

The General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Christ, USA

BY CHRIS LAITNER

The annual General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in conjunction with Church World Service was held in Minneapolis on November 10–12, 2009. The theme for this year's gathering was taken from first Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always, Pray without ceasing, and Give thanks in all circumstances." Three delegates from the Swedenborgian Church (General Convention) attended: Ms. Mary Ann Fischer, Ms. Christine Laitner (as Head of Communion), and the Rev. Ms. Jane Siebert. They joined the 300 or so other attendees made up of delegates, NCCCUSA and CWS Board members, guests, and observers. This year, the Swedenborgian delegation was seated with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends and the Friends United Meeting. Co-moderators of this year's assembly were H. E. Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, President of the NCCCUSA, and Rt. Rev. Johncy Itty, Chairperson, Church World Service Board of Directors.

The opening worship and plenary session was held after lunch on Tuesday, Nov. 10, and from then on through the Thursday night installation of the Rev. Peg Chamberlin as the new president of the National Council of Churches, there were plenary sessions that included the keynote speaker's presentation (Rev. Dr. Margaret

Aymer), information, discussion, voting, and adoption of resolutions; the addition of a new member communion; daily opening worship services held in different traditions (this year: Methodist, Taize, and Eastern Orthodox); exciting and intensive Bible study presentations (Rev. Dr. Charles Amjad-Ali); a visit from Minnesota Governor Tim Pawlenty; special caucus groups; open forums; and a variety of displays and "shopping opportunities." There

were also times for meeting and greeting and sharing wonderful meals. Altogether, the 2009 General Assembly was packed with a wide variety of opportunities for learning, for networking, and for experiencing various religious traditions and sharing one's own.

Over the next few months, there will be other articles in *The Messenger* based on issues and opportunities that have come from this year's National

continues on page 166

NCC Justice for Women Working Group

BY JANE SIEBERT

I was touched by many of the activities in which I participated at the National Council of Churches of Christ, USA, annual meeting as a representative of our Swedenborgian Church. We signed onto a Christian message to Congress on aspects of health care reform. We discussed a statement on nuclear disarmament and policies on immigration reform. But none of the presentations touched me as deeply as the work being done by the Justice for Women Working Group.

The efforts of the commissions and work groups are all necessary. They each have important issues to debate and promote and push for action. I am glad they are speaking with a unified Christian voice representing the 35 de-

nominations that belong to the NCC when they lobby Congress and make defining statements on issues affecting us all. Still, the work that invigorated me and made me want to roll up my shirt sleeves and help was the Justice for Women Working Group (J4WWG).

The J4WWG works in a variety of areas of gender justice. And this is where you can help. They asked everyone present to identify people within our denomination that might be interested in participating in webinars, conference calls, regional initiatives, or resources distribution on the following topics:

1. Gender violence and domestic violence
2. Human trafficking and sexual

continues on page 166

In This Issue:

The 2009 Columbus Day SCYL Retreat • SHS Fall Board Meeting
Lansing Church Dedication & Michigan Meeting • Book Review: *Occult America*
William Blake and the Theosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg • General Council Fall Meeting

The Editor's Desk



Celebrating Christmas

Disdaining the commercialization of Christmas is a well-worn trope of Christmas commentary. Indulge me while I join the chorus.

At the age of nine I found myself unexpectedly cast as Scrooge in the fourth-grade holiday play. I was a shy child but found I could escape my self-consciousness on stage—I loved my “Bah, humbug!” line and spit it out with relish. From that experience, I acquired an inchoate sense of the true meaning of Christmas, that it lay in love of family and neighbor, faith in the Lord, and a lack of concern for worldly things—and that reacting to its excesses with curmudgeonly disdain was not a good response to Christmas celebrations and cheerfulness.

I have struggled ever since with reconciling the simple but miraculous birth documented in the New Testament with the over-the-top shopping,

consumption, decorating, and partying extravaganza Christmas has become.

Twas not always thus. Christmas, after all is not an official church observance in most denominations, although Advent is, and the Christmas story is significant in the Gospels. But the Pilgrims in 1620s Plymouth, for instance, regarded Christmas like any other day, going about their daily work. Dickensian England saw drunken celebrants going door-to-door begging money, foreshadowing our modern Halloween celebration. It was only as the Victorian Age matured that we saw the outlines of our modern Christmas

continues on page 164

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I thought I should respond, having just received my copy of the November *Messenger*, to your references to the first edition of *Heaven & Hell* which passed through New Church College. I think the old handwriting may have deceived you slightly—for 1845 read 1875 and for John Handy read John Hardy. I confess that in saying this, I'm helped by my knowledge of the origin of the New Church College being in 1845 but the institution only acquiring a building some time later and by my having in my possession a copy of New Church College reports for the early 1870s, which have a Mr. Hardy listed as assistant librarian. I thought you might be interested in having this aspect of the history confirmed by someone working at the New Church College today.

Can I add while I'm writing how much I enjoy *The Messenger* and how much I value its contents, both for keeping up with developments in the Swedenborgian Church of North America (and North America more generally) and for its more general

continues on page 167

Church Calendar

December 27–30: SCYL Winter Retreat • Almont New Church Retreat Center, Allenton, Michigan

April 1, 2010: Association statistics due at Central Office

April 23–24: SHS spring meeting • Berkeley, California

June 23–27: Annual Convention St. Paul, Minnesota

Correction

In the photo caption at the bottom of page 148 of the November *Messenger*, Carol Lawson was incorrectly identified as Carol Lawrence.

Contents

The General Assembly of the NCCCUA.....	153
The Editor's Desk.....	154
Letter to the Editor	154
2009 Columbus Day	
SCYL Retreat	155
Lansing Church Dedication & Michigan Meeting.....	156
SHS Fall Board Meeting.....	157
General Council Fall Meeting .	158
Background of Membership in the NCCCUA.....	159
William Blake: Glances on His Engagement with the Theosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg	161
Swedenborg: Scientist, Christian Religious Seer—and Occultist?	162
Passages	167
In Memoriam:	
Alice E. (Betty) Zacharias.....	168

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Taking Helen Keller Disco Bowling!

The 2009 Columbus Day SCYL Retreat



The teen retreat gang wearing matching headbands: (L to R) Lucas, Chris, Rachel, Alissa, Cassie, Celie, Holly, Cody, MaryBeth, Nina, and Jess.

BY KURT FEKETE

Learning that Blake, Jung, Emerson, Kant, and many others read and were influenced by Swedenborg's writings is fascinating. Exploring the lives of Swedenborg's famous fans and uncovering the wonderful gifts they contributed to the world is an enlightening pursuit. Realizing our own traits and talents and discovering ways that we can use these gifts to help reshape the world is inspiring. But taking Helen Keller disco bowling, well, that's just crazy!

