

## Tears of Joy, Love, and Care A Chaplain's View of the SCYL Almont Winter Retreat

BY DAVID FEKETE

**O**f the many joys I experience as the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) chaplain, leading seminars and worship stand out. This year's Christmas retreat was no exception. I led a seminar on the Psalms and led the closing communion service with Rev. Jenn Tafel.

Our overall theme for this retreat was "Soul Music." We looked at

showed how the Psalms repeat an idea as a kind of "thought rhyme." For instance, in Psalm 145: 1, 13.

I will exalt you, my God the King

I will praise your name for ever and ever . . .

Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom,

and your dominion endures through all generations.

### SCYL Psalm 1

Sing unto the Lord all the earth  
and all the sea and sky.  
Worship Him in joyful song  
Come to Him with shouts of  
praise.  
Know it is He who created us  
and He who keeps us.  
We are His own,  
the fish of His ocean.

—Alice, Lucas, Bekka, Adam



The SCYL Almont Winter Retreat group

how music can awaken feelings and thoughts in a way that no other medium can.

In my session on the Psalms, I mentioned how they were used as religious chants in the history of Israel. I gave the teens Psalms that represented different emotions: Psalm 145, praise; Psalm 100, thanks; Psalm 69, the blues; and Psalm 62, God as our rock and fortress. I talked about the style in which the Psalms were written too. I

It appeared that the teens had some difficulty reading and understanding the Psalms. However, when I asked them to write their own psalm, it was clear to me that they had grasped the nature and style of the Psalms very well. I found the teen psalms beautiful and touching. Here are the psalms that they wrote. They show a great deal about the teens themselves, and I was impressed with how well they put their feelings into words.

### SCYL Psalm 2

Thank you God for helping us  
when we need it.  
Thank you for guiding us in  
times of need.  
For without your light we would  
be lost.  
For without your love we would  
be missing.  
I praise you in song, my gracious  
God.  
I shout to the heavens with love  
and thanks.

—Celia, Liz, Ashley, Andrew, Kalib

### SCYL Psalm 3

My eyes refuse to open  
I cannot wake up.  
I am unable to get out of bed  
I cannot get up to better your  
world.  
I begin to drift off during the  
most important things  
My eyes begin to close when I try

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## More Inside:

On Being Filled: A Journey Begins • In Memoriam: Reverend Paul Zacharias  
Transitions Winter 2012 Retreat • FNCA Plans for Camp 2012 • Call for Nominations  
Convention 2012—What Does the Lord Require of You? • New Logo for Annual Themes Unveiled

## The Editor's Desk



### Swedenborg's Influence

Karen Feil's article about the lecture and workshop on near death experience (NDE) led by Dr. Raymond Moody at the Chicago Swedenborg Library (p. 21) is engaging from several perspectives. NDE is itself a complex and difficult but compelling subject to explore. Also, there is much to learn from this article about how to promote an event using multiple strategies. A more far reaching subject evinced by the article is Swedenborg's influence outside the community of organized Christian religion.

Clearly, as Karen has shown us, with effective public relations we can draw people to Swedenborg's teachings whose interest is in his experiences and his conclusions apart from their basis in the Bible and Christianity. This seems an effective use for enlarging the audience of Swedenborg readers and infusing the "spiritual but not religious" segment of American society with valuable knowledge, but it engenders this

question: Does this kind of activity lead to the establishment of the Lord's New Church, or does it lead only to a general understanding of Swedenborg and his writings that ignores his religion? But then we can ask similar questions about an established Swedenborgian Church such as ours. Does the existence of yet another Christian denomination lead to the establishment of the universal New Church, or does it delay or have no impact on it?

Any discussion of the future of our denomination leads to these questions, as do Lee Woofenden's article in the January *Messenger* and Perry Martin's reaction to it in "Letters to the Editor" below.

How can we know that we are engaged in a useful life and that our intentional activities and institutions lead to that New Church? We can't. But we can do our best while opening ourselves to influx from the Lord.

—Herb Ziegler

## Letters to the Editor

### To Survive or Serve?

At last! Thank you Lee Woofenden for your article in the January *Messenger* courageously naming in Swedenborg's language what has been happening in our declining church. I grew up in the Cincinnati Church with its glowing Tiffany windows, hand-carved lecterns, and inspiring organ music. I felt truly blest when Louis Hoeck pronounced the final blessing, "May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and give you peace." I was mystified by John Spiers' sermons about one world long before the United Nations came into being. Our Sunday dinner was often seasoned with discussion over the decline of church attendance.

Many decades later, I was present when General Convention made a conscious decision that church growth

*Continues on page 26*

## Church Calendar

**March 1: Dr. Raymond Moody Near Death Experiences • SHS Berkeley, California**

**April 21: General Council teleconference meeting**

**May 3–4: SHS Board Meeting Berkeley, California**

**May 26–28: SCYL Memorial Day Retreat • Fryeburg New Church Assembly • Fryeburg, Maine**

**July 5–8: Annual Convention 2012 • Bridgewater State University • Bridgewater, Massachusetts**

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## the Messenger

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## Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

I find myself, as the new year has begun and is already gaining momentum, looking around and taking stock. It is an amazing perspective as president to be here in Maine and cast a geographical eye across the continent and think of all the New Church societies and Swedenborgian churches and individuals that are out there. I suppose it is an indictment in and of itself that I as an individual actually can recall all the Swedenborgian groups out there, but be that as it may, it is a joy to do so. Perhaps we truly are a family-sized church. Even as a continental denomination we are still just a rather large and spread out family-sized church. And while we may differ on sports, politics, diet, life-style ethnicity, class, and blood type, we are held together by a common faith in the presence of God as an ongoing reality here and now, around us and within us. We believe in the freedom and responsibilities of each person to make choices between putting God first and serving others as a joy or putting self first and using others for one's own ends, and that in that freedom, love and wisdom will lift us up out of ourselves into angelhood if we but say *yes* and do our best to become so. We share an understanding of the Bible as a sacred book portraying the relationship of human and divine in its literal and deeper levels of meaning. While as Swedenborgians we are primarily Christian and Biblically based in our approach to spirituality, we honor and respect all spiritual traditions. It is this faith, this "Swedenborgianism," this New Church thought, this once unique but increasingly mainstream understanding of theology and spirituality as it is lived out in life, is the bond between us. It is manifest in our caring, our communication, and our cooperation. It is what makes us a "church,"



even if that is not a word that you would choose to use. At any rate, looking at our church spread out around the continent, with all that in mind, here is what I see from my precarious perch as president:

Rev. Gabriella Cahaley is now established in South West Florida, maintaining one of Convention's spiritual communities focused on social service to children and families. Nearby, Rev. Skuli Thorhallson continues to maintain a presence at the Deland Spiritual Center.

Steve Mason, a beloved and deeply involved member of the Puget Sound Society, has relocated to South Carolina—we wish him well.

The Washington DC and Newtonville churches persevere while seeking new leadership.

Rev. Randy Laakko, his wife Millie, and the Wilmington Society begin to prepare for transition from their current long, rich, and dedicated ministry to what the future might hold.

