with the LaPorte New Church in Laporte, Indiana. During his six years at Wayfarers Chapel, Ted served as chapel administrator and then minister.

In the last few years before Ted's retirement in 2001, he devoted all of his energies to ministry, celebrating weddings, and baptisms, and conducting Bible study classes and Swedenborgian study groups. Much of his time was spent helping couples prepare for weddings. Ted was known for giving that special time and attention each couple appreciates. His kind and welcoming manner was cherished by all.

In Luke 17:20–21 we read: "The Kingdom of God does not come with observation, nor will people say, 'Look, here it is' or 'look, there it is.' Look, you have the kingdom of God within you."

And that was Ted.

It was obvious to everyone who knew him that the kingdom of heaven was

within Ted. You took one good look at him and what you saw beaming back was his unconditional love, and peace. When Ted's poor health restricted him from conducting weddings at the chapel, couples would still ask to be wed by him; new "directing rules" had to

be made because Ted now could perform weddings only from the chapel floor seated in his powered mobility chair.

At a Wayfarers board and staff dinner in 2000 I surveyed the staff asking them, "How would you describe Rev. Ted?" Many good things were said—very welcoming, has a gen-

tle and spiritual approach towards everyone, a very caring person, one who really listens with a wonderful ability to understand everyone's needs, he is fair and easygoing, has a sense of humor, handsome, inspiring, has learned to take pain and twist it around and make beautiful light of it, endures all without complaints, possesses a certain calmness, he has a way of looking at each moment in life as important that continues on page 119



Photo credit: Uni de Fresno