

Martha Bauer Retires : 20 Years of Sterling Service

BY HERB ZIEGLER

November 1, 2009, marked the end of an era for the Swedenborgian Church as Martha Bauer retired from her position as Central Office manager. Performing the function of chief operating officer, Martha worked with five presidents, five chairs of the Council of Ministers and numerous officers, General Council members, and support unit members.

Hired as bookkeeper in 1989, she stepped seamlessly into the role of executive director when that position was vacated, proving adept at not only bookkeeping, but also accounting, office management, event management, personnel management, member relations, Computer troubleshooting, research, diplomacy, and communications. Responding in a recent interview to a question about her biggest challenges Martha said,

Much of what I ended up doing in the Central Office was not

part of the job description or even part of the job as my predecessors performed it. I had to learn fund accounting and how it applied to our particular needs. Computer repair and software troubleshooting became my responsibility, but I loved it.

Not only members active in General Convention affairs, but other members across the US and Canada got to know Martha through information requests in both directions—Martha contacted members to keep records updated and members called Martha to get current or historical information.

If you look up *executive function* in an illustrated dictionary, you will probably find a picture of Martha. Comments from those who knew and worked with her usually include marveling at her mastery of large amounts of diverse information, her ability to summon it exactly when needed, often anticipating the need before being asked. In addition, she is an expert in the finances, history, polity,

and personalities of the Swedenborgian Church. Nothing slipped from her desk; all tasks, those assigned and those she initiated, were completed in a stellar and timely manner.

Martha came to the Central Office of the Church in 1989 to apply for that part-time bookkeeping position; she was motivated to get back into the

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A Farewell Celebration

The General Council feted Martha Bauer to a farewell reception following its fall meeting on November 7. Martha was accompanied by her son, Silas, and his wife, Andrea (her husband, Larry, was unable to attend). Renée Helenbrecht, the new operations manager, and Gina Perrachi, the accounts manager at the Central Office,

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The Editor's Desk



Martha Bauer

We begin the new year with renewed purpose, but it also marks the passing of life as we have known it, because life in the natural world is subject to constant change imposed by time. Even a score of years passes by quickly; looking back reveals a long distance travelled. In the page 1 article about Martha Bauer and her years as Central Office manager (and tributes to her from the current and a past president) we catch a glimpse of the enormous changes that transpired during her tenure.

I wish to add my personal thanks to Martha for her invaluable guidance and support in my work for the General Convention, as both a volunteer and an employee. Martha not only responded promptly with critical information or sage advice, she took time from her busy schedule to provide unsolicited information that she knew would be helpful.

We will miss her presence and wisdom in the office, but we appreciate that she has spent time training the very capable Renée Helenbrecht to assume the reins.

Practice

If you couldn't make it to Fryeburg New Church Assembly family camp in August—try to make it next year—then you will appreciate the small taste of the Rev. George Dole's camp lectures in the article "Swedenborg's

Practice" on page 3. Rev. Dole extracts Swedenborg's references to the ways in which he prepared for, entered, and experienced "altered states" from across his writings. Enjoy the precision with which George puts these references in a context that sheds light on our own "practices."

Service

The Rev. Dave Brown and the Rev. Carla Friedrich have recently completed an international service trip to orphanages in Nepal, where they, with a diverse group of volunteers from the US, worked to improve and enhance the lives of children. Read about their extraordinary trip and Carla's wonderful vision of establishing a new orphanage as a venue for Swedenborgian service on pages 4 and 5.

—Herb Ziegler

Church Calendar

April 1, 2010: Association statistics due at Central Office

April 10: General Council spring teleconference meeting

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

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

July 8–11: Gathering Leaves Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania

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Gathering Leaves 2010

A Feast of Friendship

The next Gathering Leaves retreat "A Feast of Friendship" will occur July 8–11, 2010, at The Lord's New Church, Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. All New Church/Swedenborgian women are invited to attend for the purpose of learning and connecting with others in our own and our sister denominations. The signification of "holding a feast" is worship from a glad mind (*Secrets of Heaven* §7093).

Contact Linda Odhner (lsiodhner@verizon.net) or Page Morahan (Page.Morahan@drexelmed.edu) with proposals for workshops and speakers. Workshop proposals are needed by December 31.

If you have questions or wish to help, contact Roslyn Taylor (hrtaylor@temple.edu). ☩

the Messenger

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Swedenborg's Practice



BY GEORGE
DOLE

Since the nineteen sixties, especially, there has been a widespread fascination with altered states of

consciousness, including some responsible and some quite irresponsible experimentation with psychedelic drugs. The western nations have discovered that oriental cultures are much more advanced in this general field, and some very impressive individuals have attracted both attention and followers.

As is often the case with a new discovery, there has been a tendency to use it to explain all kinds of things with which it may have little or no connection. I think, for example, of John Allegro's attempt to explain Jesus' life and teaching as an example of mushroom-based ecstasy. I think also of Signe Toksvig's much earlier effort to describe Swedenborg's visions as "trances" and his books as the result of automatic writing.

I have little patience with such efforts, primarily because they consistently display a pattern of looking for any and all evidence that may support them and discounting, misreading, explaining away, or simply ignoring evidence that points in a different direction. In the case of Jesus, the evidence available to standard academic scholarship is of course very slight. The lines are far, far apart, and there is lots of room to read between them. In the case of Swedenborg, though, there is a fair amount of quite solid evidence; and given the extraordinary nature of his visionary experience, it would seem to make sense to look at that evidence. If Swedenborg found a path to con-

sciousness of the other world, then, the obvious first step is to look as squarely as we can at what he said about that path as he followed it.

Alfred Acton, in his *Introduction to the Word Explained* (Bryn Athyn: Academy of the New Church, 1927) went into this subject in some detail, and a fair amount of what I will be saying is drawn directly from that work. There is useful information in any of the standard biographies, but Acton seems particularly focused and thorough. It was only when I found it necessary to check a couple of translation details that I discovered that he had left out some of the material that is most germane to this week's theme.

Swedenborg insisted that the Lord had prepared him for his task and that this preparation had been constant throughout his life.

Before telling the story of Swedenborg's "path to enlightenment," though, there are three general observations that I think are essential. The first is that "an altered state of consciousness" is not an end in itself. The purpose of creation is not simply higher consciousness but a heaven from the human race, and heaven is true community. After all, people in hell are in an altered state of consciousness, directly if distortedly conscious of the spiritual world. If an altered state of consciousness does not result in better relationships with others, it is worthless at best.

The second is that there is a difference between "observation" and "practice." I can observe that when I run up a long hill I become short of breath. This does not mean that I practice running up long hills in order to become short of breath. It certainly does not mean that I practice becoming short of breath in order to

run up long hills. There is a difference between a cause and an effect, and it behooves us not to confuse the one for the other.