The New York Korean Church is now holding worship in the New York Church—under the leadership of Rev. Young Min Kim and his wife Esther it continues to be an active and important pastoral presence in its community.

The New York; Portland, Maine; Silver City, New Mexico; El Cerrito, California; St. Louis, Missouri; Calgary, Alberta; and Rostern and Saskatoon, Saskatchewan Societies continue to maintain themselves with a strong core of lay leadership and scheduling of guest speakers, ministers, and at times themselves to lead worship. The Massachusetts Association continues to hold summer services at the Yarmouth Port Church on Cape Cod.

The Society at Temenos has hired Rev. Christine Cambell, their former church musician, as intercessory pastor. Although coming from outside the denomination, Rev. Christine has strong affection for the Swedenborgian teachings and an ecumenical approach to spirituality. The society and the retreat center are looking at a bright and growing future.

I am happy to bring to your attention the beginnings of two new pastorates, with Rev. Nadine Cotton accepting the position at the Cleveland Church and Rev. Sherrie Connelly serving as pastor for the church in Cincinnati while beginning training for

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# On Being Filled: A Journey Begins

BY REBECCA ESTERSON

**B**eginning a Ph.D. is a bit like that feeling you get looking up at a starry sky on a clear night. You become awe-struck by the fact that everything you knew to this point, your whole stock of knowledge and experience, is but one speck of light in an infinitely vast expanse of human knowledge and experience, the whole of which is far too great ever to comprehend. At least that's how I felt during my first semester at Boston University this fall as I began my Ph.D. in religious studies. It is at once both humbling and elating. It is the sense that I am working on a very, very small part of something enormous and beautiful.



the same time, *Me'or Enayim* or *The Light of the Eyes* by Rabbi Menahem Nahum. A comparison between these two theosophical texts reveals many important distinctions as well as some striking similarities. For example, both commentaries understand human beings to serve a unique role in creation: they alone unite the natural and spiritual realms. Further, both interpret the Bible, in every minute detail, to be about the spiritual life of the individual. In both of these texts, one Jewish and one Christian, the individual achieves union with the divine, not

**In both *Me'or Enayim* and *Arcana Coelestia*, God's mobile home and all of its finery becomes a coded description of the human being, created in God's image and a receptacle for God's presence in the world.**

by negation of the self, as one finds in other mystical traditions, but by fulfillment of the self. An active and full life in the world, rather than a retreat from the world, is what unites God with God's creation.

In taking this on as the subject of my doctoral work, I am continuing three long-held interests of mine: comparative religious studies; the Hebrew Bible; and Swedenborgian theology.

One might ask why, if my goal is to teach in a Swedenborgian seminary, am I studying Jewish texts? I believe in the importance of studying other religions alongside one's own. Not only do we gain knowledge of other traditions, so important in our pluralistic society, but we gain a better, larger understanding of the world our own religion is attempting to describe. As philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer writes, "To rec-

ognize one's own in the alien, to become at home in it, is the basic movement of the spirit, whose being consists only in returning to itself what is other." A fellow doctoral student of mine pointed out that comparative studies is similar to the principle of parallax. Using this principle, astronomers measure the position of a star by viewing it from two different positions on earth. Similarly, we can better understand the object of our religious studies by approaching it from two different positions.

One point of comparison in the two biblical commentaries I am studying exemplify the richness that comparison can generate. Both commentaries make much of the biblical imagery of vessels. In *Me'or Enayim* we find a homily on the bird's nest mentioned in Deuteronomy 22: 6–7, in which we are told that a student of Torah makes his mind like a bird's nest, preparing it for the inflow of the divine presence. Likewise, in *Arcana Coelestia*, we find commentary on all manner of cups, bowls, and baskets in the Bible: "... for goods from the Lord flow into the interior forms of man, as into their vessels, which forms, if disposed for reception, are the 'baskets' in which these goods are contained" (AC §5144). The wine cup and bread basket used by priests in rituals of worship and sacrifice are explored at length as symbols of the human faculties of the will and the understanding, into which Divine Love and Divine Wisdom flow (AC §9996).

In these commentaries the vessel par excellence is the tabernacle, or its later form, the Temple, built to welcome God's presence into the community of Israel. The biblical account of the tabernacle in the last third of the book of Exodus interrupts the dramatic narrative of the people of Israel, newly freed

*Continues next page*

I would like here to communicate a little of what I am doing and to make note of my immense gratitude to all those who are supporting me from within the Swedenborgian community. This fall not only marked my first semester in a five-year-long degree, but it also began my role as scholar-in-training with the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) in Berkeley. While my family and I will remain on the Atlantic Coast for a few more years while I get the bulk of my Ph.D. done, eventually we will move west, where I will join the tremendous faculty at SHS to contribute to the training of ministers in our church and more generally to Swedenborgian scholarship in the academy at large.

The focus of my Ph.D. will be a comparative study of eighteenth century biblical commentaries, namely, Swedenborg's *Arcana Coelestia* and a Hasidic commentary written around

Continued from preceding page

from slavery in Egypt and on their way to their promised Holy Land. In both *Me'or Enayim* and *Arcana Coelestia*, God's mobile home and all of its finery becomes a coded description of the human being, created in God's image and a receptacle for God's presence in the world. The following is from *Me'or Enayim*.

It is known that the light of the Infinite, blessed be He, shines forth and dwells in the letters of Torah. When a person attaches his inner life-force and his words to the Torah, that life within him is bound to the portion of divinity that shines forth from Torah's letters. Such is the case of one who studies with this intent, and has no ulterior motivations or extraneous goals. This person is himself also called a "sanctuary," for by means of the longing and joy that reach Him from such service, God contracts His shekhinah so that it may enter that man. Just as the Creator contracted His shekhinah so that it was able to be present in the collective Temple, coming down between the two staves of the ark (even though the very heavens cannot contain Him!), so does He do in the individual sanctuary within the person . . . This was God's chief intent in commanding both the tabernacle and the Temple: to cause his presence to dwell in that individual Temple which is man.

In this important passage Rabbi Nahum is describing what he elsewhere calls *influx*, a term common in kabbalistic texts. God dwelling with the wandering tribe of Israel is compared to the flow of the divine into the individual. Swedenborg, in describing the spiritual function of the tabernacle, also makes use of the term *influx* or *influxum* in the Latin. Swedenborg writes, "The presence of the Lord is effected by means of influx, and the influx is according to the life of good and of truth."

In section 9594 of *Arcana Coelestia*,

we read that the three areas of the tabernacle, the courtyard, the first room, and the Holy of Holies, represent three degrees of life in the individual, which are opened successively as three "heavens in him." These heavens are opened in degrees as follows: "the first degree by a life in accordance with what is equitable and just; the second degree by a life in accordance with the truths of faith from the Word, and in accordance with the consequent goods of charity toward the neighbor; and the third degree by a life in accordance with the good of mutual love and the good of love to the Lord."