The theme of the 2009 Columbus Day retreat of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) was "Swedenborg, His Famous Fans and You: Working Together to Change the World." Ten teens from New England (plus one from Indiana!) gathered at the Blairhaven Retreat Center in Duxbury, Massachu-

setts, over Columbus Day weekend to learn about and discuss famous historical figures whose lives were profoundly changed by reading the works of Emanuel Swedenborg.

chology (Carl Jung), Transcendentalism (Ralph Waldo Emerson), the vegetarian movement (William Cowherd), and the civil rights movement (Martin Luther King, Jr.).



(L to R) Holly, Nina, Celie, Rachel, Alissa, and Cody enjoy beautiful Kingston Bay.

The Rev. Lee Woofenden explained how notable readers of Swedenborg markedly influenced history through breakthroughs such as analytical psy-

The teens then began to examine their own lives when Kurt Fekete led them to identify positive traits of people that they admire, investigate which of these traits they possess, and determine which trait is most important to them.

Rev. Woofenden then facilitated two sessions where we discussed ways that we can effect positive changes in the world. He emphasized how change comes from within through God and how objectively looking at and improving our self is vital to promoting constructive transformation. Where change can be made (government, continues on page 164

Lansing Church Dedication & Michigan Meeting

BY JENN TAFEL

October 11, 2009, was an exciting day in the life of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church. The church was host to over 35 adults and children from all over lower Michigan for three events:

- The Michigan Association annual meeting
- The blessing of the church space
- The installation of the Reverend Jennifer Tafel as Pastor.

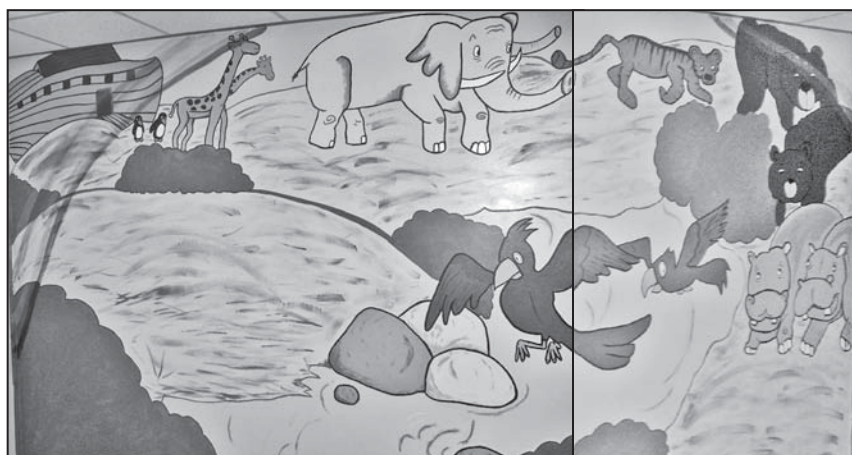
The congregants of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church proudly showed off their new space, including the Sunday school room with a mural of Noah's Ark and the animals. The children enjoyed playing games while the adults attended to business.

The Michigan Association meeting started the day off at 11:00 AM. Reports were received from Royal Oak Church of the Holy City, Lansing Swedenborgian Church, Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center, Almont Summer School, and Chris Laitner, president of General Convention. Lisa Craig, Barb Tourangeau, and Fawn Lange received certificates of appreciation for their dedication and services on the Michigan Association board of trustees.

New officers and board members elected for 2010 are:



L to R: Chris Laitner, the Rev. Jennifer Tafel, the Rev. Renée Machiniak.



The mural in the Sunday school room at Lansing Swedenborgian Church.

- President, David Viges
- Vice President, BJ Neuenfeldt
- Secretary, Margie Leas
- Treasurer, Barb Boxwell
- 2011 Trustee, Barb Barber
- 2012 Trustee, Dorie Litchfield

The Michigan Association is looking forward to meeting with the Ohio Association in October 2010. The meeting approved partial sponsorship of special weekend retreats for women, men, and families at the Almont Retreat Center. The women's retreat was scheduled for November 20–21, 2009, and the men's and family weekends will be held in the spring of 2010.

After the meeting, attendees shared a luncheon where they enjoyed good food, fellowship, and the sense of belonging to a larger community.

During the worship service, the Reverend Renée Machniak of the Royal Oak Church and Convention President Chris Laitner installed the Reverend Jennifer Tafel as pastor of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church. The congregation welcomed Pastor Tafel with a good round of applause.

President Laitner conducted a building dedication later in the service. The Lansing Swedenborgian Church displays posters of the seven Tiffany angel windows on the back wall of the church—it seemed as if those angels

were watching over the congregation throughout the service.

The day ended with dessert and continued fellowship. ☦

Truth  is Love
IN Action.

Jimmy Buccini

SHS Fall Board Meeting

BY HERB ZIEGLER

The Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) Board of Trustees met for its fall meeting October 23–24, 2009, in Berkeley, California. The trustees lodged and met in Easton Hall, a conference center maintained by the Episcopal seminary next to Pacific School of Religion (PSR), joined for all or part of the meeting by Mareta Tafel, Kim Hinrichs, Ken Turley, Inese Radzins, and Steve Sanchez.

In his report to the board, Dean Jim Lawrence noted that SHS has eight ordination-path students including one new student (Tamara Farsadi), two students at PSR, and two Swedenborgian ministers working on DMin degrees at the Graduate Theological Union (GTU). Inese Radzins will present a paper on Swedenborg's theology at a significant event on Swedenborg in Stockholm sponsored by the Swedish Academic of Sciences in June. Jim taught an intensive course, "Christian Spirituality through a Swedenborgian Lens," at Earlham School of Religion (ESR) to two SHS students as well as to two ESR students, and he gave a public lecture on Swedenborg at Bryn Athyn College (paid for by the Swedenborg Foundation).

Kim Hinrichs announced that she would be stepping down as director of outreach at SHS at the end of the year. She explained that she enjoys her work and working with colleagues, but recently discerned that she could not continue her academic career while giving adequate time and energy to her family. She hopes to find a career in family and children's ministry. Jim Lawrence reminded everyone that SHS would probably not exist in its present form without Kim. The Swedenborgian Church was little known and not well understood by PSR, but they knew and respected Kim as an out-

standing PSR graduate. In her report to the board, Kim noted that 90 people have been served through the courses she organized and administered.

Kathy Speas, the board's representative on the PSR board, reported that PSR acknowledges SHS as a leader in online and distance technology for seminaries. The board focused on replacing Bill McKinney—who will step down as president in 2010—and dealing with ongoing financial challenges. Kathy noted that the PANA Center was closed, necessitating layoffs and affecting morale on campus.

Chris Laitner, president of General Convention, reported on Convention affairs (see article on page 158). She noted recent changes in parish ministry: The Rev. Junchol Lee began serving Calgary and the Western Canada Association in September; the Rev. Susannah Currie is serving half-time at Bridgewater, Massachusetts; the Rev. Ron Brugler is serving Cleveland; and the Rev. John Billings is serving at Temenos outside Philadelphia. The Fryeburg (Maine) New Church is conducting a search, as the Rev. Ken Turley will be leaving that pulpit to serve as denomination president in June 2010.

