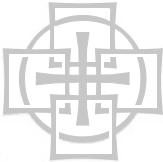


the Messenger



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Convention 2011 in Cincinnati

The 187th Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, "Behold! I Make All Things New!" convened on Wednesday evening, June 29, 2011, at the University of Cincinnati (UC). Pete Toot of the New Church of Montgomery officially welcomed conventioners to Cincinnati and the convention (see sidebar), followed by Bill Coffman, president of the Ohio Association, who welcomed attendees on behalf of the association. After a beautiful duet performed by New Church of



Eileen Franz and Maggie Panyko

Montgomery members Eileen Franz and Maggie Panyko, Diana Brake (a docent at Spring

Grove Cemetery in Cincinnati) gave an illustrated lecture titled "Cincinnati's Swedenborgian Heritage." An animated and engaging speaker, Diana took us from Adam Hurdus and the founding of the Cincinnati New

Church in 1811 through the significant contributions to Cincinnati's cultural, political, and economic history by Swedenborgians.

President Ken Turley set the stage for the convention with his opening address (see page 99).

At a reception that evening, friends and acquaintances reconnected, first-time delegates met Swedenborgians from all over, and everyone enjoyed the ambience of the dramatic spaces of the UC student activities building.

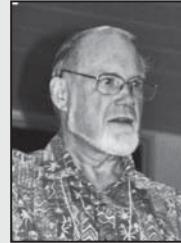
As people milled about and socialized outside the meeting room the next

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Cincinnati Welcome

DELIVERED BY PETE TOOT

Welcome to Cincinnati! Welcome to the Queen City of the West, the city where pigs fly, where they put chocolate in the chili, and you can get the best ever barbecued ribs anywhere.



We are very pleased to have you all here this year as we celebrate a very special anniversary. Two hundred years ago a small group of New Church folks formally organized as the First New Jerusalem Society of Cincinnati. That same church is still here today as the New Church of Montgomery. Now let's see, most of you are about 40, give or take a little. So you will appreciate that back when the Cincinnati church was formed it was just forty-one years since the great events of 1770, so many in that first group of church people were alive when Swedenborg was alive. To them the beginning of the Second Coming was recent history. So we've been around a long time. You will understand if we seem a little tired. Well, you'll get to hear more about our early days a little later.

Here in Cincinnati we change church buildings about every fifty years, so here on our two hundredth birthday we are again in a homeless state. We have been here before, no cause for distress. Most of you know about how we salvaged the Tiffany angel windows from the church we had over on Oak and Winslow, only a few blocks from here, when Interstate 71 was built. What many of you don't know is that it has gotten to be a habit, and we salvaged the stained Plexiglas window from the Kemper Road Church, which was torn down about a year ago. So while we can't invite you to come out and visit us in our church, we can share bits and pieces with you this week. The glass in the front of the two pedestals of the altar are two of the five panels from the window that once rose up to the peak of the roof behind the altar of the Kemper Road Church. It's certainly not Tiffany, but it is a reminder of our roots. Except for the window, the building is gone, but the church is still here.



The altar at the convention

In This Issue:

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Ordination Messages—Gabriella Cahaly & Steve Sanchez • Convention Photo Album
A Grieving Father's Hope for Peace: Ten Years After 9/11 • Commencement Address

The Editor's Desk



Meeting of the Tribes

Every year I marvel once again at the atmosphere of cooperation, friendliness, kindness, and appreciation at the annual convention. We are a small convention of churches as Ken Turley points out on page 99, which in some ways presents us with unique challenges. But our size creates opportunities that larger denominations don't have. One of those is the opportunity for any member of a society to attend the annual convention and make friends, some of whom they will reunite with at subsequent conventions. Everyone has a chance to meet everyone there. Friendships among members from far-flung places can be as strong as those that develop at home. The annual meeting brings to mind a meeting of tribes, where differences are set aside; bonds are formed through shared rituals, music, conversation, and simply being together; and common goals are pursued for the good of all the tribes.

Thanks to the host committee and

Renée Helenbrecht, we met at a site that in its design and amenities was welcoming. From their generosity of thoughtfulness, labor, and spirit we gained a comfortable, smooth-flowing and amenable convention. Thanks to host committee volunteers Noel Amend (ace cart driver), Eileen Franz, Mary Ann Fischer, Brenda Helton, Jean Lyons, Maggie Panyko, Gloria Shepherd, Jack Shepherd, Pete Toot, and Gloria Toot (chair and organizer *par excellence*). Thanks also to Laurie Turley for organizing the music; everyone who performed, the chorus and musicians, especially Paul Deming and Bet Giddings; The New Church of Montgomery and the Ohio Association; contributors Adrian Durban Florist, Bud's Cookies (and Bud Phillips) Millprint, Stitches of Ayer (Pam Kesserling), the Swedenborg Foundation, and the Taft Musem.

—Herb Ziegler

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Church Calendar

October 8–11: SCYL Columbus Day Retreat • Venue TBA • Massachusetts

October 20–23: SHS Fall Board Meeting • Earlham School of Religion • Richmond, IN

October 27–30: SCYL Survivor Winter Almont Retreat • Almont Retreat Center • Almont, MI

November 4–6: General Council Fall Meeting • Almont Retreat Center • Almont, MI

the Messenger

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If you have an idea for a program or a project that would benefit from the support of the Iungerich Fund, you are invited to apply now.

Proposals are due by September 15, with one-year grant decisions made by October 30 for the 2012 fiscal year.

Send proposals (with specifics as to creation, use, and distribution, with appropriate figures) to Christine Laitner, chair, 10 Hannah Ct., Midland, MI 48642 or email chris.laitner@gmail.com or kiplingcat@juno.com.

President's Address to the Annual Convention

Welcome friends and colleagues. With this convention, I complete my first year as president of our denomination. It's been quite a year. I thought I knew quite a bit about General Convention: I was born and raised in this church; I have served as a parish minister for over twenty-five years; and I thought I knew what this church is all about. And generally speaking, I do know most of it. But I have learned more about things I had only heard of in General Convention in the past year than I thought possible. It's been quite fascinating.

It's been a year of self-reflection as well as observation of our church. Over the years in this church I have annoyed, angered, and offended many people by what I had to say, and more often than not by how I said it. But, even if people thought I was completely nuts, I have always been known for being honest, sometimes brutally honest, and sincere in my caring about people and about this church. Well, as the years have gone by, I've mellowed some, and I hope that I have learned something about being kind as well as honest, and that my caring has only deepened. Nonetheless, what I am about to say may annoy, anger, or offend a lot of people, but I hope you can trust that what I am about to say is sincere and comes from a place of deep caring about you as the people of this church and about this church itself. So having been warned, prepare yourself, for here I go!

In 1893 the World Congress of Religions met in conjunction with the Chicago World's Fair. They met for almost a month, and there were over seven thousand people there. As we know, this was the brainchild of the Swedenborgian Charles Bonney, and that event is still known today as the birth of world-wide interfaith dialogue. In 1993 there was a Centennial Gather-

ing of Religions, and to my shame and chagrin I did not even know about it. In Googling it, I could not find one reference to Swedenborgians or the New Church.

At the recent NCCC [National Council of Christian Churches] meeting I attended, a religious leader from another denomination was talking about ongoing interfaith activities, and he had never even heard of the Swedenborgian church.

In 1925 there were over five thousand members of the General Convention in North America. Fifty years later in 1975, there were about three thousand. Today, just over thirty years later, there are barely one thousand. My guess is that number is inflated somewhat.

... as a denomination we are in a race for our very lives. If you don't want this church to die right out from under you, then we must get motivated.

We have thirty-nine active churches grouped in twelve associations. Of those churches seventeen employ full or part-time ministers. Of those seventeen, three or four are able to be financially self sufficient, that is employ their minister without "welfare" from Convention.

We currently have Fifty-nine active names listed on our role of ministers. About a third of our ministers are employed within the denomination.

The National Church in Washington DC, once intended to be our flagship church, our visible presence in the nation's capital, has no congregation, and this huge, impressive, but physically failing building, along with a few events each year, is being maintained by two or three devoted individuals.

But even after the efforts of three of our best ministers, it remains failing as a church, too expensive to keep and too expensive to sell.

Most of our churches and societies are continuing to hold on. They continue to be committed and caring spiritual communities. They continue to be active to a greater or lesser degree, and some are even producing relatively vibrant schedules of programs and events along with Sunday worship.

Looking at my own personal history, which is eerily like a microcosm of our denomination as a whole, twenty-six years ago I was ordained by Convention and then hired by the Elmwood Church. This past year that building was condemned and will soon be torn down. There is a remnant of the congregation with a part-time minister committed to rebuilding.

The other half of my employment was as director of Blairhaven, and with the help and support of Ray Guiu and the Massachusetts Association and New Church Union, we engaged in an effort to revitalize it. We remodeled and constructed a new building and revived the activities of summer camp, retreats, and conferences. Leadership changed hands, and it was active for many years, although almost but never quite financially self-sufficient. This past year it was sold to the town of Duxbury to become a park, and I had the bittersweet experience of participating in our final worship service to be held there.

