



The Rev. David P. Johnson: 1912-2010

A Daughter's Tribute to His Life and Ministry

This article is adapted from the eulogy delivered by Betsy Coffman, David's daughter, at his memorial service on December 4, 2010, in Bellevue, Washington. His obituary appeared in the January 2011 *Messenger*.

There is no way to capture in a few words the fullness of a person's life—in this case my father's—and I think rightly so, because it would be diminishing, for the richness of memories that we are left with when a dear one passes from this world are not so much something of the mind but of the heart, and the heart speaks a different language than words. So words can never be enough, can never capture the totality of who that person was. And yet, we want so much to somehow express what that person meant to us—how his life, deeply and permanently intertwined with our own, has meant so much that we are laid bare by his absence. And so, acknowledging that no amount of words can ever be fully adequate, I want, nevertheless, to try to express, as my father requested of me, something of the facet of his life that expresses his faith and forty-some years of ministry in the church he so dearly loved.

In retrospect, it almost seems that it was written in the stars that Dad felt called to the ministry. He was the descendent of Swedenborgian ministers on both sides of his family. His great, great-grandfather on his mother's side was the Rev. William Benade, the first

bishop of the General Church (Swedenborgian). On his father's side, he was the descendent and namesake of his great, great-grandfather, the Rev. David Powell, also a Swedenborgian minister, who lived on the Ohio frontier in the early 1800s and probably knew Johnny Appleseed, who had an orchard nearby. And so, perhaps, as the late Rev. Bob Kirven once commented to me, being a minister was "in my father's genes."

Yet my father's journey to the min-

istry was not a simple, straight path. Although he had been encouraged for some time to enter the ministry by his pastor, Rev. Richard Tafel Sr., Dad's father favored a more "practical" career for his son. So Dad completed a degree in business at Drexel University and was employed for several years as an accountant and bookkeeper. But his disillusionment with an expectation that he participate in dishonest business practices led to his decision to take

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It has been my pleasure to have worked with David Johnson throughout my ministry. My earliest recollection was in the Council of Ministers, as David served as faithful secretary. Then he served six years as president of Convention. This was the time before computers, copiers, faxes, and printers. David sent out reports and correspondence with a number of carbon paper sheets and onion skin copies. We could count on David to be ever prompt in his correspondence. His education in business administration was certainly helpful throughout his ministry. David was open to new forms of ministry such as group dynamics. He urged Convention to employ psychological consultants to enable us to work together more constructively. Conferences were held regionally and in local churches to enable members to understand the complexities of group interaction. David urged Convention to join the National Council of Churches, and it was my privilege to make formal application and serve on the Governing Board.

David has a strong sense of history in the Swedenborgian Church. On the hundredth anniversary of the founding of Convention at the 1917 session of Convention, "ruddy-faced, five-year-old David" drew back the curtain to uncover the plaque proclaiming Convention's birth in 1817.

In an age when most of our ministers were introverts, David obviously enjoyed reaching out to people, and his love and compassion endeared him to generation after generation of church members and friends.

With fond memories and deep respect.—Erni Martin

The Editor's Desk



Continuity and Change

Betsy Coffman's eulogy for her father, the Rev. David Johnson, on page 17 reminds us that continuity and change can coexist in a person's life. David Johnson emerged as a Swedenborgian minister from a direct line that extends into the nineteenth century, and he held the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg as God's messenger and the traditions of his church close to his heart, living the teachings through service to others, even as he blazed new paths to spreading the Word and loving his neighbor. His long life of service is an inspiration to us as we survey our lives and our denomination, where we have been and where we are going.

President Ken Turley, in his letter on page 19, reminds us that changing our attitudes and world views is a good thing that must be done with respect for what has gone before, and he addresses young people in particular.

In another contribution from Betsy Coffman on page 32, she brings us up to date on current affairs of particular interest to Swedenborgians at Urbana University. There is much exciting news, particularly at the Swedenborg Library and the Johnny Appleseed Museum that illustrates the theme of continuity and change.

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More Hell and Beyond

On page 23, David Fekete revisits its theodicy (divine goodness and the existence of evil) as addressed by Erni Martin in the January 2011 *Messenger*. He begins with a view of Swedenborg's writings from the academic perspective of postmodernism and deconstruction and then considers how Swedenborg's teachings might help us understand how evil acts may not be intentional, and what that means for humankind in relation to everlasting life.

In light of the recent shootings in Tucson that resulted in deaths and the wounding of US Rep. Gabrielle Giffords and others, the article has particular relevance. We all try to make sense of such incomprehensible behavior, often vacillating among feelings of sympathy, anger, pity, and helplessness. We turn to our faith and call on God's love to help us with our understanding; we struggle to reconcile the contending forces of morality, politics, and economics within ourselves and society in hopes of learning how to prevent another such occurrence and how to effect change to prevent it. David's article may help us better focus on our road to good and truth.

Spring

I am always awed by the beauty of the landscape in the middle of a snow



Winter at Avon Old Farms School
(Connecticut)

storm, but as the snow turns to gray slush, I rest secure in my anticipation of the spring rebirth.

—Herb Ziegler

the Messenger

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Church Calendar

**March 1: General Council
meeting, conference call**

**April 15: Annual reports due at
Central Office**

**April 17–21: Youth retreat:
Purley Chase Centre, England**

**April 29–30: SHS Board of
Trustees meeting, Berkeley**

**June 29–July 3: Annual Con-
vention, Cincinnati**

Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

I am sitting here at the close of the year, thinking about wishing you season's greetings, and realizing that you won't read this until February, when we will all be off and into this new year now before me. And being a person who tends to focus on the moment, I am again reminded what a different perspective the presidency provides. Just for context, that lake I wrote about diving into a few months ago—well, it is frozen solid now but still beautiful in a severe and unforgiving kind of way. Swimming, without chopping a hole in the ice and preferably having just emerged from a sauna, is just not an option. And yet that very limitation provides the opportunity for actually walking on water! It may be stretching the symbolism a bit, but the metaphor does serve to remind us that when something that has been welcoming and refreshing turns cold and inaccessible, it very often provides a different means of access and a different kind of usefulness. But to make use of the situation, we too are required to change and be changed. If we are willing to let go of preconceived notions, previous expectations, and specific definitions of what success is and open our minds and our vision and look at things with an openness to what is possible, it is amazing what new possibilities and opportunities make themselves apparent.

Many of us are at a place like this in our lives. And certainly our denomination is at a place like this in its life. Many of the things of the past that served us so well, just don't work the same way anymore. Many of the ways in which we used to do things have just stopped providing the results

that we used to depend on. So the question now arises before us: are we able, are we willing, to let go of those old ways of being, of seeing, and depending on things, and begin looking at what is actually out there before us? Given the new landscape and the new conditions before us, if we are able to make some internal adjustments, what can we see that is possible from where we are now? I for one, plan on taking a snowshoe walk out on to the lake where just a few months ago I went swimming!