After breaking out to meet in committees, the board reassembled to report on their areas of focus. The outreach and development committee presented ideas for continuing the work begun by Kim Hinrichs. Recognizing that much of her work involved creating and then initiating programs in two areas, outreach (involved with lay courses and public relations) and development (involved with increasing giving and public relations), the committee passed two motions: that SHS continue to generate, publicize, and administer ongoing classes, programs, and other outreach efforts; and that SHS continue to focus on fundraising

and cultivating donor relationships.

The finance committee met with Alan Thomsen, financial manager of SHS, and both the controller and chief financial officer of the GTU to learn about new developments in accounting and reporting for SHS. PSR has consolidated its accounting department with the GTU to realize greater efficiency use of resources and cost savings. SHS has always used the accounting services of PSR for bookkeeping and accounting services, keeping financial management functions in house. The new arrangement provides much improved bookkeeping and accounting services for SHS, with better and more timely reporting.

Recent changes in California laws required action by the board. The Uniform Prudent Management of Institutional Funds Act allows expenditure of the corpus (the original amount) of gifts, even when disallowed by terms of the gift. The law therefore requires boards to expressly designate whether they will consider those funds restricted or not. Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer of SHS explained the situation to the board and led a discussion that resulted in the board voting to maintain restrictions on all restricted funds. Unlike some institutions that must spend down the corpus of restricted funds to keep their doors open, SHS is able to continue full operations without tapping into the corpus. The board was unanimous in affirming the importance of honoring the terms of bequests in perpetuity.

Steve Sanchez, student representative to the board, related concerns expressed by some distance students. The concerns centered on the unavailability of SHS scholarship money for students matriculating at a school other than PSR and the difficulty in experiencing

continues on page 166

General Council Fall Meeting

BY HERB ZIEGLER

The General Council (GC) of the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches met November 6-7 at the UCC Conference Center in Framingham, Massachusetts. All officers and members were present, along with Ken Turley, president-elect of Convention, Andy Stinson, president of the Council of Ministers (COM), and Renée Hellenbrecht, operations manager of Central Office.

President Laitner reported on her travels, meetings and other denominational interactions since the close of the 2009 annual convention. She shared information regarding grants awarded for 2010 through both the Mission and Augmentation Funds, discussed the Cabinet process for annual budgeting and ministry-setting and spoke briefly about Convention 2010 (St. Paul, MN, June 23-27). She ended her report with an initial review of highlights of the past five-plus years.

Vice-president Lori Steinhiser reported on activities of the personnel committee and the cabinet meeting. Martha Bauer's training of Renée Hellenbrecht for the position of operations manager has been completed, and as of November 1, Martha retired and Renée moved fully into the position of operations manager. The personnel committee continues to work on a personnel management plan and organizational chart.

Treasurer Susannah Currie presented the audited financial statements for

fiscal year 2008 (ending December 31), the first audited statements to include Wayfarers Chapel figures in the denominational statements. They show separate columns for Convention and Wayfarers, and then a combined column. The combined statements conform to accepted financial accounting practices. This report will be published in the 2009 Journal of the Swedenbor-

fice bookkeeper and accounting clerk has been working with our part-time outsourced accountant from the firm, AccountAbility, and has been trained to process Common Fund reports for General Convention. Looking for ways to reduce costs, the council discussed the budgeting process and the roles of the cabinet, FPRSU, and the augmentation fund committee (PUSH) in the budgeting process.

Andy Stinson reported on issues and concerns from COM. The budgeting process and control of expenses are difficult given the unpredictability of annual convention costs (lodging, board and airfare). COM asked the GC to explore options for annual conventions and COM meetings that will help control costs.

In her report on Central Office, Renée Hellenbrecht asked for guidance in responding to churches that ask her for help in developing church Web sites. The personnel committee will meet with Renée to resolve this issue. In addition, GC will evaluate the role of IMSU and make recommendations for updating their responsibilities in the bylaws.

After a discussion about the effectiveness of support units and the value of shepherds (council members assigned as liaisons to support units), the following shepherds were appointed for 2010: COMSU, Chris Laitner; EDSU, Barb Cullen; FPRSU, Susannah Currie; IMSU, Matthew Fleming; and MINSU, Dave Vigés.

continues next page



Top to bottom (L to R): Dave Vigés, Renée Hellenbrecht, Matthew Fleming, and Renée Machiniak; Susan Wood-Ashton and Barbara Cullen; Carl Helm and Andy Stinson.

gian Church, available soon from Central Office. The transition of accounting functions performed by Martha Bauer, the outgoing Central Office manager, to an accounting firm has been completed. Gina Peracchi, the Central Of-

fice bookkeeper and accounting clerk has been working with our part-time outsourced accountant from the firm, AccountAbility, and has been trained to process Common Fund reports for General Convention. Looking for ways to reduce costs, the council discussed the budgeting process and the roles of the cabinet, FPRSU, and the augmentation fund committee (PUSH) in the budgeting process.

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Chris Laitner informed GC that the Swedenborg Lecture at Urbana University this year attracted over 100 people. GC voted to continue funding this lecture and scholar in residence program

(\$2000 for 2010).

Speaking as members of its steering committee, Barbara Cullen and Susan Wood-Ashton presented a report on the cyber ministry, the Swedenborgian Community (swedenborgiancommunity.org), and recommendations for action. The steering committee feels that they have completed their task of launching the cyber ministry and seeing it through its early growth stages.

continues on page 160

Background of Membership in the NCCCUSA

In the early 1960s, I talked with Dr. Eugene Carson Blake, president of the World Council of Churches, about the advisability of our denomination joining the National Council of Churches. We had been rebuffed by a few National Council leaders, but Dr. Blake urged us to pursue application for membership. He further recommended that I go to New York and meet with Dr. Edwin Espy, General Secretary of the National Council. I did that, and Dr. Espy was most cordial. He recommended that instead of making formal application at that time, we “enter into conversations” with Council leaders. He was aware that there were member denominations who were opposed to our membership on theological grounds, and that we could also be turned down on the basis of membership totals. The Council was limited to denominations of 30,000 members or more, although that restriction could be waived.

I replied that we would welcome “conversations” with Council leaders, and Dr. Espy set up a meeting for Dr. Robert Kirven of the Swedenborg School of Religion and me with a number of leaders of the National Council of Churches. Bob and I spent more than an hour explaining our church teachings and responding to questions about Emanuel Swedenborg, our church history, and our church practices. It was an historic occasion, and I shall never forget it. The “conversation” was recorded

and a transcript was made that was distributed to all National Council member churches. Within a few weeks, Dr. Espy called me to say that the response had been very favorable, and he urged our denomination to proceed with formal application for membership.

