

Elmwood Bids Farewell to Historic Home Plans Future in New Home

BY HERB ZIEGLER

On November 7, 2010, at 2 PM, the final service at the Elmwood New Church began to unfold. After 156 years, the building had reached the end of its useful life, but the society that worshiped there had not; the members were sad to lose a building that had been such an integral part of their lives, their history, and their community, but they bore witness to their determination to continue to worship together.

Over the past several years it became apparent to the society that the building was structurally unsound and would require structural repairs beyond their ability to pay. Also, it was clear to them that the church had been built



in another era, when it was the hub of activity for a vibrant neighborhood. The neighborhood included a post office, a firehouse, and a shoe factory; people did not go far to work, shop, or worship before the widespread use of automobiles. Today, the church is too large, too difficult to heat, too expensive to maintain,

and a constant worry.

There are specific permits and approvals required to demolish an historic structure, which the Elmwood Church has been designated as. Elmwood is a neighborhood of the town of East Bridgewater, whose Historical Commission may impose a 120-day waiting period on the demolition, during which the congregation is charged with looking for a buyer who

will preserve the building. Failing to find one, the congregation can proceed with demolition due to demonstrated hardship.

The congregation plans to build a new church on the same site, funding the demolition and construction with funds obtained from selling nearby property to a developer for seven new home sites. The Historical Commission is involved in this transaction as well because there is a rock on the property inscribed by the Rev. Timothy Otis Paine, second minister of the Elmwood New Church, with his thoughts on hearing of the Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862. It says in part, "This rock I visited so oft I wish may here remain." The commission is working with the developer to see that the rock is undisturbed during and after construction.

A spirit of community pervaded as the nave filled with members, neigh-

continues on page 145



The nave of the Elmwood New Church was filled to overflowing with members, friends, and well-wishers as Rev. Donna Keane led the final worship service and invited congregants to share their memories and feelings about the society's home of 156 years.

In This Issue:

Reflections on the Price of Freedom • SHS Board Implements Changes at Fall Meeting
Book Review: Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection • GC Fall Meeting

Guest Editorial

Happy Holy Days

BY ERIC HOFFMAN



During a time of the year when we may be called upon to participate in circumstances that are beyond our control, from which there seems to be lit-

tle chance of escape, I would like to bestow upon you—as if it were within my power to do so—the gift of choice.

The circumstances I'm speaking of are the big end-of-the-year holidays—Thanksgiving and Christmas. For the record, I thoroughly enjoy both, but have also noticed that mandatory celebrations can easily be focal points for resentment. Who among us has not lamented at one time or another that Christmas has become too commercial? How many people feel stress about large family gatherings? How many see

the holidays as times when there is simply too much to do?

I've been reading about the history of our favorite holidays. Did you realize that the first Thanksgiving feast, in Plymouth in 1621, serving ninety-one Indians and fifty-six European settlers, was prepared by four women and two teenage girls? They would have had more help, but thirteen women in the colony had died the previous winter from hunger and disease. Christmas, as it turns out, was considered sinful in the two centuries following Jesus' life and was only accepted by the Church because they needed something to counteract a winter festival celebrated by a rival religion. It should come as no surprise that December twenty-fifth probably isn't the actual date of Jesus' birth. A more likely time is in the spring, since that was the only time during the year when shepherds watched their flocks by night (it was the lambing season). There are all sorts of other details I could mention—the history of both of these holidays and their associated traditions is fascinating—but I think the most relevant fact about both of them is that their timing isn't accurate. What they seek to commemorate didn't actually happen on the dates we commemorate them.

Here's where the gift of choice comes in. The word "holiday" is derived from "holy day" (the Middle English *haligdaeg*). From a Swedenborgian point of view, everything is holy that receives and expresses the Divine. Doesn't that pretty much describe every day? Every day is holy if we simply open our eyes and hearts to see it. Days like Thanksgiving Day and Christmas are indeed "holy days", like all the rest, but our ancestors have chosen these days to celebrate specific aspects of what make all days holy, namely, the importance of gratitude in one's spiritual life and the Divine Presence that responds to our spiritual needs in

continues on page 148

Letters to the Editor

Religion and Politics

To the Editor:

Thanks for your thoughts re: the complexities of religion and politics in the October issue of *The Messenger*. I am grateful for the opportunity to have worked for some years with the Religious Liberty Committee, affiliated with the National Council of Churches. It was there that I learned the somewhat paradoxical truth that the actual purpose of the separation of church and state is to promote a healthy relationship between religion and politics—something that is not possible in either an atheistic or theocratic system. It is precisely the "separation" be-

continues on page 154

Contents

Elmwood Bids Farewell to Historic Home.....	141
Happy Holy Days.....	142
Letters to the Editor.....	142
Letter from the President.....	143
Reflections on the Price of Freedom.....	144
SHS Board Implements Changes at Fall Meeting.....	145
Book Review: <i>Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection</i>	146
Bridge Book Awards for New Book Proposals.....	147
The 2010 SCYL Almont Survivor Teen Winter Retreat.....	148
GC Passes Budget at Fall Meeting.....	149
Leadership and Growth at Virginia Street Church.....	149
Chicago Library Displays Angels.....	150
Networking from the Heart.....	151
Passages.....	155

Church Calendar

December 27–30: SCYL Winter Retreat, Almont, Michigan

June 29–July 3, 2011: Annual Convention, Cincinnati

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Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

I am looking to the rapidly approaching end of the month of October, marked by Halloween. As a child it was one of my favorite holidays! As an adult it has become one of my least favorite holidays. What was once seen as an special opportunity to dress up in a fun costume and venture out into the darkness of night, knocking on doors at strange houses and experiencing the fun and laughter of reactions to our temporary identities as pirates, pumpkins, cowboys, funny witches, and Casper-like ghosts and returning home with a bag of candy has now become an ordeal of opening my door to a stream of horrors each one attempting to outdo the other in ghoulish grotesqueness and graphic gore. Some of the little ones are still cute as buttons but the ones that are taller than me and hold out the bag or even reach out and grab a handful of candy without even bothering to offer a "Trick or Treat!" have begun to try my patience. And I really didn't like the feeling of seeing that candy bowl getting empty and the door bell continuing to ring. Maybe I'm just getting old and grumpy but it is amazing how time and transformation will change the way you see things!

As a seminary student I loved living at SSR (Swedenborg School of Religion) with the others of my class. And while I griped about homework along with everyone else, still I truly loved the work of learning, personal regeneration, and the life-changing commitment that was part and parcel of becoming a minister. I loved the student chapels in the morning, the small classes that were sometimes boring and sometimes truly inspirational! I loved the long hours of homework, the

Frisbee games in the yard, working as a security guard from 11 PM to 7 AM and driving back to school giddy with exhaustion and desperately attempting not to fall asleep in class. I think I actually learned to sleep with my eyes open back then! And then the honor and thrill of ordination and the experience of landing and beginning my first position as an ordained minister.