The tabernacle itself is full of vessels: the altar to hold sacrifices, the table with its cups and plates for offerings of bread and wine, the lamp stand with its almond shaped cups, the laver full of water for cleansing. However, it is the mercy seat which primarily captures the attention of the commentaries, which see it as the point of divine influx within a person who seeks union with God. Hidden from view, a perfectly square inner room was constructed within the tabernacle and gilded on every surface. And in it an empty throne was placed. The mercy seat was placed on top of their legal contract with God, where other Near Eastern nomadic tribes might have enthroned their God's idol. In the tabernacle there was no idol, only an empty space between the cherubim where God's invisible presence could dwell. This is a special kind of emptiness, made holy by the elaborate construction around it.

In both commentaries, this special kind of emptiness resolves a fundamental tension between emptiness and fulfillment. The individual who seeks union must empty her soul for God's presence to flow into, but she also must preserve those things which make her unique, manifest, an actor in the world. As we read in *Me'or Enayim* "for in your very earthliness there

## 2011 Journal Available

The 2011 *Journal of the Swedenborgian Church* is available free of charge by emailing Renée Helenbrecht at [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org) with a request. Hard copies are available as well. The full *Journal* is \$11 plus shipping and handling and the mini *Journal* (does not include reports) is \$5 plus shipping and handling.

dwells the Life of Life." Even though in the end, God's holy presence flows into an empty space, not an idol carved of human hands, the man-made structure of the tabernacle is what makes the space available and what makes the holy possible.

This theme of emptiness and fulfillment of the vessels appeals to me at this early stage in my studies, as I am confronted with the reality of how little I know relative to all of human knowledge and experience. I could spend my life in the library and still only gain a few stars worth of knowledge, while an entire universe exists beyond my reach. I am comforted by Rabbi Nahum's words when he writes: "The end of knowledge is the awareness that we do not know."

At our core we are empty spaces, like the empty seat in the center of the Temple. Our lungs expand and contract, as life flows into us, always in motion. The oxygen that we breathe does not belong to us, and neither does knowledge belong to the student. But by breathing, studying, we invite it in and allow it to give us a useful life. Or as author Ray Bradbury writes: "We are cups, constantly and quietly being filled. The trick is, knowing how to tip ourselves over and let the beautiful stuff out." ☩

Rebecca Esterson is the SHS scholar in residence. She belongs to the Cambridge Church of the New Jerusalem and resides with her husband and two sons in Somerville, Massachusetts.

## 2012 SCYL Officers Elected

The 2012 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) officer and chaplain elections took place at the Almont Winter Retreat this past December. The results are as follows:

**President:** Celie Bauer  
**East Coast and Fundraising & Finance Officer:** Liz Dyer  
**Midwest and Activities Officer:** Skylor Daisy  
**Canada and Service Officer:** Joseph Ferr  
**West Coast and Public Relations Officer:** Alice Henderson  
**Editor, Clear Blue Sky and Communication Officer:** Bekka Lange  
**League Chaplain:** Rev. Dr. David Fekete

Only two SCYL officers return to another year of service, while we welcome four new teens to the League. We say goodbye to 2011 officers Holly Bauer, Rachel Madjerac, and Jess Trimble who are moving on to the young adult Transitions group. We will miss them at our retreats and gatherings, and we thank them for their service in the SCYL. Jonat Campos is retiring from the West Coast officer position but has another year in the SCYL. We look forward to seeing him at future retreats as a leaguer.

We have an outstanding group of officers elected to serve in 2012. We welcome Celie Bauer into the position of SCYL president. Celie's sister Holly was president last year and so another in the Bauer family continues to guide our teen organization. Celie was *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) editor last year. She lives in Maine and is involved in church retreats, camps, and conventions. Celie enjoys sharing her gift of music and performs often at SCYL worship services. She is a determined and intelligent girl who has loads of leadership

ability. If you haven't met Celie, try to say hi to her this year. She is not afraid to make tough decisions and meet difficult challenges. She will do an amazing job moving the SCYL forward.

We greet four first-time officers Liz Dyer, Skylor Daisy, Alice Henderson



(l to r) President Celie Bauer, Midwest activities officer Skylor Daisy, and Immediate past president Holly Bauer.

and Bekka Lange. Liz lives in Maine and has been very active participating in Convention, retreats, Fryeburg Assembly, and Fryeburg New Church Youth Group. Liz is a capable, funny, thoughtful girl, with a wonderful understanding of our church's teachings. We are happy to have her as an officer. Skylor is from LaPorte, Indiana. She was elected officer at her first SCYL retreat! She is a bubbly, energetic, kind girl, who has been very active in our tween retreats in LaPorte as well as a regular Almont summer camp attendee. It is wonderful to have Skylor join our team. Alice is finally an officer! Alice has been attending Almont summer camp for many years, and we are so grateful to have her serve the League. Alice loves performing in theater musicals. She is also an excellent swimmer and life guard. As one of our older teen officers, Alice will be a great leader and organizer. Alice is one of the nicest young ladies you will ever meet. Bekka is our new *Clear Blue Sky* editor. Bekka has been involved in tween retreats, conventions, and Almont Summer Camp, where she serves as assistant registrar. Bekka has written up

reports for nearly every event that she has attended and is a natural fit for the position of League editor. She has some big challenges as we move to take CBS to an electronic format and revise mailings to target teens with memorable photos and reports of happenings. Bekka is friendly and likable yet has a strong-minded grit that will drive her to succeed in this position. She is everything you would want and expect in a news reporter. I really look forward to working with her on improving CBS and League communications.

Joseph Ferr returns for his third year as our Canadian officer. Joseph is one of three officers who joined us on our Easter Rally Retreat in the UK last year. He is very active in the Kitchener Church of the Good Shepherd, working to raise funds by participating in the church talent show. He is working on becoming an accomplished juggler, and we welcome Joseph back to another year of helping the SCYL keep all the balls in the air.

Rev. Dr. David Fekete was reelected to his fifth consecutive year as the League chaplain. David loves being the youth chaplain and takes his position very seriously. He attends retreats and also was a lecturer and teen boys dorm dad at Almont Summer Camp. He writes chaplain posts for the SCYL blog ([youthleague.blogspot.com](http://youthleague.blogspot.com)) and is available to teens in need. The teens enjoy having Dr. Dave as their mentor and spiritual leader.

Please join me in congratulating all of our 2012 SCYL officers and our League chaplain. We have a younger, energetic group of teens leading the League this year. Their original ideas and love for the church and their other teen friends will keep the SCYL growing in enthusiasm and spirit. I am blessed to be working with this group and I hope that you get a chance to know them all.

—Kurt Fekete  
 Youth director

## Winter Retreat

Continued from page 13

to focus.

God support me through this difficulty

Give my spirit strength.

—*Mariel, Deckard, Holly, Jon, Alex*

### SCYL Psalm 4

I feel alone all the time.

Even when surrounded by people  
I am lonely.

I can't bring myself to do anything.

I don't try at the things I love.

Comfort is found so rarely.

I always search for warmth and love.

Someday it will get better

and you, God, will lift me up.