The third is that we need to look at what we mean by the word "practice." Specifically, do we mean any regular discipline, or do we mean only a deliberate, conscious discipline? Let me give three examples. First, I make a conscious effort to check my blood pressure at the same time every evening. I have been doing this for quite a few years now, and I still forget now and then. Second, I'm better at brushing my teeth. It's just about impossible for me to forget because I don't feel right if I fail to do so after breakfast and before going to bed. Third, I also have developed a very strict discipline for walking, namely alternating feet. I do this all the time, but I am conscious of it only when I stop to think of it, as now, when it comes in handy for purposes of illustration. When we have done something the same way for so long that we do it without thinking and in fact would have to make a conscious effort to do it in any other way, is that a "practice"?

With these three points in mind, then, let me turn to the subject of Swedenborg's practice. This must be put together from scattered pieces, since he never gives us a comprehensive overview.

We may begin with his early childhood, expecting that we will see change over the course of the years, and noting first of all that he was born in an era and in a household that took the presence of spirits and angels for granted. In his revelatory years, Swedenborg insisted that the Lord had prepared him for his task and that this preparation had been constant throughout his life. In §2532 of *The Word Explained* he wrote,

... the tenor of divine providence has ruled the acts of my

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Nepal Service Project 2009



BY DAVID BROWN

At 11:20 PM on Friday evening, September 18, a small group of eight spiritual wayfarers lifted

off from the tarmac of Los Angeles International Airport on route to our final destination of the Ama Ghar and Loving Arms Mission orphanages of Nepal. The Rev. Carla Friedrich from San Diego and I accompanied this group as the first international service project for our denomination in many years.

I am friends with Shrawan Nepali, founder the Ama Ghar orphanage, which I visited six years ago. I was impressed with how the organization was run, and so in 2008 I proposed a church service project to The Ministries Support Unit (MINSU). Rev. Friedrich had been in contact with Kent Rogers of the Loving Arms Mission, who had grown up in the General Church and was led by the Lord to begin this orphanage in Kathmandu. It took over a year of planning and preparation to launch this effort, and I know it was truly transformational for all who took the journey.

I turned to the Holy Word and, of course, to Swedenborg's writings for my inspiration for being charitable and useful. Two quotes have helped me keep the big picture in perspective:

Religion that is pure and undefiled before God, the Father, is this: to care for orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world (James 1:27).

Heaven consists in this, that from the heart we wish better for others than for ourselves, and desire to be of service to others in order to promote their happiness, and this for no selfish end, but from love (*Diving Providence* §60).

This first leg of the flight for our Nepal service project was approximately twenty hours long before landing in

Thanks to the Ministries Support Unit and members of the Swedenborgian Church, the Wayfarers Chapel board of directors and staff, and the congregation of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church for helping to make this service project possible.

—Dave Brown and
Carla Friedrich

It was here that we met as a group, and I helped prepare everyone for the enormous adjustment in cultural and socioeconomic circumstances we would be facing in just a matter of hours. Perhaps *prepare* is not the appropriate word here,

because there really is no way to properly prepare anyone for the experience of going from a wealthy Western country to a poor country in Asia.

It is not only a shock to the senses to travel from a wealthy nation with a massive infrastructure to a poor, developing

nation, but also a culture shock of different languages, social norms, religions, and life philosophies. From the Bangkok airport to landing in Kathmandu is only a four-hour flight, but it is a gigantic transition from the relative comforts of the modern Western world. The last words of advice I gave our group before boarding the plane in Bangkok were, "Go with the flow."

Spiritually, it is always a good practice not to resist whatever happens in life, to accept the reality of life no matter what form it takes and to maintain your spiritual center. This spiritual

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The first evening at Ama Ghar; the children got everyone dancing.

Photos: Kymri Witt

Thailand. Upon arrival in Bangkok, I handed everyone in our group a home-baked chocolate chip cookie that Amara and Mikayla (my wife and daughter) had made for us. It was a welcome treat after a very long flight and it was the last taste of home for the next few weeks. Bangkok International Airport is a massive structure filled with all the modern conveniences that you might find in any major airport—fast food, coffee, factory outlet, and duty-free shops lined the twenty-minute walk through the terminal to our connecting flight.

And a Child Shall Lead Them (Isaiah 11:6)



BY CARLA FRIEDRICH

"If you Love me
Keep my Com-
mandments" (John
14:15)

"The Kingdom of
Heaven is a King-
dom of Uses" (Heaven & Hell 387)

Nepal is a diverse and fabled land of the Buddha, Hindu temples, and mountain views. It's bordered by India to the southwest and the Himalayas and China to the northeast. The population of Katmandu, the city we visited, has doubled in the last year. A first impression is that poverty is everywhere and economic and political strife are extreme. Yet, in the face of much misery, the people of Nepal are generally happy, friendly, welcoming, smiling, and gracious. They are also very beautiful of face and spirit. We were always greeted with the prayerful "Namaste," which is a Sanskrit word with a multitude of meanings, most of which translate to "I recognize, greet, or honor the spirit in you which is also in me." Amid the bleak surroundings, one gets the impression that the enjoyment of bright colors, spices, savory foods, and music might border on something close to a religious experience.

Bold smells, a high ambient noise level, and colorful signage everywhere overwhelm the senses. Each morning as early as 4:30 AM, we were awakened by barking dogs, crowing roosters, clanging bells, shouting, running, and laughing children, prayers, chanting, birds in the trees, motorcycles, buses, and honking car horns.

Katmandu was a lot to absorb, and before departing, I had precious little

time to learn about it. I did, however, rely on the research and vast experience of my traveling companions.

I was grateful to be able to join the Rev. Dave Brown's Swedenborgian service trip to Nepal as a latecomer when cancellations made some space available and the San Diego congregation, who believed in what we were doing,



Members of the servie group and children from Ama Ghar at the new orphanage work site.

supported the project with donations. We were to represent the denomination through mission work, thus uses.

My desire to be useful in the project complemented my long-term motivation: A dream to establish an orphanage. In fact, this "call" preceded my call to ministry. I know from personal experience how our teachings—or the Lord's presence in them—have the power to save, heal, or set a person free, to enrich, restore innocence and trust, build confidence, inspire hope, and bring joy. So, with this trip, I intended to begin an informal feasibility study of orphanages, and to begin by experiencing one in a Swedenborgian context. In addition to visiting Ama Ghar, I planned a visit to Loving Arms Mission/New Life Home for Children, founded ten years ago by Kent Rogers, a Swedenborgian in the Gen-

eral Church. Kent was almost immediately joined by his (now) wife, Shova, and not long after by his sister Nadine, and her husband Rajendra (who is Shova's brother). I wanted to see how and to what extent our New Church teachings translated into useful service—into real work in the real world with real people. I wanted to absorb any aspect that could be duplicated. I went to discover how and if this kind of good could be multiplied if we supported such endeavors denominationally and organizationally. I also wanted to spread the word, inspire, and build hope within our denomination about the good we can do collectively with our focus on saving children.