Of course in those days, the Augmentation Fund covered the entire cost of my seminary education after five years of work within the denomination, and I had no real worries about a salary because even though the churches were small and could not afford to pay my salary, again The Augmentation Fund was always there to kick in and keep me above the poverty line.

How things have changed. Now our newly ordained ministers enter their professional lives with as much as \$80,000 in debt hanging over the heads—and no relief from the Augmentation Fund after five years. Now, our churches are still small and struggle to pay a decent salary, and the Augmentation Fund, that once inexhaustible source of financial security, is struggling to meet the requests of all the churches that still need help to keep their ministers above the poverty line. For years I saw things as the minister standing at the door expecting to be given help from the fund. Now I see things from the perspective of the ones who do the giving. It is disturbingly like the end of Halloween evening when the bowl of candy is nearing empty but the kids keep ringing the doorbell holding out their bags with expectant eyes.

It is amazing how time and transformation will change the way you see things. I now understand why in the nineties MINSU (the Ministry Support Unit) began to institute a sun-setting policy on grants to churches and ministers. It seemed so unfair and created so much pressure as a minister back then. But now, sitting on those committees in the new century, I understand why we can only offer one year grants with increasingly stringent requirements to continue qualifying for the next

continues on page 147

Reflections on the Price of Freedom

A Critical Review of Three Writers on Hell

BY ERNEST O. MARTIN

As a fifth-generation Swedenborgian active in the ministry of the Swedenborgian Church for almost sixty years, I have had a strong ongoing interest in Swedenborg's teaching about heaven, hell, and divine providence. In sermons, articles, and lectures, I have focused on these themes, and have not limited myself to what Swedenborg said. For example, in studying life beyond death, I am reviewing the Ingersoll lectures on immortality given at Harvard each year since 1896, and have made a serious study of mysticism through the ages.



As a practical mystic, I want to know what contributions Swedenborgianism can make to religious and philosophic thought today. I was intrigued in 1988 to read *Heaven—A History* by McDannell and Lang, which included a forty-six-page chapter on "Swedenborg and the Emergence of a Modern Heaven." The Swedenborg Foundation was so impressed by this treatment that they asked Bernhard Lang to write the introduction to the New Century Edition of *Heaven and Hell*.

Although Lang's treatment of Swedenborg was essentially fair, he did conclude that

the modern heaven—exemplified by the visions of Swedenborg, the writings of Elizabeth Stuart Phelps, and Mormon theology—has become the minority perspective during the twentieth century. Rich and detailed accounts of the afterlife, accepted in the nine-

teenth century, are labeled as absurd, crude, materialistic, or sheer nonsense.

At the memorial service for Princess Diana, telecast to more than a billion people around the world, not one word was said by Anglican clergy about any hope for eternal life. Christian memorial services are criticized today for their informal celebration of the deceased, and no recognition of a transition to a spiritual realm.

If talk about heaven is going out of style, what about any recognition of the reality of hell? I was startled some years ago to read the headline: "Hell outlawed in Norway." Before moving my family to that Scandinavian land, I read further, and found that the Norwegian Parliament had voted to outlaw belief in hell, as irrelevant in to-

... to what extent are we responsible for making choices that will lead to eternity in heaven rather than hell?

day's world.

Popular polls still indicate that most people believe in some kind of existence after death, but fewer are inclined to believe in hell. This doesn't seem to be true of Swedenborgians, however. The three books chosen for review give considerable attention to evil and hell, and all have been written within the last ten years. Bruce Henderson and George Dole focus on freedom and evil, while Andrew Dole tackles the question of "the eternity of the hells."

All three writers acknowledge the primacy of free will. George Dole writes in his book *Freedom & Evil: a Pilgrim's Guide to Hell* (Chrysalis Books, The Swedenborg Foundation),

From a practical point of view . . . our society depends on a tacit agreement that we are free moral agents and that it is, therefore, reasonable for us to hold each other accountable for our actions.

Limitations of Freedom

In much Swedenborgian writing, it is assumed that this freedom is absolute. Near the end of *Freedom & Evil* George Dole writes,

The limits to our freedom, however, are obvious. I cannot do just anything I feel like doing. There are limits to my physical strength, limits to my knowledge, limits to my intelligence, limits to my determination. From one point of view, I am really a very small person in a very big universe. I cannot understand most of the languages of our planet, do not know most of its inhabitants, have not read most of its books, have not seen most of its cities, and have not tasted most of its food; and there is no possible way that I can. In fact, I am obliged to select, to choose. (p 171)

I am convinced that our freedom is extremely limited, and our rationality even more so. Given the limitations imposed by heredity, environment, intelligence, addictions, poor education, social and economic factors, poor judgment, etc., to what extent are we responsible for making choices that will lead to eternity in heaven rather than hell? And how capable are we of making wise decisions, for Swedenborg said, "wisdom is the eye of love."

Referring to the work of scholar John Hick, Andrew Dole says in his essay "Freedom, Evil, and the Problem of Hell" in *Essays in Honor of George Dole's Contribution to Swedenborgian Thought* (Edited by James Lawrence, Studia Swedenborgiana),

continues on page 152

SHS Board Implements Changes at Fall Meeting

The Board of Trustees of the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) held its fall meeting in Berkeley October 22–23.

Dean Jim Lawrence reported to the Board that the work initiated by the academic committee has resulted in decisions around the faculty, the library, and SHS offices.

Dean Lawrence was pleased to announce that SHS has signed a contract with its new faculty member, Devin Zuber (announced at the annual convention in St. Paul) who will assume his position in January, 2011. Rebecca Kline Esterson has been offered a position as scholar in training pending her acceptance and matriculation in a

Ph.D. program.