—*Chris, Celie, Beccah, Skylor*

Closing worship is wonderful and sad at the same time. For some of the teens, the worship they experience at retreats is the only formal worship they experience. But it is sad because it happens on their last night together, and they know they will be saying goodbye tomorrow.

I was really moved with the service this year. I found myself choked up in several places. The teens were silent, wide-eyed, and reverent throughout the service, filled with the innocence of the young. We opened with a song, and then two of the teens contributed lyrics and music that they found meaningful. One teen recited the lyrics

to a song that cried out about famine, homelessness, and other social issues, asking "Where is God?" Then the song indicted us all—we are God's hands; it is up to us to salve these social ills instead of blaming God. I wiped my eyes. Then a teen sang a song, accom-



(l to r) Retreat leaders Rev. Nadine Cotton, Rev. David Fekete, Rev. Jenn Tafel

panied by Paul Deming on guitar. The song was about a farmer, teacher, preacher, and hooker who were riding on a bus that got into an accident with an eighteen-wheeler. As he is dying, the

preacher hands his blood-stained Bible to the hooker—the only survivor of the wreck. We find that this story is being narrated by a preacher to his congregation, as he holds up the blood-stained Bible his mother read to him. I wiped my eyes again.

I preached on the subject of God's infinite and intimate love for us all, based on Psalm 33 and 1 Corinthians 13:1-8. Psalm 33 tells us that "the earth is full of His unfailing love." And 1 Corinthians 13 tells us what love is like. I asked the teens to think of how they act toward the people they love, and then to imagine how God, who is infinite love must feel toward us. My voice was thick with emotion as I talked, and once I had to pause to keep my voice at all. Before communion, Paul Deming played a song that had been composed by the teens and him in a music session. As the chorus came around, the teens burst into song, singing, "It

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## Four First Time SCYL Retreaters

My first teen retreat was a very interesting experience. I enjoyed the feeling of being just with the teens for the first time. It made me happy to know I have the responsibility and privileges of a teenager. I had a lot of fun with just the teenagers at Almont.

—*Deckard, age 13*

My first year at winter retreat was awesome. The people were really nice. I am definitely coming back next year.

—*Alex, age 13*

There were many events in the 2011 winter retreat. Kurt and other staff definitely made this a fun retreat! We first had an icebreaker—my favorite! We all went around and introduced ourselves and said our favorite music experience. Then, we made our own musical instruments. This consisted of noise makers, whistles, and rain sticks. Finally, we all celebrated with a party at the roller rink. It was so much fun! I definitely recommend going to a teen winter retreat.

—*Skylor, age 13*

My first winter retreat was awesome! It's so much fun coming to Almont. I hope I can come again. Everyone is so nice and funny and welcoming to me, and I hope I can stay in touch with most of them. The food is great, and I like learning about Swedenborgian concepts. It's interesting to me. I feel very welcome here and I love it!

—*Celia, age 15*



Winter retreat knitters and friends (l to r):  
Holly, Alice, Skylor and Deckard

# Transitions Winter 2012 Retreat

BY NINA SASSER

I felt very lucky to spend the first few days of my 2012 at my favorite place in the world with some truly wonderful people. This Transitions retreat, held at Almont from January 2–January 5, was small and low key in comparison to some of the teen winter retreats I've been to, but nonetheless was very enjoyable. It did feel very



The Transitions group. Back Row (l to r): Holly Bauer, Cody Steinhiser, David Underwood (behind hands). Front Row: Nina Sasser, Teresa Buss, Scott Bray

strange however, arriving at Almont Retreat Center in Michigan after only four hours in a car as opposed to the usual fifteen (I got to spend several days at Cody Steinhiser's house before the retreat, so I was coming from Indiana rather than Maine.)

This retreat contained much of the

*Transitions* is the name of the Swedenborgian group of young adults who, despite their busy schedules, manage to keep in touch and gather for occasional retreats.

familiarity of teen retreats. We managed to uphold many cherished traditions such as eating brownie batter, going bowling, making bubble beards, having lots of jam sessions, and pulling an all-nighter on our final night there. Yet as young adults we encountered some new freedoms and responsibilities. We pretty much governed ourselves and with the help of Jenn [Rev. Jenn Tafel] came up with a list of ground rules for the retreat. We also cooked our own meals, did our own grocery shopping, and set our own schedule. It was nice to make all these decisions ourselves. But planning does take work, and until now I don't think I've truly appreciated all the people who have devoted so much of their time into planning teen retreats.

As always, the sessions did not disappoint. In fact these were some of the best sessions I've been to. I think since it was a very mature group, we were able to explore more deeply the topic at hand—"Putting Tools in Your Spiritual Toolbox." I was immediately drawn

to this idea for a retreat theme when Jenn suggested it. Being in college and out of the SCYL I have found myself severely lacking spiritual outlets in my life. But the sessions taught us some of the ways we can incorporate spirituality back into our lives. And even though it was only for a few short days, just being at Almont seemed to fill this void. Every time I return to Almont I am embraced by a loving community, and whether it's a community of one hundred or seven, I always feel like I am coming home.



Scott, Nina, and Teresa

Thank you everyone who came to this retreat. And thanks Chad and Brenda for helping out with the sessions and teaching us your methods of putting tools in your spiritual toolbox. And above all, thank you Jenn for all your planning and hard work—this retreat would not have been possible without you. ☩

Nina Sasser is from Maine and attends Wheaton College in Massachusetts.

## Winter Retreat

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makes me glad." The lyrics listed the things that made the teens glad—foremost among them was coming together with their friends on SCYL retreats. After communion, and the service had ended, I felt a holy joy come over me. And from the smiles I saw among the teens as they got up, I think that it pervaded the whole group.

This was a relatively young group.

This was the first SCYL retreat for some of the teens. There is a continual stream of teens who come to these retreats and who come back year after year. One important contributing factor is the "Tween" retreats for young children on the brink of adolescence. Another significant factor is Kurt Fekete's wonderful rapport with the teenage group. He programs the retreats so that there is a healthy balance of fun time and religious programming. I believe that

the religious programming affects the teens, some of whom have no church of their own. I left feeling charged up at seeing such vitality among such a good group of teens. The SCYL retreats continue to be a valuable ministry to the teens, and an invaluable resource for future church leaders of our denomination. ☩

The Rev. Dr. David Fekete, is SCYL chaplain and pastor of the Church of the Holly City in Edmonton, Alberta.

# Revisiting Near Death Experience

## Chicago Swedenborg Library Hosts Raymond Moody

BY KAREN LAAKKO FEIL

Over the years, one of our most productive outreach topics at the Swedenborg Library in Chicago has been science and religion. Last year, on April 29 and 30, the Swedenborg Library hosted the man who coined the term *near death experience* (NDE), Raymond A. Moody, M.D., psychiatrist and author of *Life After Life*, first published in 1975 when he was 31 and in medical school.

After securing the dates with Dr. Moody, we asked the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) and *Mindful Metropolis* magazine to participate as marketing partners for the Friday evening lecture and Saturday workshop. While not a sponsor, the suburban Chicago chapter of International Association of Near Death Studies (IANDS) promoted the event.