By departure time, I'd prepared about 200 questions about how the orphanages were founded, their histories, what daily life was like, schedules, activities and responsibilities, difficulties and challenges, successes and joys, original inspirations and goals, organizational structure, staff, education, funding, the layout of the physical plant, and the dynamic interactions of all involved. I needed help. I needed to record data and document in visual form so that we could bring our experience home to inform and inspire others. I needed help formulating a business plan and an executive summary, and I needed people of good spirit to bring joy and happiness to the children and their parents.

I put a request on Facebook (an Internet social networking site) of all places. Immediately, four people enthusiastically responded and "signed on." The Swedenborgian Church of San Diego supports the arts, so one re-

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Martha Bauer Retires

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workforce by a desire to fund her son's attendance at a private school. Taking the plunge into full-time work and assuming much greater responsibilities than she had originally anticipated, Martha became office manager in less than a year. She quickly learned the ropes and took charge.

Every job has its rhythms, and Martha soon learned that the annual convention set the agenda for work and service. Working with local host committees, she arranged an unbroken string of successful conventions, dealing with numerous involved parties and endless details. Many people who had not met Martha or who knew her only through her telephone voice got to know her at annual conventions.

Those fortunate enough to get to know her have enjoyed her friendliness, her sharp wit and ready humor, and her helpfulness. Beyond the call of duty, she opened her house to meetings and, with her husband Larry, hosted many house guests and meals for Central Office visitors.

Over the course of twenty years, Martha implemented many organizational changes at the Central Office. Some of the changes reflected the na-

A Tribute to Martha

We have recently said goodbye to a woman who has served us extremely well as Central Office manager. That is probably the understatement of the year! And knowing this, it is only right and proper that we wish Martha Bauer (and her husband Larry too!) nothing but the best as she enters into this new phase of her life.

Throughout my years as both chair of the Council of Ministers and president of General Convention, Martha was always there for me and for others in so many ways. In all that she did, her primary goal was to help in accomplishing the goals that we set and the dreams that we held. She was there with information; she was there with guidance; she was there with a smile, hug, and whatever else was needed; and she never let us down.

I also feel the need to point out that this was the case in spite of the physical pain she endured due to her fibro myalgia. My heart literally ached for her when it hit. But even so, she did what needed to be done. Service was always her number one priority.

I have so many fond memories, especially of numerous evenings spent around the Bauer dining room table where we would gather after a long day of meetings. Martha would produce wonderful meals after working along with us all day, and the joy and laughter that we shared nourished our souls as much as the food nourished our bodies. I can still see her smiling. The love that was present in that house was a beautiful thing to share.

I am confident that Central Office has been left in good hands. Yet even so, we will all miss the woman who was a blessing to us all. But more than that, she is a friend—and a dear one at that! Thank you, Martha! And God be with you, always.

—Ron Brugler, former president of the Swedenborgian Church



The Rev. Andy Stinson blesses Martha Bauer and declares November 7 as a feast day in her honor. (r to l: Silas, Andrea, and Martha Bauer)

goals and priorities change, and financial resources fluctuate. But changes in technology played a large role in the challenges the Central Office faced. The decade, and Martha's tenure, began when personal computers had gained a foothold in offices, but the Internet had not come into common use. Martha managed the Central Office response to those changes and adapted to leaner and more efficient ways of conduct-

ing business. Commenting on changes she has experienced during her tenure, Martha said,

The increased use of ever cheaper electronic equipment and the reduction in staff are the biggest changes. I would also mention the evolution of the Central Office from a hospitality center with TV, kitchen and bedrooms to a business office. Also, as support units gave up the paid secretaries who kept records, the Central Office became the repository of digital and printed minutes and other documents.

Although she was, and continues to be, an active member of her Episcopalian church, she has become

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ture of organizations: offices and governing boards change continually,

Farewell Celebration

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Larry Conant and Gloria Toot joined the festivities as well.

After sharing refreshments, conversation, and laughter, the group turned their attention to the Rev. Andy Stinson. Andy conducted a short service, bestowing a blessing on Martha and naming November 7 as a feast day in her honor.

The evening ended with the presentation of a gift to Martha, a silver platter inscribed to Martha, by President Chris Laitner to thank her for twenty years of outstanding service to the Swedenborgian Church. Resounding applause was a final tribute as Martha began her retirement. ☩

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quite knowledgeable and conversant in Emanuel Swedenborg's teachings, finding much to appreciate there.

Asked about what she will miss most, Martha said,

I'll remember all the lovely people I met and got to know so well over twenty years, those still living and those who have gone to their reward. Everyone was very generous to me. I will remember the unique challenges of the position which led our lawyer to describe the Swedenborgian Church as his "most interesting client—by far!"

Discussing the future, Martha said, "I will miss my friends and the feeling of being useful to the church." And about the future, she said, "I have no specific plans yet, beyond regular exercise and a clean house. We'll have to see what Providence brings."

Providence brought Martha to the Swedenborgian Church, and the Church and its members appreciate and honor her service; we wish her well in the next phase of her life. ☩

Just for the record . . .

In 1989, a bookkeeper shared by the Swedenborg School of Religion (SSR) and the Central Office at their shared offices in Newton, Massachusetts, had to be replaced. According to the notes from 1989 pre-convention General Council meeting and also from the minutes of the annual convention, the new bookkeeper, Mrs. Martha Bauer, "is proving to be adequately experienced and very capable in learning the system used by the General Convention. She is quickly learning the ropes, and the treasurer and auditor are very pleased with her work."

In what was an unrelated action during the 1989 pre-convention General Council meeting, it was voted to establish a position called "Central Office manager" that would complement the position of Central Office director. The new position would have an annual salary of \$22,000.

The following October the General Council, with gratitude for a job well done, accepted the resignation of the central office director, Miss Ethelwyn (Muff) Worden, which would be effective August 1, 1990. A search committee was formed to find a successor.

All of these unrelated occurrences coalesced with the decision reported by the search committee chairman, Mrs. Betsy Young, vice president of Convention, that Mrs. Martha Bauer had been hired to begin the position of central office manager beginning August 1, 1990. It was further reported that this position would replace that of Central Office director.

. . . and a final word

It has been the good fortune of the General Convention that this series of actions culminated in the hiring of Martha Bauer as our central office manager. Over her twenty years of working with the denomination, she has proven to be a caring, helpful, invaluable resource and friend. We will miss her, but we also wish her a wonderful retirement. On Saturday evening, Nov. 7, 2009, the General Council closed its meeting with a reception for Martha, presenting her with a silver plate inscribed: "Martha Bauer for twenty years of loving, dedicated service to the Swedenborgian Church."