After several years of discussion by the Board and planning by the dean about reducing library costs and directing more resources to faculty and faculty development, implementation of a plan has begun. The Rev. Jane Siebert, chair of the Board and the dean concluded negotiations with the Pacific School Religion (PSR) resulting in a reduction of rent for library space from \$60,000 per year to \$0 per year in recognition of the value to PSR of another SHS faculty member. The library space will be reduced by half, but after some deaccessioning of some books unrelated to Swedenborg and Swedenborgianism, the space will make the core

collection easily accessible. Sadly, the SHS librarian, Michael Yockey, who has done an outstanding job since the library was moved to SHS will be let go in December. The rationale for this move is that the collection is largely cataloged now, and the library is overstaffed, as few students are on the PSR campus and a few hundred books are checked out each year. Other arrangements will be made for students to access books that students take out. The question was asked: who is going to handle details for book borrowing once we no longer have our own librarian? It was acknowledged that there are still details to be worked out—there is a need for help on a part-time lev-

Elmwood Church

continued from page 141

bors, friends, and fellow Swedenborgians. The service opened with Dick Campbell, the longtime soloist, singing his stunning rendition of “The Lord’s Prayer.” After the liturgy, Rev. Donna Keane welcomed everyone and announced that on this historic occasion, the sermon would be replaced by words from the congregants. Those who were moved to do so stood up and spoke of their connections to the church, its meaning in their lives, and their feelings on the loss of the building. As more people spoke, the interlaced connections of those present, departed relatives, ancestors, neighbors, and the life of the village and town gradually emerged. President of the Swedenborgian Church Rev. Ken Turley, whose first pulpit was Elmwood, and his wife Laurie Turley spoke, as did Rev. Jonathan Mitchell, a minister at the Wayfarers Chapel in California, an Elmwood native who had begun his Swedenborgian journey at this

church.

The service concluded with a procession of flags removed from the chancel for safekeeping until their new home is built, the American and Christian flags, and the children’s banner.

A bittersweet feeling pervaded the body as it exited the sanctuary for the last time. Many paused for a last look at the beautiful room with its long, curved pews, tall stained glass windows, simple yet elegant altar, and perfect proportions.

At a crowded reception in the downstairs hall, friendliness and good cheer transpired amidst a small feast of treats prepared by the stalwart women of the society.

The society looks expectantly toward the future as it moves services to the nearby Methodist Church. They have begun preliminary plans for the new structure. It will contain a worship space with more flexible seating, a fellowship hall and Sunday school space, an office, and a kitchen; it will be built to be handicapped accessible, energy

efficient, green, and easy to maintain. A strong reminder of the old structure will be present both physically and aurally—the pipe organ, which will be put in storage in the meantime, and then reconditioned for its new home.

Like the phoenix, the congregation will emerge with their new home from the ashes of the old. ☩



Book Review

Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection

BY EUGENE TAYLOR

J. S. Haller, *Swedenborg, Mesmer, and the Mind/Body Connection: The Roots of Complementary Medicine*. West Chester: Swedenborg Foundation, 2010.

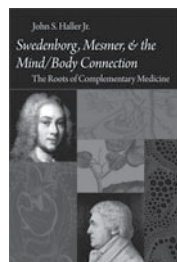
Swedenborgians will want to read this book for three reasons: it is mostly about Swedenborg; it is well-written and well researched; and, despite the fact that the final chapter on the New Age is both misnamed and a little light, it raises several philosophical questions that Swedenborgians today might find worth considering.

The opening chapter beyond the introduction examines the work of Emanuel Swedenborg as an eighteenth century scientist and interpreter of revealed religion, and the next chapter examines the ideas of one of Swedenborg's contemporaries, Franz Anton Mesmer, physician, healer, and promulgator of methods of trance induction. At the same time, the author is weaving a larger picture of the relation between mind and body over the historical period of their two systems, thus linking the discussion to the present age, although a detailed look at modernism turns out not to be the primary focus of the book.

The chapter on Swedenborg is rich with biographical facts set in their historical context and punctuated by clear explanations of Swedenborg's psychospiritual philosophy, itself set in the context of the Christian scheme of salvation. The author summarizes, however, important differences between Swedenborg writings and received Christian teachings. On small matters of doctrine, for instance, Swedenborg did not argue in favor of the Trinity. But on the larger issues, the most important distinction was Swedenborg's articulation of the five ages of the spir-

itual church, by which he also meant the five spiritual ages of humanity, culminating in The New Church.

The first of these was The Most Ancient Church, beginning with the time of Adam and Eve and originally constituted by communication with the Lord through influx. Nevertheless, men and women were eventually consumed by evils and falsities, however. This period ends with Noah and the Flood.



Second was The Ancient Church, the post-flood period after the previous age of sins had been washed away. But due to its own transgressions that built over time, this church was also destroyed by its own means. This era ends and ushers in the era of The Jewish Church, the time of the Old Testament, which commences with the Ten Commandments. The Jewish Church was then superseded by The Christian Church; commencing with the assemblage of the Apostles and the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus. The Christian Church effectively ends in 1757 with Swedenborg's vision of The New Church, which was the Last Judgement, the descent of the Holy City onto Earth, made known to the world through his writings. This was a falling away of the denominations and depicted as the transformation of world Christianity, meaning the generic experience of higher spiritual consciousness.

The Author places no great emphasis on such ideas as the seven days of creation being not a literal progression of time and events over a week, but rather a symbolic rendering of the seven stages of an individual's spiritu-

al regeneration evolving toward higher states of consciousness. Meanwhile, his rendering of the New Church, revealed to Swedenborg in 1757, does lay out a tremendously hopeful agenda for the Christian faith contributing to the outcome of our own present era, enjoining us toward, not Swedenborg, nor even Christianity, but toward the more generic spiritual self-actualization of all humanity.

Haller's text remains largely focused on the history and connection of spiritual movements. Haller's hypothesis is that Swedenborg and Mesmer represented competing systems of equal power, Swedenborg from a spiritual perspective and Mesmer from a secular point of view. It was only natural therefore that the two forces would eventually merge at certain key points. He begins with Swedenborgianism, then turns to Mesmerism. He introduces phrenology, before moving the discussion to phrenomagnetism. Magnetism and homeopathy lead to Swedenborgian homeopathy, and then on to the influence of hypnosis on osteopathy and chiropractic. He ends with what he calls New Age theories of healing, a term made popular by *The New York Times* to differentiate what the editors hoped were their readers—allegedly normal Americans—from the drug crazed spiritual gyrations of the American psychotherapeutic counter-culture. The analysis at this point is the least focused, the shortest from the standpoint of earlier sections of the book, with the least emphasis on Swedenborg, except for a few iconoclastic lines at the end.

We may also quibble with a few minor points. The author acknowledges the Baltimore New Church Society's

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Bridge Book Awards for New Book Proposals

As a collaborative effort to generate dynamic book proposals and publications from aspiring authors, the General Church of the New Jerusalem and the Swedenborg Foundation have announced a new competition called the Bridge Book Awards. The author of the winning proposal in each category will receive a cash award of \$1,500, be honored at an awards ceremony, and be guaranteed a review by the Swedenborg Foundation Press editorial board, with the possibility of publication. Three runners-up in each category will also receive a cash award of \$500 each and the possibility of review for publication. The deadline for proposal submission is February 1, 2011.