Events such as this present opportunities for the library to widen our communication network and build awareness through multiple channels. In addition to advertising to our list, letters and follow-up calls were made to several Loop-area universities, including DePaul, Loyola, Roosevelt, and Harold Washington, requesting display of our event poster and postcards. Invitations were also mailed to local Jungian analysts. *Mindful Metropolis* published an interview with Dr. Moody in the April 2011 edition, and IONS distributed flyers at two monthly events. Ads appeared in the Literary Events section of the *Chicago Tribune*, in the lectures section of the *Chicago Reader*, and in *The Hyde Park Herald*.

Another important partner was the First United Methodist Church, in

whose building the Swedenborg Library resides. We used the main sanctuary for the Friday lecture, and a smaller chapel for Saturday's workshop. In keeping with our religious values, we sought to provide a positive experience to the attendees that we anticipated would be unfamiliar with our library, so our advertising included an RSVP for the Friday event, which had a \$5



Dr. Raymond Moody

cover charge, and the Saturday workshop, which had a \$20 cover charge.

This being the first time we had hosted a program with Dr. Moody, Lily Gaines and I said a prayer lifting up our wishes for a full house (225 people) for the Friday lecture. It may come as no surprise to most readers of *The Messenger* that we had 224 people at the Friday event, the majority having their first contact with the Swedenborg Library.

There is faith, and then there is doing one's part. We requested RSVPs in our advertising to ensure that we had enough volunteer support to provide a smooth and pleasant experience for the attendees and to help us estimate the quantity of books needed for the book signing. In answering phone calls and email requests for tickets, we found that many callers had NDEs of their own to share, and as a result of conversation, callers gained a sense that they would be welcomed—that they'd be on the list—and that they would find a friendly environment for sharing their experiences.

Dr. Moody's talk centered on his most recent book, *Glimpses of Eternity*, which discusses the shared death experience that family members and hospital staff attending the dying have re-

ported. These remarkable experiences have on occasion involved those in attendance seeing the dying person's life review just as the dying person sees it. Because the life review is experienced by others as well as the dying person, Dr. Moody explained, the argument that near death experiences (NDEs) are the result of a dying brain shutting down is refuted.

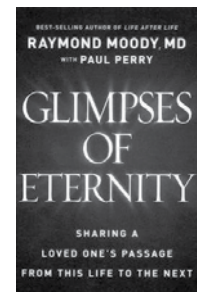
One of the downsides of success at a young age is that people think you are older than you are. At 67, Dr. Moody was well up to the challenge when the Saturday workshop group kept him for an extra hour with questions. We had several amusing conversations following the program in trying to correct participants who were adamant that Dr. Moody must be in his eighties based upon his education and accomplishments.

At the Friday lecture, we sold four dozen copies of Dr. Moody's current and previously published books, including eighteen copies of *Life After Life*, which has sold more than thirteen million copies worldwide, and has been translated into dozens of languages. We also sold twenty-six books from the Swedenborg Foundation, including *Afterlife*, *Swedenborgian Sampler*, and *A Scientist Explores Spirit*.

Here's what we learned and gained from these events:

- To first-timers, the Swedenborg Library looks like an organization that can pull 200 people to an event. On a subsequent Swedenborgian class on *Heaven & Hell*, an IANDS

*Continues on page 26*



## FNCA Mid-Winter Meeting—Plans for Camp 2012

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

For the past five years, I have had the pleasure of attending the mid-winter meeting of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly's (FNCA) Board of Directors. Some may look at them as "bored" meetings, and though they can be boring at times, it is one of my favorite weekends of the year. To be honest, I love any excuse to spend time with my FNCA family.

This year was a little different for us. My husband, Jason, was elected FNCA camp director, so he is now the chair of the Summer Session Committee (SSC) that plans the camp program. The evening before the board meeting, we hosted the SSC meeting at our home for the first time, and along with that came some fun overnight guests, Nancy Little and Trevor, close friends of ours who are frequent flyers of our guest room, and Nina Sasser, who replaced Jason as our Flames representative to the Board of Directors. This was her first experience with this weekend of meetings, and it was great to field all her questions as she was beginning to understand how things work on the executive level of camp, as well as to hear all her insights on the Flames and Senior Flames groups. She is definitely going to be a huge asset to our team.

The other big difference this year from others is that we needed to find a babysitter for the day. Lucky for us, my mom lives close by and was more than happy to spend a long day with her 11-month-old granddaughter.

So we made our trip to the Elephant Walk Restaurant in Waltham, just west of Boston. Members of our Board are from five New England states and as far away as Pennsylvania, so Waltham serves as a fairly central location for us to gather. As a donation to camp

each year, our treasurer and my dear friend, Bob Perry, graciously hosts us at his restaurant, serving us an amazing Cambodian/French lunch prepared by one of his professional chefs. Our meeting is scheduled to begin at 10:00 AM, so we all try to get there a little early to get our cups of coffee or tea, exchange hellos and hugs, and settle in for a long day of brainstorming, prob-



(l to r) Susannah Currie, Jason Greenwood, Nina Sasser, Trevor, and Nancy Little.

lem-solving, discussion, and trying to make the best decisions we can for this place we all love.

As usual, the bulk of our time was spent on finances and fundraising. This is a difficult economic time for all, and our small organization is no different. Although we had more campers this year than the past eight years, we nevertheless function at an operational deficit that we need to cover by donations.

We had some unexpected expenses this year: one was the purchase of a new bake stove and another was replacing all the stolen copper piping(!) from under the Main Building. Both of these took many hours of time to replace, and we can't say enough about how efficient our Buildings and Grounds Committee is with their budget and donated time. We have to be mindful of everything, since we are well aware that very soon we will need to replace the entire Main Building roof. (That will cost us close to \$35,000.) With all

this in mind, we spent a long time discussing fundraising.

So, we want to let you know that anyone can donate to the FNCA on line anytime. We especially encourage you to set up an automatic monthly donation in any amount from \$5 and up, since it supplies income during our off months when our cash flow is particularly low. Donating to the FNCA is very easy at: <http://fryeburg.org/donate>.

We spent another large portion of time discussing last year's session and plans for the upcoming one. Outgoing camp director Debbie Cook gave her report on an amazing 2011 camp session and incoming camp director Jason Greenwood gave his report on the SSC's plans for this year. With very minor changes to a well-liked program, it looks to be another amazing year.

Our meeting came to a close around 4:15. As always, we could have gone on much longer, but (thankfully!) the restaurant staff had to get ready for the dinner shift, and we all had to make our journeys home. We don't get much time for socializing during this meeting with so much business to discuss; we are often only able to take a few minutes afterwards for some parting words with each other. Many of us will see each other at the FNCA over the Memorial Day work weekend but others we won't see again until the camp session in August. So then we simply say, "Until next time."

The FNCA is a Swedenborgian family camp located on twenty acres of pine forest on the Saco River in Fryeburg, Maine. Won't you join our camp family? Full information is on the camp's Website: <http://fryeburg.org>. ☩

Beki Greenwood is the FNCA Board vice-president.