—Chris Laitner, president of the Swedenborgian Church



Chris Laitner presents Martha Bauer with a gift from General Convention expressing gratitude for twenty years of outstanding service. (Martha is flanked by Silas and Andrea Bauer)

Swedenborg's Practice

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life from my very youth and has so governed them that I might at last come to this end, that so, by means of knowledges of natural things, I might be able to understand the things which lie deeply concealed in the Word of God; and thus of the divine mercy of God Messiah be able to serve as an instrument for laying them bare.

That is what it looked like in retrospect.

The preparation he associates with his early childhood is the practice of “internal breathing.” In his *Spiritual Experiences* (§3464) he wrote, “I was first accustomed to breathe in this way in infancy when saying morning and evening prayers.” This is Acton’s translation, and this is where I found it necessary to check the Latin. “Infancy,” for us, is pre-verbal, and once children are saying morning and evening prayers, we no longer refer to them as “infants.” “In infancy” would be better translated, “when I was little.” The second involves the precise meaning of “accustomed to.” Does this mean simply that it became familiar, or that it became habitual?

The fuller text of §3464 goes a long way to answer this question.

Then I was shown some kinds of breathing and was told enough about them. There is an external one with usual breathing that is commonplace in the world of spirits. Then there is an inner one with an unconscious external, which is good enough, an inner without an external, which is better, and then one that is unconscious, one I could scarcely sense, which is angelic. These are general categories. But there are more such categories, and any number of subcategories, also varying as to locus in the body and the limitations that result from this—if the Lord is willing, I will

say more about this later.

I got used to breathing like this in early childhood when I was saying morning and evening prayers and sometimes later, when I was exploring the coordination between the lungs and the heart. Especially when I was writing from my mind things that were published, over the course of many years, I kept noticing that my breathing was tacit, scarcely conscious. Later I was given to think and to write about this, so from many years, from early childhood, I was introduced into such kinds of breathing, especially by intense concentration (*speculationes*) in which my breathing became quiescent—otherwise intense concentration on what is true is not possible.

Then later, when heaven had been opened and I was talking with spirits, so that I was not breathing inside at all for a few minutes, drawing in only enough air to enable me to think.

As it happens (*forte*), I have also noticed now and again that when I was falling to sleep my breathing was almost taken away so that I woke up and drew breath (*spiritum*). Further still, when I am not noticing anything like this and am writing and thinking, my breathing is brought to a halt without my thinking about the fact that I believe something like this has happened, as has happened countless times. I could not then [infinite missing] the different kinds because this was without reflection. This I can now say, that every state, every sphere, and therefore every community, especially the more inward ones, has a suitable breathing within me to which I am brought into relationship, without reflection. This is also the means by which I can be in the company of spirits and angels.

This is Swedenborg the empiri-

I Hate Wallpaper

Like peeling off many layers of wallpaper

It’s fun, exciting even—
What might be underneath?

But the fun fades
as the wall gets uglier.
And stubborn pieces won’t let go.

It’s way harder than I thought it would be.

And I’m left with rips and pits
In the wall beneath.

A smooth surface, ready to be primed,
gets farther and farther away.

Am I making any progress here?

As much as I hate wallpaper,
I’m tempted to slap up another piece.

Or maybe I should grab the crowbar
my hand is itching to wield,
unused muscles aching to be strained.

What would I do
if I could
start all over?

Would I even have a wall here?

Damn that innocent little curled
up corner—

If I stare too long,
I see it every time.

—Lori Gayheart Steinhiser

cist speaking, describing his experiences as precisely as he can; and one of the distinctions he is most careful to observe is the distinction between what he did deliberately and what happened apart from his intent. Two instances of deliberate breath control are both from his early childhood. As an adult, he experimented with breathing when he was exploring the coordination between the lungs and the heart,

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obviously not in order to alter his state of consciousness but to gain anatomical information. When it comes to his ability to be conscious in the spiritual world, this is something done to him rather than something that he is doing. “I kept noticing that my breathing was tacit, scarcely conscious”; “I was introduced into such kinds of breathing, especially by intense concentration (*speculationes*) in which my breathing became quiescent”; this happens “without reflection,” “when I am not noticing anything and am writing and thinking”; “my breathing is brought to a halt without my thinking about the fact that I believe something like this has happened”: “I am brought into relationship” with one or another kind of breathing. Notice particularly that a causative role is assigned to “intense concentration.”

Acton also cites *S.E.* 3320. “Before I spoke with spirits, it was granted me to know by much experience that respiration corresponds with thought; as when, in my infancy, I purposely wished to hold my breath when they were saying morning and evening prayers.” Here the change in breathing is explicitly intentional, and again, the fuller text is of interest for present purposes.

I have also been shown that every physical sense has its own breathing—even its own locus of breathing, since when our voluntary breathing ceases, the breathing that is active in proportion to our state of wakefulness when we are awake, then there is only a natural breathing, as much, therefore, as comes from the wakefulness or activity of one sense or another. When I am in the company of spirits there has therefore been a voluntary breathing that is arranged by the Lord alone, so that the amount and quality of the voluntary element of my breathing

is as much as contributes to the amount and quality of that sense, which I have also been enabled to notice from experience.

Further, I have been given the same knowledge by plenty of experience earlier, before I was speaking with spirits—that breathing is responsive to thought, as when in my childhood I tried to hold my breath on purpose when they were saying morning and evening prayers and when I tried to make the rhythm of my breathing agree with that of my heart, and thus that my understanding seemed almost to sort of vanish, also later, when I was imagining myself to be writing, I had noticed that I was holding my breath, that it was almost tacit.

Even when he is intentionally trying to control his breathing, he concludes not that that thought is responsive to breathing but that breathing is responsive to thought, and he refers to his “voluntary breathing” as “arranged by the Lord alone.”

Acton devotes little more than a page to “Preparation in Later Years.” This is obviously a major omission, since the “later years” were the fifty or so years between Swedenborg’s early childhood and 1744, a span throughout which, according to Swedenborg himself, the Lord was preparing him.. It would be an immense but rewarding labor to work through the books that he published during those years to see what comments he might make about his mental states, but the general tenor is quite charmingly presented in the closing section of *Soul-Body Interaction* (§20): “From my first youth I was a fisherman in a spiritual sense—that is, one who did research into earthly truths. The reason I am now doing research into spiritual truths is that these latter are founded on the former.” In his introduction to the *Principia*, Swedenborg went to some length to insist

that deductive reasoning, starting from principles and proceeding to facts, was possible only for angels, and that we mortals must be content with inductive reasoning, laying foundations in observed facts, and building up from there.