This first annual contest for the Bridge Book Awards will seek book proposals in four categories. Although the categories are specific, the types of book within each category are not.

Genres and formats as varied as inspirational gift books, guidebooks, scholarly research, illustrated books, and both fiction and nonfiction will be considered. The categories are

- The Afterlife: (understanding concepts of heaven and hell, and how these impact our life and death)
- Living a Spiritual Life: (focusing on spiritual practice, relationships, marriage, and the workplace)
- Biblical Commentary from a Swedenborgian/New Church Perspective: (illuminating Bible stories from knowledge of the internal sense)
- Swedenborg for Dummies: (explaining key theological concepts in an accessible and relevant way)

Because of the growing interest in the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and a growing student body at the Bryn Athyn College, whose curriculum is based on Swedenborg's theology, the

Foundation and the General Church are eager to publish books that are relevant, accessible, and theologically sound. All proposals are valued, and varied perspectives are welcomed. The final selections will be based on a combination of potential usefulness to new readers of Swedenborg, creative interpretation, quality writing, and contemporary relevance.

For further information about the contest and awards, go to www.swedenborg.com or www.newchurch.org. Forms for submitting proposals are available in downloadable form at <http://www.swedenborg.com/downloads/BridgeBooks.pdf>. You can also request proposal forms from Kristine Medley at 267-502-4901 or Kristine.Medley@newchurch.org.

If there is interest, there may be a proposal writing workshop to assist interested participants at Bryn Athyn College in early December. Contact Kristine Medley or check the websites for further information. ☩

continued from preceding page

discussions of Abercrombie on Mesmer's ideas in the 1790, yet in a later chapter also succumbs to the standard interpretation that Poyen introduced animal magnetism into New England in 1837. The author does acknowledge the connection between Swedeorgianism and homeopathy, but he does not credit Swedenborgians as the first to introduce homeopathy into the US in 1825, as asserted by Marguerita Block's *New Church in the New World*.

There is also a positive side to the work. As Haller pointed out, where Swedenborg's teachings differed from traditional Christianity they also served as a bridge between science and religion, a relevant clue for the present

age. He also maintained that the role of Swedenborgians was to be able to articulate the difference between the Christian Church, especially the failings of the institutional church to provide meaning in people's lives today, and the New Church, which carries the message of where the denominations should be going in the future—to a collective spiritual realization of humanity beyond the parochial, more narrow, and denominational definitions of institutional religion.

My conclusion is that Haller's book is eminently worth reading. ☩

Eugene Taylor, Ph.D. is vice-president of the Massachusetts Association of New Churches and a member of the Cambridge Society.

From the President

continued from page 143

year's grant. Times have changed and so has my perspective. Halloween is not going away any time soon. But neither are we. We just have to find new ways of approaching things. We have to get creative. We have to be willing to change our conception of how things are done. We have to dig a little deeper in terms of our time, energy, and, of course, our financial contributions to the churches and ministries that we are part of. We need to open our doors and open our hearts and open our minds. But, of course, this is something we all know well. It is now time to put into practice what we know in theory.

But really this is nothing more than a call to put our faith, our love of God,

continues on page 148

The 2010 SCYL Almont Survivor Teen Winter Retreat

In Swedenborgian theology there is an understanding that everything has a use, and this must certainly include the huge period of time we all spend during our lives asleep. Yes, it's a time for resting our bodies but it is not a time of inactivity, it's a time

spent dreaming! Emanuel Swedenborg himself understood the importance of dreams. His spiritual awakening began with a deliberate attempt to understand his own dreams.

Swedenborgians believe that we are all angels clothed in a physical body.

December 27–30
Almont Retreat Center,
Berlin, Michigan

Our faith also teaches us that angels in the spiritual world (and unfortunately demons as well) are constantly at work in our lives. Heavenly and hellish forces communicate with us not only through our dreams. Each and every moment of our lives they send us messages, try to influence our choices and continually strive to sway us to travel down the path they want us to go.

What can our dreams teach us? Why do we have nightmares? How much control do we have over our thoughts? Can we listen more closely and actually hear the whisperings of angels?

Come join us for this last SCYL retreat for 2010. Let's explore together the spiritual aspect of dreams and discuss how angels converse with us. Bring your questions, bring your dreams, and bring a friend! I can't wait to see you there!

—Kurt Fekete,
SCYL director



About SCYL Retreats

The SCYL is the Swedenborgian Church Youth League. Our retreats are open to teenagers ages 13–18 of all faiths and beliefs. At our retreats we offer sessions on life skills and spiritual matters based on the principles of the Swedenborgian Church. We offer a safe, secure and inclusive environment to discuss and share relevant and meaningful ideas and challenges facing teens. We work, play and learn together as a community. We have fun! Those of you teens and parents new to SCYL retreats, please don't hesitate to contact Youth Director, Kurt Fekete with any and all questions and concerns (email kfekete@hotmail.com or call Kurt at: 802-345-0169). Kurt will answer your questions or, if appropriate, put you in contact with a League teen officer in your region to help give you as much information and encouragement as you need!

The cost of this retreat is \$60. But please do not let finances get in the way of attending! There are scholarship funds available for help with teen travel and the cost of attendance. If you need financial help to attend contact Kurt and we can easily and confidentially help to cover costs. We want to make sure that all teens interested in coming to the retreat get there!

Happy Holy Days

continued from page 142

subtle but miraculous ways.

Neither Christmas Day nor Thanksgiving Day is instituted in the Bible. The underlying spirit of each, however, is. Each is an essential part of living mindfully and we can choose to acknowledge them on any holy day of our choosing. Given that, it's also kind of nice to have specific holy days on which we may celebrate these things together, but if we can't celebrate them on any day, then having one specific day upon which we are expected to celebrate them doesn't seem all that helpful. I prefer to view December twenty-fifth and the fourth Thursday in November as dedicated invitations to celebrate what I am

capable of celebrating at any other time in my life. In that light, I wish all of you "Happy Holy Days" and hope that there are quite a few of them.

Incidentally, I don't mean to burst any bubbles, but New Year's Day is pretty arbitrary, too. It's unlikely that the Big Bang happened on January First; it doesn't actually mark the start of anything in nature or history. Even so, enjoy all of your holy days in the most meaningful way you can choose. ☛

The Rev. Eric Hoffman is pastor of the Virginia Street Church.

Reprinted from the November-December 2010 Correspondences: The Virginia Street Church Newsletter,

From the President

continued from page 147

and our love of neighbors to work in our lives and in our churches. It is spiritual regeneration at the denominational level. And as we know as individuals, it is often hard and painful and difficult, but we also know that it is the things that challenge us the most that result in the greatest rewards. As we keep our focus and our efforts centered on serving the Lord's Second Coming here on earth, we can see and take heart in the evidence of Divine Providence at work all around us and within us.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken (Turley)

GC Passes Budget at Fall Meeting

The General Council (GC) of the Swedenborgian Church met for its fall meeting November 4–5 in Duxbury, Massachusetts at Blairhaven Retreat Center. The Council was hosted by the Massachusetts New Church Union.