# Call for Nominations

**E**lected positions in the General Convention are filled at the annual convention. This year, the following positions will be voted:

- President: three-year term commencing in 2013
- Vice-president: one-year term
- Secretary: one-year term
- Treasurer: one-year term
- General Council: one minister and two lay members for three-year terms

*General Council is the governing body of the Swedenborgian Church. It meets face to face at the annual convention and in the fall (travel, room, and board pro-*

*vided). All other business is conducted by conference call and email.*

- Communication Support Unit: three-year term  
*COMSU developments printed materials. Meetings are by email and conference call.*

- Education Support Unit: three-year term

*EDSU facilitates activities that enhance the understanding and the skills needed for the realization of the Swedenborgian Church's purpose. This unit is concerned with resources, personnel, and programming (specifically, annual convention mini-courses). Meetings are*

*by email and conference call.*

- Information Management Support Unit: three-year term

*IMSU's focus is on gathering, storing and distributing data pertinent to the fulfillment of the Swedenborgian Church's purpose. Its primary focus has been the denomination's Web page. Business is conducted through electronic communication.*

- Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit: three-year term

*The central focus of FPRSU is on the wise use and development of such resources as are directly under the Swedenborgian Church's control. FPRSU oversees the management of the Swedenborgian Church's properties and investments, seeks new sources of material support, and provides consultants for the Swedenborgian Church's collective bodies and the best coordinated use and development of the body's financial and physical resources. Meetings are usually by email and conference call.*

- Ministries Support Unit: two for three-year terms)

*MNSU is charged with facilitating ministries within the Church and activities that increase the number of individuals and groups consciously committed to the realization of the Swedenborgian Church's purpose. It meets face to face once a year (expenses paid) and by email and conference call otherwise.*

- Nominating Committee: two to be nominated, one elected for a five-year term)

*It is the duty of this committee to present at the annual convention nominees for the officers of the Swedenborgian Church and vacancies in the elective members of the General Council and all other boards, support units and committees. The nominating committee proposes a slate representative of the Swedenborgian Church's overall constituency. Meetings are by email and conference call.*

- Committee on Admission into the Ministry: one lay member for a

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## Planning for FNCA 2012 is in Full Swing!

As the new camp director of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA), I am eager to share new and exciting program developments from our recent Summer Session Committee meeting. But first, since I am new to this position, here is a quick sketch of myself. I live in eastern Massachusetts with my wife Beki and our almost one-year-old daughter, Serena. I am a seventh grade math teacher, coaching and refereeing kids' sports on the side. I started coming to the FNCA about five years ago with Beki (my then girlfriend) and haven't missed it since.

First and foremost, we are pleased to announce that Chef Bobby Abesamra will return to camp this summer. Bobby was a fantastic addition to our camp last summer and we are ecstatic to have him return.

Our camp registrar, Nancy Little, created an online survey asking campers about their camp experiences last year. The SSC takes everyone's comments, both positive and negative, into account to make improvements for the following year. Campers especially enjoyed many of the evening programs, the Afternoon Book Club, the adult discussion group after lectures, and many of the impromptu games. (Thank you Nancy for your hard work creating and managing this survey.)

With thanks to our religious program coordinator, Rev. Susannah Currie, we would also like to announce the lecture themes for this year's session: week 1 (doctrinal theme), "Memorable Relations and How They Speak to Daily Life;" week 2 (Biblical theme), "Descent of the Holy City." Brief write-ups about the themes are on the Assembly's website at: <http://fryeburg.org/lecturethemes>.

If you have not yet experienced the FNCA, or are looking to make a return, I invite you to come experience a piece of paradise for all ages. The 2012 session of the FNCA will begin Saturday, August 4 and run through Sunday, August 19. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me at [jgreenwood@fryeburg.org](mailto:jgreenwood@fryeburg.org). I look forward to seeing you all again or meeting you for the first time!

—Jason Greenwood, FNCA Camp Director

# New Logo for Annual Themes Unveiled

BY JOHN MAINE

**D**rum roll, please! You have before you the new logo for the seven-year cycle of annual themes. It's been provisionally approved by General Council and will be given the official okay at our upcoming annual convention. As you may recall, at our last gathering it was voted unanimously that we would celebrate the seven major teachings of our church, each teaching providing the theme for a given year (a year being from one annual convention to the next). This year, we are starting where we should always start, with the Lord; 2011–12 is thus "The Year of the Lord."

The logo is available to be used by all our of ministries to identify where we are as a church community on our journey of faith together. Specifically, the logo can be used to identify a particular program or activity dedicated to celebrating the theme of a given year.

As you can see, the logo depicts our Swedenborgian cross surrounded by a circle of seven stars. In the Book of Revelation, the author has a vision of Christ holding seven stars in his right hand (Rev. 1: 16, 20). Swedenborg tells us that seven represents all, while stars correspond to knowledge of goodness and truth from the Lord. Thus the seven stars symbolize all the knowledge of Divine goodness and truth, which taken together constitute the new consciousness we call the New Church (see *Apocalypse Revealed* §51, 65). To journey through the circle of seven stars is to walk the path of spiritual wisdom leading to regeneration and new life.

There is, however, more to the seven stars than this. The designers of the logo (one of whom, Heather Soeder, is a lifelong Swedenborgian) also made the connection between the seven stars and the seven chakras of Hindu and Buddhist practice. The chakras are



centers of life-force or spiritual energy in the body and reflect different states of consciousness. They are arranged in an upward progression along the spine, with the highest chakra—the highest state of consciousness, oneness with God—being the crown of the head.

Inspired by this, our designers have proposed that the highest star (the one located directly above the cross at the top) should represent the theme of the final year of the cycle, namely, "The Year of Regeneration." Thus, to begin our journey, we start with the star to the right, which is why it is highlighted by being made larger than the rest. This is the star that represents the Year of the Lord. Each year another star in the circle will be similarly made larger than the rest to mark our progression through the whole cycle.

Incidentally, each of the chakras is also associated with a particular color. The first or base chakra, foundational to all the rest, is red, an excellent choice for the Year of the Lord. Red, as we know, corresponds in the Word to the love which is the Lord's essential nature. (Incidentally, the designers have also provided us with the logo design with all seven stars done in their chakra colors. It's a beautiful image, with the stars creating a kind of rainbow effect around our Swedenborgian cross.)

However, the main point in all this is that the new logo is *yours*! It is be-

ing emailed out right now, in both its black-and-white and colour versions, to all our ministries, and we want to encourage everyone to use it. Post it up—talk about it. Think about what celebrating the Year of the Lord might mean for you and your community—and then get it going! Little or big, if it speaks to you of love—do it, and do it for the Lord, with all your heart.

And please share what you're doing with me so I can share it with others. Give me a call or drop a line (jemaine@rogers.com or 519-742-2478). That way we can all benefit and grow on this journey together. And as the apostle says, let us "rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say, rejoice." ☩

John Maine is pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario.

For more information about the Cycle of Annual Themes, see page 146 in the December 2010 Messenger.