With the approval of the General Council, I filed the application. The only theological requirement was that our church accept Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. The Constituent Membership Committee of the Council approved our application, and it was voted on at the next meeting of the Governing Board, which I believe was in 1966. My recollection is that the Lutheran Church was the only member denomination that opposed our membership, and we were voted in. I talked with Lutheran friends on the Council, and they said that word came from on high to deny our application. Evidently their leaders still considered Swedenborg a heretic.

The Rev. Richard H. Tafel, Sr., then-president of the General Convention, represented our church at Council meetings, and I also attended. During my presidency, from 1968 to 1975, I represented our church and served on the Governing Board of the Council. I regularly met with the presidents, bishops, and other denominational leaders, and had numerous opportunities to represent our church, including a meeting with President Gerald Ford in the cabinet room of the White House. I also served as Sec-

retary of the Constituent Membership Committee.

It was most significant that our church, with its tiny numerical membership, was accepted and respected by the leading Protestant denominations of the country. Bob Kirven was very active on the Faith and Order Committee and made important contributions on behalf of our church. Later, the Rev. Robert McCluskey assumed a leadership role in our relation to the Council, and along with people like the Rev. Dorothea Harvey and the Rev. Susan Turley, bore witness to the rights of women in ministry, and were supportive of gay rights.

Through our membership and involvement in the National Council, we showed that we were not an insignificant cult on the fringe of Christianity, but a church that was an integral part of the Christian movement. Our church was virtually unknown in the USA, but when people learned that we were members of the National Council of Churches, we gained new visibility and respectability.

Along with most other churches, we are facing financial difficulties at this time, but to me it would be disastrous to withdraw from the NCC. Such a move could very well signal a step toward oblivion. It would cut off the greatest opportunity we have to remain in dialogue and cooperative action with the leaders of established Protestantism in the USA.

—Erni Martin

General Council

continued from page 159

Their work involved not only direction oversight, but also hands-on involvement in building, maintaining, managing, and staffing the site. The Web site and ministry are fully functional and have attracted a large audience. The

setts New Church Union for appointment to an empty seat on the Gray Fund board of trustees. The council approved the recommendation, which will be submitted to the attorney-general of Massachusetts for appointment. Rebecca is a member and past president of the Cambridge (Massachusetts)

and fire monitoring and the strain on general funds, the council denied the request and will suggest that the church apply for a loan from the Convention building fund. Concern was expressed about the financial stability and future of the church, which will be communicated to the National Church board of



Friends and colleagues honoring Martha Bauer (center) with a blessing and a fest day in her honor.

committee suggested that it be replaced by a new committee charged with new goals and new responsibilities. The council voted to dismiss the steering committee with great thanks effective immediately. It then voted to appoint a committee to study the management structure of the cyber ministry and develop recommendations to GC before their spring 2010 meeting. Ken Turley, Matthew Fleming, and Chris Laitner were appointed to the committee.

Andy Stinson sought input from the council on a draft proposal from COM to institute a program of affiliation with international ministries and individuals working to promote Swedenborgian ideas and spirituality. Applicants would be foreigners working in isolation who could be more effective with the imprimatur of a recognized Swedenborgian entity. The ministries and individuals would be vetted by COM. Concerns expressed by council members centered on the possibility of poor communication or lack of monitoring with affiliates and potential liability.

Rebecca Kline Esterson's name was recommended to GC by the Massachu-

Society and a graduate of Harvard Divinity School.

Chris Laitner initiated a discussion about the wisdom of Convention's continued membership in the National Council of Christian Churches (NCCCCUSA) in light of the expenses of dues and delegate participation. Randy Laakko read a history of Convention's joining NCCCCUSA written by Erni Martin (see sidebar). Although many were concerned with the cost, paid from general rather than restricted funds, the council concluded that participation is of significant value in maintaining communication with other Christian denominations and giving them a better sense of who we are and what we believe in, voting unanimously to continue membership, but with the proviso that GC would seek donations to defray the cost of membership.

The council received and reviewed a request from the Church of the Holy City, identified as the National Church in Washington, DC, to fund \$20,000 of repair work, including \$15,000 to investigate the structural soundness of the tower. In light of the \$10,000 Convention pays annually for insurance

trustees, with a recommendation to address the problems and challenges facing the church.

Susannah Currie presented the budget for 2010, recommended by FPRSU, for discussion and approval. The council reviewed the budget in detail to ferret out areas for cost-cutting. Although some line items were eliminated or reduced, because expenses have been cut continuously over the past several years, there was little room to reduce expenses beyond what the cabinet and FPRSU had proposed. It was the sense of the council that expenses for administration and programs were reduced to the bare minimum, and the budget passed as amended. The council voted to recommend that FPRSU explore the possibility of using a zero-based budget process next year.

The last item discussed was a request by Ken Turley for input from the council on a proposal before the Maine Council of Churches to take a stand endorsing civil discourse in civic affairs. Debate ensued as some members felt the proposal was politically inspired and others felt it was simply a matter

continues on page 163

William Blake: Glances on His Engagement with the Theosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg

BY FRANCESCA MCCROSSAN, AND
JAMES F. LAWRENCE

Most students of literature and of the Romantic poets possess more than passing familiarity with William Blake (1757-1827). Volumes have been written on his style, eccentricities, and influences. But many may be surprised to learn that one of his most provocative influences came from the eighteenth-century theosophist Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), a Swedish philosopher who spent long periods of time in Blake's London and who was well-known among the Kabbalists and esotericists of the city. There is a traceable evolution of Swedenborgian engagement and of an intriguing discourse between members of the newly formed Swedenborgian community in London and other artists in Blake's circle.

William Blake—poet, engraver and early member of what became known as the Romantic school of English literature—was born in London in 1757 (the year Swedenborg claimed the Last Judgment occurred in the spiritual realms). His circumstances were good compared to many of the time; his father was a hosier who supported his young son's desire to become an engraver. Some scholars also report that his parents were Swedenborgians, or at least were familiar with the works of Swedenborg and kept several volumes in their home, but these reports are varied and inconsistent. The European Enlightenments (note the plural) were developing throughout Europe, and the young Blake was to experience the dynamic tension between the rise of scientific reason and spirituality that Emanuel Swedenborg also felt in the last years of his life. Both Swedenborg and Blake can be placed as prom-

inent figures in what has been called the Mystical Enlightenment, which amassed in significant ways in eighteenth-century England through various mixtures of Romanticism, the new prowess of the natural sciences, kabbalah, occultist theories, and numerous versions of Christian mysticism. Blake was but fifteen when Swedenborg died (in London), but Swedenborg's repu-



William Blake: "The Everlasting Gospel"

tation and imprint were strongly present in the environment in which Blake came of age.