GC meets three times a year, by teleconference in the spring, at the annual convention in summer, and in the fall. The fall meeting is where the budget is discussed, amended, and approved.

The budget process is dictated by the Bylaws of the Swedenborgian Church. They specify that the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU) will receive budget requests from the Cabinet—GC, the Council of Ministers, and all support units—and from these prepare a preliminary budget, with adjustments that are in its view necessary, for submission to GC for adoption. The President met with the Cabinet by teleconference to discuss budgets for their respective entities, although not all units sent representatives. Using a zero-based budgeting process (a budget based on projected needs rather than an adjustment to the previous year's amount), the cabinet proposed a budget that the president submitted to FPRSU. After

review and adjustments they felt were financially prudent, FPRSU sent the budget to General Council.

General Council has been struggling with deficits in the unrestricted funds budget over the last several



COM chair Jonathan Mitchell, and Council members (l to r) Kit Billings, Carl Helm, David Vigas, and Betsy Coffman relax at the Miles Standish Monument.

years, cutting expenses and reorganizing where possible. This year, FPRSU identified areas where costs could be

shifted to restricted funds to help balance the unrestricted funds budget. At present, all administrative costs related to funds are charged to unrestricted funds. The council voted to apportion a percentage of those costs to restricted funds. The treasurer will explore an administrative cost structure for restricted funds.

President Ken Turley reported that he has been travelling to churches, meeting many many members. Many ministers and members feel sense of isolation as part of a small and far-flung denomination. He reported the establishment of a safety committee to educate churches, ministers, employees, committees, and volunteers of issues surrounding working with children, sexism in the workplace, and unethical or illegal behavior.

Jonathan Mitchell, chairman of the Committee of Ministers (COM), reported that the executive committee of COM continues to work on a proposal presented at the COM convention meeting for recognition of foreign field ministries and ministers. He also reported that the executive committee is in consensus that times continue to change and that we could benefit from some creative re-envisioning of annual convention week to attract broader

continues on page 155

Leadership and Growth at Virginia Street Church

The Virginia Street Church (St. Paul, Minnesota) was fortunate to be able to host The Rev. Frank Rose as trainer (assisted by Jeremy Rose) for a weekend training program on leadership and church growth October 23–24. On Friday evening Rev. Rose shared his experiences increasing the growth at Sunrise Chapel in Tucson, Arizona and then put the board of trustees through their paces in small group activities in church leader-

ship. The result was a group of leaders who felt much more competent to run the church and great enthusiasm for getting started doing just that.

Saturday an all day program for the entire congregation was held on church growth. Rev. Rose was very pleased with the result, which was more than he expected. This session also was carried out through a series of small group activities. Not only did the groups barnstorm a number of exciting pro-

grams and activities, but they also got plans into shape for the how to and who will implement them.

This workshop was made possible through funding from a 2010 PUSH grant. Rev. Rose ended the weekend by providing the sermon at Sunday's service.

Not everyone was at the workshops but everyone is needed. The most successful church growth will occur when the entire congregation is involved. ☛

Chicago Library Displays Angels

BY KAREN FEIL

The Swedenborg Library Chicago, in cooperation with the First United Methodist Church, installed a display of the five-foot tall canvas reproductions of the Seven Angels of Revelation representing the early churches. Installed in glass display cases immediately outside the Methodist sanctuary, the exhibit was installed in time for viewing by attendees to Chicago Humanities Festival programs that were hosted in the Methodist sanctuary during the weekends of November 6–7 and November 13–14, 2010. The theme of this year's Humanities Festival was "The Body";

the angels represent the spiritual body known as the church. Descriptive cards adjacent to each angel explained elements of the art and Swedenborg's view on what the angel represented.

In addition to the exhibit, the Swedenborg Library is cohosting with the Methodist church a series of three Friday evening Advent services in December, each of which will include reflection on the Revelation scripture related to one of the angels—Smyrna, Thyatira, and Laodicea were selected. Although this may on the surface seem a little unusual for an Advent service, the Revelation scripture will be incorporated with a spirit of renewal and new

beginnings by Rev. Dr. Cheryl Magrini, one of the pastors of the First United Methodist Church. The Swedenborg Library is housed on the seventeenth floor of the Methodist Church's twenty-three-story combined church and office building.

In October, the Swedenborg Library hosted a successful event for Dr. John Haller Jr., author of *Swedenborg, Mesmer & the Mind/Body Connection*, with twenty-eight participants. Previous programs on William James, Michael Pollan's *Defending Food*, and on the New Testament's Letter of James were also successful, with audiences ranging from twenty to thirty participants each. ☞

Karen Feil, is the director of the Swedenborg Library in Chicago.

SHS Board Meeting

continued from page 142

el, including basic support for ongoing acquisitions.

Kathy Speas reported on the PSR Board of Trustees meeting. They welcomed the new president, Riess Potterveld, who was appointed as an interim president for a three-year term as the presidential search process did not yield a permanent president. PSR is running a \$1.5 million per year deficit that is cutting seriously into their endowment. To eliminate deficit spending, they hope to implement a plan that includes selling PSR's scattered real estate and building an energy-efficient campus building for housing, community life, and public space. They plan to attract more students by forming partnerships with other groups and providing courses in a more cost-efficient way. (An increase of 40 students should offset \$500,000 of deficit), including more emphasis on virtual real-time classrooms. A strategic advancement group is charged with increasing giving.

Francesca McCrossan, Administrative Assistant, noted that SHS is ahead of PSR in using technology in the classroom (five years ago SHS began using video conferencing). PSR does not have such technological advantages, exacerbating problems with enrollment. This part of the program continues to unfold and provide challenges; most of them are technical and happen at the beginning of the Fall semester, especially, as new students come on board. Distance students keep in touch quite regularly, between negotiating their classes with SHS, IT issues and CAM requirements. PSR who is in the planning stages of a flexible learning program for its Certificate of Theological Studies. Laurie Isenberg, who is providing the Board's educational time on Friday, will be giving a good overview of their plans to date. The program will include online, hybrid, blended and intensive courses much as our own Certificate of Swedenborgian Theology does.