In the early 1990s I was funded to give one more chance for the New Church in Portland, Maine. We revived it, and it became a vibrant church, active and well known in the community, although never again quite financially self-sufficient. Today it is pretty much back where it was when I began, with a tiny but loyal congregation and

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Ordination Message—Gabriella Cahaly

Readings:

Genesis 3:8-11
Heavenly Secrets
226 & 227
Stepping Stones

Last summer, heading for the home stretch of my seminary education, I took the required course Constructive Theology; for our final paper we were to write our credo, our beliefs. But in class we were given an unusual assignment for a seminary course. We were to present our credo in four images with an explanation of their meaning for us. The images stayed with me, forming and reforming my experience of seminary and the transformative process that began in 2006 at the Pacific School of Religion. I selected these images to metaphorically re-present my journey. I believe you may discover parallels in your life. Writing my credo, I discovered that I was engaging in an internal dialogue about where I was theologically, emotionally, and physically. I was responding to the question in our text “Where are you?” We learn from *Arcana 226* that God knows where we are, so answering is a significant recurring internal dialogue throughout our spiritual journeys. We do a lot journeying in our lives on the intellectual, physical, and spiritual planes. In fact, we are always in motion, continuously moving from one place to another spiritually and physically; the question “Where are you?,” an invitation for self-exploration, often came up for me in the past five years. Seminary studies urge students to enter into spiritual formation. We learn to trace our spiritual biography to construct our theology to discover where we are and where we are going. I envisioned my spiritual jour-



neying as crossing a river. I experienced the physical characteristics of the riverbeds—the sand, mud, and the current in the streams I crossed in the past few years. I relate the effort and the feel of learning theologies and making real life decisions to the effort and feel of wading in the water—stepping and leaping to the next stepping stone in the current of life.

Buddhists imagine life as a voyage across life’s river. Swedenborg’s correspondence for crossing the Jordan implicates movement toward heavenly life. The correspondence of oceans, the Sea of Galilee, the crossing of rivers, inspires reflection on movement toward transformation. Seminary involves a transition from one spiritual state to another. Such crossings involve effort on the physical, intellectual, and spiritual levels. The physical effort of



jumping to the next rock, a safe secure theological position like lifting one foot into that empty space while balancing on the other foot, involves trust that the next safe rock will be there. Intellectual and spiritual growth compares to that kind of spiritual athleticism. I have an affinity for all things aquatic. Not surprisingly, crossing a stream seemed an appropriate metaphor for this part of my life’s journey. I believe God calls each of us to wade in the water to cross the river, stepping stone to stone. From the time I returned to school, completed my un-

dergraduate studies, and entered seminary progressing towards this moment, I felt the question *Where are you?* echo in my being. Where are you? I was not always sure of the next step. I move through the fluid boundaries of my theological identities. My beliefs continue to be shaped and reshaped at the intersection of two cultures and several theological traditions. Fluent in Hungarian and the American cultures, I found myself sympathetic to some of the Baptist, Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, and Quaker faith traditions. I am comfortable in a pluralistic society. However, I always approached theology from a Swedenborgian perspective. The past five years has been like wading in the water, stepping on stones, feeling their firm support under my feet. Swedenborg tells us that stone corresponds to truth. Truth, like stones, supports us

when we wade in the water. We search for truths that feel secure. Wading in the water, like life in seminary, involves the whole person. You must watch your step, feel the rocks, test yourself against real life currents. Wading into the calm river appears easy but other times churning water becomes challenging. In seminary we accumulate a great deal of knowledge about theology. We study the super stars of Christianity who shaped the Christian message. Not all theologies stood strong and firm in the rush of currents. Some stones, covered with green algae, were slippery and slimy. The doctrine of atonement, salvation by faith for example, did not feel safe. Encountering slippery stones caused me to question where I was going. Was I truly called to ministry? Was I developing a theology that would support me in the murky waters of life? At these times I longed for a fuller sense of life

continues on page 116

Ordination Message—Steve Sanchez

My spiritual director recently used the phrase, "I guess that is the price you pay for being a Swedenborgian."

He was referring to the circumstance that, as wonderful as the study of Swedenborg is, there are not a lot of people to share it with. Without some dedication, it is not easy to access the treasure of the writings. I have spent most of my career learning how to speak a language that works for others from different traditions, which has been a very good thing, but I still yearned for more in terms of my own needs.

For the last two years the emphasis of my formation has been on being a Christian minister. There has been plenty of intellectual study, but I have focused my intellect on the goal of being with others. Field study and working in a hospital has helped me to become more confident in this regard. I have learned how to be present to people's issues and psychological needs. By practicing staying close in and interpreting my own anxiety, I have learned to perceive and serve the needs of others with some skill. Having the inner experience of suffering and recovery, and learning the technical language of psychological assessment has been invaluable in fulfilling my role as pastoral counselor. Within myself I am constantly informed by an understanding of Swedenborgian theology, but rarely do I have occasion to actually discuss it.

It seems to me being a minister involves being able to have a sense of humility and a sense of authority that comes from listening to the inner



teacher. In this regard, perhaps living a minister's life has an extra element of loneliness to it. This loneliness is part of the process of providing spiritual leadership in a community. It can be a rich loneliness, because just as we exegete wisdom from the Word, we need to exegete the content of our own soul. Loneliness, like grief, is a form of love. It is the soul's painful exposure to point of need and the resulting longing and yearning. It leads us to discover what is inside, and to articulate what we need to be whole, and what we need to have meaningful relationships with others. It requires paying deep attention to the need at hand. Perhaps this is what Swedenborg calls soul-to-body communication.



Henri Nouwen in *The Wounded Healer* wrote many years ago,

The Christian way of life does not take away our loneliness; it protects and cherishes it as a precious gift . . . our loneliness reveals to us an inner emptiness that can be destructive when misunderstood, but filled with promise by he or she who can tolerate its sweet pain.

The many severe follies of my life can be interpreted at root as an effort to escape loneliness. I tried to find direction by desperation too many times, and it always led back to where I was or into a deeper hole. This is, for instance, how I ended up in a cult.

The emotions of grief, anger, and anxiety are white noise until we exam-

ine them and find the particular colors that are causing them. By staying with the pain of these emotions, and not going to cut-off, we are listening to the inner teacher, and the emotions may turn into joy. In doing so we move through a barrier of fear and into greater intimacy with our self, each other, and God. I believe this correlates in some ways to what Swedenborg calls temptations. As practitioners, being able to interpret our own anxieties gives us the room to be more present to, and assess the issues of, those we hope to serve. As a hospital chaplain, many times I have entered a room and felt a lot of anxiety when faced with the intense situation in front of me, such as an extended family making the decision to ex-

tubate a parent so they could die naturally, a woman who just learned she has cancer, a spouse grieving over a dying mate, or a youth that is confronting the knowledge that he is paralyzed from the waist down. I believe the Holy Spirit goes before us and does the work if we actively use our mind and soul to be present.

The Lord said in the scripture read today, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me." Everything I have been saying is inspired by this piece of scripture. As humans we are full of evil inclinations from head to toe, and for the most part, if left to ourselves we would ignore these inclinations all our lives if we could. But the Lord by Providence brings these inclinations to our awareness. It is not uncommon for people who suffer tragedies to come to the point of seeing their burdens as gifts, because they would never have otherwise turned to the internal. They took on his yoke, and learned of Him.

The phrase *learn of me* is a mar-
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Embracing the New

Sermon by 2011 Convention Minister Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell

In Revelation, John said that he saw a new heaven and a new earth. I'm not going to vouch for the new heaven—I believe and pray it's there—but I can certainly vouch that we are seeing a new earth.

In my ministry at Wayfarers Chapel, where we do many, many weddings, I'm realizing that the world is becoming one and that I am marrying everybody to everybody. And part of the joy and part of the challenge—a joyful challenge—of that is to adapt myself to many cross-cultural situations. It's a new earth.

I'm sure many of you here have been affected by the economic downturn and the globalization of our economy. If you're not experiencing it personally, you are praying in your churches for people who are, or know people who are. We are seeing a new earth.

And then, of course, there's the technology! When I became chair of the Council of Ministers, I got myself a tablet computer. They were jokingly referring to it in the office as my new best friend. It was a mixed blessing. There would be times when I had my list of things to do that day and I would be sitting my office, and there's my desktop computer, and there's my laptop, there's my tablet, there's my smart phone, and I'm thinking I have all these things to do and all the files I need are . . . somewhere . . . I've had moments of brain freeze. I don't know what to do! Or I'll be working on my desktop say, and the message comes up that I have an email, I read the email, I start to answer it, the phone rings, I answer the phone, someone comes to my office door to ask a question. One of the wonderful things about the new technology is that the interruptions to our interruptions to our interruptions can be interrupted. I have just accepted

it as a fact that, when it comes to new technology, I am going to be lost and confused for the rest of my life.

Or again, a big part of my job these days is done by phone calls and emails. With the ability to connect through cellular service, I can park in a shady spot with a beautiful view, sit in the passenger seat of my car and do my job. The other side of that, however, is that my job follows me everywhere I go, 24/7. It is indeed a new earth.

There is a deeper side to that as well. There are new ways of doing seminary and new ways of doing church.



Spiritual seekers are out there with all this new technology. It's an amazing thing—I carry around in my pocket a device that will link me to all of the world's information, everywhere, all the time. Spiritual seekers have—at least online—all of the full richness of human spiritual traditions and religions. It's all there for them all the time. Maybe there are not so many opportunities for the face-to-face, it depends on where you live, but it is all out there.

What we are experiencing with spiritual seekers recently is that they come to our ministries, they benefit from them, they get what they are looking for, and they move on. As a minister at Wayfarers Chapel, I have come to

think of everyone as a wayfarer. People may stay for a day, they may stay for an eight-week course, or they may stay for years, but everyone is a wayfarer—they're pausing for a while, and then they're moving on.

When people leave our ministries, often they are not leaving angry, they are leaving grateful. Sometimes I say to my Angels in Training group that someone who just "graduated" sent me a very grateful email, saying they got the support and help they needed, and now they are doing something else on Wednesday evenings. They are leaving grateful, but they are moving on. That is a reality of the current world

It is a new earth. And at the seminary and on the placement committee we are changing. And we are going to continue to change. It's not whether we are going to change, it's how we are going to change. We are living in a new earth, and we are going to become—whether by planning or by just letting things unfold—a new church.