In the course of his education and in his professional career, then, Swedenborg formed a basic habit of mind that was of critical importance to his role as revelator—respect for evidence. Think for a moment of what happened after the spiritual world was opened to him. What a mind-blowing experience that must have been! Surely he must have been bursting with the news, but he went about his usual business so faithfully that even his closest associates did not notice anything different. He wrote in *The Word Explained* 943, “Meanwhile I lived among my friends in my own country for five months, and with all others in society just as before, no one observing the fact that there was such heavenly interaction going on.”

Why? I think it is fairly obvious that this experience raised far more questions than it answered. I’m reminded of an incident from my own youth when the shy little first-grader next door came up to me and said, “I bet you don’t know how much one and one is.” The world of mathematics had just opened up for him, and he couldn’t resist sharing it. No, Swedenborg by that time had a thoroughly disciplined mind, one that would not go off half-cocked. On that April night in London he had just discovered the mind-blowing fact that a particular one and one—the physical world and the spiritual world—make one.

So he set to work. He diarized his experiences, brushed up his Hebrew and Greek, and made his own index of the Bible. He drafted material for publication—volumes of it—that nev-

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Swedenborg's Practice

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er saw the light of day. He was still the researcher, the probing mind, the mind that would not leap to conclusions but demanded the solid foundation of evidence.

Here I believe we come to a vital feature of Swedenborg's practice—look for evidence and pay attention to it when you find it. My computer tells me that the word *experientia*, “experience,” occurs 579 times in the published theological works. The first is in §59 of *Secrets of Heaven*: “I have been most thoroughly taught (*instructissimus*) by the experience of so many years . . .” The next two are in §241, two statements that we can know things from our own experience. The next is in §322, a statement that if we don't believe in the substantiality of the spiritual world now, experience will convince once we get there. I could go on and on and on. I skimmed through the references in the first three volumes of *Secrets of Heaven*, and after having found fifty-seven instances where Swedenborg bases assertions on his own experience and seventeen where he recommends that readers rely on their own experience, there didn't seem much need to keep going.

In the same three volumes, the word *revelatio* occurs forty-three times, never in direct connection with what we might call “Swedenborg's practice.” The references fall into three categories: descriptions of the state of the Earliest Church, descriptions of the Lord's glorification, and descriptions of how the Lord works with everyone. I was particularly struck by the statement in §2781 that the correspondence of splitting wood with taking credit for good works seems so remote that it can be known only by revelation, with the reader then referred to §1110, where Swedenborg tells of seeing people who claimed to have earned heaven splitting wood in the spiritual world. It is

made quite clear in §1712 that if we do not provide the receptacles, revelation will have nothing into which it can flow. I am thoroughly convinced that both the data and the discipline acquired in those years of government service were essential in providing such receptacles and in making sure that they were open.

We are back on track with Acton when he turns to the subject of “First Premonitions,” In the *Journal of Dreams* entry dated October 27, 1744, he describes experiencing a swoon

. . . such as I experienced six or seven years ago in Amsterdam, when I began *The Economy of the Animal Kingdom*, but much more subtle, so that I seemed near death. It came upon me as I saw daylight and threw me on my face. Gradually, however, it passed off because I fell into brief slumbers. . . . It signifies, as at the former time, that my head is being put in order and is actually being cleansed of that which might obstruct these thoughts; as also happened at the former time, because it gave me penetration, especially with the pen.

Note again that this is something that happens to him—“it came upon me,” “threw me on my face.”

At about the same time he began having experiences of what would now be called “photism.” These are described at some length in *The Word Explained* 6905, which says (among other things), “while I was writing a certain little work, hardly a day passed by for several months in which a flame was not seen by me, as vividly as the flame of a household hearth; at the time, this was a sign of approbation.” In *E.A.K.* 9, he writes,

To search out the causes of things from given phenomena is a peculiar gift into which the infant's brain is in a way inducted from its first stem and with which

it is later imbued by easy stages by means of use and cultivation . . . The more profoundly they penetrate into the sciences, the less do they confide in their imaginative faculty; in the absence of experience, they fear to extend the chain of their reasons beyond the nearest link . . . As soon as they light upon the truth, after a long course of reasoning, straightway there is a certain cheering light, a joyous flash of lightning, which brings confirmation, and which bathes the sphere of their mind. *There is also a certain mysterious radiation—I know not whence it springs—that darts through some sacred temple of the brain.*

This is an invaluable picture, a picture of the brain being trained by “use and cultivation,” learning to trust experience rather than “the imaginative faculty,” and thus eventually becoming capable of seeing that “certain cheering light” after a long course of reasoning.

Spiritual Experiences 2951 offers another valuable overview of the transition period:

For many years previous to the time when my mind was opened so that I could speak with spirits and so be persuaded by living experience, such proofs existed with me that I now wonder that I had not then come into persuasion concerning the Lord's government by means of spirits. Not only were there dreams for some years, informing me concerning the things that were being written, but there were also changes of states while I was writing; a certain extraordinary light in the things that were being written; later there were also many visions when my eyes were closed, and a light miraculously given; . . .

This may help understand the cryptic closing sentence of his 1740 booklet on a corpuscular philosophy: “These

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things are true because I have the sign"; and it was this kind of trust that led some very negative reviews of his last scientific work, *The Animal Kingdom*.

It was also during this time that Swedenborg began recording his dreams and his interpretations of them, and his *Journal* shows him to be deeply introspective and struggling with what he was finding.

This, finally, brings us to 1744 and the first of his two pivotal Christ visions. On Easter Sunday in 1744 he was in the Hague, and took communion there. That night he experienced in his sleep such "life and glory" that he felt he was in heaven, and in the morning he found himself in a state of radiant happiness. The next day, still lost in beauty, he traveled to Delft; and that evening, while reading Exodus 10 about Moses' miracles, he found himself troubled by doubts and wondered whether his scientific discipline might not be an obstacle to true faith. He seems to have felt comforted by this realization and was at peace with himself when he went to bed. He was shaken by tremors and felt overshadowed by something holy, and then went to sleep. He was awakened by violent tremors and thunderous noise, and was thrown from his bed. The words of prayers for mercy were put in his mouth, and he found himself held in Christ's arms, looking into his loving face. He was asked whether he had a certificate of health and answered, "Lord, you know that better than I." "Well, so do," came the reply.

Thereafter, his scientific discipline came to the fore, in that he took very seriously the fact that this experience might or might not be authentic. He apparently looked at it in the context of his previous paranormal experiences, which he had learned from experience to trust, and decided that this was a further step in the right direction.

For some time after that, he had experiences of being neither asleep nor awake, of having double thoughts, and in general of a consciousness of himself as a sentient spiritual individual. He describes being "in sleep in the night . . . led into a state of interior wakefulness which was such that I had no knowledge other than that I was awake . . . a wakefulness of the spirit and not of the body" (SE 4250). There seems to have been no thought that this might have been simply a particularly vivid dream, by the way.