Now I have something for the younger folks to consider, those who may not see the changes happening because they are coming of age in the status quo I remember as a youngster in my twenties and thirties, condemning my elders for the situation we were in. How could they do this? How could they hold the values they did? How could they continue doing what seemed so obviously *wrong* to me, with my fresh eyes newly opened on a world of unlimited possibilities? Well, as I see it from my present perspective, I was not entirely wrong in asking my questions. Nor was I completely wrong in my frustrations and condemnations of the problems that seemed so obvious. But there was something very important missing in my perspective. First, things I saw as the way things had always been were in an ongoing state of change. Also, I did not understand that the vast majority of individuals that made up the generations I was condemning whole cloth were, and had been for their entire lives, doing the best they could with what they were given and what they had to work with—just as the older generation is doing now. My generation did not have to endure World War II, which was an entirely different kind of experience than the Vietnam War. We did not understand or appreciate the suffering and sacrifice that went into making this life we so easily criticized possible. Young people of today did not have to endure the upheaval that resulted from that war and the cultural earthquake that happened in the sixties and seventies and just as

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A Dreamy 2010 SCYL Winter Teen Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

The frigid winds blew snakes of snow across icy Cameron road as we turned the van into Almont Retreat Center after midnight

Dr. David Fekete, known to the teens as Dr. Dave, could not be with us this year, we were blessed to have four ministers in attendance. Joining us this year were the Rev. Sage Currie, the

North America was in the house! Rev. Brugler was the lead winter retreat facilitator and spiritual guide when I was a teen. It felt so natural and reassuring to me to have Rev. Ron there, like



Photo: Kurt Fekete

The retreat group at Almont

on a dark December morning. We had once again successfully made the sixteen hour trek across Northern United States through Southern Canada via Niagara Falls. And while teenage girls leaped from the van, screaming with glee as they raced through the snow to christen the frozen swings, my thoughts turned to the warm fireplace of Pfister and the dreamy state of returning home to the place where I first *found* myself. We had arrived.

The theme for this year's 2010 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Almont Winter Retreat was *Dreams and the Whisperings of Angels*. Although League chaplain Rev.

Rev. Alison Longstaff, the Rev. Jenn Tafel and, returning after a 21 years hiatus, the Rev. Ron Brugler—the Rev. Ron Brugler, past Almont director, re-

all was right with the world and everything at peace. It was an honor as well as deeply satisfying and comfortable to work with him at this year's retreat.



Photo: Kurt Fekete

Retreat minister lineup:

Rev. Alison Longstaff, Rev. Ron Brugler, Rev. Sage Currie, Rev. Jenn Tafel

treat center administrator, and president of the Swedenborgian Church of

Rev. Sage started the retreat with an evening session introducing the dream theme by sharing some basic dream interpretation techniques, discussing Swedenborg's *Dream Diary* and covering some simple dream correspondences. The next morning, twenty-seven blurry eyed teens awoke early to join dream sharing circles where we talked about our dreams and what they meant to us.

Rev. Alison led the next two sessions
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sions. She took us down the path of nature correspondences and how angels speak to us through earthly beauty. Then Alison showed us how affirmative messages may come to us through the Tarot. One lucky teen even had a Tarot card reading during the afternoon session. The evening session featured Rev. Jenn sharing her very personal experience of how the spiritual world connects with her and how messages from angels and demons can be confusing, frightening, and embarrassing to share. Rev. Jenn talked about how difficult it was for her to sort out the bewildering and often scary voices and images from the other side when she was a teen. Rev. Jenn explained that even today as a working medium she struggles to make sense of and find peace in communications from the spiritual world. She closed her session by having each of us select an angel (card) to help us work on a problem or challenge that we are working to overcome. Our prayers for angelic assistance were written on slips of paper to be attached to the Yule log that was to be burned the following evening at the closing worship service.

We awoke the next day to another round of dream sharing circles. After breakfast, Rev. Ron presented an introduction to dreams of the Bible. Rev. Ron gave us a basic understanding of how important Biblical dreams are, and then we read a couple of dreams from the Bible which included spending a good deal of time looking at the many dream references in the story of Jesus' birth. In Rev. Ron's afternoon workshop session, the teens broke into groups and selected Biblical dreams to interpret using provided reference books, such as *Pott's Concordance*, the *Dole Notes*, and the *Dictionary of Bible Correspondence*. It was wonderful to watch so many youths working with and discovering meaning from these

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SCYL Elects Officers for 2011

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2011 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) officer and chaplain elections were held at the Almont Winter Retreat in December. The results are

President: Holly Bauer

East Coast and Activities Officer:

Rachel Madjerac

Midwest and Public Relations

Officer: Jess Trimble

Canada and Service Officer:

Joseph Ferr

West Coast and Fundraising &

Finance Officer: Jonat Campos

Editor, *Clear Blue Sky*, and

Communication Officer:

Celie Bauer

League Chaplain:

Rev. Dr. David Fekete

Some of the SCYL officers return to

another year of service, while we welcome some new teens to the League as well. We sadly say goodbye to 2010 officers Nina Sasser, Cody Steinhiser, and Janice Earls, who are exiting the League and moving on to life after high school. We will miss them at our retreats and gatherings and thank them for their service in the SCYL.



President Holly Bauer

Photo: Kurt Fekete

We have an outstanding group of Officers elected to serve in 2011. We welcome Holly Bauer into the position of SCYL president. Holly has been a

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Announcing a . . . Youth Retreat in England! April 17-21, 2011

Hey Everyone! Kurt Fekete, our National Youth Director, will be leading a retreat at Purley Chase, in England next spring!

Do YOU want to go?

Cost? \$600–\$800, depending on response, need for financial assistance, and our ability to find good prices on flights.

However . . .

If YOU want to go, WE will try to make it happen.

Purley Chase is a large English country home—now a retreat centre—near Birmingham, in the heart of England. It sits on several acres of fields and trees, with trails and an adventure play ground. You will be joining British Swedenborgian youth, as eager to meet you as you are to meet them.

Now is the time to begin planning! If you are interested, contact Kurt at kfekete@hotmail.com or if you live in Canada, contact Rev. Alison at [Rev. Alison at Rev. Alison@shepherdsway.ca](mailto:Alison@shepherdsway.ca).

SCYL Winter Retreat

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Swedenborgian books that I grew up with.