In planning this sermon, I wanted to talk about the spirituality of embracing change. The more I thought about it, the more I came to feel that the way to handle change is to focus on what does not change. In our readings this morning there is common thread and a common word. That word is dwell. In the opening of Psalm 91, we read, "Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations." And in Revelation, "Now God's home is with all people. God will dwell with them. They will be God's people and God will be with them and be their God." Swedenborg didn't use the word dwell, but it is implied in the end of our reading from him. He's promising us that there is always a church on earth. He's promising us that we can always be part of that

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church. And indeed, the church he is speaking of is “a place where the Lord is known and where the divine truths are to be found which enable people to be united with him.” (*The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Doctrine* §5) In other words, church is a place where people dwell with God.

Rev. Ken Turley, in his presidential address, came to us as a prophet. I like what Steve Sanchez said in his ordination address, that Ken not only named the elephant in the room, he stomped on it too. Like a prophet, Ken told us some hard truths, and issued a dire warning. But like a true prophet, however, he also offered us hope. Swedenborg promises us that there is always going to be a church and that we can always be part of it. What no one is promising, however, is that there is always going to be a General Convention of the New Jerusalem. I agree completely with Ken’s assessment. I’ve been on the Placement Committee—I’ve seen the same data. There will always be a church, but it remains to be seen whether there will always be a General Convention of the New Jerusalem. That is up to us and the Divine Providence.

This is an invitation to think about what church is in its essence. I think one way to approach this is simply through the word dwelling—not as a noun but as a verb. A church is a place of dwelling. What I’ve seen in my ministry is that one of the great hungers in this world—where we are so busy and so fast and so connected—is for the deeper conversation. I’ve seen this many times at Wayfarers Chapel: we have Sunday service; I’m talking to people afterwards at coffee hour; I get called away to a baptism; I come back and they are continuing the conversation; I go do a wedding, come back and they are still talking. I’ve realized that once you break through the polite get-to-know-you, and “How are you do-

ing?” “I’m doing fine” Once you get beyond that and punch into something deeper, people do not want to let it go. There is a great hunger for it. If I say a class is an hour, it goes an hour and a half. If I say to myself, really an hour is not enough and make it an hour and a half, it goes two hours. If I say, “C’mon guys, it’s nine o’clock, the staff needs to go home,” we close up, we’re driving out—they’re standing next to their cars, continuing the conversation. People have a deep hunger for the deeper conversation.

People want to be known. But to be truly known, that is a scary thing. Because when you offer from your deepest thoughts, your deepest feelings, your deepest desires, when you offer from that, you’re vulnerable—and it’s scary. I was going to say that we’re vulnerable to judgment, to being looked down upon, to being criticized. But when I was preparing this morning, I thought that really what we are more afraid of than any of that is being misunderstood, or even of not being understood at all. If we share from our deepest thoughts and feelings, and the response is “Huh? What?”, that’s a very lonely place to be.

When you find the place where you can be known, where it is safe to be known, where you’re heard with compassion, where you’re held as just who you are, where you are, how you are, that is church. Wherever you find it, that is the dwelling place of the Lord. When people are held that way, that’s when they open up to looking within, to questioning their hearts, to discerning the changes they need to be making in their lives, and to finding the insight and the courage that allows change to unfold. Wherever you find that in your life, that is the dwelling place of the Lord, that is church.

In November, by synchronicity I was back in my native Eastern Massachusetts for General Council meetings, but it was also my dad’s seventy-ninth

birthday, in which I got to participate. But part of that trip also was a very bittersweet experience: I attended the last worship service of the Elmwood New Church in their historic building. Elmwood New Church is still there, and they’re still worshiping, but not in that building. That was the place where I became a Swedenborgian many years ago. It was Rev. Ken’s first pastorate. He was the one that convinced me that—despite what I thought—I was a Christian after all. Once I understood Christianity through the lens of Swedenborg, I realized I was a Christian and that was a good feeling.

So obviously, the Elmwood New Church, that building, was a significant place. That place on that day was packed, and many people shared what the church had meant to them. But what I took away from that event were the ironies. Many of the people who came back and were missing the church and were angry and upset that the building was going to be torn down hadn’t set foot in that building for years or even decades and hadn’t contributed anything for years or decades. And I also remember the irony that Rev. Donna Keane, pastor of the Elmwood Church, pointed out that all of the sharing in the end wasn’t about the building, it was about the people remembered, it was about the relationships.

The church is the dwelling place of the Lord where we are known and held and are given the insights and the courage to make changes in our lives. The church is not a building—though certainly it can take place in a building. It is not any one particular order of worship—although, to be sure, it can take place in the worship experience. It is not any particular form of meditation, or prayer group, or class or workshop—though church can happen in all of those places. Church is the dwelling place of the Lord where

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A Grieving Father's Hope for Peace: Ten Years After 9/11

BY JOHN TITUS

Ten years ago, life as I knew it was tragically altered, never to be the same. I've come to realize that change is normal, change is inevitable, and for the most part, I welcome change. I embrace the changes that help me move to a higher plane and a new state of regeneration. But, I was not prepared for the abrupt change that resulted from the murder of my firstborn daughter, Alicia.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, Alicia's plane exploded in a fiery crash as it careened into the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 500 miles per hour. That image is burned into my memory; the constant media depictions that inundated newspapers, magazines, books, television, and computer screens over the past ten years serve as a haunting reminder. The horror experienced on that plane during those thirty-one plus minutes after the hijacking must have been horrific. As the plane erratically descended towards its destination in a near free-fall rate of speed, people were being hurled about the plane after experiencing the bloody take-over just minutes before; they must have known that the end was near. This is the worst possible nightmare imaginable.

Initially, denial served to protect Bev and me from the grim possibility that Alicia might be on board. I reasoned, with the thousands of flights going out each hour, what is the probability? Even when the facts were known about the hijacked flights, my mind refused to accept the possibility that Alicia might be on board. Four hours after her plane crashed, we received a

phone call that confirmed our dreaded fears: Alicia Nicole Titus, age 28, flight attendant on board United Flight 175 was dead. Our whole world exploded, literally and figuratively.

It has been ten years since that fatal crash, and most people have moved on. Life goes on. However, for those of us directly affected, it's not easy to move on. Our grief has been complicated by politics, wars, and constant references to 9/11. It has been overwhelming at times. Healing is an ongoing process. Whereas, there was a time when I thought I would never feel joy again, I thank God I can now experience the purity of joy in my life. After feeling completely desolate for so long, my capacity for love, compassion, and understanding has grown appreciably. I feel truly

my healing, I have cried an ocean of tears, and with each

tear comes release—release from the potentially destructive force that grows out of repression, release from the lurking anger and hatred that evolves out of suppressed sadness, release that allows me to move beyond my fear and find forgiveness in my heart.

After Alicia was murdered, I realized that this was too much grief for one person to carry. I also realized that there was no way to escape the intense sadness, the extreme loneliness, the haunting fear, the searing pain, and the heart-wrenching agony. I could certainly understand why people

would want to find relief from such a powerful force that longed to consume my whole being. Quite often Bev and I both felt like running away. But, the cold reality is there is no escape. Consequently, I began each day with a prayer and continued praying throughout the day and night. I found that if I sat in quiet meditation out in nature, I could feel the goodness of life once again; somehow, life made sense as I listened to the wind

pass through the pines, or meditated on the singing of the birds or the trickling stream, or immersed myself in the powerful roar of the ocean. During these peaceful moments, I could feel God's love willing me onward, soothing my aching soul, and gently guiding me out of the mire and confusion. I was made to understand more fully how divine providence is with us al-

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Alicia's smile



"This photo is the last day we would see Alicia, taken in the Thousand Islands, July 11, 2001. Shanoa, Alicia, Bev, and me."

blessed; but, there is a constant sadness that pervades my soul. Paradoxically, I welcome the sadness. Why? Because, it serves to remind me that when we allow ourselves to feel greater love, when we fully experience the joy of another in our hearts, when we grow our compassion to a place where we truly feel the interconnection with God and all of life we will be made to feel the sadness and the pain at the same level. In

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ways, and undoubtedly was with Alicia in her final moments.

The afternoon of September 11, 2001, I escaped to Peach Mountain near our home in Michigan. The sadness in my heart was completely overwhelming as the waves of grief were relentless with their powerful force. I sat on an overlook surrounded by trees facing westward. I cried, I prayed, and I meditated. My mind was filled with turmoil as I agonizingly replayed what I envisioned were Alicia's last moments on that plane. What was going through her mind? What had she witnessed or experienced during the bloody takeover by the terrorists? Was she one of the sacrificial lambs used by the hijackers to create shock and awe at the onset? As I prayed, I was given a vision so clear it was as if I were there. I saw Alicia sitting in the back of the plane, a small child beside her with his head in her lap. He had brownish blonde hair, a Beatle-style haircut, and she was caressing it with the gentleness of a mother. The boy of about 2–3 years old was soothed. I looked upon her face, and there was an aura of peace—she had an angelic glow about her. She had already made her peace, she was with God, and God was with her. A couple of months later, I was looking at the victims from her flight on a website and saw the same little boy I had seen in my vision, who was traveling with his dad to California. A few months after that, I was told by a clairvoyant, who had no previous knowledge of this, the very same thing. The comfort of seeing Alicia holding a child in her final moments was soul-soothing. This was one of many visions I was given in which Alicia came to me, comforted me, and filled my soul with love and peace. But, always, my human longing wanted more. I just wanted to hold my daughter in my arms and gaze upon her radiant face. My heart was comforted during these times, but it still

ached beyond measure.

As I reflect on my life since that horrible day and try to comprehend the mystery of life, I am deeply humbled. I am only one person in the sea of billions. My life is not so extraordinary in my mind, yet at times I am given glimpses into the mystery. Through those moments of clarity, I realize that my contribution to this world is in relation to a much greater whole. I see myself not as a separate entity but interconnected to the billions of other cells that make up a greater body. Just like the cells of our bodies, we rely on the optimal functioning of each other to realize our highest good, which is to build a heaven on earth. By seeing myself as a part of a greater whole, I come to realize that even the bad cells are an intricate part of the whole. I see

separated.