Blake was fairly obscure during his own lifetime, but he was noticed by Coleridge, who was immensely famous during his short lifetime and who was also an appreciative reader of Swedenborg. The art patron and spiritual enthusiast C. A. Tulk published a letter in *London University Magazine* in 1825 (just two years before Blake's death) trying to elicit interest in the little-known Blake, and relates having taken the great Coleridge to Blake's home that year to view Blake's magnificent

"Last Judgement." Tulk writes,

Blake and Coleridge, when in company, seemed like congenial beings of another sphere, breathing for awhile on our earth; which may easily be perceived from the similarity of thought pervading their works.

One can couple this with one of Coleridge's published letters to the British writer and critic H. F. Carey, in which Coleridge avers Blake to "be a Swedenborgian—certainly" (Deck, 1978).

A key early attraction of Blake to Swedenborg was the Swedish mystic's reputation as one who had extensive mystical visions. The young William reported his first vision at the age of eight, when he related to his parents that he saw a tree whose boughs were full of angels. His mother was supportive, but some accounts note that his father, upon hearing the news, set out to thrash him. And so one of his earliest understandings was that mystical experiences could be physically dangerous when revealed to the unsympathetic.

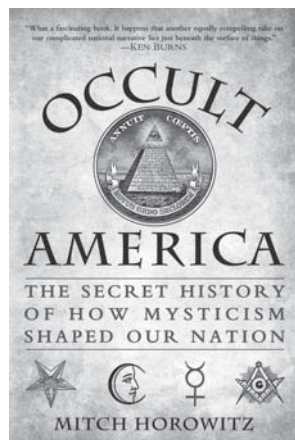
Blake was coming of age in the Age of Reasons, an era enamored of its new goddess, Science, and her handmaiden, Mathematics. . . . Henceforth all matters, cosmic and pedestrian, sacred and secular, were expected to yield their dark secrets to the Enlightenment and her vanguard of scientists. . . . Blake's psyche, however, had not evolved the appropriate wheels and gears to mesh with the new mathematical logic" (Bellin, 1985).

Blake studied at one of London's drawing schools and was apprenticed to an engraver, James Basire, from 1772

continues on page 165

Book Review

Swedenborg: Scientist, Christian Religious Seer—and Occultist?



REVIEWED BY EUGENE TAYLOR

Occult America: The Secret History of how Occultism Shaped Our Nation, Mitch Horowitz, Bantam Books, 290 pages, \$27.00

It may disappoint many New Church men and women, but there is not much about Swedenborg in this book. It is good that Swedenborg is not once again equated with Satanism and witchcraft, which, after all, underlies the true implication of the word *occult* to most practicing Christians, doesn't it? But it is not so good considering that Swedenborg's ideas had a major impact on American social and religious history, and, as one minister said, "no man could know the theology of the nineteenth century who had not read the works of Emanuel Swedenborg."

The conundrum lies within the definition of the word *occult*, by which the author, himself a journalist and editor of Tarcher/Penguin books, means, not Satanism and witchcraft, but a sanitized version of spiritualism, magic, New Thought, Christian Science, faith healing, and utopian idealism that is sometimes mapped onto the moral teachings of Christianity

and sometimes not in the history of American popular culture. Swedenborgians have the same problem in figuring out whether Swedenborg was just another mystic in the occult scene of the eighteenth century who claimed to travel to other planets or a true seer who produced the Third Testament for World Christianity. Swedenborg did have an influence on eighteenth-century French and German Rosacruzianism and Freemasonry, as chronicled by Al Gabay's *Covert Enlightenment: The Eighteenth Century Counterculture and Its Aftermath* (Swedenborg Foundation, 2005).¹ Hans Birch Gram, a Swedenborgian and a student of Samuel Hahnemann, brought homeopathy to the United States in 1825 and gathered a small number of Swedenborgian ministers around him as his first students.² Later in the nineteenth century, the major homeopathic apothecaries, such as Boerick and Tafel in Philadelphia, and Otis Clapp in Boston were also major distributors of Swedenborg's writings. The author, Mitch Horowitz, overlooks these facts, but identifies Swedenborg as a scientist and mystic. He mentions the influence of Swedenborg's ideas on Johnny Appleseed and his appearance in the trance visions of Andrew Jackson Davis, allegedly the father of American spiritualism, and Prof. George Bush of New York University, a Swedenborgian author who was enamored with Spiritualism and hypnotism. There is no mention of The New Church as an orthodox Christian denomination,³ or the tremendous influence Swedenborg's ideas had on the New England Transcendentalists.⁴ He neglects to mention Swedenborg's wide influence on people interested in the process of spiritual self-realization, such as Helen Keller.⁵ And curiously, in

the eight instances where he does mention Swedenborg, he never explains who he was. They are just one-liners out of any context.

That being said, what more was there to write about? Actually, geared to a lay audience, although with a deceptively annotated bibliography drawing on newspaper accounts, scholarly studies, trade books on the subject, unpublished letters, and first person statements—several of which the author took a fact from without grasping the writer's overall thesis, the book is surprisingly well written. It's a fascinating subject and a great read. Its thesis is that the tradition of the occult, in the way the author defines it (which is *occult-lite*), had a major impact on the birth and evolution of the United States as a free democracy. He does mention the occult as a kind of religious movement unto itself; he does mention Christianity, some of whose members were spiritualists as well; he does mention moral development as a putative goal of many spiritualist enterprises; and he does mention the scientific aura that surrounded attempts to communicate with the dead, allowing some spiritualists to side with science against organized religions, if in word only.

Written in a journalistic style, *Occult America* is quite readable and quite informative, but I have two caveats about the author's accomplishments. First, because he is not a historian or a scholar of the subject, he lacks a methodology or background to evaluate the theses of the numerous authors who have already written so well, and some not so well, on this subject; he takes his sources uncritically, giving their views equal status. Second, while he is justified in keeping the focus on his main

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continued from previous page

thesis, the influence of the occult on the rise of democracy, he skirts many of the concomitant issues. A few of these include celibacy versus free love; ascetic communities fostering altered states of consciousness, meanwhile retaining a wing of economic development, and the incompatibility of these two opposing sets of values; the perpetration of fraud for financial gain; the tawdry side of sexual magic; and the presence of a true criminal element, as in what the Nazis brought to their interpretation of the occult as the new religion of the Thousand Year Reich. In short, the author seems to ignore or downplay the dark side of the movement he is describing.

Finally, we should ask what this book does to help the reader understand where Swedenborgian thought fits into "Occult America." Was Swedenborg a scientist, an interpreter of revealed religion, *and* an occultist as well? I will finish with an instructive story that suggests Mr. Horowitz's book gives us a somewhat skewed picture, reflecting what remains to this day an international stereotype about the Swedenborgian Church. When I was a student at Harvard Divinity School back in the late 1970s, I made friends with Rob Stockman, a member of the Baha'i religion, and we had long conversations about Thornton Chase, a Swedenborgian minister who had converted to Baha'i in the 1890s. After Rob graduated he became the official historian of the Baha'i religion in America, stationed in Wilmette, Illinois. As a member of the American Academy of Religion, he was contacted by the Alternative Religions in America Study Group headed by Tim Miller and asked to write a chapter on the history of Baha'i in America for a book they were planning on alternative religions.