The final evening of the Winter Retreat brought us to a new, very im-



Teen boys working hard in the kitchen

Photo: Kurt Fekete



Happy teen girls, Celie, Tia, Nina, Emily

Photo: Kurt Fekete

portant and meaningful ritual. I, with request from Rev. Ken Turley and help from many others, have been working on a rite of passage ceremony for our eighteen-year-old teens who have graduated out of the SCYL and into the young adult Transitions group. A

number of us have wanted to create something special for teenagers who are moving on. We wanted it to be a ritual that these young adults will remember and find solace in, something that might ease the rite of passage out of the SCYL and into the adult world they are entering. I immediately recognized that I wanted the ceremony to celebrate and respect the journey of life. After much consultation, the first "Exodus to Independence" ceremony was developed and launched! All six eighteen-year-old teens in attendance chose to participate in the ceremony. The rite of passage followed the journey of the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. I related various challenges that the children of Israel faced with the corresponding hardships that teens face when they journey from the relative safety of the family home out into the big "scary" world. Highlights included discussion on leaving the SCYL and moving into the young adult Transitions group, embracing the journey, moving on, the Lord will provide, God's love, gifts and talents, and the support of friends and healthy relationships. We set up stations that the teens traveled to, each involving a minister mentor, where the six teens received a gift or task, e.g. a sage smudging, manna crackers, worksheet, or anointing. While the six eighteen-year-old teens were on their journey, the younger re-

treat teens wrote affirming words and messages on pillowcases. At the end, I gave each of the six teens a book (*Swedenborg's Garden of Theology*, Frank Rose, 2010, Swedenborg Foundation). The retreat group rejoined, and a close friend, sister, or brother presented the decorated pillowcase to each transitioning teen. From here, we went right into the closing communion worship service, led by Rev Jenn and Rev. Ron, featuring Rev. Jenn's Yule log burning ritual.

The closing evening was an incredibly powerful experience for the teens, both those departing the SCYL and those younger teens still in the SCYL. I was really surprised how moved the younger teens were and how seriously the whole group took this activity. It was clearly very meaningful, and I am so thankful for all the inspiration, encouragement, and support that I received in launching this new program. It will continue to be improved and expanded, but what our oldest teens in the SCYL received was something that all of us in the church can be proud of and thankful for.

We departed the following morning, feeling perhaps overly dreamy and a bit teary-eyed. Both teens and staff alike experienced an emotionally and spiritually fulfilling haven over these cold, windy December days at Almont.

I would like to thank all the retreat staff: Lori Steinhiser, Lori Patana, our Almont providers, Don and Lisa Craig, and first time, Winter Retreat leaders Jane Fullerton, Aaron Tahsler, and Bill Prout, as well as the ministers. Without you, none of this amazing retreat experience would have been possible. ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.



Photo: Kurt Fekete



Hanging out at the roller rink (l to r): Tia, Holly, Cody, Nina, Scotty, Janice, Jess

God, Hell, and Regeneration

BY DAVID FEKETE

The article in the December *Messenger* titled “Reflections on the Price of Freedom” by Ernest O. Martin raised some issues I wanted to address. Although the thrust of Rev. Martin’s article is to reconcile the notion of hell with an all powerful, all loving God, there are other issues in his article that deserve comment. I will begin with a reflection on the place of Swedenborg in the postmodern university. Then I will reflect on the question of God’s love and heaven and hell.

Postmodernism, Deconstruction and Swedenborg

While it may seem tangential to Rev. Martin’s main focus, which is on hell and God’s omnipotent love, it is germane to discuss the postmodern academy and why it would have problems with Swedenborg. We need to know what world we live in. Rev. Martin cites Bernhard Lang’s treatment of Swedenborg and the emergence of “a modern heaven.” Lang says of Swedenborg,

The modern heaven—exemplified by the visions of Swedenborg . . . accepted in the nineteenth century, are labelled as absurd, crude, materialistic, or sheer nonsense (*Messenger* 144).

There have been profound changes in world view since the nineteenth century that render the world seen by Swedenborg to be characterized as Lang does. Most thinkers in the nineteenth century professed a belief in a God who exists regardless of what goes on in the human mind. This belief system changes in the postmodern world. A leading voice of this shift in world view is that of Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is known as an early voice of the “death of God” philosophy. But along with God’s death, Nietzsche argued against Platonic notions of truth.

For Nietzsche, there is no absolute truth that stands outside human experience. In fact, Nietzsche’s writings are poetic and literary without claiming to articulate a provable truth. Nietzsche’s writings were taken up in the twentieth by Richard Rorty and Jacques Derrida in an intellectual movement called *deconstruction*. The claim of Derrida is like that of Nietzsche, but Derrida carries the argument further. For Derrida, texts do not contain meaning, we do not find meaning in a text, there is not a reality that texts copy, and texts do not point to some truth outside of them. Rather, texts refer only to texts and to language play within them. When meaning comes to a text, it is brought by the reader. So when a text says, *fish*, for example, the text does not refer to something we can find swimming in a lake. When *fish* is mentioned in a text, it only refers to the text in which the fish is. The reader may bring a personal meaning to the text when he or she confronts the word *fish*, but the text does not point to something outside of itself. So there is no truth outside of a text, to which the text refers.

This leads Richard Rorty to claim that there is not truth at all outside of the human mind. In fact, he claims that there is effectively no truth at all.

To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations

Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there (*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* p. 5).

What we are left with is not truth, but opinion, rhetoric, and persuasion. So Rorty writes,

Conforming to my own precepts, I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favor look attractive . . . (*Contingency* 9).

I heard a lecture on conscience by Rorty while I was a Ph.D. student at the University of Virginia, where Rorty taught. For Rorty, conscience is the statement, “I want to identify with that power group.” There isn’t a “right” or “wrong” outside what “I want.” In his lecture, Rorty proceeded to call Hitler a monster, and I later asked Rorty on what basis he could judge Hitler as a monster if there is no right or wrong. Rorty replied, “Because we all call Hitler a monster today. Perhaps in the future he will be called a saint, and then I will call him a saint.” There is no Truth. There is only popular opinion and rhetoric. Finally, what does all this have to do with God, Swedenborg, and the spiritual world? The lack of an ultimate Truth, means that there is no source for ultimate Truth. There is no truth outside our minds, so no God which will always be true regardless of what goes on in the human mind.

But if one clings to the notion of self-subsisting facts, it is easy to start capitalizing *truth* and treating it as something identical either with God or with the world as God’s project. Then one will say, for example, that “Truth is great and will prevail” (*Contingency* 5). With this understanding of truth, and of God, Swedenborg’s vision of a God who transcends the human mind—of a God who will exist regardless of what the human mind thinks of God—would be, in Lang’s words, “absurd, crude, materialistic, or sheer nonsense.”

Rorty represents a general trend in postmodern intellectual thought. Most postmodern intellectuals are atheists.

Our civilization is made up of a host
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God, Hell, Regeneration

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of societies, sub-societies, and milieux, all rather different from each other. But the presumption of unbelief has become dominant in more and more of these milieux; and has achieved hegemony in certain crucial ones, in the academic and intellectual life, for instance, “whence it can more easily extend itself to others” (Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, p. 13).