Immediately after Alicia's death, in the midst of my own personal pain and my family's suffering, with my government hell-bent on exacting revenge against an entire country for the crimes of a few, I was being called in a different direction. I remember quite distinctly when we first bombed Afghanistan. Many people from the United States celebrated; war cries of "bomb them back to the Stone Age" could be heard . . . and all Bev and I could do was weep. We could see the tortured faces of the innocent Afghani children, the horror in the eyes of the mothers and fathers as their homes and lives were shattered. They would be made to feel the excruciating pain and grief we felt. And it only made our pain worse. Most of these people knew nothing of Osama bin Laden or the attack on America—innocent victims to political violence—merely collateral damage. Whole villages and entire families were destroyed. The campaign was designed to demonstrate to the world how mighty and powerful the United States of America is, and it was intended from the onset to create "shock and awe." The wrath of America would be witnessed by the whole world, and justice would take a back seat to vengeance.

By this time I was speaking out against an all-out war. I knew that there would be many thousands of civilian casualties as a result of our bombings, and I knew that justice would not be served. Immediately after the attacks of 9/11, many countries expressed allegiance to the United States. They were willing to help us bring those responsible to justice. We had an opportunity to build a true alliance with those countries, demonstrate what true justice looked like in an international court of law, and address the underlying causes and conditions that perpetuate such animosity against the United



Bev and John at a NYC peace rally

clearly that I am my brother's keeper. I become aware of the pain of suffering of my brothers and sisters in all parts of the world. I feel a deep sense of responsibility for the thirty thousand plus children who die each day due to lack of food or medicine. I can see the injustice of a system that allows a wealthy few to control the majority of the world's resources while three billion people live on less than two dollars a day. I begin to comprehend the anger, fear, and hatred that emanates from this blatant injustice. And, I see very clearly the correlation between justice and peace, knowing there can be no peace in our world without justice, just as love and wisdom cannot be

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SCYL Teens: Fellowship in Service & at Play

BY KURT FEKETE

Convention 2011 was one to remember! Twelve teens, including five SCYL (Swedenborgian Church Youth League) officers gathered at the University of Cincinnati to worship and play together with other Swedenborgians and gather in celebration of the theme "Behold, I Make All Things New." The UC "Bearcat" campus was beautiful, with an open stadium where we were permitted to run on the field anytime, lots of moist grassy areas to explore, and unusual outdoor artworks and buildings.

For the Wednesday evening ice-breaker, the teens took old scraps that we found around campus and created new works of art. Then they combined all of the work they had created to write an original skit, *Thom Servo*.

The teens spent most of Thursday preparing an amazing worship service that followed an order of worship from darkness to light, which consisted of a series of "pods" (Psalm reading, skit, musical performance).

The teens started with an *intro-pod* with the gloomy Psalm 13 read by Rachel, Danny's moving performance of "Where is the Love," accompanied by a series of tearful face pictures running on screen in the background, a prayer of despair by Jess, and a dark meditation with Cody soloing on the bass. The service continued with a series of *centropods* that became progressively more cheerful. Each began with a

Psalm, followed by a skit, and finally a song performance. Psalms were read by Anna, Liz, and Ruby. Liz, Jess, Danny, Jon, Anna, Celie, Bekka, and Audrey performed skits. Danny, Audrey, Celie, Bekka, and Holly sang and played



SCYL chorus performing at their service

musical interludes with Cody on bass. The teens closed with the beautiful Psalm 98, a reading from *Divine Love and Wisdom* and Cody's prayer of happiness, Danny playing a cheery guitar meditation, followed by Rachel leading the Lord's Prayer, and the whole group singing "A Whole New World." The entire worship experience was moving and filled with the blessed gifts of the talented teen group.

Most astounding of all, was that the service was presented after three teens, Lori, and I spent most of the preceding night in the emergency room of University Hospital with an ailing teen who was rushed there by ambulance at 11:30 PM with chest pain. The rest of the teens stayed up until after 3 AM rewriting the entire service in case the teen in the ER could not perform in the morning. All were relieved when the teen returned well enough to participate in the service.

We all felt relieved once the SCYL worship service ended. It is a joy to work hard preparing and presenting the service, but it is a lot of work, and everyone is exhausted afterwards. However, we had one more task before relaxing—Holly, the SCYL president, still had to deliver her report.

I introduced Holly after my youth director report; she came up and immediately introduced all of the teens at the convention. She delivered a wonderful report as she unfolded the beautiful sto-

ry of how Rachel and she met as children, grew apart, then reconnected through youth group and SCYL. Holly's story emphasized how the church has helped her to grow spiritually and how being in SCYL has introduced her to friends and a community of people

she would not have otherwise known. And it brought Rachel and her back into a close and very meaningful friendship that likely otherwise would have been lost. It was a touching and emotional report that ended with an embrace between two dear friends.

After the service, we went to a funky little shopping district just north of the campus but got back to UC in time for the outing to the Taft Museum to view the angel windows.

At the ordination service Friday night, Cody (bass) and Danny (acoustic guitar) played with the convention

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Rachel Reads a Psalm



Audrey, Jonat, and Bekka enact reconciliation

continued from preceding page
 band and rocked the house, opening with an extended "Wade in the Water" and closing with "Day by Day," holding their own with the more seasoned musicians, Ken (guitar), Laurie (keyboards), Paul (guitar), and Lon (drums).

At the reception that followed, the teens set up their SCYL merchandise. And this year the SCYL sure had a lot of stuff to peddle. Love-Wisdom-Action T-shirts and bottles, potato stamp cards, LED hats, and custom magic wands turned on a lathe by

Holly. The teens worked hard selling goods at the table, and Cody, Danny and Jon provided music to draw people in. The teens sold \$920 of merchandise at Convention. All fundraising

profit goes to teen retreat travel and camp costs.

After hours, we all revisited Nippert Stadium field for more Frisbee action under the lights. Newly ordained Rev. Steve Sanchez joined us for a high energy game of Ultimate. Whether playing Frisbee, watching from the bleachers, or sitting around in the end zone, everyone enjoyed the late night activities on the field. It was great to spend some time running around and getting to know Rev. Steve. After brunch on Saturday, we gathered for our big outing to Coney Island Amusement Park. Coney Island (in Cincinnati) is home to Sunlite Pool, the world's largest flat-

surface swimming pool (200 x 400 feet). Also, there you can find bumper cars, carnival rides, paddle boats, and canoes. The pool was the perfect place to relax on a hot Cincinnati afternoon.



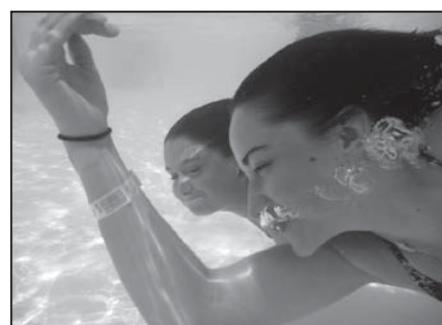
Raising funds at the sales table

The teens took lots of underwater pictures with waterproof cameras. I only share one here, but trust that many, many more were taken. It was a lot of fun. Af-

ter Coney Island, we landed at a Red Robin for dinner—bottomless drinks and fries all around! We sat together at a big, long table and had a fantastic meal.



Thelma's new LED cap



Celie and Rachel at the Coney pool

We returned to UC in the early evening. The teens had one last opportunity to work the sales table on this last evening of the convention. Late-night teen activities included a photo shoot of human statues at an interesting spot where we found empty stone pedestals. The last night closed with our traditional late night pizza party.

On Sunday morning, we attended Rev. Sage Currie's closing worship service. Then we packed up, and Lori took us to the airport. (Jon got an earlier ride.) We travelers from Maine arrived home safely in the late evening.

Thank you Lori Steinhiser for being such a faithful, loyal and hardworking leader. Also, thank you Rev. Dr. Dave Fekete for leading the teen group in an opening prayer and for being available to us throughout the convention. Lastly, thank you to all the teen sponsors who helped make it possible for the teens to attend such a wonderful event. 



The Statue



Front row (l to r): Bekka, Rachel, Holly, Celie, Ruby, Liz, Audrey, Jess, Anna
 Back row (l to r): Lori, Kurt, Cody, Danny, Jonat;

Convention 2011 Photo Album





A Father Grieves

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States. What would our world look like today if we had taken this approach? We've had ten years of war, hundreds of thousands of our young service men and women have been killed, traumatized and injured; millions of Afghani and Iraqi civilians have been displaced from their homes, killed, traumatized, and victimized; we have spent over a trillion dollars that could have gone to better use here at home and abroad, and peace will not be found for years to come. My grandchildren will surely pay the price.

So, what can we do about it? How can we change this self-perpetuating cycle of violence? What can one person do to make a difference? This is our dilemma, this is our challenge, and for many of us, this is our calling.

It's almost too overwhelming to think about. Perhaps, this is why there is so much complacency, so much frustration, so much polarization, and so much fear in our world. I truly believe that most people in this world want to live in peace. The quandary we face is, how do we find it? Peace is not something "out there." True peace comes from God when we are in a state of love that grows out of understanding. If we try to force peace through violence, we open ourselves up to greater fear, more hatred, and more terrorism. We cannot kill our way to peace because, along the way, we are only creating more enemies who will strike back with an equal fury and vengeance. As Gandhi once said, "an eye for an eye only makes the whole world blind."

The past ten years have been pain-filled and extremely difficult, but in many ways I have been blessed. I prayed for strength to endure, for clarity of mind, for love, for hope, for the return of joy, and for peace, and I have been blessed with all of these and more. My journey has taken me to many places to share my story, and in return, I

WA Luncheon

BY CONNIE HELM

The Women's Alliance of the Swedenborgian Church held its 108th annual luncheon meeting July 1. The meeting began with a short devotional by Rev. Carla Friedrich, during which members were asked to remember women of our church who had passed into the spiritual life.