Riess Potterveld, the new president of PSR (see sidebar), joined the trustees

for several hours. He expressed his desire to move toward more online classes. Rev. Potterveld acknowledged the need to meet several challenges over next few years but does not see it as being a dire situation at this time. Rev. Turley asked about Social Justice (i.e. are gay/alternative lifestyle people getting jobs and how has it been affecting the "regular" middle class type student – is it causing friction?). Rev. Potterveld acknowledged that international students are the largest influx at PSR and that PSR students are getting jobs, though he has only been on the job a few weeks and has not had the time to view the entire situation. Tom Neuenfeldt questioned what the future direction is for PSR (based on the economical situation, housing issues, etc.). Rev. Potterveld is committed to moving ahead with an online platform, continuing education, programming for congregations as well as Master of Divinity Degrees.

Herb Ziegler reported on the sale of Dorothea Harvey's home in Massa-

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Networking from the Heart

Sunday Evening Home Gatherings

The Royal Oak Church of the Holy City began a program this fall on Sunday evenings once a month at parishioners' homes offering good food for the body (potluck), food for the soul (guest speakers on a variety of spiritual subjects and traditions) and time for fellowship and networking (afterglow).

On October 24, our kick-off event

featured former Detroit Lions Quarterback Eric Hipple, whose son battled depression and committed suicide. He authored the book, *Real Men Do Cry* and gave to a gathering of twenty people an inspiring evening of hope and honesty. In November, Tai Chi Instructor Jeanne Towar, will demonstrate the discipline and teach us about The Way of the *Tao*. We do not

meet in December, due to busy schedules in the Christmas season, but meet again in January for "Deep Winter Relaxation," in February with featured guest, Laurie Pappas, counselor and author of the book *The Loving Heart: Navigating the Journey from Conflict to Peace*. In March we focus on financial health and planning. This is a new church program and it was inspired by the past summer's annual convention mini-course on church growth led by the Rev. Frank Rose. ☩

PSR's New President

Reiss Potterveld, recently president of Lancaster Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania, has become president of the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) for a term of three years, beginning October 1, 2010. Before going to Lancaster, Potterveld served in three administrative roles at PSR from 1993 to 2002, and he says that his development there, both professionally and personally, played a role in his decision to return. "There is

no other institution that could have induced me to leave Lancaster," he said. "My ten years at PSR were particularly challenging, but also exhilarating. I was able to serve in a variety of roles and to see the school from several different perspectives—as fundraiser, vice president, and finally acting dean for two years. Those rich experiences and connections to the PSR community are leading me to return to offer what I can to strengthen this school."

continued from preceding page

chusetts. The closing occurred in late September, and SHS received the entire proceeds of \$650,000 as no commissions were involved. The board voted a \$1000 honorarium for Janell Andrews for helping by managing landscaping improvements and maintenance and assisting with house showings, and cleaning the entire house before the closing. (Janell was Dorothea's next door neighbor and close friend who managed Dorothea's twenty-four hour care at home for the last sixteen months of her life.)

Inese Radzins, Assistant Professor

of Theology and the Dorothea Harvey Professor of Swedenborgian Studies, reported on "Emanuel Swedenborg—Exploring a World Memory: Context, Content, Contribution," an international symposium at the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm on June 7–9, where she presented a paper, "On Swedenborg's Critique of Theology." (Go to www.center.kva.se/svenska/forskning/Swedenborg2010Program.htm to download abstracts and view videos of all the presentations.)

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay reported a surplus of approximately \$16,000 year-to-date an improving investment

market conditions and earnings from the proceeds of Dorothea Harvey's annuity gift.

The board broke into committees—finance, academic and development—to discuss specific areas of concern. The finance committee recommended salary increases for the office staff, a bonus for the dean and a supplemental housing allowance for Devin Zuber and his family until PSR faculty housing is made available to him, both of which the board approved. The academic committee discussed course loads for teaching staff, ways to assist students on different campuses to stay connected, and SHS's and CAM's role in ministerial preparation. The development committee discussed ways to strengthen connections with churches and ways to increase giving. ☩

Letters to the Editor

continued from page 142

tween church and state which provides an open, free space where conversation, dialogue, and discussion can take place, and where religious and political concerns can interact and shed light on each other.

Which brings me to the sad irony of
continues on page 154

Reflection on Freedom

continued from page 141

The existence of evil within the world is not the result of a misuse of an originally pristine agency, but a natural consequence of the fact that human beings are, in general, not yet competent to choose the good with any consistency.

Further reflecting Hicks's view, Dole writes,

Successful soul-making thus requires more than simply making good decisions: it also requires overcoming temptations, learning from mistakes, developing empathy for suffering, and in general grappling with the dark side of creaturehood. (p 52)

In this context, Dole quotes Marilyn Adams.

If God's deepest desire for human beings is that they freely develop themselves into virtuous and God-oriented creatures through a protracted process of overcoming spiritual obstacles, it is not clear why God permits the existence of evil so severe that they exceed the ability of persons to recover from them. (p 53)

She goes on to defend the view according to which God can allow us to "do our damndest and save us anyway." (p 55)

The Nature of God

Andrew Dole takes on the profound task of exploring the nature of God. Following are three statements by Dole that jumped out at me from the reading of his essay.

. . . while it seems to me that Swedenborg offers a comprehensible account of how individuals might end up in hell without being "cast" (i.e. consigned) there by God, this is not enough to show that a God who presides over a cosmos containing a hell from which some will never escape could be understood to be "om-

nibenevolent," or perfectly loving. (pp 39-40)

But hell, as described by the majority report of the Christian tradition, seems to represent a case where God does not merely permit but intentionally inflict evil in the form of suffering upon creatures. (p 43)

Swedenborg in essence represents God as willing to allow the eternal suffering of some for the sake of the eternal blessedness of others. (p 55)

George Dole in *Freedom and Evil* and Bruce Henderson in *Why Does God Let It Happen?* (Chrysalis Books, The Swedenborg Foundation) come to the defense of God, declaring that everyone dies at the time best for his or her spiritual future. Dole writes,

It may strain credulity to believe that with all the uncertainties we face, every single individual who has died of natural or unnatural causes has died at the optimum moment. It may strain credulity almost as much as the dogma that no two snowflakes are alike. (p 185)

Eternity of the Hells

Where is our freedom if God is in control, and decides what's best for us? Do we suffer the consequences of our choices, or as George Dole declares, "an omnibenevolent providence makes sure that we are not overwhelmed." Were the six million Jews overwhelmed at the holocaust? Or the over one million suicides in the world each year, with ten to twenty million attempts—were they overwhelmed? Or the 140,000 children who die each day? Or the millions addicted to tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and other drugs?