We are left with a world that is locked up inside the human skull, to use Charles Taylor’s description of the postmodern world view. Rhetoric exists in the human mind, which means the brain, which is inside the skull. This means that reality is only what we experience in the present. There is no reality that transcends our mind, stands above our experience, or exists outside the skull. Merold Westphal wrote a groundbreaking work of theology that takes into account this postmodern world view. His work is called, *Overcoming Onto-Theology: Toward a Postmodern Christian Faith*. He tries to talk about God in terms that take into account Nietzsche, Derrida, Heidegger, and the great philosophers who deconstruct the Enlightenment world view. However great this tome is, I fear that Westphal is preaching to the choir, and that only those who already believe will give credence to his efforts. Atheism is a belief system, and as a belief system, there are certain presuppositions that will not be admitted into consideration. At the same time, I think that most believers would not be satisfied with the God and afterlife left after Westphal’s discussion.

So it is not that Swedenborg is too weird to be accepted by contemporary thought. Rather, the world has undergone a major intellectual shift from the nineteenth century. The world view of our postmodern society cannot accommodate Swedenborg’s presuppositions about truth and about God’s relation-

ship to our experience. It is not that Swedenborg is weird, it is rather that he is obsolete.

However, Swedenborg is making a comeback under the academic category of esotericism. This field hasn’t yet established itself to a great extent in the university, but it is a field of growing interest. There have been several seminars devoted to Swedenborg at the American Academy of Religions conventions by scholars outside the church. So while mainstream philosophy and theology may have problems with Swedenborg, the burgeoning field of esotericism is finding him a worthy subject of scholarship.

These remarks may explain why Swedenborg is not looked upon in the university with such favor today as he was in the nineteenth century. But for believers of all faiths, I doubt that the subtleties of postmodern philosophy will win the day. Perhaps these ideas will not even endure long in the university. For believers, there is a God who stands apart from mere human thought. For most believers, there is a Divine Truth and a Divine Good that endures whether it is in a human skull or not.

God’s Love

This brings us to Rev. Martin’s article and the existence of hell. There are some passages of Swedenborg—not often cited—that I would like to emphasize before I state my final ideas about hell.

First, God is all love, all mercy, and all forgiveness. God wants us to be happy. God wants to give us happiness as a gift. Like all lovers, God wants to give us all He has—and God is infinite love. Of all the lovers we have known, God is the first and truest lover. I think of mothers, or couples in love, and I think of their limitless will to give and make the child or beloved happy. How much more must this be true of love itself. We have no bounds as to the depth

of joy we can receive from God.

Jehovah, or the Lord’s internal, was the very Celestial of Love, that is, Love itself, to which no other attributes are fitting than those of pure Love, thus of pure Mercy toward the whole human race; which is such that it wishes to save all and make them happy forever, and to bestow on them all that it has; thus out of pure mercy to draw all who are willing to follow, to heaven, that is, to itself, by the strong force of love (AC 1735).

God wants to make us all happy forever; to bestow all that He has on us, and to draw us all into heaven. God never condemns anyone to hell. In what I find to be a touching passage, Swedenborg says that God cannot even look upon the human race

. . . with a stern countenance, as He wills only what is good he can do nothing but what is good. . . . From these few statements it can be seen how deluded those are who think, and still more those who believe, and still more those who teach, that God can damn any one, curse any one, send any one to hell, predestine any soul to eternal death, avenge wrongs, be angry, or punish. He cannot even turn Himself away from humanity, nor look upon anyone with a stern countenance (TCR 56).

Swedenborg provides scriptural support for this gentle image of God, this image of God as all loving and non-condemning.

That the Lord imputes good to every person and evil to none, hence that He does not judge any one to hell, but so far as a person follows raises all to heaven are evident from His words: Jesus said, “When I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all persons unto Myself” (John 12:32); “God sent His Son into the world not to judge the world, but that the world

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through Him might be saved” (John 3:17); Jesus said, “I judge no man” (John 8:15) (TCR 652).

Here Swedenborg speaks of God drawing the whole human race to heaven by the strong force of love. Love is the essence of God’s omnipotence, and love is a strong force. Swedenborg makes another reference to how powerful God’s saving love is when he says, “From the mercy of the Lord [we are] withheld from evil, and kept in good; and this with a mighty force” (AC 7206). Swedenborg describes this mighty force of love that draws all to heaven as a current in the ocean.

There is actually a sphere elevating all to heaven, that proceeds continually from the Lord and fills the whole natural world and the whole spiritual world; it is like a strong current in the ocean, which draws the ship in a hidden way. All those who believe in the Lord and live according to His precepts, enter that sphere or current and are lifted (TCR 652).

These passages about God’s nature need to be kept in mind when we ponder the existence of hell. We need to think of God as an all-giving lover, who wants everyone to be as happy as we can be and draws all to heaven by the mighty force of love.

This mighty force of love is extended to the whole human race. The mighty force of love draws us toward God all through our life here, and it continues into the next life.

Divine mercy is pure mercy toward the whole human race to save it, and it is likewise with every person, and never recedes from any one; so that whoever can be saved, is saved. And yet no one can be saved but by Divine means, . . . Divine means are what are called Divine truths; these teach in what manner man is to live in order that he may be saved; . . . So far therefore as a person abstains

from evil, so far the Lord out of pure mercy leads him by His Divine means, and this from infancy to the end of his life in the world, and afterward to eternity (HH 522).

Reformation and Regeneration

Swedenborg calls the process by which we are brought to God the process of reformation and regeneration. And as stated above, it begins in infancy and proceeds to the end of life in this world and then afterward to eternity. Not only does this reformation process go on into eternity, it can even happen in the next life if it hasn’t happened here. I was taught growing up in the church that however far we progress in this life we will remain in the next. But I found a passage from Swedenborg to the contrary as I was preparing this article. It is in a passage about the despair a person goes through in temptation.

That they who are being reformed are reduced into ignorance of truth or into desolation, even to grief and despair, and that they then first have comfort. . . . They who are such that they can be reformed, if not in the life of the body, yet in the other life are led into this state of reformation . . . and are at length taken away into heaven, where they are instructed among angels as it were anew in the goods and truths of faith (AC 2694).

So reformation can happen in the next life. This makes me think of those unfortunates I see who look like they haven’t gotten a fair break. They come from abusive parents or drug abusers, and they follow the circle of dysfunction in their own lives. They seem not to have been given a fair start in life and seem to have no one to fall back on. I think of these cases in relation to this passage from Swedenborg. Perhaps these are the ones who are reformed in the next life, taken up into heaven, and

instructed anew by angels. In another fascinating passage, Swedenborg states that even those who are in evils can be reformed. We don’t have to be raised with familial good in order to be saved. Everyone has his or her own path, even those who are “in evils.”