Stockman recommended me as a candidate to write the chapter on Swe-

denborgianism. The study group confined me to only fifteen typed pages. When the paperwork arrived, it indicated that the entry on the history of Swedenborgianism, which they classified with the American spiritualist churches, would go in between Satanism and witchcraft. I wrote back that that characterization of the Swedenborgian Church was in error; they replied that they were the experts in the history of religions in America and that their experts placed Swedenborgians among the American spiritualist churches.

So I wrote a chapter on Swedenborgianism that laid out, in detail, the history of the ecclesiastical New Church in America as a Christian denomination, and the ten reasons why it was not an American spiritualist church. The group accepted the manuscript as the best chapter they had so far received and issued an apology, because it was clear from my ecclesiastical history that 1) they had never read any Swedenborg, and 2) the Christian denomination of the Church of the New Jerusalem was not derived from the American spiritualist churches. They obliged by placing my chapter alongside Transcendentalism and Unitarianism.

Regarding Swedenborg as an occultist, my opinion is that, following the texts on non-Western religions that give credence to the reality of psychic experiences, as Swedenborg himself had done, supernormal powers are an epiphenomenon in the process of spiritual self-realization and are merely signs of one's progress, not ends to be pursued unto themselves. Jesus said as much when a disciple asked him about the miracles he produced that are recounted in the Gospels. I am certain that Swedenborg would agree. ☩

Endnotes

1 See also E. Taylor (2005). "Review of Alfred Gabay's *The Covert Enlightenment: Eighteenth Century Counter-Culture and Its Aftermath*." *Studia Swedenborgiana*.

Vol. 14, April, Number 2 [www.bayside-swedenborgianchurch.com].

2 Margarita Block, *New Church in the New World: A study of Swedenborgianism in America*. New York: H. Holt & co., c1932

3 E. I. Taylor (1995). "Swedenborgianism," T. Miller (ed) *America's Alternative Religions*. Albany: SUNY Press, pp. 77-86.

4 E. I. Taylor (1988). "Ralph Waldo Emerson: The Swedenborgian and Transcendentalist connection," R. Larsen (ed), *Emanuel Swedenborg; The Vision Continues*. (300th anniversary volume). New York: The Swedenborg Foundation. 127-136; Reprinted in J. Lawrence (ed) *Testimony to the Invisible*. San Francisco; J. Appleseed and Co., 1995.

5 Eugene Taylor (1981). "William James and Helen Keller," *Studia Swedenborgiana* Vol. 4, Number 1. [www.baysideswedenborgianchurch.com].

Eugene Taylor, PhD is a member of the Cambridge Society and vice-president of the Massachusetts Association.

General Council

continued from page 160

of courtesy and respect.

After adjournment and a closing devotional, the council hosted an evening reception to honor Martha Bauer for her nineteen years of service as Convention's Central Office Manager. (An article detailing Martha's service will appear in the January Messenger.) The council and guests were joined by Larry Conant, Gina Peracchi, and Donna Keane to welcome Martha, her son, and his wife. Chris Laitner presented Martha with a gift from Convention, an inscribed silver platter, after speaking of Martha's dedication, contributions, and friendship. The Rev. Andy Stinson conducted a short ceremony to establish November 7 as a feast day in honor of Martha Bauer. All present expressed their gratitude to Martha and their sadness on her departure, but wished her well in her retirement. Martha reminded everyone that she lives not far from the office and still has a telephone. ☩

SCYL Retreat

continued from page 155

school, etc.), at what level (local, state, national, etc.) and how (working within the system, non-violent civil disobedience, etc.) were all discussed.

A highlight of the retreat was the Rev. Susannah Currie's session on Helen Keller. Rev. Currie opened her evening session sitting in silent meditation. She was introduced to the group as Helen Keller. Then each teen retreat-er was asked to come forward and introduce himself or herself to "Helen" by spelling his or her name into her palm using a finger. Helen then greeted each person and gave him or her an inspirational or thought provoking message to read to the group.

We then watched portions of the video *Shining Soul: Helen Keller's Spiritual Life and Legacy*, and then discussed her life, her extreme challenge, and the many gifts she brought to the world.

To conclude the session, we all got an opportunity to take (and be!) Helen Keller bowling. A local alley features Saturday night disco bowling with popular music and black light fluorescent ambience. Helen Keller unfortunately could not experience either of these attractions. Our group reserved three lanes and added the name "Helen" to each bowling team. Every time Helen's turn to bowl came up a retreat-er was blindfolded, ear plugged and lead by a friend (Anne Sullivan) up to the lane. The friend then assisted Helen in selecting a ball, positioning herself on the lane and throwing the ball (hopefully) towards the pins. We all had the chance to experience the world blind and deaf in a very full sensorial

environment.

One teen embraced the activity and boldly decided to bowl much of his game blind without assistance. His score amazingly improved! As a matter of fact, many bowlers lost to "Helen"



(L to R) Celie and Nina prepare lunch as Cody and Holly oversee activities.

(albeit gutter rails were up). Perhaps this is a lesson we all can learn from. One Helen bowler did, however, manage to bounce a ball into an adjacent, and fortunately, unoccupied lane.

I found the experience of bowling as Helen unnerving and unsettling. I was concerned that my teen assistant might trick me and align me in the wrong di-

rection or otherwise embarrass me. I found it both difficult and rewarding to let go and trust someone else completely. After bowling, one teen commented, "Every time I went up to bowl as myself and not Helen, I felt grateful for my ability to see and hear."

God has given us a great gift in the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. Many people over time have gained inspiration and strength through his words, and perhaps no one so deeply and intensely as Helen Keller. And Helen Keller changed the world. On the ride home from the Blairhaven Retreat Center, teen Nina Sasser remarked, "I really needed that Blairhaven. All the pressure from college

visits and tests." To Nina, this retreat was a dose, a shot, of positive and affirming energy. We all really need that Blairhaven. Time spent with friends learning and growing together can change you. And you can change the world. ☙

Kurt Fekete is the Swedenborgian Church youth director.

Editor's Desk

continued from page 154

celebrations emerge in popular culture, first in England and thence to the rest of the Western world. It grew from modest decorating and gift-giving with an emphasis on children and the family, to a commercial holiday that overshadows its origins.

In my maturity, I have made peace with the commercial Christmas, not feeling the need to rail or despair at it, but rather focusing on the deeper meaning I find by reflecting on the

Lord's birth.

So how do I keep Christmas? I attend Christmas Eve service, share a meal and simple gifts with family and close friends, and spend some quiet time reflecting on God's world, the love I receive and give, and the meaning of God's appearance on earth in the form of Jesus Christ.

I wish all of you a happy Christmas, celebrated in the way you choose, I hope, in the presence and memories of family.