Throughout this period, we find Swedenborg struggling with his conviction of his sinfulness, and particularly with his pride. There isn't time enough to go into this, but there is evidence that this was a real problem for him. This should not surprise us, since he was socially privileged and intellectually brilliant, and by all earthly standards an outstanding success. As a young man, he had been so convinced of his worth that he suggested that members of the Uppsala faculty take pay cuts in order to provide him with a salary. Suffice it to say that he did find himself humbled and that it was not easy.

In the course of the following summer, Swedenborg evidently had occasional visions, one of the main themes being a palace that seemed to represent a spiritual community that he wanted to be admitted to. He again experienced tremors, but with a sense of being supported rather than being thrown down. "This was in a vision," he wrote, "when I was neither awake nor asleep, for I had all my thoughts collected. It was the inward man separated from out outward, that sensed it" (*Journal*, July 1, 1744).

There seems, then, to have been a year during which paranormal experiences of various kinds were relatively frequent and usually rather cryptic, leading in some way to the climactic

experience, the full opening of his spiritual sight. Again and again, though, we find higher consciousness taking him by surprise, so to speak. If we were to follow his 1744 example, we would simply work hard on a project that seemed to be getting nowhere, try to understand our dreams, take communion on Easter Sunday, and go to bed. If we were to follow his 1745 example, we would keep right on working, keep trying to understand our dreams, go to a restaurant, and eat too much.

Wilson Van Dusen was known to complain that Swedenborg never prescribed a practice, but to my mind he answered his own complaint with his booklet entitled *Uses: A Way of Personal and Spiritual Growth*. The deeper levels of the mind are opened by living truly useful lives—to put it in familiar doctrinal terms, by shunning evil as sins as if of ourselves and acknowledging that this is really being done in us by the Lord. In Swedenborg's case this meant a lifelong dedication to the quest for understanding characterized by a respect for evidence that amounted to reverence and a truly extraordinary capacity for sustained concentration.

That was his particular calling, though, his unique use. What strikes me at this point, though, is that his calling is different from any of ours only in detail. That is, we are all called to the quest for genuine understanding of ourselves and our proper use. We are all called to the same kind of honesty that served Swedenborg so well. Perhaps the most that can be said in conclusion is that if we let go of an over-termination to lead ourselves where we think we should go, we may notice that the Lord is leading us where we *really* should go. ☩

The Rev. George Dole is a professor at the Swedenborgian House of Studies and minister to the Swedenborgian Church of Bath, Maine. He delivered this article in a lecture at Fryeburg New Church Assembly in August 2009.

Nepal Service Project

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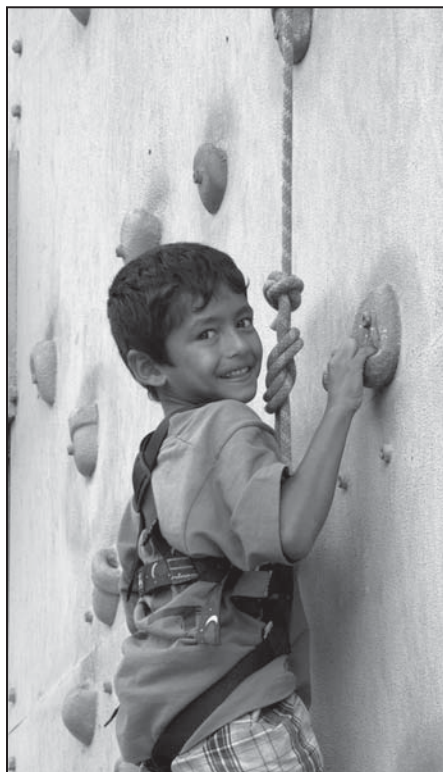


Photo: Kymri Wilt

Santosh on the rock climbing wall.
All the children had a chance
to do some climbing.

teaching, like most, is much easier to say than to practice. Landing in Kathmandu was a flurry of activities—accounting for all of our bags, making sure everyone was present, and then transporting all of us through the crowds of people anxiously wanting to help us as we exited the terminal.

As we exited the airport parking lot we caught the welcome sight of Bonnie Elison, the director of Ama Ghar, who then helped us sort through all the confusion of people and bags. The van ride from the airport to Ama Ghar was a bit of sensory overload, taking in the fresh sights, sounds, and changes surrounding the city of Kathmandu. The Ama Ghar orphanage is six miles south of Kathmandu in the valley of Godavri.

That evening we were greeted with the *amas* (mothers) of Ama Ghar placing red tikka on our foreheads. All for-

ty children of the Ama Ghar orphanage had been practicing for several days to make our arrival special. They performed several dances, popular songs accompanied by guitar, and traditional Nepali songs as a large group. (One of the girls who danced a traditional dance, Krishna, had won an award several years earlier and had been flown to Japan for her performance.) After they performed, the children kept the music playing and got everyone in our group up on their feet dancing with them. It was a magnificent evening filled with joy, laughter, and dancing after a long, somewhat grueling trip.

Many of the children left the next morning for their home villages, because the largest holiday of the year for Nepal, Dasain, was about to begin. While we missed many of the children during our time there, it also meant that each of us was able to get to know the ten orphans who did not have villages to visit for holiday. Spending time at an orphanage is one of the most heartwarming experiences in life. Although these children come from very difficult circumstances, their eyes sparkle and they are full of life! Their *joie de vivre* is infectious.

The stories of how these children arrived at this orphanage can be heart-wrenching. In the West, the devastating effects of AIDS are not as visible as in Nepal where there are at present over 100,000 children who are orphans because their parents have died from complications due to AIDS. One of the orphans that I became attached to, Santosh, was taking care of his father at the age of five because his father was dying of AIDS. He had begged on the streets with his older sister, figuring out how to survive. The commonplace level of poverty and need in Nepal is unlike anything here in North America.

We were able to spend quality time with these children for two weeks.

Simply being a loving presence in their lives for this period was a gift to share with them. It let them know that people care for them and that they are loved. Beyond spending time with the children, we of course made ourselves as useful as possible. Organizing their library, mending and patching old clothes, repairing a volleyball net, setting up an old tire to use as a

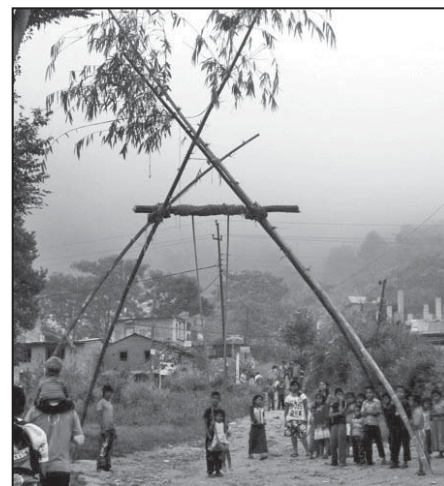


Photo: Kymri Wilt

A swing built for the children.

basketball hoop and finally clearing an area of land that will become a part of a new orphanage site that is set to open in August of 2010.