All may be regenerated [emphasis mine], each according to his state; for the simple and the learned are regenerated differently; as are those engaged in different pursuits, and those who fill different offices . . . those who are principled in natural good from their parents, *and those who are in evil* [emphasis mine]; those who from their infancy have entered into the vanities of the world, and those who sooner or later have withdrawn from them . . . and this variety, like that of people’s features and dispositions, is infinite; and yet everyone, according to his state may be regenerated and saved (TCR 580).

These passages give us much to reflect on when we consider the question of hell. Rev. Martin makes an excellent point about the limits to our free choice. Regarding those who seem to have unfortunate beginnings, to have fallen into the camaraderie of street gangs or into the cycle of abuse or substance abuse and regarding others who appear to us as having limited choices, the spiritual reality of these persons may be very different from what we perceive from an earth-bound perspective. We may see them as being in evil and unfairly believe that they are hell bound. But we see from TCR 580 that even those who are “in evils” can be reformed.

Even though reformation and regeneration is a lifelong process—indeed a process that continues to eternity in the next life—the good news is that everyone can be reborn if they are but open to God’s influence. Swedenborg states this in no uncertain terms, “Since all men have been redeemed, all

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David Johnson

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“the road less travelled”—to enter the ministry—and that *did* “make all the difference” for him and for the myriads of lives he touched along the way. His father’s reaction was that he had wasted his business degree. But by now the call was strong, and having married my mother, Elizabeth (Langshaw), Dad entered the New Church Theological School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, in the fall of 1939. And Dad often told us, contrary to his father’s opinion, how useful his business background was in his work in the church.

Dad was called to pastor the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1942, and became the full pastor upon his ordination in 1943. Apparently his arrival, with my mother and brother, David, a baby at the time, created quite a stir, and his influence continued to permeate and change the character and direction of the church throughout his twenty-one-year tenure. This is how Brita Hazell, a former parishioner, just a child when this “new minister” arrived, describes her experience in a recent letter to our family:

When your dad came to Kitchener to be the new minister at the Church of the Good Shepherd, he and your mother stayed at our home in Freeport with their new baby. I was quite young then, probably 11 or 12, but I can still remember being so taken aback by how friendly and smiling this new minister and his wife were—so different from the previous minister who had a rather stern and unapproachable demeanor. Our household was also very disciplined and formal, and I wondered, how was this smiling, friendly couple—and a baby—ever going to stand living in our household? But their warmth and outgoing personalities won over everyone in the church (especially us teenagers).

As a result, I became very ac-

tive in the [young people’s] League until I left Kitchener to go to university. While there, I became engaged to my first husband (now deceased), and your dad performed our wedding service the following year. I can still see him standing at the front of the church in his new white robe and *pale blue* vestment! What a shock (and delight) after the years and years of ministers in black robes.

Your mom and dad’s personalities changed the atmosphere in our church. It was like someone had opened a window and let the sunlight in. We all grew to love them, and enthusiasm for church activities and interaction between the members flourished. I do believe our membership grew significantly during those years.

Your dad’s sermons were so down to earth and relevant to our daily lives in those days after the War, that everyone ate up his every word. Even Charlie Hagen stopped dozing off (as he had done in the past) and listened. . . . I’ve had occasion to think about what he said many times over the years.



Elizabeth and David Johnson at the Golden Gate in earlier years

And so it seems that Dad was an agent for positive change right from the early days of his ministry. And he was actively engaged, not only in the life of the church, but in community groups as well, to such an extent that it’s hard

to do justice to all he accomplished, but a few things of note include his significant role in developing the design for a new stained glass window in the church depicting the “Descent of the New Jerusalem” and in procuring a major donor. In the community he was active in the Y’s Men’s Club, serving as president for a number of years. He also took on the role of production manager for the Twin Cities Operatic Society, which was largely founded by my mother and other church members and which is active to this day.

For his growing family during those years in Kitchener, the church was an integral part of our lives, and the congregation was our extended family. These are some of my memory-images of that time: weekly Sunday school with Dad giving a children’s talk; sitting and squirming in the church pews during services, under the kind and patient care of parishioner-volunteers while Dad spoke from the pulpit and Mom sang with the choir; sitting in the church balcony with little brother Paul, who would spontaneously wave and call out “Hi Daddy” right in the middle of the service; Dad smiling back and waving at him from the pulpit; the children’s choir singing for special services; Christmas pageants; the church decorated by Dad at Thanksgiving with real fruits of the harvest; getting up and dressed in what seemed the dead of night for the annual 7 AM Christmas morning candlelight service, filing out of the house into the cold, wintry snow to church, where window and altar candles were lit and warmly glowing and beloved Christmas carols and stories were sung and told until, bit by bit, light began to filter through the stained glass windows—and by the time the service ended it was full daylight, the winter sun often streaming through, and returning home full of excitement and anticipation for the rest of our family Christmas. All these

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memories and so many more are embedded in my psyche. They are a real and living part of who I am today, an abiding place within me, full of the love, warmth, safety and a sense of community that has continued to nurture me throughout my life.

Dad's involvement at the national church level led to his election as president of the denomination, at the relatively young age of 44, a six-year tenure beginning in 1956. During this time, he and Mom were sent on a mission trip as emissaries to sister churches in Britain and Europe, including the still-burned-out city of East Berlin. Also during this period and for almost twenty years, Dad served on the Urbana College (now University) board of trustees. His three oldest children and one of his granddaughters attended Urbana.

Dad was a natural leader, who continued to grow into that role. He truly believed in servant-leadership, and he sought to lead the church forward in facing the challenges of finding new and more relevant ways to meet the spiritual needs of people in the second half of the twentieth century.

In 1963, feeling drawn to a new opportunity and challenge, he moved to Bellevue, Washington, to inaugurate, with two colleagues, the Rev. Owen and the Rev. Calvin Turley, an innovative team ministry called Project Link. The Bellevue Church, seeking to integrate religion more with daily life, experimented with new, non-traditional services and programs long before this was popular. The ministry included a focus on pastoral counseling with groups and individuals as a means to promote personal and spiritual growth and wellbeing. Fully embracing this new facet of ministry, Dad completed extensive training to become qualified as a fellow of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors. While his two colleagues eventually moved on to

pursue other ministries, Dad remained pastor of the Bellevue Church until his retirement, continuing with his work in pastoral counseling.