The officers for the 2011–2012 year are president, Dorie Litchfield (Michigan); vice-president, Thelma Hawkins (Massachusetts); secretary, Connie Helm (Kansas); treasurer, Gloria Toot (Ohio); religious chair, Roslyn Taylor (Pennsylvania); publications chair, Barb Halle (Indiana); Mite Box chair,

B.J. Neuenfeldt (Michigan).

Mite Box chair B.J. Neuenfeldt presented a check to Rev. Susannah Currie in the amount of \$1,255.46, for travel expenses as a delegate to the National Council of Churches General Assembly. A new collection of \$436 was taken to start this year's Mite Box, which will help fund the Tween Retreat.

Rev. Jane Siebert gave a moving women's liturgy for a worship service of lamentation and hope, opening our eyes and hearts in awareness of women all over the world who are suffering horrible kinds of abuse.

Thanks to Gloria Toot and the women of the New Church of Montgomery for organizing the wonderful luncheon. 

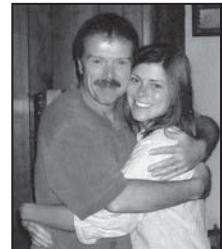
have been gifted with greater compassion and renewed hope. Along the way, I have joined with some amazing people who are working tirelessly to build a more peaceful and just world. And, I am truly inspired by the sheer number of people from all walks of life who are dedicated to this cause. Marianne Williamson, speaking at the Department of Peace Conference in Washington D.C. on the fourth anniversary of 9/11, spoke about how a few fully committed terrorists had changed our world in such a radical way, and asserted that, if those of us who believe in peace and justice committed ourselves with the same passion and intensity, we could indeed change the world in a very positive way.

As we approach the tenth anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks that took the lives of nearly three thousand innocent people including our sweet, loving daughter, let us honor their lives by taking time to reflect on a world in which love, compassion, understanding, hope, joy, and peace fill our hearts and minds. Let us live our lives in accordance with God's will

for us through our love, wisdom, and use. And, may each of us dedicate our lives to making our world better for the sake of humanity and for our children's sake.

At Alicia's memorial service on September 17, 2001, over six hundred people held hands and sang, "Let there be peace on earth and let it begin with me."—such a simple message filled with so much hope for peaceful tomorrows.

Throughout this journey of grief and healing, Bev, my family, and dear friends have lovingly been there by my side. Their love and support have given me strength and hope. For the tenth anniversary, Bev, Betsy Coffman, and I decided to host peace activities at Urbana University and the Urbana [Ohio] community using the Alicia Titus Memorial Peace Fund. In addition, I will be releasing my book entitled, Losing Alicia: A Father's Journey after 9/11, which will be available through Amazon Books. 



Mite Box Appeal

Each year, beginning and ending at the annual convention, the women of the Women's Alliance select a cause and take up a collection to fund that cause. The project selected for this year is helping with the expenses of the "tween" retreats that Kurt Fekete, the youth director, has started. This group consists of 10–13 year olds in our church who are anxious to become members of the SCYL. Keeping their interest during these formative years is important for church growth.

I am letting you know early in case

you want to follow in the path of our founding mothers and put away just a little "mite" each day. A dime a day will allow you to give \$36.50 at convention time next year, and it will not even be missed from your pocket. If only 100 people join in this effort we will be able to help out with over \$3000. Wow—what a possibility! If you would rather just send a one time donation, that is fine with us as well—mail checks made out to National Women's Alliance to Gloria Toot, 10280 Gentlewood Dr., Montgomery, OH 45242-5813. 

—B.J. Neuenfeldt, National Woman's Alliance Mite Box chair

Embracing the New

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we are known and we are given the insights we need to move forward in our lives, and wherever we find that we have found church.

I am going to propose a couple of quotes from Paul as a spirituality for facing a future where there's always going to be a church, but maybe not always the General Convention of the New Jerusalem. I pray that there always will be, but I agree with Ken, it is an open question. Paul in Romans says, "If we live, we live to the Lord. If we die, we die to the Lord. Whether we live or die, we are the Lord's." And in Galatians, he says, "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, Christ lives within me."

Now as a Swedenborgian theolo-

gian, when Paul says that "I have been crucified with Christ," I am not understanding that, of course, through the lens of atonement; I'm not understanding that through the lens of substitutionary sacrifice. Rather, if I am committing myself to following the path that Christ has opened up to me, relying not on my own strength, but relying on the strength of the Christ that lives in me and in all of you, if I try to follow the path that Christ opens up to me, relying on Him for the wisdom and the strength and the courage I need, even maybe to the ultimate temptation, then I have been crucified with Christ, and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives within me.

The last couple of years, I've gotten back—selectively—into Paul. There's a lot there that doesn't need to be—shouldn't be, I think—read in terms of atonement theology but a theology of living the life that Christ lived. If there was a person who had the right to say "It is no longer I who live, Christ lives in me," before Paul said it, that person was Jesus of Nazareth. Jesus died so that Christ would live within him. That is his path for us.

My greatest and eternal gratitude to the Swedenborgian tradition is, as

I said, that it allowed me to self-identify as a Christian again. I think growing up there was one thing I never lost, and I swear this, I never lost my reverence for the actions of Jesus, the sayings of Jesus in the Gospels, the path that he asked us to follow. I never lost that. But Christianity seemed like an obscene mistake in many ways. How could anyone imagine for a moment that this is what He was asking of us? But then the Swedenborgian tradition gave me Christianity back again, it gave me the Bible back again.

Being a Swedenborgian for me is first and foremost being a Christian, as I've come to understand being a Christian through Swedenborg's writings and theology and as I have come to experience it through involvement in Swedenborgian gatherings. But it is all about following the path that Christ is leading me down. The word "Swedenborgian" is secondary. The Swedenborgian tradition is a means to an end.

There will always—*there will always* the Bible promises us—*there will always*—as Swedenborg promises us—be a church. There will always be a church—it will always be open to us to be a part of that church. I pray for all of us that we dedicate ourselves to finding that church, wherever it appears in our lives, putting aside all of our preconceptions of what a church is, what it looks like, what it does externally, what is worship, what is prayer, what is meditation. Wherever you find that dwelling place with the Lord and especially in deep conversation and in community with your fellow human beings, that is church. There will always be that church. My prayer is that together we live into that church and that as we live into that church, the Swedenborgian Church will be one of the many places, and indeed a very powerful place, where the Lord dwells, one of the places where church powerfully happens. I pray that the Lord so guides us. Amen. 

Contributions to the Alicia Titus Memorial Peace Fund can be sent to

The Alicia Titus
Memorial Peace Fund
c/o Urbana University
579 College Way
Urbana, Ohio 43078

President's Address

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no minister.

When you look at our denomination as a whole, if you will as “the body of Christ,” we are, as people have been observing for the past thirty years, in a state of steady decline. To continue the metaphor, we are, as a body, currently hooked up to life support and to put it bluntly, the prognosis does not look good. As president, having accepted the job of “being there” as spiritual leader for this body, I am still trying to figure out if I have taken on the role of mid-wife to a chrysalis-like transformation involving a near-death experience and a return to new life, or whether I have simply taken on the job of hospice chaplain to the denomination.

In either case, when a person finds him- or herself in this kind of situation, faced with the inevitability of his or her own mortality and the possible end of life as we know it, the tendency is to engage in self-reflection and life evaluation. So let me reflect for a moment:

The General Convention of the New Jerusalem, as an earthly organization has led quite a life so far:

1. We planted the seed of ecumenism and interfaith dialogue, but we are no longer leading, in fact we are just barely part of the discussion.
2. We have brought forth and dispersed momentous theological concepts and a new understanding of the Bible but we are no longer unique in this, in fact we are becoming lost in the crowd as what we know as the Lord’s New Church emerges within the various denominations all around us.
3. We are theologically committed to freedom of choice coupled with the moral imperative to serve God and the neighbor, but as a denomination we make precious few choices and have little impact in the cultural milieu.

4. We have disdained “faith alone,” yet still tend to comfort ourselves in the belief we have the theology and yet collectively do very little “charity,” i.e. works.

5. With our shrinking funds and shrinking membership we are tending to pull back in all areas, and I can’t help but think of the parable of the master and the talents. If we have no use beyond preserving our own well-being as an earthly organization, we have no use, at least no use that the Master will recognize and honor.

6. Over the years, we have served the spiritual growth and well-being of thousands of individuals; ministers gave talks to huge crowds and we were fundamental to the emergence of the Transcendental Movement of New England and the Arts and Crafts movement of California, but currently we are just not on anybody’s radar. We have somehow lost the ability to even get people’s attention let alone be of service in a way that is exciting and inspirational.

7. We have been a church and a theological philosophy that has appealed to and inspired some of the greatest minds this country has produced and continue to do so with occasional personal contacts and publications, but as an organization, today I must say, with that wonderfully poignant understatement, not so much.

8. We are a most wonderful example of irony in claiming the name *The New Church* when the majority of our funds and efforts go in to maintaining endeavors that can only be called “old church” in form.



The list of ways we were great and influential, vibrant and inspirational, and a force to be reckoned with but now are not, goes on and on. And yet there are still signs of life. We have a wonderful new website, begun although it remains far from finished, and an online community that while small has regular attendance, as many as most of our physical communities. We have individual societies that are small but active in their communities. We have three or four new kinds of ministries just being launched. Yet with all of these things, we have to face the fact that our church as we have known it is in decline.

So I put it to you now: perhaps the Swedenborgian Church, this group of individuals of which we are all a part, collectively known as The General Convention of the New Jerusalem, as an earthly organization has served its purpose and is going to simply and quietly disappear. If we continue on as we are now it is an absolute certainty. If we continue on as we are, I give us about twenty years, maybe more, but not much more. And maybe that is okay. All things have their life cycle, and this organization has served many good and useful purposes over the past three hundred years. Maybe it is indeed time for us to go away, in fact get out of the way, and let the Lord’s Second Coming manifest in a spiritual awakening in the world without the constraints and arbitrary definition of a human organization claiming its name. If that is the will of this body, then OK, I will be here for you for the next two years, I will hold your hand, I will be your hospice chaplain for the remainder of my office. We can all just go on as we have, not struggle too much and simply and gracefully accept the inevitability of death of the body, this body. There is little doubt that it would be easiest to just go on as we are until there are only a few of us

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left to decide what to do with money, buildings, and resources that remain. Maybe we could build a statue of Swedenborg or Johnny Appleseed or something like that. If that is the will of this body, remain silent now, and I will sit down, and we can go to the reception, have some food and continue with business as usual. [*An emphatic "NO!" from the congregation*]

I am glad to hear you say that!