## Nominations

*Continued from page 23*

three-year term)

*This committee meets with ministerial candidates to review and recommend qualified candidates for ordination. Meetings are by conference call and face-to-face (travel, room and board provided).*

- The Board of Trustees for the Swedenborgian House of Studies: (four to be elected, two to the representative class and two to the at-large class for three-year terms)

*The SHS board manages the business and affairs of the New Church Theological School. Meetings are face-to-face (travel, room and board provided).*

Please contact Alison Lane-Olsen, one of the other members of the nominating committee or Central Office if you are interested. ☩

## From the President

Continued from page 15

interim ministry. God bless you all in your new beginnings!

As I treasure new beginnings I also truly value constancy. Rev. Renée Machiniak in Royal Oak, Michigan, and Betsy Coffman, lay leader in Urbana, Ohio, have both served Convention and their respective societies, not to mention their local communities, with excellence and integrity for many years. I would add to that list Rev. Eric Hoffman and Rev. Ron Brugler and his wife Val, as they end many years of service to the St. Paul Society and Kitchener and Cleveland respectively; Rev. Donna Keane at Elmwood, Massachusetts; Revs. Paul and Ernie Martin in Puget Sound; Rev. Dick and Linda Tafel in Florida; Rev. Freeman Schrock in LaPorte, Indiana; the legacy of Rev. Paul and Pat Zacharias of Kitchener, Ontario, continued in the ministries of Rev. John Maine, Rev. Alison Longstaff and Steve Thomas, lay leader; Rev. Wilma Wake in Portland, Maine, and now the online Swedenborgian Community; Rev. Dr. George Dole, seminary professor and minister at Bath, Maine; Rev. Bill Woofenden and his wife Louise, retired in Maine; and the life-long ministries of Rev. F. Bob Tafel and his wife Gretchen and Rev. Gladys Wheaton. And there is also Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell, who recently completed many years of excellent service at Wayfarers Chapel and currently serves as chair of the Council of Ministers; he is exploring options for a final chapter or two or three to his career.

Looking farther west, I also see the Swedenborg Library in Chicago, kept alive and flourishing for so many years by Karen Feil. And this list cannot end without mentioning Rev. Harvey Tafel at the Wayfarer's Chapel and Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence at the Swedenborg House of Studies, our seminary.

It is also with the joy of an elder that I see the number of younger ministers

establishing themselves. Rev. Kevin Baxter in Cambridge, Rev. Sage Currie in Fryeburg, Maine, Rev. David Brown at Wayfarers Chapel in Palos Verdes, California, Rev. Jenn Tafel in Lansing Michigan, Rev. Junchol Lee in San Francisco, Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen in Pretty Prairie Kansas, Rev. Dr. David Fekete in Western Canada, Rev. Carla Friedrich finishing at San Diego; Rev. Hunter Roberts and the Church without Walls, Rev. Susannah Currie, now at Bridgewater and secretary of Convention, as well as responsible for *In Company With Angels*, which brought to public life the stained glass angels.

I also see the many pastors serving as chaplains including Rev. Kit Billings, Rev. Kathy Speas, Rev. Lana Sandahl, Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Cameron Linen, Rev. Gard Perry, Rev. Steve Sanchez, and Rev. Andy Stinson, who is completing distinguished service as an Army chaplain, as well as Rev. Susan Turley, who for many years has been training leaders in Certified Pastoral Education (CPE) at the Veterans Hospital in Palo Alto, California.

There are also ministers working independently, including Rev. Rich Tafel

as a life coach; Rev. Cathy Lauber beginning a spiritual center; Rev. Judith Vandergrift's on-line prayer ministry, and Rev. Lee Woofenden, writing and publishing.

And if we are looking at important people and happenings within our larger church we must remember the transformation of Rev. Eric and Lisa Allison's ministry and life.

Churches in San Diego, El Cerrito, Western Canada, Kansas, St. Paul, Silver City, Newtonville, New York and Wash. D.C. continue to search for pastoral leadership. And I would also add that there continue to be a goodly number of individuals and small groups of "Swedenborgians" scattered around the continent who would gladly serve as the nucleus for an emerging community . . . Just a thought . . .

I expect I have opened a Pandora's Box of praise in beginning to mention ministries and pastors who have made worthy contributions to Convention. And though I know I have forgotten someone and will and should hear about it, I will now arbitrarily shut the lid! And as I do, I wonder what else is going to happen this year?

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

## SWEDENBORG COLLOQUIUM ON SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

SATURDAY, MARCH 31ST 2012, ALL DAY

PHILMONT COUNTRY CLUB, HUNTINGDON VALLEY, PA

**SPEAKERS:** Rev. Susannah Currie (Moderator); Drs. Robin and Stephen Larsen; Sandra Amrita McLanahan, MD; Rev. David Millar; Peter Rhodes; Rev. Frank Rose; Rev. Dr. Jonathan S. Rose; Rev. Jane Siebert; Rev. Dr. Ray Silverman; and Dean Sluyter.

**ADMISSION IS FREE**, but REGISTRATION is required. Those interested may purchase a box lunch. Coffee, tea and water will be available all day long.

**BOOK SIGNING:** The program will conclude with a book signing session organized by the Swedenborg Foundation. This will enable participants to purchase publications by the speakers, meet with them, and have their books signed.

For more information please contact Doris Odhner Delaney  
at swedenborgcoll@gmail.com

## Letters to the Editor

Continued from page 14

would be our first priority. I felt this to be wrong, but did not have the words—the vocabulary—that Lee Woofenden has used so effectively to be able to speak out. Neither did I have the experience of something different.

For the past seven years I have been a member of the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting. Nothing in my Swedenborgian perspective is incompatible with the Quaker way. But what a difference! Quakers, although small in number, are known throughout the world for working for peace and justice. We don't ask how many people are attending meetings. Half of our budget is for benevolences, or what we might call charity. Our major disagreements have to do with whom and what we are giving to. Grounded in our desire for peace, we listen respectfully to differing points of view, and decisions are made by consensus, not majority vote.

When I came in to Convention as a young adult, I heard members attacking each other viciously over differing views on how to spend our money or interpret our teachings. Much later I was literally screamed at in our ministers' spouses group when I expressed my opinion that the church was dying and we needed to try new ways. In General Council a minster was accused without direct communication of mismanaging funds; six months later the action was rescinded without apology. There were antagonistic political groups and budget manipulations; I have never felt that we Swedenborgians expected to follow in our organizational life the very teachings we wished others to embrace.

Over the years, I have seen vibrant projects successfully reaching out with our message to wider audiences. Yet each has had to expend massive effort to defend its right to exist and be supported. Project Link brought people together in *Prayer Can Change Your*

*Life* groups. The *Chrysalis Reader* offered by the Swedenborg Foundation expresses the Swedenborg perspective through literature and art. Temenos reached hundreds of new people with personal growth groups. The Stone House Bookstore offered spiritual growth classes to people attracted by its beautiful display of spiritually-oriented books. Yet none of these has received encouragement and support until it could become self supporting because success was measured only by church attendance. At the same time, churches offering traditional services were given help from the Augmentation Fund and MINSU. The Wayfarers Chapel is unique because it has been able to support itself through expensive weddings.