Yet, even in his retirement, he continued to serve his church, spending several years as a member of the Wayfarers Chapel board and continuing to attend church conventions and Council of Minister meetings for many years. As his physical health slowly declined and his hearing impairment grew more profound, he nevertheless remained mentally very sharp and emotionally present. He often used e-mail, as a way of maintaining ongoing correspondence with many people. The same Brita whose letter I read earlier, went on to say,

I turned to your Dad so often, during the past 15 years, for support and guidance (via email) during some very difficult times. He was always there for me, . . . showing a genuine interest in my welfare, encouraging me, sensitive to my situations, and gently guiding me. I once remarked to him that he was more of a father to me than my own adoptive father had been . . . and from that time on I began calling him "David-Dad" and signing the emails "daughter Brita."

Christine Laitner, immediate past president of our denomination wrote this,

David has been one of the best things in my life [in regard to] my work in the General Convention—from my earliest annual convention times [serving on various committees and offices], to my more recent "church life" as . . . president. He has been, in the past ten years, a good email companion on the journey. Your father certainly loved this church, didn't he? Many years ago he sent me information about . . . Project Link and specifically, . . . background on the symbol developed for it,

which has become the denomination's symbol over time. It has been a great source of knowledge and comfort to have been in communication with your father over these many years. Thank you all for sharing him!

And so, even in his eighties and nineties Dad was still making a difference, was still following his life path as he ministered to others in any way he could. Dad's personal faith and beliefs were always the life force behind his ministry and all his human interactions. As a Christian of the Swedenborgian faith it was his

. . . firm belief and conviction that the Lord has created us as spiritual beings, living in our physical bodies as we learn his ways in preparation for the life to come.

And that the only truly religious or spiritual life consists in living God's ways from a true desire of the heart—that is,

. . . living a life of love and kindness . . . from . . . a heart-felt desire for the good of others . . . serving others from love to promote their happiness, doing what is good, honest and just, simply because it is, good honest and just . . . not for the sake of any selfish hope of reward" (Swedenborg, HH 481,408).

For him, that is the way we become alive and real as spiritual beings, how we develop and are born into the life of the spirit. Dad believed that by living this way, we open ourselves as channels for the Divine to work through us and to accomplish the ongoing goal of God's creation and purpose for humanity. And this was what he strived to do—to live out "the call" he felt—for he believed that the Lord "has called us each by name and in whatever degree it may be, great or small, God may use each human soul as a tool to reveal his truth." Thus, from his sermon in the July 2000 *Our Daily Bread*,

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God, Hell, Regeneration

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may be regenerated each according to his state" (TCR 579). This idea of rebirth is inclusive, rather than exclusive. It means that everyone has his or her own path to take in the process of spiritual rebirth. One person's path may be very different from another's. The variety of ways in which people are reborn are as infinite as there are faces in the human race. And above all, we are not in a position to look at someone else and determine if he or she is heaven-bound or not. This is something only God can know, in God's infinite love and with God's mighty force of love.

Hell and Heaven

Given these qualifying ideas about the process of salvation and God's love, I do believe that there is a hell. Lovers can be rejected. But as I was taught by Rev. Calvin Turley, it is not easy to enter hell. One can't blunder into hell accidentally. Hell has to be chosen deliberately. In order to qualify for hell, one must do bad things knowingly and by conscious choice, struggling against that mighty force of love. Swedenborg claims that even if a basically good person does evil, it is of a different quality than evil done by a basically bad person. Swedenborg asserts,

But good spirits are never punished, though they had done evils in the world, for their evils do not return; and I have learned that their evils were of another kind or nature than those of evil spirits, not being done purposely contrary to the truth, and not from any other evil heart than what they received hereditarily from their parents, into which they were carried from a blind enjoyment when they were in externals separate from internals (HH 509).

Here Swedenborg distinguishes between two qualities of evil. In a paradoxical statement, Swedenborg claims

that the hereditary evil done by basically good people does not return in the next life. I call this passage paradoxical because so much of Swedenborg seems to say that we must struggle with and overcome hereditary evil. Yet here hereditary evil isn't damning. The key line in this passage is the phrase, "not being done purposely contrary to the truth." The kind of evil that fits a person for hell is done by full knowledge of the truth and purposefully wanting to act contrary to it. It isn't blind pleasure; it isn't because one hasn't the spiritual resources to find God; it isn't because of limited choices. To be fit for hell, a person needs to be in full possession of his or her faculties, to know evil and choose evil, and to struggle all his or her life against the mighty force of love. I knew a person in Florida who said that he wanted to go to hell because that is where his uncle is. I asked him how he knew that his uncle is in hell, and my friend said that his uncle committed suicide and therefore must be in hell. Such a person is not acting contrary to the truth. I would say that his truths were mixed up. I was a social worker at the time and unable to enter into theological discussions, but even so, I doubt that I could have changed the belief system of my friend. I do not think this is an example of acting contrary to truth nor a rejection of God. It is rather a love for his uncle and a mistaken understanding of depression and the dynamics of suicidal ideation.

The blind enjoyment which carries basically good people into evils when they are in a state of externals separate from their internals is intriguing. It suggests that there are other times when their internals are informing their actions and that they are trying to enter that current of love elevating all to heaven. It also says, as we have seen above, that the mere commission of evil doesn't damn a person for hell.

All the above suggests that the processes that lead a person to heaven or

hell are extremely complex. Swedenborg wrote thirty volumes detailing the subtleties of these processes. The wellsprings of people's actions are beyond our abilities to discern. The apparent violence we witness by gang members may be a longing for community and love that were absent in the unfortunate's upbringing. It may be what Swedenborg calls hereditary evil, which apparently isn't damning all the time. People who say that they hate God may be individuals who have false ideas about God that make God look despicable. We all have different backgrounds, and as such we all have different ways of finding God.

Our choices certainly are limited. At best, we have only appearances of truth. In this insight, Swedenborg to some degree anticipated postmodern thought. The truth we know is only according to our education and experience and to that extent is relative. We don't have absolute truth to base our choices on. There is, however, an absolute Truth toward which we can approach. This limit on what we know to be true may lead us to kick against teachings about God and heaven that are inaccurate and worthy of rejection. I have to believe that an individual in this state will find a way of doing good according to some truth system that will be redemptive—either in this world or the next. Others of us may find sufficient truth to make us wish to return our Creator's love and to be with our loving Creator forever.

But whatever our grasp of truth is, God is the first lover who is in love with the whole human race. God is all mercy, all forgiveness, and imputes evil to no one.

I conclude that it is probably easier to enter heaven than it is to enter hell. Jesus says, "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me"

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Urbana Update

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... the story of John Chapman through interpretative text panels, artifacts, pictures, music and discovery. Topics will focus on Johnny Appleseed as missionary, entrepreneur, pioneer, and herbal medical person. Where he traveled, his relationships with settlers, and what is factual versus “myth” and his evolution into popular folklore will also be part of the story (*The Appleseed*, Fall 2010).

March 19, 2011, is the day of the grand opening of the refurbished museum, including a reception and dedication ceremony to which the community is invited.