OK, I will offer you two scenarios to consider.

First scenario:

When I was younger I wanted to be a composer. In those days you wrote music by hand with pen and ink, and I spent years learning how to write music that was perfectly legible. It took five or six hours of meticulous effort to produce that page of music. And just as I got so I could do that consistently, the computer industry introduced music-writing software. You know what that means don't you? What I could do, the skill I had spent years learning how to do, what I was so proud of, was totally obsolete!

It was this church that helped me purchase a computer and music writing software, and I learned how to use it. And now what took me five or six hours I can do in less than an hour, and as of today I've composed an oratorio, close to three hundred songs, and produced seven CDs of original music, including scores for three musical plays, "Songs For The Journey," and original compositions for our conventions. We can learn and change and continue to do what we love, we just have to learn how to do it in a new way!

Second scenario:

When I was in seminary, I was struggling with the idea of God as person. I had long since given up the Santa Clause image of God as an old man with a long beard who alternates between benevolent father figure and the terrifying Zeus-like punisher. I just

could not get my head around the idea of God as a person. And of course that is essential to Swedenborg's theology. There is that passage in the Bible that says we are "created in the image and likeness" of God, and we are people so God must be a person. In wrestling with this with my friend and mentor George Dole, I was saying things like "How can God be a person? That is too limiting, to finite—God the infinite the source of all creation just can't fit into a person." George looked at me and simply said, "Ken, your definition of person is too small."

It hit me like a ton of bricks—a person is not a body, a person is love and wisdom. And God is the source of love and wisdom, and there is no limit to

love or wisdom. Changing my understanding of what a person is has allowed me to be here, twenty-six years later.

So we can just go on as we have or we can learn new ways of doing what it is we love. We can remain bound by our old understanding of who we are and what we do, or we can let our understanding of church expand from the confines of buildings and established structures and understand that church is the Lord's love and wisdom alive and manifesting. If we are willing, we can shed our skin and grow into something new that we do not yet know.

So what is your will, business as usual and we call it quits in ten or twenty years? Or are we willing to be changed and transformed and this church lives on in new forms? [*"Change and live!" from the congregation*]

Change and live? Then I will say a little more:

What is clear is that business as usu-

al is just not going to cut it! Assuming someone else will do it just doesn't work! Attending worship service once a week is not enough! Thinking and saying I can't do that, I don't know how, is simply no excuse; we have got to be willing to learn how, or find someone who does know how.

And if you have been in charge, if you have been in control, if you have been the authority in your church, then I challenge you to seriously consider creating a vacuum and encouraging and helping someone newer or someone younger or someone less experienced to step up and be in charge for a while. Let change happen. Just don't expect them to do it your way.

As someone said forty years ago. We are heading into a new world, so lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way.

At this point, after what I have seen and heard, General Convention's biggest problem is a paradoxical combination of fear and defeatism on one side and stubbornness and obsession with the past on the other. If what your church has been doing for the past decade is not working, just doing more of the same, even doing it better, is definitely not going to work in the next decade. Hey! if you are old, and I say this being 62 and knowing that old is a state of mind, if you are old, you have done good work, you have had a good run, and while you have earned the right to be ministered to in a way that serves your needs, it is also time for your church to undergo transition. That presents a paradox for ministers and leaders. But you must know this: letting go is not defeat, letting go is creating the opportunity for transformation. Holding on to what is, with a death grip, that is defeat. I see too many people who, out of the best of intentions, are holding on to what has been with a grip so tight they are literally choking the life out of the church they love so much. I challenge you to



President's Address

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let go and let God!

And if you are young, please get involved and share who you are and what you have to offer. We old folks can't do it alone. We need you and we need you now.

As much as I would like to, and I love giving advice about what other people should do, I cannot tell you what to do. And it is a temptation to try, believe me. But I just can't tell you what to do—each person and each situation has its own answers. But I can tell you that you, and by you I mean each and every one of us, that we had better figure out in a hurry why we care about this church. We must tap into what it is we love about this church and let it move us. At the same time, if we don't muster up some courage and passion and engage the culture that is transforming all around us, if we don't find ways to get attention and inspire and move people in a way that changes the fundamental patterns of their lives, then we will continue to become even more irrelevant than we already are.

I can tell you that as a denomination we are in a race for our very lives. If you don't want this church to die right out from under you, then we must get motivated. We must all get creative. We must all find and generate inspiration and spiritual fulfillment in the very doing of the work of the church we love, whatever that may be, or more importantly, whatever that may become.

Make no mistake, the Second Coming is happening already, and it is happening whether we are part of it or not. There is simply no stopping it. The Lord has said, "Behold I make all things new," and it ought to be obvious that God is not waiting for us. The question is, will this church be a part of the changing world that is the Second Coming, or are we going to be left behind, becoming the new Most Ancient Church? The answer to that ques-

tion is not going to be found in books. It is not going to be found in hymnals or budgets or meetings. The answer to that question is going to be found in the hearts and minds of each and every one of us sitting in this room—and in the hearts and minds of our friends and fellow church-goers back home. The answer is going to be found in how we live the theology we love in a new and changing world. And more than ever before, it is going to be answered in the way we go about letting it be known that we have something to share with people that is of value to their day-to-day lives. Whether that is a loving community connection or an online blog or a once-a-month music café or even a Sunday morning worship service, it is not what, but how.

Please hear me, for this is important: we know we have good people; we know we have a great theology; we know we have nice buildings. We've known this for years. What we do not know, and must discover, is how to let others know in a way that is inviting and welcoming and engaging and immediately accessible and useful. For most of us that is yet to be discovered. It is there waiting. The question is whether or not we have the courage and the motivation to do what it takes to find that new way. The question is whether we have the courage to let the love we have for this church show and to share it with others so that they may know it as well. The next few years will tell if we have that courage?

So let's make the very most out of this next week here at our annual convention. Talk to people. Make a point of greeting and meeting the people you don't know. Attend the business meetings and pay attention and participate. Attend every mini-course you can fit it in. Give yourself to the spirit of worship and sing with joy and abandon. Open yourself to the beauty of the angel windows. Let yourself be moved and opened and inspired. And then

take back and share with your people at home what you have received in being here. The Lord is making all things new, and if we are going to be a part of this new life, this new world, the Lord's New Church, then we had best get about letting the Lord make us new.

So what do you say, business as usual or discovering new life?

—Ken Turley

Convention Report

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morning, they were drawn into the first business meeting by the haunting strains of Aaron Copeland's

"Fanfare for the Common Man," played on a lone trumpet by Stan Conger of the Pacific Coast Association.

Reports, as specified by the bylaws, were presented at the annual meeting by the officers, the General Council, the Council of Ministers, the support units, committeees, and associations. (These reports will appear in the 2011 Journal, available in by the end of the year by emailing a request to centralo@swedenborg.org.)

Stephen B. Jones, Ph.D., president of Urbana University in Ohio, spoke to the convention about his efforts to learn more about the association of Urbana with the Swedenborgian Church and make it stronger. (You can read his thoughts on his experience at www.urbana.edu/index.php/about_us/office_of_the_president/.)



Stan Conger

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The theme of the convention, “Behold! I Make All Things New!” was the touchstone for a panel featuring Ken Turley on “Vision and Purpose/Structure and Function,” Chris Laitner on “What the Church Has Been,” and Poly Baxter on “Biennial Conventions.” Representatives from societies spoke about the successes their churches were experiencing, and then breakout groups discussed ideas for church renewal and presented their findings.

The Corporation of the New Church Theological School (operating as the Swedenborgian House of Studies) held its annual meeting Thursday evening. Chair of the Board of Trustees Jane Siebert and Dean Jim Lawrence reported on the past year’s activities and future prospects, illustrated with a large-screen presentation.



Jane Siebert

The graduation ceremony began with the Rev. Sag Currie delivering a commencement address (see right). With smiling faces, Gabriella Cahaly and Steve Sanchez accepted their SHS certificates to audience applause.

Susannah Currie and Lorraine Moller, trustees of the *In Company with Angels*, presented short videos to introduce the angel windows in preparation for the field trip to the Taft Museum to see them.

After the SCYL worship service on Friday morning (page 104), reports continued and elections were held. Elected were vice-president, Betsy Coffman; recording secretary, Su-

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Commencement Address

BY SAGE CURRIE

In comparison to the many events of what it is to become a minister in the Swedenborgian Church, there is perhaps for some of us the temptation to feel as if this evening is slightly less important. The graduation ceremony itself has lost more than a little bit of its pomp and circumstance of its earlier days. No more robes and processions, no more funny hats since our church’s theological school has morphed from the all-inclusive seminary experience of the Swedenborg School of Religion, where all aspects of training for ministry were carried out by faculty “of the tradition,” into the Swedenborgian House of Studies, which does only what it does best, train Swedenborgian theologians.

While at PSR or ESR you have earned your Master of Divinity, which establishes your professional credentials to do pastoral work in the world, and on Friday, through the laying on of hands and the stating of your ordination vows, the Church will bestow upon you the title of reverend, claiming you as a person called by God to serve the New Church. Tonight you receive your Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies, which I would like to lift up as a rare distinction, a distinction that acknowledges your knowledge of and commitment to Swedenborgian theology. I would like to suggest that tonight’s ceremony is in no way less important than the other milestones of this week and this year, because tonight you receive the important distinction and title of theologian.