—Herb Ziegler

Blake

continued from page 161

to 1779. At the age of 25 in 1882, he married Catherine Boucher, whom he taught to read, write, and draw. It was under the tutelage of Basire that Blake first encountered the writings of Swedenborg. Blake owned at least three of Swedenborg's major works: *Heaven and Hell* (1758), *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (1763), and *Divine Providence* (1764). They were found among his estate annotated in his own hand. We also know that he became familiar with Swedenborg's ideas on love and eros in his 1768 work, *Conjugal Love*, as he later noted its influence on some of his writings and drawings. From his earliest adult years Blake was drawn to radical ideas, one of them being kabbalistic and Tantric ideas surrounding the ability of sexual trance to bring one closer to God. There is evidence that he was familiar with Moravian and Sabbatian groups, both of whom were writing about and practicing antinomian behavior.

One of Swedenborg's most contentious ideas is that of concubinage and its potential worth in marriage. In *Why Mrs. Blake Cried*, Marcia Keith Schuchard notes,

In 1893, when Edwin John Ellis and William Butler Yeats brought out their ground breaking editions of Blake's works, they repeated (earlier reports): "It is said that Blake wished to add a concubine to his establishment in the Old Testament manner, but gave up on the project when it made Mrs. Blake cry" (Schuchard, 2006, p. 3).

In an earlier work, Schuchard gives more details.

In fact, it was through the Swedes' influence on the Swedenborg Society in 1788–90 that the first evidence of Mrs. Blake's difficulties with her husband's sexual theosophy begins to emerge. In March 1788 Charles Bernhard

Wadström . . . arrived in London with the manuscript of Swedenborg's spiritual diary. Though Blake's friend John Augustus Tulk offered to subsidize the publication of these "memorabilia" from the spirit world, some of the English Swedenborgians were horrified at the erotic and magical scenes described in them. In February 1789, . . . bold advocacy of Swedenborg's sexual and alchemical theories exacerbated an emerging liberal-conservative split in the society. Though the London society was linked with Swedenborgian Masonic lodges in Avignon, Paris, Berlin, and Stockholm, a minority of English members distrusted the revolutionary leanings of the foreigners, and they determined to establish a separate dissenting church at Great Eastcheap. When the Blakes attended the Great Eastcheap Conference in April 1789, the factions attempted to patch over their quarrel, and they issued a compromise manifesto, which both William and Catherine signed (Schuchard, "Why Mrs. Blake Cried: Blake, Swedenborg, and the Sexual Basis for Spiritual Vision" *Esoterica*, 2000, p. 65).

That, however, is the last piece of evidence that either of them continued mingling with organized Swedenborgian meetings.

Though they were both known for mystical experiences, as personality types Blake and Swedenborg were opposites: the artist emotionally explosive, the natural philosopher reserved and methodical. Yet they were both immensely creative men who liked to work independently and outside the confines of human institutions, and they both proved lasting architects of new movements in their respective fields. And they both drew heavily from some of the same underground currents of thought in their quest to address the great ques-

tions of religion and philosophy. Today they stand forth as receivers of and contributors to a broad stream of Western esotericism in which some particular ideas and concepts loom large in each career. Foremost would be an unfettered commitment to a transcendental realm which holds the natural and phenomenal world in its care. Equally compelling is a shared understanding of some of the principles of relating to that realm: correspondences, influx, the Divine Human (and the idea of the human form as a metaphysical microcosm of the cosmos). And as well they shared a symbolist view of sacred scripture, which each held as a privileged divine text.

Many Blakean scholars know little about Blake's esoteric passions, including his off-and-on interest in Swedenborg. And many Blakean scholars believe only the early Blake was interested in Swedenborg. That doyen of Blakean scholars, Kathleen Raine, nevertheless describes three phases of Blake's relationship to Swedenborg: early enthusiasm, middle hostility, and late renewed appreciation (as the 1825 Coleridge visit attests). In examining Blake's *Songs of Experience* and citing Blake's deployment of such Swedenborgian concepts as the Divine Human, the succession of epochal "churches," and the nature of regeneration, Raine concludes, "The influence of Swedenborg, if anything, is clearer in the last works than in the first" (Bellin, p. 101).

Blake's rise from obscurity came from a popular biography of him published in 1863 by Alexander Gilchrist. He speculates on the artist and Swedish sage coincidentally crossing paths on London streets one afternoon in 1772:

The coincidence is not a trivial one. Of all modern men the engraver's apprentice was to grow up the likeliest to Emanuel Swedenborg; already by constitutional temperament and endowment was so:

continues on page 167

SHS Board Meeting

continued from page 157

a sense of community with other Swedenborgian students. The board took their concerns under consideration and empowered the executive committee to designate a policy for scholarship fund use by distance students.

Reporting for the academic committee, Tom Neuenfeldt delineated four points. First, the Certificate of Swedenborgian Theology has been adopted by PSR (as reported in the October 2009 *Messenger*). Second, with two students studying at Earlham School of Religion (ESR) in Indiana, it is proving a good fit with SHS as PSR and ESR accept cross-registration of courses (credits transfer seamlessly). Third, the three-year curriculum plan was detailed: Inese Radzins, Jim Lawrence, and George Dole cover a complete cycle of required Swedenborgian courses. Fourth, the time has come when a Swedenborgian scholar must be developed in order to address future academic needs.

In the ensuing discussion, Jim Lawrence presented his thoughts on the issue of scholar development. He believes that SHS, as many seminaries are now doing, should provide full tuition as well as a living stipend to a PhD candidate preparing to do research and teach in Swedenborgian studies, and the board agreed. Furthermore, he felt that this candidate should be a committed Swedenborgian, 45 years old or younger. Inese Radzins is establishing herself in theology, and Jim is establishing himself in both history and spirituality, but neither George Dole nor Jim Lawrence will be available to teach forever. After extensive discussion, the board formed a search committee chaired by Tom Neuenfeldt.

Discussion then shifted to allocation of financial resources to achieve the shift in goals. An ad-hoc committee was formed (Jane Siebert, chair) to investigate potential cost savings. ☩

NCC Women's Group

continued from page 153

- exploitation
3. Maternal health and fistula
 4. Expansive language
 5. Poverty
 6. Climate change and eco-justice concerns
 7. The girl child
 8. Young women's leadership
 9. Sexism and theology

Chris Laitner, Mary Ann Fisher, and I were sure that some of you would be interested, and so we are asking for your input. Please e-mail me at jane.siebert@wesleymc.com about your interest, and I will pass your information on to the appropriate group. You can decide how involved you wish to become as you work with others from a variety of denominations. You can help from home and within your community, no travel required.