During Homecoming Weekend in October, a reception and unveiling ceremony was held in the Swedenborg Memorial Library to celebrate the addition of several beautiful new oak, climate-controlled bookcases able to house about a third of our valuable and historic Swedenborg collection.

Some years ago, a flood in the basement library room where the books had previously been stored had damaged part of the collection. Through the efforts of church and university personnel, we were able to raise funds to repair most of the damaged books and to formulate a plan to permanently protect them. Bookshelves of the type needed are extremely expensive, and it was through a combination of university funds, two generous faculty donors, and individual and group donations by Swedenborgians, that we were eventually able to purchase the Swedenborg Collection cases. Chuck Winter, a UU trustee and member of the Cleveland Swedenborgian Church, was a driving force behind the initiative and was able to obtain a significant gift from Rev. Junchol Lee’s uncle towards the project. The primary faculty donors were family members of Charles (Chuck) Earnhart, associ-

ate professor in the College of Business and Dr. W. Dean Pond, his cousin, who is a faculty member in the College of Education and Sports Studies. Chuck’s mother and father met while attending Urbana College. Several of their children also attended. Mr. Earnhart sees their gift as a way to “pay forward” for future generations. “I financially support the university because my fondest memories are observing the growth over the years and watching it develop and prosper. I want the library to continue to be a meaningful part of the academic community,” Chuck says. The family has pledged to purchase an additional bookcase to house more of the collection.

The bookcases are arranged along the wall of the library reading area, in full view of students who are relaxing or working there. Librarian Julie McDaniel, points out, “the gift allows the library to beautifully display the impressive Swedenborg book collection.” As President Stephen Jones noted in his remarks at the dedication,

The library is an icon for what makes a campus whole: archives (the past); a place of research, study, and reflection; lectures; films; late nights; intensity; naps; and fresh-baked bread thanks to Julie! [On many days Julie McDaniel brings homemade bread to the library for the students.] Our library palpably connects Urbana University to our Swedenborgian roots. The new display brings life to that connection; the displays bring light to archives stored for many decades in darkness. Thanks to our donors, we can glimpse first-hand and in full daylight our rich heritage.

Our hope is to eventually raise enough additional funds to house our whole Swedenborg collection.

We also had a ribbon-cutting ceremony after the reception to celebrate the naming of the Helen Keller Bookstore, made possible by the contribu-

tions of groups within the Swedenborgian Church to the Will to Excel Campaign. The Ohio and Michigan Associations’ pledges accounted for a significant portion of the \$75,000 that was raised to gain the naming rights for the university bookstore. Dr. Jones expressed his gratitude to all Convention groups who contributed to the success of the campaign, the most significant benefit being the building of our beautiful new Student Center which houses the bookstore.

For approximately ten years, Urbana University has hosted a “Swedenborg Scholar-in Residence” program. This consists of selecting a scholar who has some expertise and knowledge related to Swedenborg or Swedenborgian topics. That person is invited to spend up to five days on campus during which he or she may utilize the Swedenborg collection and archives for study and research. In exchange, the scholar provides classroom discussion and a community lecture on a Swedenborg-related topic. General Convention provides a significant portion of the funding for this event, with support coming from Urbana University and the Ohio Association of Swedenborgian Churches.

Ray Silverman, a faculty member from Bryn Athyn College, affiliated with the General Church, will be this year’s scholar. He will be on campus during the week of March 21–25. His topic will be “I’m Not Religious, I’m Spiritual: The Inner World of the 21st Century College Student,” based on the “distilled results” over many years of journal entries of college students submitted as part of a college course he has taught. At present, plans are in place for him to speak in several classes and to lead a “brown bag” lunch seminar on campus. He will also visit nearby London Correctional Institution, where he will speak in an “inmate class” taught by a UU faculty member. In addition, he will hold a public lec-

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SCYL Elects Officers

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wonderful *Clear Blue Sky* editor for the last two years. She lives in Maine and is very involved in church retreats, camps and annual conventions. Holly is a thoughtful, intelligent, and cheerful young lady who values friendship and the social side of life, along with school, grades, and all that other academic stuff (she is amazing at math!). If you haven't met Holly, try to say hi to her this year. She is a kind and beautiful person with a happy soul! She will do an incredible job as president in her final year of eligibility as an officer.

We greet three first-time officers: Jess Trimble, Jonat (Jon) Campos, and Celie Bauer.

Jess lives in Ohio and has been an active participant at Almont Summer Camp and local retreats. Jess has been a part of the Almont family and the SCYL for a long time, and we are so pleased to have her elected as an officer!

Jon is from San Diego. Finally, we have a West Coast officer actually from the West Coast! Jon has been to an annual convention, participated in the San Diego camping retreat in November 2010, and attended his first Winter Retreat this past December at Almont. Jon loves to play the guitar and is a very kind and soft-spoken teen. He is a great addition to the SCYL leadership team, and we are so thankful that he has been elected to serve our teens out west.

Celie, younger sister of Holly, is our new *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) editor. She has some big shoes to fill, with the amazing job that Holly did over the last two years. Celie is up for the challenge, however, and has lots of great teens, including her sister, to help her succeed.

Rachel Madjerac returns for her fourth year as East Coast officer and has also moved into the position of activities officer. She will help us decide

David Johnson

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In any age, in any race or nation, God's self-revelation goes on wherever he can find the human instruments to use. We, then, are all 'the chosen people' in the sense of Scripture. Ours is not to be a mere passive reception of religious doctrines and dogmas. We, are, if ready – and anyone may be ready at any time – the ongoing agents by which God provides an ever-continuing deeper revelation of spiritual truth and good in the world.

We see this expressed similarly in the following poem he wrote many years ago,

which fun outings the SCYL will go on. Joseph Ferr continues to represent Canada for a second term and will remain our service officer as well. We welcome Rachel and Joseph back as officers and appreciate their continued service to the SCYL.

The Rev. Dr. David Fekete was re-elected to his fourth consecutive year as the League chaplain. David spent much time and energy traveling to retreats last year. He also was a lecturer and teen boys' dorm dad at Almont Summer Camp. He wrote monthly chaplain posts for the youth league blog (youthleague.blogspot.com) and was available at all times to teens in need. The teen boys at Almont love having Dr. Dave as their mentor and leader.

Please join me in congratulating all of our 2011 SCYL officers and our League chaplain. We once again have an amazingly talented group of teens leading the League. Their exorbitant energy and creative ideas will keep the SCYL fresh and inspiring. I'm thrilled to be working with this group and I hope that you get a chance to get to know them all.

—Kurt Fekete

The Lord Jesus Christ Reigns

We on earth are his hands and feet.
We are his voice to speak.
He speaks forth from the lives we keep.
He comes as we live His ways,
Love others, nourish, cherish and obey.
We need not wait his coming.
For He's here with us today.