In one of Swedenborg’s letters, he



describes his understanding of what it was to become a theologian, to move from a more natural view of the world to a spiritual one. I want to share it with you.

I was once asked how from a philosopher I became a theologian, and I answered: “In the same way in which fishermen were made by the Lord disciples. [and that] From my first youth I have been a spiritual fisherman.”

On hearing this, he asked, “What is a spiritual fisherman?” I answered that “In the Word in its spiritual sense, a fisherman signifies a man who teaches natural and then spiritual truths rationally. Hence it is clear why the Lord chose fishermen for disciples, and said: ‘Come after me and I will make you fishers of men.’” (Matt. 4:18,19, Mark 1:16,17)

Hearing this, my questioner raised his voice and said: “Now I can understand why the Lord chose you; for as you have said, from your first youth you have been a fisherman in the spiritual sense, that is, an investigator and teacher of natural truths, and now of spiritual, since these are founded on the former.” To this, being a man of reason, he added that “The Lord alone knows who is fitted for the perceiving and teaching of the truths which are of his New Church.” *Letters* (Acton) n. 9.

Gabriella and Steve, both of you have been identified by the Lord as fitted to perceive and teach the truths of the New Church—that is a huge and important aspect of what it is to be called to serve in the ordained ministry of the Swedenborgian Church. You have been called to look—to understand the nature of the world through the lens of the largest of questions. Why are we here? What is it to be human? How do we fit into the divine

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Ordination: Cahaly

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and a vivid consciousness of my call to ministry. Sometimes, my steps landed me in squishy mud—my feet disappeared. A bit scared, without feeling anything solid under my feet, I lived on faith. Surely the Lord will lead me through the mire. Theologies based on the letter of scripture felt misleading. I longed for the spiritual realities hidden under the surface of the letter. We know the literal sense it is not the whole story. Just for starters, we cannot know the mind of God from the letter of the text. We may not understand God but we are encouraged to find our inner reality reflected in biblical stories. From the beginning, the very beginning of our awareness of God's presence, we hear an internal echo, *Where are you?* We are Adam and Eve in the garden over and over again after eating of the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Apparent "truths" deceive us, the slippery stones along the way. *Where are you?* Our answer will be different every time because we are in motion and changing on all levels of our being. The ongoing dialogue, questioning and answering, occurs in our innermost being and often reflects in our physical reality. Swedenborg reveals that God's purpose for creation is a heaven from the human race, but that is discernible only to those who desire to understand and live in ways that define true human qualities. But, we cannot progress toward our highest potential unless we enter into this risky business of questioning and answering, wading into the water, engaging life on all levels of our being, stepping from stone to stone, encountering squishy muddy waters and clear waters. I experienced uncertain places, but I just could not stop. I sensed an urgency to heed the call to serve. I slowed down and became cautious. I did this theologically, spiritually, and also physically. I discovered that moving cautious-

ly, feeling with my feet, I could move to the next firm rock. I could not deny or ignore my bodily experience on this journey.

Where are you?, a multilayered question, can be answered on the level of the spirit, mind and body. Seminary, often called spiritual formation, occurs in the mind and spirit while living in the body. I trusted that theological training would prepare me for the uses of ministry intellectually and spiritually. It meant being open to God's leading while engaging in my studies. My most profound learning led me to engage in uses wisely lovingly, letting go of enmities, becoming forgiving, hopeful and joyful. I learned to be self-reflective. There was no sudden aha moment but rather a gradual sense of confirmation of the call to minister to people in crisis. As I worked in hospitals and visited patients in ICUs, the call to serve as a chaplain became stronger. There were unexpected gifts along the way, moments of clarity and a deep sense of peace. You know these moments. You feel a firm solid stone under your feet. At those times you are in synch with God's will. Our concept of God is intimately connected to our self-understanding because God, the "Grand Human," encompasses all of creation and wills to draw all people to himself. The goal of creation, a heaven from the human race, involves the divine activities of providing, maintaining, and sustaining the potential for conjunction with the Grand Human, the Lord Jesus Christ. We are invited to partake of His life and make it our own, one stepping stone at a time.

Our spirit dwells in every part of our body, in the minutest microscopic cell and fiber. We ignore our bodies at our peril. This is true in the experience of crossing a river in daily life, and it is certainly true in seminary. We can begin to understand God from the organization and interconnectedness of every tissue and organ with remarkable

ability to replicate, revive, adapt, and rebuild. These same vital abilities exist within our spiritual being in our spiritual fibers and organs. Our God-ordained invitation and destiny is to become ever more perfectly human, to be reformed, revived, and regenerated under divine auspices—in short to "be a blessing" to others. It matters what we do as much as what we believe. Learning theology and writing papers was preparing me for ministry; it was the beginning of spiritual formation. One firm stone for me is the sure knowledge that God inflows into the things I love to do. I love being here with you, and I have never felt the call to serve more than I have this past year. I never tired writing about the cornerstone of our Swedenborgian faith that "Religion is of the life and that the life of religion is to do that which is good" just as we know our Lord Jesus Christ by the work he did for all humanity, gradually reforming his earthly form into the divine human form. We are evaluated for the things we do. It makes perfect sense that my employer wanted my resume, background check, driving record, health exam, (including a drug test) insurance policy, and not my theology or my credo while completing the hiring process.

The bedrock of our faith is that the Lord is present "not only indirectly by means of the heavens, angels, and spirits," but also "directly, flowing into the most singular things, and through immediate influx by means of the spiritual world." We are not alone in our journeys. Swedenborg assures us that we are "governed by the Lord by means of spirits and angels" though we may not be aware of their presence. We are intertwined with, interrelated to, and interdependent upon people around us and with spirits. When I was crossing this stream there were people all around me—mothers holding their children's hands, sweethearts hold-

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continued from preceding page

ing hands, hopping from one stone to the next. One woman stood precariously on a stone at the bottom of the waterfall while a friend took her picture. The lifeguard in me paid attention to this scene. What if she slipped? Would I go to her rescue? I imagined going into rescue mode, running down the path from my vantage point to save this woman. She wavered but she never slipped. The picture was taken and we each went our way.

Two years ago, I stood alone on the edge of this brown torrent of water rushing past me. I walked along the edge, jumping from gnarled roots to solid rock but did not enter the turbulent, troubled waters. Now, as a crisis advocate and chaplain, I enter troubled waters. I offer spiritual first aid to people experiencing chaos, but I am not alone. I rely on a well defined support system. Last July, a human chain of thirteen people helped rescue a 29-year-old woman from the James River in Virginia. A month earlier, also on the James River, a 13-year-old boy was rescued by a human chain formed by friends, family, bystanders, and firefighters. People working together can save lives. I imagine church communities to be like a human chain. We are meant to wade in the water, holding each other and reaching out for people at risk. We are meant to be engaged within our communities. Lone rescuers often die in rescue attempts. I am not alone serving survivors. I am present to the survivor engulfed in fear, shame, guilt, and chaos; I say to them, "You are not alone; help is available." Did you hear this from friends and family? Do you sense our Lord speaking these words to you?

I sensed the call to serve eight years ago. Back then the call was barely audible to my inward senses. But the call never disappeared. Like the boy Samuel, I learned to answer, "Here I am Lord." Each of us is called to serve.

Convention Report

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sannah Currie; treasurer, Polly Baxter; General Council, Barbara Cullen, Tom Barrett, Tom Neuenfeldt, Randy Laakkko; Committee on Admission to the Ministry, Nadine Cotton, Susan Wood-Ashton; Communications Support Unit, Roz Taylor; Education Support Unit, John Maine; Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit, Jennifer Lindsay; Information Management Support Unit, Kris Lang; Ministry Support Unit, Dick Tafel, Gloria Toot; SHS Board of Trustees, Kathy Speas, Jennifer Lindsay, Bill Coffman, Jane Siebert; Nominating Committee, Barb Boxwell.

Busses ferried everyone to the Taft Museum in downtown Cincinnati to view the angel windows and get a quick tour of the museum collections on Friday afternoon. For many it was their first viewing of the magnificent angel windows from the former Cincinnati church.

The ordination service took place after dinner. In a ceremony repeated over the years from the beginnings of the Church, Gabriella Cahaly and Steve Sanchez were ordained as min-

isters in the Church of the New Jerusalem while minsters of their choosing placed hands on them. Rev. Ken Turley officiated and, after their ordination, Rev. Cahaly and Rev. Sanchez led communion.

The main worship service was the focus Saturday morning, led by convention minister Rev. Jonathan Mitchell (sermon page 102). In the afternoon, the Women's Alliance Mite Box was passed (article page 115), new office-holders were consecrated, and retiring office-holders were recognized and thanked for their work. Later, the Association of New Church Sunday Schools held its annual meeting, which will be reported in a future issue.

On Saturday evening, the convention hosts presented MUSe Cincinnati Women's Choir to a full house, who performed a variety of songs from traditional to modern.

Departures began Sunday morning, but most were able to attend the closing service led by Rev. Sage Currie and Rev. Eric Allison. The convention closed after a brief business meeting as people headed home and began planning to attend Convention 2012 in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. 

Each of us is called to use our gifts, to serve in ways uniquely suited to our talents. There will be stepping stones along the way and there will be people around you needing your support and others encouraging and supporting you.

In seminary, I felt God's presence in the people who reached out to me and supported me. I was not alone. Teachers guided me; family, friends, and classmates stood by me in turbulent waters. I am grateful to each of them. I am grateful to my family who trusted and encouraged me to answer the call. I have a community around me. I could not include every individual who

has reached out to me along the way. I am grateful to the Swedenborgian Church, my CAM advisors, my teacher mentors, family, and friends. They helped me wade in the water to recognize secure stepping stones.

We know God's presence through our relationships when we love—communicate joy and hope to people around us. We are meant to be aware of our spiritual, mental, and physical environment when we support one another. All of us will enter troubled waters. In those times we need a human chain holding us firmly in God's presence. Let us remember God is with us when we enter troubled waters. Amen.