If you have more questions, please e-mail me, and I will try to answer them. My interest is in maternal health and fistula. You can also visit the Web page, www.nccusa.org/womensministry, join them on Facebook at "NCC Women's Ministries," or e-mail atie-

NCC General Assembly

continued from page 153

Council of Churches' general assembly, as well as things that the Rev. Dr. David Fekete might bring forward from his attendance as our named ecumenical officer to the Governing Board of the NCCCUSA. In the accompanying article, the Rev. Jane Siebert has written about the Justice for Women Working Group. Our denomination's General Council discussed our need to remain connected to the National Council of Churches, determining to find ways to support a continued presence both on the governing board and at the general assemblies. If you would like to know more about this organization, please take the time to visit www.nccusa.org for information. ☩

Chris Laitner is president of the General Convention.

meyer@nccusa.org to be included in their e-mail list serve. ☩

Thanks. I am excited that we can add our voice to the many others working for gender justice.

The Rev. Jane Siebert is a Chaplain in Hutchinson, Kansas.

Women's Creed

(From the J4WWG Web site: www.nccusa.org/womensministry)

- We believe in God who creates women and men as partners in God's image.
- We believe in working together in harmony—respecting and honoring each other.
- We believe that we are co-workers with God in creating and preserving life.
- We believe in God who took human form to redeem us from fear and prejudice, anger and hatred, greed and selfishness.
- We believe in Jesus, who empowered women and outcasts and gives them new life.
- We believe in the Spirit, active in our world, who encourages and nurtures, strengthens and restores us.
- We believe in the Spirit who quickens us to be involved in the work of the Kingdom.

Passages

Baptisms

Monroe Francis Lane-Olsen, son of Adam and Alison Lane-Olsen, was baptized into the Christian faith on October 4, 2009, at the New Jerusalem Church in Pretty Prairie, Kansas. The Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen officiated. Monroe is the grandson of Elvin and

Veneta Lane, of Hutchinson, Kansas, and the great-grandson of the Rev. Eric Zacharias, also of Hutchinson.

New Members

The New Church of the Southwest Desert welcomed **Mark and Carol Jeldness** of Silver City, New Mexico into membership in October 2009.

Lisa Lucka and **Lou Golob** transferred their membership from the LaPorte

(Indiana) New Church and joined the Royal Oak (Michigan) Church of the Holy City on July 5, 2009.

Deaths

Betty Zacharias passed on into the fuller life of her gentle spirit October 15, 2009. She had been a resident of Golden Plains Nursing Home in Hutchinson, Kansas, for most of the past three years, suffering from Alzheimers Disease, which, sadly, had destroyed much of her memory. The transition experience was for her a great release, with her granddaughter, the Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen, and her husband, the Rev. Eric Zacharias at her bedside. A memorial service celebrating her long and good life was held in the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church on October 24, Rev. Lane-Olsen officiating. She is survived by children, their families, and many grandchildren. Internment took place in Lone Star cemetery, Pretty Prairie. (See memorial article on the next page.) ☩

Online Course from SHS—Open to All

A Survey of the Theology and History of the Old Testament: The Rev. Dr. David Fekete

Starting January 11, 2010

In Exodus 34:6-7, God says to Moses, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin." This is not the God many expect to find in the Old Testament. Many think that the Old Testament God is angry, violent, and jealous. But there is much beauty and power in the Old Testament that many readers miss because finding its beauty sometimes requires guidance. The Old Testament is a compilation of texts representing 2,000 years of additions. As the people of Israel developed over time, their interpretation of holiness and of God evolved. This course is a guide for progressive readers to the history of the Old Testament and the development of its theology.

Rev. Dr. David Fekete is pastor of the Edmonton New Church Society in Alberta, Canada. He holds an M.T.S. from Harvard University in Religion and Culture and a Ph.D. from the University of Virginia in Religion and Literature. His research interests are in spirituality and love, in all its varied forms.

Tuition for each seven-week class is only \$150. 50% discount to the first five students who register! For more information, please go to www.shs.psr.edu!

Betty Zacharias

continued from page 168

sponse. In her quiet, calm manner she would reply, "I don't think so." I then asked, "If you would like to get married sometime, I'm ready to be your husband. Would you like that?" "Yes," she answered, "I wish that you and I could be married. I would like that."

Memories! A long parade of wonderful memories! Perhaps this is what life is all about. Life is indeed a journey, one in which, from day to day, in our relationships with one another, some most intimate, others much more distant, we author a book of memories that reveals a tale of joy and sorrow, of work and play, of high ideals and also some depth of despair . . . and in the end, there it is: the smiling face of our Creator, as always, offering His presence to lead us home.

—David Lomax

—Eric Zacharias

Blake

continued from page 165

in faculty for theosophic dreaming, for the seeing of visions while broad awake, and in matter of fact hold of spiritual things. To savant and to artist alike, while yet on earth, the Heavens were opened (*Life of William Blake*, Alexander Gilchrist, p. 15). ☩

Reprinted from the SHS Web site: www.shs.psr.ed.

Francesca McCrossan is academic affairs associate at the Swedenborgian House of Studies and James F. Lawrence is the dean.

Letters to the Editor

continued from page 154

stimulation and interest? (I have so far enjoyed Jim Lawrence, David Fekete and Steve Sanchez's articles in this particular issue.) It's also good to read references to people that I met whilst attending Annual Convention in 2000, even when being sad to hear recently in your pages about Marlene Laughlin's death.

I hope you're enjoying your role as *Messenger* editor—I'm enjoying the fruits of your labours.

—David Lomax

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 Memoriam

Alice E. (Betty) Zacharias

It was over. Finished. The long, painful struggle with Alzheimers . . . the suffering which had taken her away from family, her talent, her friends . . . in a single moment, left her at peace. It was just before lunch on October 15 that she, with her granddaughter, Alison, and I at her bedside and holding her hands . . . that she took her final breath.

Betty was born March 24, 1923, in Kitchen-er, Ontario, to parents Lorne and Veneta Melen-backer. She grew up on a farm near the commu-nity of Ayr with an old-er brother, Ward, and a sister, Anne. An outdoor person, she not only loved but grew in her knowledge of, the secrets of the riv-er that flowed through the farm pasture, the trees of the woodlot which gave map-le syrup in the spring, and the garden vegetables and the bugs so determined to destroy them.

On May 29, 1943, Betty and I were joined in holy matrimony, with the Rev. David P. Johnson officiating. It was war-time. The ceremony took place on the family farm in the presence of family and

a few friends, with lilacs and apple blos-soms decorating this lovely setting. The late afternoon train brought us home to the RCAF base near Trenton, east of Toronto.

Betty had the good fortune to be born with not only an inquiring mind, but also with the na-tive ability to satisfy that mind. She knew song birds, flowers, even weeds and bugs. She lived with a book in one hand and a serv-ing spoon in the other. She became our church organist and taught Sunday school—but couldn't sing well. She made most of her outer garments and those of her five children in their early years. She made the best apple pie and the world's best cabbage borscht.

Betty and I enjoyed a long, rich, and blessed life. In a strange way, the Alzheimers brought us closer to one another. "Who are you," she often asked as we, with her in the wheelchair, walked on sunny afternoons. "Well, I'm your ever faithful husband," was my re-

continues on page 167