Wait not for the Lord to come again
He's here with you and me in every way.
Yes, I know He's come again to stay,
And be my guide and Savior day by day.

Dad was certainly not perfect—by his own admission, he had periods when he “lost his way” and had to be “found” and brought back to the fold by his “Good Shepherd.” Yet, over the course of his ninety-eight-year span of life, Dad lived, loved, served, and in the end accepted the fullness and totality of his life and who he was with a joy and gratitude that was both humble and inspiring. Now, for him, the burdens of this world have passed and he is free to continue the pursuits that have been the love of his life, the core of his being. Perhaps if we listen with our “inner hearing,” we can hear him being greeted by those who have gone before him:

“Well done, good and faithful servant—welcome—enter into the joys of the Kingdom.” ☩

God, Hell, Regeneration

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(Revelation 3:20). Whatever state we are in, I think all can hear that knock. I have to believe that we are all free to either respond to that knock, or deliberately and on purpose to keep the door shut. Finally, we only know for ourselves where we are in that mighty current—and that only vaguely. However it may appear, I have to believe that we all have enough freedom to make the ultimate choice. ☩

The Rev. Dr. David Fekete is pastor of the Church of the Holy city in Edmonton, Alberta.

From the President

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sume the positive changes that resulted as “the way things should be” without understanding the suffering and sacrifices that were required to make those changes happen. And in all of this, the younger generation, both then and now, has a great propensity for seeing their elders critically without the willingness to step up and get involved in the ongoing effort to move things forward in a positive direction.

So my challenge for all of us in the coming year, both young and older alike, is this: if you see something you don't like, don't criticize without offering a positive suggestion for making it better. Don't demean the efforts of others unless you are willing to step up and take some responsibility for creating change yourself. And don't keep your creative ideas and energetic enthusiasm to yourself pessimistically expecting they will be disregarded or dismissed. Our world *needs* what you have to offer, and if you are willing to step forward, offer your contributions with respect, and give of yourself, then you will most likely be welcomed, treated with respect, and given the opportunity to be a contributing part of the world you live in.

We are in a new year and it is a new world. It is in some ways hard, cold, and cruel. And yet in so many ways it offers beauty and opportunity as well. The question before us all: are we willing to make the inner adjustments that will allow us to see, take advantage of, and even benefit from, the changes constantly taking place in the world around us? And are we willing to step out of our comfort zone and make an effort? Divine Providence does and always has worked through ordinary people just like you and me. Let's work together to make this a new year to remember!

—*Blessings,*
Rev. Ken

Urbana Update

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ture for the community.

Those of us in the Swedenborgian Church with ties to Urbana University continue to support and promote an ongoing affiliation between the school and the church, as we believe that both benefit in recognizing our common bonds of history and heritage. In so doing, we keep alive the vision of our Swedenborgian forbearers who sought to bring Swedenborg's enlightened views into the area of educating young people. Urbana University's philosophy continues to reflect the Swedenborgian principles of free and rational inquiry in the development of human potential, intellectually, socially and spiritually. As an educational community it attempts to provide an “environment in which students develop as sensitive, caring, thinking individuals and members of the community . . . while supporting an ongoing search for modes of behavior which uphold human dignity, honor human freedom, and foster individual and community resourcefulness and responsibility.”

As a small, regional university, UU continues to provide higher education to a significant number of students who are the first in their families to attend college. In addition, UU partners with the regional correctional institutions to provide certificates and degrees to eligible inmates. President Stephen Jones recently presided over commencement at the London Correctional Institute (LoCI) and received the following letter from the grandfather of a young man who received his degree.

Thanks for the memorable award ceremony and commencement Urbana University held . . . for the fifty-five individuals who, against great odds, received their achievement certificates and degrees. Obviously, they and the audience of dozens of family and loved ones present were touched

by the event and thankful that Urbana University and LoCI make this possible. You did a masterful job with the address. Clearly, UU is a caring place, and you are a compassionate person. I suspect that many if not most of the men could not believe this was happening—that an institution was sharing its resources in order to give them a second chance and that its president was honoring them. Ever since I was a boy, I have believed that the persons in most need of understanding and acceptance are persons populating prisons. I believe, and statistics support, that the majority of offenders have been at risk for most of their lives. In fact, I believe that many were doomed at birth. Relatedly, it was sad to see that so many of the men at the ceremony had no one present to share this joyous occasion. Your faculty and staff are their family.

As in most areas of life, it is only by our own commitment, dedication, and investment that we keep vital and alive things for which we care deeply—relationships with our loved ones, our church, or causes that inspire us. If you feel inspired to be more involved in the promotion of Urbana University, there are many ways to provide support. You can join the Johnny Appleseed Society, make a donation to the Johnny Appleseed Foundation (the fundraising body), the Angel Fund for needy and worthy students or to a specific scholarship within the Urbana University Foundation, or the Alicia Titus Memorial Peace Fund. If you are a graduate, you can join the Alumni Association and become involved on Facebook. You are invited to visit the website at www.urbana.edu, where you can keep track of events and discover ways in which you might become part of the Urbana University community. ☩

Betsy Coffman is lay leader of the Urbana, Ohio, Swedenborgian Church.

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.

Urbana and Johnny Appleseed

BY BETSY COFFMAN

Urbana University (UU) is celebrating its 160th anniversary with events that may be of interest to Swedenborgians. As a member of the church class of trustees for the past twenty years, it is exciting to be part of Urbana's development and to promote an ongoing awareness of the rich heritage made possible by the vision of our early Swedenborgian founders of this institution of higher education affiliated with General Convention.

In September, Urbana University's Johnny Appleseed Educational Center and Museum participated in the celebration of the 236th birthday of Johnny Appleseed. This included a tour to places in the Midwest associated with Johnny, ending on his birthday at Urbana University on September 26. The tour featured planting of commemorative trees by the American

Forests Historic Tree Nursery, speakers, and Johnny Appleseed portrayer, Hank Fincken. The on-campus celebration included "musical entertainment, educational activities, dress-up contests, food, children's games, arts and crafts vendors, museum tours, and the opportunity to purchase books, T-shirts, jewelry, and other items" (*The Appleseed*, Fall 2010).

As interesting and fun as this was, the most exciting news regarding the J. Appleseed Museum is the major upgrade scheduled for late winter of 2011, a \$75,000 project funded by a

matching grant from the Ohio Cultural Facilities Commission and primary donations from the Johnny Appleseed Foundation and Johnny Appleseed Society members. The upgrade will bring the museum displays into the twenty-first century. Visitors will learn,

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Pat Sommer, Virginia Hazard, and Ann Corfman at
Johnny Appleseed's 236th birthday

Photo: Betsy Coffman