From the time I entered the ministry in 1952, I have challenged Swedenborg's statements that the possibility of regeneration ends with physical death, and an evil person will spend eternity in

hell. Dr. John Swanton, eminent Swedenborgian scholar of the early twentieth century, undertook a mission to challenge the teaching of the eternity of the hell, but he didn't get much support. For most Swedenborgians, a clear quote from Swedenborg ends any discussion: "thus saith the Lord." It is encouraging, however, that present-day seminarians and younger ministers are questioning the traditional view.

I can't conceive of a loving God who would settle for any one of his creatures suffering eternally in hell. I like to think I love my six children unconditionally. If, with their limited freedom and rationality, they make poor choices and suffer thereby, I am not going to say: "Tough, you made your bed in hell. Now lie in it." I will do my utmost to lead them to the life of heaven. I thought that the parables of "the lost" were to this effect. If the Lord would leave the ninety-nine sheep, and seek after the one which was lost, would he not use his omnipotence to save one of his human creatures? I don't recall that the father ever gave up on the Prodigal Son.

Divine Providence

I have made a long-time study of near-death experiences and am fascinated by the many accounts of what seem to be permanent transformations in the lives of the near-death experiencers. If thousands of people can be transformed by an experience of "unconditional love", can't we presume that a wise, loving, merciful God will be able to find ways to seek and to save every last creature? Given our belief about the reality and closeness of the spiritual realm, can we not envision the Lord using the citizens of heaven in our regenerative process? What are Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle doing these days? What about the disciples in this New Age? And Freud, Jung, and Einstein? Or Swedenborg? And the many others

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who followed in their train?

Writers continue to say that the Lord works constantly to lead people from a hellish life to a heavenly one. Henderson writes on page 5,

God permits only evil that can be turned eventually toward good. Of course, no amount of goodness could bring back the lives lost on September 11, but consider a few evil people committed that atrocity; millions of people responded with faith, love, and kindness. This is the power that always overcomes the evil.

Was this the power that killed three million Vietnamese in a war that Defense Secretary McNamara said was a “mistake.”

Again and again Henderson says that God continually does all that he can to lead people to the life of heaven, but almost nothing is said of the myriad ways in which God leads us. We read articles and books about ministers, teachers, therapists, parents, writers, etc. who perform wonders in turning lives around. In his infinite love, wisdom, and power, surely God is not helpless in aiding us in the regenerative process. Perhaps he is leading these human helpers.

Henderson declares that God permits evil to happen in the interest of freedom. But he tries to have it both ways. When we “choose” to do evil,

because of the freedom he allows—he feels our pain, is present with us (whether we feel it or not), and is always working to bring the best out of the situation. (p xiv)

Is whatever happens the best that we could hope for?

As evidence of good coming out of evil, Henderson refers to Victor Frankl.

Out of Frankl’s experience in Nazi death camps came the heartwarming and life-changing best-

seller *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which has had more than seventy printings and been translated into twenty-six languages. (p 6)

How does this book compare with six million deaths in the Holocaust?

We read that “God always leads us from bad events to good outcomes.” (p 25) Should we believe that no matter how evil our choices are, it makes no difference in the long run? Good will triumph?

Challenge

Swedenborgians have a great challenge before us. We must acknowledge that there are few scholars among us, and few creative writers. We must acknowledge that Swedenborg’s views of heaven and hell have not been accepted, and more and more confirmed members of the church are questioning the traditional teachings of Swedenborg. The New Century Edition of Swedenborg is a great accomplishment, but it does little to tie in with the best current thinking in the fields of theology, philosophy, psychology, psychotherapy, and science. For church stalwarts like Henderson to pontificate that Swedenborg has all the answers will only further the notion outside the Church that we are an insignificant narrow cult and not worthy of serious study. Let us remind ourselves that Swedenborg heralded the beginning of the New Age. It did not end then and there.

The essay of Andrew Dole comes as a breath of fresh air. In his work at Amherst, he is in contact with scholars from different traditions, and is meeting with a great variety of students who, hopefully, are searching for new insights. He can be a gadfly for those among us who are still open to new ideas and approaches. At the close of his essay, he does not offer a solution, but says,

There is, in my estimation, a significant tension in Swedenborg’s writings between the con-

cept of a God of truly infinite love and the God who, from the beginning, saw fit to allow creatures to make their beds eternally in hell; at least, in this essay I have been arguing that what it would take to reconcile these two – a solution to the “problem of hell”—is not yet in evidence.” (pp 58-59) ☩

Andrew Dole is assistant professor in the religion department at Amherst College, Amherst, Massachusetts.

George Dole is pastor of the Fryeburg Church, translator for the Swedenborg Foundation, and a member of the faculty of the Swedenborg House of Studies in Berkeley, California.

Bruce Henderson is director of communications for the General Church at Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

Ernest Martin is the associate pastor of the Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church in Redmond, Washington, and enjoys a life of semi-retirement.

Mite Box For 2011



The Women’s Alliance voted on June 25, 2010, at its annual meeting to pledge this year’s Mite Box to support Convention delegates to the National Council of Christian Churches meetings. We especially encourage that one of the delegates from the Swedenborgian Church be a woman.

Check out the NCCA website: <http://www.nccusa.org/> and notice a prominent headline:

“Ecumenical women are a powerful presence at the Centennial Gathering in New Orleans”

Save up your change and bring it to Convention in Cincinnati—or send a check made out to National Alliance of New Church Women (memo Mite Box). Mail to our Alliance treasurer:

Gloria Toot
10280 Gentlewind Dr.
Cincinnati, OH 45242

Letters to the Editor

continued from page 151

your opening point: that we are uniformly cautioned against discussing the most important subjects, politics, religion and sex. I've come to believe that the reason for this is depressingly simple. It is not possible to discuss these issues without revealing something very important about ourselves: where we stand in relation to reason and compassion. Open this box of issues, and people are forced to confront their hypocrisy, their fears, their faithlessness. And like a patient who seeks merely to mask symptoms rather than endure the discomfort of a cure, we find it satisfactory to leave well enough alone, knowing that it is not well enough at all.

Swedenborg offers an important insight in his discussion of the three "realms" of moral, civic and spiritual life. These realms correspond to our private and personal interactions (moral), our public and social interactions, including political activity (civil), and our more inward and transcendent interactions with the Lord (spiritual). As is his style, he emphasizes the need to bear in mind that these realms are both distinct from and continuous with one another; they are interrelated. He further notes that one can be moral and civil without being spiritual, but that one cannot be spiritual without being moral and civil as well. In other words, the spiritual life requires that we be politically and morally active, and that all three realms be related in a consistent and coherent manner in our lives. As you point out, Swedenborg's lack of explicit guidance in these matters leave us free to determine how this is to be done in each individual life. But his theology as a whole makes it clear that we are also responsible to actually do it.