The new orphanage is under construction, and when it is opened it will house seventy orphans, and there will be guest accommodations for ten volunteers. While in Nepal, Rev. Friedrich helped to create a bridge between the Ama Ghar Orphanage and the Loving Arms Mission Orphanage. I invite all of you to make donations to both orphanages if you are able. They do incredible and important work that helps to create a better and more loving world. Here are their Web sites where you can find out more about them, the children, and to donate if you are so moved: www.amafoundation.org and <http://lovingarmsmission.org>.

The Rev. David Brown is a minister at The Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

A Child Shall Lead Them

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quest was for a filmographer to make a short inspirational film from the videos and photographs of our trip. Within two hours of posting the request, Kymri Wilt, a professional travel photographer who lives in San Diego, had posted that she was interested. Kymri grew up with parents involved in the live theater community here at Swedenborg Hall (at the San Diego Swedenborgian Church), so the connection was a natural one. Rev Felicity Wright, a friend from my time at seminary, offered to be my “mental Sherpa,” collecting information from our experiences to help write a preliminary business plan (executive summary) for establishing an orphanage. Also immediately responding to the call from the Facebook post was a childhood friend, Kalar Holland and her husband Brett, who is a professional musician, and who both brought their lively and loving spirits to bear on our endeavor of service.

All of the very capable individuals who went on the trip risked much: collectively they gave up time at work and with their families, overcame health challenges, and delved into their savings to be a part of this worthy endeavor. We met and tried to overcome our fears and challenges of faith, physical stamina, ego (*proprium*), and strived to be the best we could be, individually and as a group. In the beginning I thought it would be nice if we were all Swedenborgian, but that is a luxury. We were a motley crew and a mixed bag of religions. We were Swedenborgians, a non-denominational Christian, a Catholic, a Sufi, a Jew, some mostly Buddhists, and others perhaps

not identifying with any single religion but all the world’s religions. We were closer to a microcosm of the differences and diversity we experience on the planet. Amid the various conditions of origin and background, motivations, world-views, and personal challenges, we managed to make two groups one. Our striving and unifying agreement was that we were there to serve, that our common doctrine should be love, and our purity of purpose should be care for the children, as I believe it should be for our church’s faith stance toward the world.



Kymri Wilt shooting video of children at Loving Arms for the documentary.

Photo: Felicity Wright

For all my goals and intentions, I could not have had my wishes more completely fulfilled. My expectations were met and then some. And the children at both orphanages are not only rescued and surviving; they are thriving, flourishing in fact!

We saw three successful models of orphanages, or homes for children. All strive to keep the Nepali culture and language intact; all enjoy traditional foods. Loving Arms/New Life Homes is primarily a family-based model of love, belonging, and lifetime commitment with a mom and a dad and ten to twelve children in two distinct families. Ama Ghar is family-styled, yet more community-based with thirty-eight children, and is tied to the local village and its culture, traditions, and customs. For instance, at Ama-Ghar, they eat very traditionally, sitting on the floor and with hands, as did we (something completely ac-

ceptable in many parts of the world!) The third orphanage, Hamro Guan, is an eco-village that focuses on sustainability and is very tied to the land, offering agricultural development and educational opportunities for woman and children.

In each home, the experience of dance and song is a primary source of enjoyment. Each home tries to empower the children with life skills, a good education, and vocational training. All of them partner to varying degrees with other non-profit groups with the same interests and goals. All of the orphanages are moving toward the most sustainable model they can achieve. I believe a viable, replicable model can be developed using elements from all three orphanages. Being collaborative yet distinctly one, partnering and interdependence provide the key.

The orphanage directors, Kent Rogers, Bonne Ellison, and Rene Veldt, were transparent with me; willing to share their expertise, personal wisdom, and even some tangible items. They sat with me to pull organizational documents, mission statements, non-profit business plans, staff and job descriptions, fund raising plans, and other important paperwork. Many people,

after hearing the story, have come forward to offer their intention to help, ongoing commitment, and the possibility of financial support and land donation for a future



Three boys from Loving Arms.

Photo: Kymri Wilt

orphanage. Many knowledgeable successful people, such as Rene Veldt, the founder of the sustainable eco-village and orphanage Hamro Guan, offered to come to the US to consult for the price of airfare.

The children’s progress is incredibly

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miraculous considering their experiences. Many were orphaned due to the effects and horrors caused by political unrest, orphaned or abandoned by parents too poor or ill to care for them, and others were rescued from the horrors of human trafficking, having been kidnapped or sold into slavery for sexual favor or other kinds of servitude. And yet what we encountered is the remarkable triumph of the human spirit and the miracle of love and the Lord's mercy. As Brett put it, "the best thing about Nepal is seeing these children so full of love after such a hard life." We met remarkable and joyful children—strong and brave children, like Santosh Rogers, twenty, who loves nature and whose constant refrain is "I just want peace and to help people; I don't want them to ever give up. Don't ever give up." Our efforts paled in comparison to that kind of courage exhibited by the children themselves and what the "parents" have accomplished with love

and care, but everyone brought their talents and spirit to bear on the experience for the sake of the children: Mac, with his MacGyver instincts and innovations; Fran for her tenacity she communicated to the children; Peggy, with her organizational nursing skills and gentle, reassuring ways; Dave with his foresight to get us there in the first place; Tina for her young and adventurous spirit; and Serena for her fun-loving, knows-no-strangers personality. Everyone had something (much!) to offer.

At Loving Arms, Felicity, AKA Aunt Happy, who is a natural teacher, brought out the best in the children through caring conversation, and also gave a powerful and encouraging Sunday message. On the last night at Loving Arms, we produced a talent show. Brett helped the children learn songs and put their original lyrics to mu-

sic. Kymri helped the young children SKYPE (communicate via the Internet) with her daughter's stateside classroom, and she filmed the children's powerful stories for a documentary.

Kalar offered "dream papers" and asked the kids to write their dreams on them and fold them into origami birds. Brett and Kalar later took the collected dreams to sacred and peaceful sites to be photographed—a visit to the Dali Lama and on a fishing trip for instance—and they'll also be used to decorate Brett and Kalar's Christmas tree. They



Alisha and Puja from Loving Arms.

Photo: Kymri Wilt

are sending photo-postcards back to Loving Arms to show that the children's dreams are being energized by people around the planet.

To learn more about our trip, I invite you to visit Felicity Wright's blog (<http://felicitywright.com/blog/>) and Kymri Wilt's extraordinary photography and travel journal (www.mirater-ra.blogspot.com [scroll down to find the Nepal blog and pictures]).