Ordination: Sanchez

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velous invitation. There is an unfathomable depth and brightness in these words. These words give the intimation of the unending vistas of passion that compose the life of the Divine Human. *Learn of me.* They beckon us to touch the Holy fire that proceeds from Him with our soul and mind. The detailed theology and spiritual psychology of Swedenborg offer the opportunity, if we have made them our own, to implicitly or explicitly share our passion and presence with others. In the statement, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me," I hear the Lord saying, take the religiosity off of religion and be in relationship directly with me.

Swedenborg offers a most marvelous opportunity to learn of the Lord—as so many of you here have discovered—in his writings. In my view there is nothing more beautiful than a perception of the divine human nature of the Lord. Swedenborg says this is the very essence of religion. The other day, after Jonathan gave a little sermon and communion, I noticed Kit was grieving with pain and joy, and after a moment I spoke with him. Kit heard the love in Jonathan's message. He grieved that as a Swedenborgian he is isolated, and that he so rarely hears a message from the community he loves. At the same time he rejoiced at hearing a message from Jonathan that gave him a perception of the Divine Human.

The Lord's love when he was in the world, above all else, was to give the human race all things that are in him. But most of religion speaks very little of the process Jesus had to go through to become divine. Before Jesus started his mature ministry he did not know how he would accomplish the redemption of humanity. He saw the terrible suffering of humanity, and his all consuming desire was to bring about the salvation, but he did not yet know how he would change its external condition.

Humanity in general had declined to an external way of being. This was the cause of profound suffering for Him; he had to gradually learn his way. He first had to learn to marry the internal and external within himself, and then teach humanity to do the same thing. Not only that, the writings reveal that his growth was dependent on at least some of the people in his community successfully growing into an internal perspective. The temptations and assaults of evil forces upon him were endless, and the way evil got to him was by corrupting and destroying humanity, just as a terrorist will go after a leader's family to destroy the leader. The challenge for Jesus was to help the people transform from a habitually external way of being into recognizing the internal within them.

Everywhere in the Gospels you can see this taking place over and over, but I will give one example. In the story of the adulterous woman, Jesus provides an object lesson. The woman comes to him, and the community wants to stone her. The scripture says, "Jesus knew what was in their hearts." He knew the grief and anger under their righteous persona. This crowd was not just a mob, but composed of men and woman Jesus knew in the community. Their reaction to the woman is according to external law. Jesus draws a line in the sand fully aware of what is in the people, and fully aware of what they need, and how to love them. The wisdom of his presence is irresistible to the people. He says, "He that is without sin throw the first stone." And every person listening to him is convicted by their own conscience. Crushed, they set down their stones but began to learn to examine themselves by reflecting on their inner states. This happens over and over in the gospels, and it is what we need to do for ourselves and for each other. The youth group did this for us today in creatively demonstrating some of their feelings in

song and skit. These were about the dark struggles they go through and how they find healing. Their presentation helped—and I hope helped all of us—to look at where we are closed so that we can open. Rev. Ken Turley in his great speech the other day did this also. He crushed the elephant in this room, and helped us all to lay down the stones of our defeatism.

The scripture read to us today also said, "Learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Rest in our souls is not idleness, but the joy of use, of coming to know our use in life and thereby finding confidence in our voice and identity. One of the great joys of life is when we come to the crossroad where the use we have trained and labored for out of love meets a great need in the world, and we are able to fill it with skill. I pray that each and every one of us find this joy, where a new work begins.

I would like to finish by saying one more thing. I know many of you are aware of this need, but I have not heard it emphasized this week. For the Swedenborgian denomination to survive it is essential that we change our culture of personal giving in regard to money. To do this we need to consistently teach in our churches the purpose and value of giving every week. In many of our churches, when the offering basket is passed around we are embarrassed and just put in a few dollars, if anything. Part of loving, owning, and participating in our church is the joy of giving significantly. We receive so much spiritually, but we give very little. A negative culture toward tithing and giving has grown because we have long lived by the bad habit of depending on large original donors. We need to teach good stewardship in regard to giving money in all our churches to change this culture. In my view this is the primary thing that must change for our denomination to survive. 

Commencement Address

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design?

While every human being, I believe, has and needs to have his or her own evolving personal theology, you, Gabriella and Steve, have accepted this as a profession—you have made this your job. You have taken on the responsibility of being a theologian in the world, not just for yourself but for others. You have taken on the responsibility of carrying what you have learned at SHS forward into the world to share with others, not just in lectures and sermons, but in the very way that you live the New Church theology that we all hold so dear.

I wonder, Steve and Gabriella, if you consider yourselves to be theologians? I will admit I rarely introduce myself as a theologian and when I think about what I “do” or what I have done since graduation, “doing theology” doesn’t always hit the top of the list.

When I think about what I do, I think about the hours I’ve spent sitting at the bedsides of my hospice clients, sometimes examining with them what might happen after they die or the meaning they feel the events of their lives have had for them but more often sitting with them in silence as their level of dementia makes them no longer able to speak. I think of my time as the pastor of our on-line community where I would debate the nature of evil with members from all parts of the globe but would spend more time fighting with my computer. And in my current ministry, I think of chats on the porch, hearing the latest Fryeburg news, serving up hamburgers in the fair booth, and organizing the Bibles to be distributed at the end of the Sunday school year.

As I prepared to speak tonight, what I began to see was that while I may not feel what I’m doing is theology, I realized in each of these situations how important the fact that I am a Swe-

denborgian theologian is. I see and interpret the world in a way like not too many other people in the world. While I might be sitting with the silent dying woman just like her daughter and the hospice nurse, I am seeing the situation differently. I understand my placement and hers in the scope of a Swedenborgian cosmology, and this changes the situation—can shift the thinking of those around me. And that is my job.

I would argue that while I’m sure you each enjoyed and gained much during your experiences of doing theology while you were in seminary and while you were a student at SHS, I assure you that as you leave this academic setting and enter the work of ordained ministry you will be called to put the wisdom that you gained into use and to listen to the wisdom that the Lord will gift you through the people you are called to serve.

Your studies at SHS have shaped you and set you on the path with some

answers but more so have given you the skills and confidence to continue to explore and look for your own answers. You have gained the skills and confidence to join in as leaders in developing the evolution of our New Church theology.

The old adage, if you give a man a fish he will eat for a day but if you teach him to fish he will eat for a lifetime, fits here. You have not just been given “the Truth” while at SHS, but hopefully you have been taught to fish. For a lifetime you will take part in the great theological heritage of our new church in gathering, exploring, explaining, and expanding spiritual truths. May you be grateful for the spiritual knowledge that you have gained and may you trust that the Lord will continue to share his wisdom with you as long as you continue to cast your net. Thank you for choosing the path of becoming a Swedenborgian theologian. Welcome. 

Year of the Lord

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tree, etc., dedicated to the Lord

There are so many things we can do, and they don’t have to be huge or involve money we don’t have. Rather, they should be meaningful, engaging, fun, challenging, and inspiring. They should be activities that give life and hope, to us and to others.

Of course, it helps to have some encouragement along the way, some sense that we’re not alone in all this. We Swedenborgians tend to be so spread out, so isolated from one another. It would be great if, instead, we could be sharing our energy and ideas as we go and then celebrate our journeys together at our next convention. After all, that’s the whole point behind this “Year of the Lord,” why this proposal was passed unanimously at this past Convention. The idea is that it will help keep us

connected through the year and foster a sense of our common faith and purpose.

Well, that’s my job and where I hope to be of use this year! Via email, phone calls, *The Messenger*, Facebook—you name it, I will be in touch with all our churches as much as I can this coming year to facilitate the flow of information. You’ll be hearing and seeing more about the “Year of the Lord” in the weeks and months ahead, not only from me but hopefully more and more from you!

Right now though, my aim is to extend the invitation to you to get involved. Learn, grow, have fun, maybe try something new. This is our time. Welcome to the year of the Lord! 

The Rev. John Maine is the coordinator of the convention theme program, which Convention 2011 voted to adopt. (See the June 2011 *Messenger*).

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September 2011

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.

The Year of the Lord

BY JOHN MAINE

Welcome to the year of the Lord!

Well, okay, I know, every year is the year of the Lord. But this year is different. For a start, we're talking about our church year, which, unlike the calendar year, runs from one convention to the next, that is from summer 2011 to summer 2012. During these twelve months, Swedenborgians everywhere are being invited to reflect on, celebrate, and make known the Lord in their lives.

The planning committee for next year's convention (in Bridgewater, Massachusetts) has already taken up the call. They have announced that the theme of the coming convention will be "The Year of the Lord—and What Does the Lord Require of You?" This is a great tag line (with thanks to Micah 6: 8b) because what the Lord requires of us will depend a lot on who the Lord is for us. As Swedenborg says, everything always turns on our understanding of God, whether relentless judge, gentle spirit, inner light, or something else.

But how are we to get involved in this year of the Lord? What is our role? It's really very easy. Think about where the Lord seems to be at work in your life. Talk it up with others in your church and community. Maybe the Lord's pres-

ence is in something you're doing now or your church has been doing. Maybe that's where the new life is, where you're finding hope these days. Or perhaps you're feeling a call to try something new, be of use in some new way.

Whether it's happening now or yet to be, this is the Lord in your time and place. Manifesting that awareness can take many forms. Following are just a few possibilities:

- An activity that helps children grow in their knowledge of the Lord
- Something dedicated to the Lord that many can work on (a quilt, a banner, a prayer shawl, etc.)
- Learning how we can turn to the Lord—journal writing, prayer, meditation, art, walking the labyrinth, etc.
- Making and sharing the gift of music—"making a joyful noise to the Lord"
- Starting or participating in some community event or project for peace and social justice
- A study group, book club or "sacred cinema" program, with the Lord as its theme
- A special worship service or preaching series on the Lord in our lives
- Caring for the creation, planting a

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