As for guidance from scripture, I am reminded of something Mark Twain once said: "Most people are bothered by those passages which they cannot

understand; but as for me, I always notice that the passages in Scripture which trouble me most are those which I do understand." For instance, Matt. 12:50 and Micah 6:8, suggest a clear link between regeneration and social justice, an interrelatedness that is often denied in the name of apparent harmony and peace.

Finally, I would like to share with your readers something that has helped me to understand the seemingly complex relation between religion and politics; why it is so important and yet so difficult to talk about openly.

The political problem is not a political problem, it is an economic problem.

The economic problem is not an economic problem, it is an ethical problem.

The ethical problem is not an ethical problem, it is a spiritual problem.

—Robert McCluskey,
West Hollywood, California

Healing the Rift

Dear Editor:

I recently received my November Issue of *The Messenger* and read with interest the observations of and reflections on the Swedenborg Colloquium. The article mentioned the start of the healing of the rift, or schisms, between our sister churches as beginning in 2004 with the retreat of all Swedenborgian/New Church women called Gathering Leaves.

These annual or biannual gatherings are very important to the health of our church as a whole. However, the healing began long before 2004 in Calgary, Alberta. General church people have been attending our General Convention affiliated church for at least the last twenty years (as they probably do in other churches). We would often have General Church (GC) ministers visit our congregation as Convention ministers were few and far be-

tween. The Rev. Mike Gladish was one of these ministers. Eventually an idea began to form for a cooperative ministry in Calgary.

In June of 2001, at an Annual General Meeting of the Western Canada Conference, we officially sanctioned the cooperative ministry between the General Church and General Convention for the Calgary New Church Society. This action received the blessings of Bishop Buss of the GC and Rev. Ron Brugler of General Convention. We called our group "The Calgary New Church Project."

I emailed Rev. Gladish before I began to write this letter, and his email said in part,

When you write, I hope you will make clear that it was never intended to be a merger, but a "cooperative ministry." This I think was key to the success we had. In effect we agreed to disagree on some things, and determined to work together in every area where we could agree—especially outreach. It was also my conviction, as I'm sure you will recall, that there will always be some newcomers who receive the Writings in a GC sort of way, and some who receive them in a Convention sort of way, and so it seemed good to me to have *both* organizations ready and waiting to serve them.

I think it is important for both Convention and the General Church leaders and parishioners to know, rather than only a few individuals, that we successfully bridged our differences and, for a few short years, had a wonderful relationship, cut short only by the transfer of Rev. Gladish to other parishes.

Symposiums and retreats are great ways to get together, but there have to be action steps or follow up. Otherwise they are just "feel good" activities.

—Sharon Williams
Secretary, Calgary New Church Society

General Council Meeting

continued from page 149

participation and to better advance our mission as a church. He reported that the Committee on Ministry (CAM) held seven interviews with SHS students in Berkeley in October. Gabriela Cahaly and Steve Sanchez are completing their programs with anticipated ordinations at the 2011 Annual Convention in Cincinnati. Two students remain on the ordination track and are making good progress, two students are applying off the ordination track, one student begins studies in January and one student is in discussion about possible paths to ministry.

Renée Helenbrecht, operations manager, reported on conditions at the central office. Conditions have improved since her last report, but the council is still concerned about teenagers hanging out by the front door and in the parking lot, as it is hidden from the street. She also reported that although the new denominational website is up and running, and she is performing some maintenance, she is unable to devote the time needed to keep the site updated with new content on a timely basis. She observed that the site needs a steady source of new content to keep visitors interested as well as a gatekeeper to approve content for the denomination.

The council received and approved the Wayfarers Chapel budget. Revenues and expenses are budgeted to closely resemble the FY 2010 budget with total revenues of \$1,529,500 and total expenditures of \$1,523,832.

Betsy Coffman reported on Urbana University matters. Ray Silverman, editor of *Light In My Darkness* (originally *My Religion*) by Helen Keller, will be the resident scholar, giving the Swedenborg lectures at Urbana University this spring. This program is funded by the denomination. The school has been raising money to purchase climate-

Passages

Births

Michelle and Bill Nielsen of the Virginia Street Church in St. Paul had a lovely baby girl, **Josephine May Nielsen** on October 9, 2010. Mom, Dad and sister Lena are doing fine.

Confirmations

Swedenborgian House of Studies student **Dagmar Bollinger** joined the life of The Royal Oak Church of the Holy City (Michigan) on Johnny Appleseed Sunday, September 26, 2010. Dagmar lives in Ann Arbor, Michigan, attends Earlham College School of Religion and is an ordination track program at the Swedenborgian House of Studies. Welcome Dagmar!

Mark Roby of Birmingham, Mich-

igan, and **Kathleen McComsey** of Royal Oak, Michigan, joined the life of The Royal Oak Church of the Holy City on Thanksgiving Sunday, November 21, 2010. Mark and Kathleen have been active friends of the church for years and have inspired us to cherish life to it's fullest after Mark battled a rare liver cancer and successfully received spiritual support along with a liver transplant at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation. Many thanks to our sister church in Cleveland, whose members offered hospitality and support!

Three new members joined the Virginia Street Church (St. Paul, Minnesota) on Rally Sunday. Welcome to **Jeremy Rose, Julia Robinson, and Thomas Robinson**. Although they have been part of the church for many years, it is wonderful to welcome them as new members. ☩

controlled display cases displaying the Swedenborgian collection in Urbana's Swedenborg Library. The library was rededicated after its renovation and the Helen Keller Bookstore (campus bookstore) was dedicated. March 2011 is Founders Month, and the school will mark its 150th anniversary and dedicate a new Johnny Appleseed display.

Matthew Fekete reported on the Swedenborgian Online Community (www.swedenborgiancommunity.org). The community continues to grow its membership and number of visitors, and this year raised \$4000. The community received funding for the online minister's salary from the Missions fund, relieving the need to fund her from unrestricted funds this year.

The Central Office oversight committee proposed, and GC approved, a lease to be offered to the Newtonville (Massachusetts) Society for continued rental of office space in their parish house. The lease addresses some ongoing problems and facilitates planning

for both parties.

The council discussed membership in the National Council of churches and then voted to continue membership and representation.

Kit Billings reported that he has been in touch with other chaplains in the denomination to discuss common issues and concerns. They might become an official group to share concerns and ideas, support one another, and gain recognition as Swedenborgian ministers being of use in the larger world.

The council voted to adopt EDSU's "Seven-Year Proposal" (see the November 2010 *Messenger*) and authorize EDSU to work with the president to implement it.

President Turley brought up the possibility of saving money and encouraging more ministers and members to attend the annual convention by making it biennial. A committee was formed to explore the implications for the constitution and bylaws. ☩

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.

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