I invite you to stay in touch and keep your eyes and ears and hearts open to how you can help and be a part of the work to be done throughout the year as we bring forth various aspects of our trip in presentations and our short documentary.

Jesus, "Behold, I make all things new," and I believe a child's hope, innocence, and trust can be restored and be made anew. We need to fulfill not only scripture but fulfill and remain faithful to the writings as well. Please ask how your church community can help us establish another orphanage. If you care to make donations for the sake of the children, please go to www.lovingarmsmission.org or contact me at augi6555@gmail.com. ☞

The Rev. Carla Friedrich is pastor of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church.

Dream of a Child at Loving Arms

My dream is to teacher in my life.

I want to be a good bassist and want to play in a band.

And I also want to help the people who are in need.

Spiritual loving marriage.

To know the world.

I want to be a good pianist, and I also want to help other people.

That love be true.

I wish that everybody in this world love each other like Jesus have loved us.

To travel the world.

My dream is to be helpful to others. Because people need any help to solve the problems. Now, I can do it. You also can do it.

I love people and country. I help my people and countries.

Do not give up. May God (Jesus Christ) bless you and loves you.

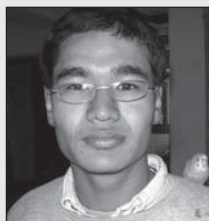
I like to help poor people.

I want to be social worker and to be player of basketball and football.

I want to be a famous actor.

I want to make people happy.

I want to be a great.



—Santosh Rogers, age 20

Swedenborgian Bloggers

Two graduates of the Swedenborgian House of Studies have blogs (web logs, or personal essays posted on the Internet).

The Rev. Hunter Roberts has begun a blog in the “Living Section” of *Huffington Post*: www.huffingtonpost.com/w-hunter-roberts. She addresses a variety of current political, spiritual, and cultural issues in the news. Hunter writes,

Please visit my blog and post a comment if you are interested. If you really like it, feel free to post it to your own network, on Facebook or Twitter, or to send it on by email to your friends.

If you want to help disseminate a particular piece, then when you go on the site, “DIGG” the post, by clicking “Digg It” just below the title. If you are already a registered user of Digg, that’s all you need to do. If you are not, you will need to register an email address. That will really help.

Ed Sylvia began a blog in 2008 at

From *Messengers Past*

Television Debut

José Melis, New York Society, made his television debut Christmas morning on Jack Paar’s popular variety program. It is over CBS channel 2 Fridays at 10 AM.

—January 23, 1954, *New Church Messenger*

José Melis (Guiu) died in 2005. He was the brother of Rafael (Ray) Guiu, longtime member of the Cambridge (Massachusetts) Society. Melis continued as Paar’s music director, moving with him to The Tonight Show, until Paar left television in 1962. The Guiu brothers were born and raised in Havana, Cuba.

the <http://thegodguy.wordpress.com/> called, “Love Is the Ultimate Experience—the GodGuy’s Blog,” where he posts reflections, stories, and observations on spiritual and theological issues almost daily. His blogspot reads,

Philosopher and theologian Edward F. Sylvia, M.T.S. attended the School of Visual Arts in New York and received his Master of Theological Studies at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, and a Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies from the Swedenborgian House of Studies. He is a member of the Center for Theology and the Natural Scienc-

es (C.T.N.S.) and the Swedenborg Scientific Association (S.S.A.).

Author of *Sermon From the Compost Pile: Seven Steps Toward Creating An Inner Garden*, his next book, *Proving God*, will fulfill a continuing vision that God’s fingerprints of love can be found everywhere in the manifest universe.

Mr. Sylvia has been a student of the ideas of both Emanuel Swedenborg and George I. Gurdjieff for more than thirty years. Read more about TheGodGuy, his books and his ideas at <http://www.staircasepress.com>. ☛

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In particular, encourage them to share one good thing that happened and one bad thing. This can be a time for children to practice joy and forgiveness and for adults to learn openness and listening.

- Have an altar shelf in your home, a place where you have not only a personally meaningful symbol of your faith but also things from the natural world—leaves, pebbles, flowers, a bird feather, etc. Celebrate the turning of the seasons and the beauty of Creation. Help children see the connectedness and unity of all things.

Leading children to know and trust in the goodness of the One in whom they have their life and being is a very great gift to give, not only to them but to the cause of the New Jerusalem. Sunday school can’t do it all. Building a new future for our world and for our church must start in our homes and our family life.

“Share the Story” Campaign Update

We’re off to a good start but we need more submissions! Has *your* church gotten involved yet? If not, consider starting a “Share the Story” group. Have some fun putting ideas together (we can send you an easy-to-use tem-

plate) and then send them in to Sunday School Association secretary Missy Donaldson (abra99@yahoo.com). Make it your New Year resolution this year!

Annual Survey of Sunday Schools

Just a note to watch for your *Annual Survey of Sunday Schools* being sent out this month to all ministries of our denomination. Share your information and your thoughts and ideas about helping the Spirit to shine in our children and families today! ☛

The Rev. John Maine is chair of the Sunday School association.

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.

GATE*ways



Spirituality at Home

BY JOHN MAINE

I recently came across a very interesting article entitled "Encouraging Children's Spirituality" by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat (www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features.php?id=16936). They point out that children can teach us adults a lot about imagination, play, wonder, and being fully present to life—all important avenues for drawing closer to God.

On the other hand, we as adults can do much to foster the spiritual life of our children. Here are some of the authors' suggestions, to which I've added a few of my own:

- If it isn't already, make it your practice to say grace at the table. Give thanks not only for the food but everything that contributed to it—the cook, the farmers, and the rain, sun and earth. Teach "the attitude of gratitude."
- Watch a favourite TV show or movie with your kids and then "put yourself in the story." Explore how you and

they would act and why. Use imagination to build empathy and compassion for others.

- When doing chores with children around the house (clearing the table, folding laundry, putting away toys, etc.), re-frame what you're doing as "returning things to their home, where they will be more comfortable." This teaches reverence for their surroundings as well as kindness and nurturing.
- Practice times of silence with children (maybe just for a few seconds at first!) and really pay attention to what we see and feel. Help children to be open to the wonder of life.
- Make a simple list of "correspondences" that pertain to common objects encountered every day: rocks, trees, birds, clothes, shoes, etc. Use this knowledge as part of an effort to help children see that everything has meaning and purpose and wisdom that we can learn from.
- Find occasions to celebrate a pet if you have one and help your children reflect on what they learned from their furry, feathery or scaly companion. Teach them respect for the web of life and for all beings.
- Let it be part of your bedtime ritual with children to sit with them and reflect on what the day has brought.

***Growing Angels Through Education**

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