I read *The Messenger* each month, and I am amazed that no one is talking about climate change, which is threatening human existence. ("The earth is the Lord's. And the fullness thereof.")

Our country is suffering from the huge gap between the few wealthy and the masses who live in poverty. Our educational system has fallen behind other developed countries and our prisons are overflowing. None of this seems to impact our little church struggling and dying. Are these secular problems only? What happens to our belief in correspondences? "To survive or to serve?" asks Lee Woofenden. The January *Messenger* shares the front page between this question and the announcement of the Tafel Fund "for the Swedenborgian Church and to honor Tafel ministers past and present." Is there a chance that spending this money to reach out to the needs of our times might change our church life and its future? I remember past treasurer Gus Ebel saying, "We are going to run out of people before we run out of money." There is yet time to make a change.

—Perry S. Martin  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

## Revisiting Near Death

Continued from page 21

member and Moody lecture attendee walked into our Library, and said with surprise "Oh—I thought there'd be 200 people." All through the fall, we have held Swedenborg-based study groups led by Rev. Dr. George Dole (using *Afterlife* and *The Heavenly City*) with eight to twelve people attending most weeks. This is directly attributable to the Moody event last spring.

- We established a co-sponsoring relationship with the Chicago IONS and IANDS groups that will be helpful in the future. It takes more than one organization to get the word out on events these days, and we don't have enough pull alone. We are the relatively unfamiliar (and possibly weird) organization; having other known and trusted organiza-

tion logos on our ads is invaluable to us. We also impressed the Methodist Church with the turnout. The senior pastor discussed his own shared death experience with his father in a subsequent Sunday sermon.

- We've linked the Swedenborg Library with near-death experience in a positive way, as Dr. Moody gave a wonderful lecture and people were truly thrilled to hear and meet him.
- We learned which of our local print advertising and internet event sites can be effective for us.
- Our regular program participants enjoyed the opportunity to usher and help with hosting the event.

On March 1, 2012, the Swedenborg House of Studies will host Dr. Moody at the Pacific School of Religion. ☩

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

## In Memoriam

## Reverend Paul Bernard Zacharias

BY FRAN MCINTOSH

The Rev. Paul Bernard Zacharias was born April 16, 1926, into the loving family of Rev. John and Mary Zacharias in the small prairie town of Herbert, Saskatchewan, where he grew and thrived with brothers Henry, Clifford, and Eric and sisters Marion and Laura. The teachings of Swedenborg were part of Paul's very nature. His father was a Swedenborgian minister and brother Eric also became a Swedenborgian minister. This became Paul's goal as well, and he travelled to Urbana University in Ohio to pursue his studies. In Urbana, he met his future wife, Pat, and began a loving relationship of sixty years.

Paul was ordained in 1956 and served parishes in Elmwood, Massachusetts, and Portland, Oregon, before being called to the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, in 1963. He and his family moved into a house on Union Street in Kitchener before they had seen it on the advice of a congregant, but it was a happy choice, and Paul and Pat and their three children, Jeanmarie, Matthew, and Joy grew up there.

Paul quickly established a wonderful relationship with the congregation of the Church of the Good Shepherd. We respected his quiet nature, the serious issues treated in his sermons, his knowledge of the teachings of Sweden-

borg, his deep faith, and his love of the Church. It was quite a surprise to see a different sort of person arrive at Christmas celebrations wearing a brilliant red vest, which became a tradition of future Christmases. None of his parish-

ioners will ever forget his arrival at another occasion through a mist of dry ice vapor, with full white wig and eighteenth century dress, as Emanuel Swedenborg himself. There was a standing

ovation!

Throughout the years, Pat was his quiet support, Jeannie gave her music as a gift to the church, and Joy and Matthew were always in our hearts. Paul's joy was very much centered in his family, and he delighted in the arrival of his grandchildren, Katie, Jon, and Anne and great-grandchildren Oliver and Simon.

Paul initiated the idea of a team ministry at the Church of the Good Shepherd in the 1980s, and during this time took advantage of the shared ministry to spend a year in a ministry in England.

As minister emeritus to the congregation following his retirement, he was always supportive of the ministry of the Church and was called on many times, not only for support and advice, but for active participation in the services. Paul's wisdom, his caring, his faith, will long remain a part of this congregation. We miss you Paul. ☙



Rev. Paul and Pat Zacharias at the 2008 Annual Convention

## Passages

## Deaths

The Reverend Paul Zacharias passed into the spiritual world at age 85 on December 16, 2011. (See memorial article left.) ☙

## Convention 2012

*Continued from page 28*

with Kathy Black. After lunch, from 1–4 PM, Rev. Sarah Buteux will present a public workshop on “Living Your Faith,” which will be a wonderful preliminary to the opening of the convention that evening.

Even business meetings will be held in a new way, with some streamlined procedures being initiated to give us more time to listen to and learn from one another. Questions about the advance reports will be solicited and submitted to the secretary to guide some of our time together. We're asking you to help us make this a new experience by participating in a new way. And bring examples of how you've celebrated the “Year of the Lord” for a table where we will share and be inspired by each other's call to be the Lord's church together.

Our ordination service and main convention worship will be held on Saturday, July 7, at 7 PM; a party hosted by the Massachusetts Association will follow. Sunday morning worship will include installation of those elected to office. All in all, it will be an exciting new experience, one that will inspire us all to discover what the Lord requires of us!

Watch for more information and registration materials in next month's *Messenger* or contact operations manager Renée Hellenbrecht at Central Office with specific questions. ☙

Susannah Currie is pastor of the Bridgewater New Church and chair of the 2012 convention host committee.

### 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.

## Convention 2012— What Does the Lord Require of You?

BY SUSANNAH CURRIE

**A**nnual Convention 2012 will convene at Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts as it did in 2008. The campus is a few blocks from the center of this lovely little New England town, and located on the town square is the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, which will host the convention worship service and ordination ceremony. The convention is scheduled for Thursday evening, July 5, through Sunday morning, July 8. Pre-convention activities are scheduled for Wednesday evening and all day Thursday.

In the spirit of doing things in a new way, as inspired by last year's convention theme, "Behold I Make All Things New," this year we *will* be doing things differently! The convention will be shortened by one day, and we are reviving pre-convention workshops for those who

want to arrive on Wednesday evening. As Wednesday is the 4th of July holiday, the Massachusetts Association will host a supper barbeque, games with Trevor the Games Man, and we'll be able to see the town's fireworks from the hill on campus. A complete listing of local holiday activities will be available. Come celebrate Independence Day with your General Convention family! There will be childcare offered this year during *all* scheduled convention events.

On Thursday morning from 9 AM to noon, two workshops will be offered: "Spiritually Integrated Self-Care for Those Who Care for and about Others," offered by Rev. Dr. Gard Perry; and "Workshop for Ministers' Partners" to guide clergy spouses and partners in the development of a year-long support group which meets their needs and fits their life situations,

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Bridgewater New Jerusalem  
Church