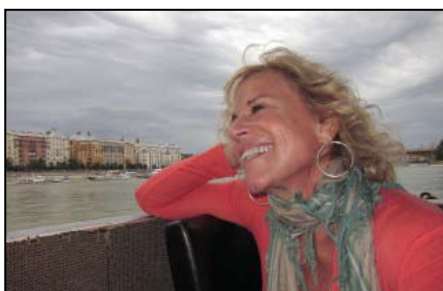




## Spirit Without Walls: Spiritual Entrepreneurship in Budapest

### Part 1: A new Home and a New Ministry



BY HUNTER ROBERTS

**W**hen I tell people I am developing an entrepreneurial ministry without walls in Budapest, Hungary, their mouths fall open. Why ministry in this remote secular and Roman Catholic culture? Why did I pick Budapest? How on earth did I get here?

It certainly wasn't in my plan when I arrived here in the spring of 2010. I came to Budapest to save my own soul, not anyone else's.\* Events of the previous few years had persuaded me I needed a fresh start, somewhere far from everything familiar. I feared such a move meant leaving my ministerial dreams behind, but, as I had not succeeded in previous efforts to get support for the edgy, post-modern ministry to the secular to which I felt called (and had en-

\* Roberts, W. Hunter "Notes of An Expat, Epilogue: the First Year," Huffington Post, 11 Nov. 2011, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/w-hunter-roberts/taking-life-risks\\_b\\_1078164.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/w-hunter-roberts/taking-life-risks_b_1078164.html).

visioned since before my ordination), I saw no reason to belabor it. While I continued to fulfill the necessary requirements to keep my name in good standing on the roster of the Council of Ministers, I gave up my hopes for a career as a church planter, and moved on to Plan B.

Plan B had been in the background for many years, since I returned to the States from my long, post-grad trip through Europe in a VW van. I had long thought: "If someday I have nothing more 'important' to do, I will find a way to move to Europe." I felt oddly at home here. I liked the old build-

**... I was still a minister in my being and in the community of people I encountered, filling priestly, prophetic, and pastoral roles.**

ings, the cafes, the covered markets, and the way of life, which did not seem so rushed and transactional. One day I awakened and realized I had nothing more important to do, like saving the world from nuclear war, or starting a new church. I could do what I was doing, writing and seeing clients on SKYPE, from wherever I was and live wherever I wanted. I chose Buda-

pest because it was beautiful, it was affordable, and I had one old friend who had settled here in the mid-1990s, so I would not be completely alone.

I had been here several times since my first trip behind the Iron Curtain. Budapest holds a mysterious blend of East and West. One can sit in dark wood-paneled cafes with old lace curtains and write in the shadow of Hungary's great poets, meander down cobblestone streets, and look at Art Nouveau buildings with statuary and balconies, on streets that have survived their own traumas. Walking down streets of its inner city, it is possible to see elaborately crafted statuary of La Belle Époque, built during Hungary's legendary heyday as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and gateways and doorways of the Art Nouveau period, juxtaposed with boxy, utilitarian offices and apartments built by the Communists, now crumbling. If you look closely you will see bullet holes, and wreaths, splattered with red paint, commemorating the deaths of Hungarian patriots, especially in the failed 1956 Revolution. I wanted to breathe in beauty to heal my aching soul.

And so I set out to do just that, filling and enlivening my spirit with art and music, Hungarian food and wine,

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### More Inside:

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Johnny Appleseed Gets a Fresh Look • Minister Transitions • SCYL Columbus Day Retreat  
Getting into Heaven—and Out Again • Investment Committee Sets Payout • Being Human











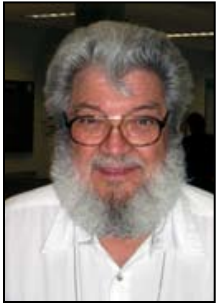








## A Moment with Rev. Freeman



July brings us to the end of my eight-year ministry at LaPorte New Church. I have been asked to write about my experience of leaving the ministry, for retirement. To date, I have done very little writing and even less speaking about it. In a way, it all seems ineffable and beyond description in words or images, leaving one with that unutterable mix of gratitude and grief. Yes, grief—oh yes, those stages of grief so commonly known and so beautifully described by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross.

The first stage is numbness or denial—I simply could not believe I have lived so long that I simply must retire, primarily due to my age. One can stay in denial for a very long time. My denial took the form of disbelief—I just couldn't believe it.

Then comes, two: the anger phase. While anger is expressed in many forms, what I seemed to experience mostly was akin to silent rage. I really didn't know how to talk about the pain I felt in connection with the anger and my deep sense of loss—I did not want to end my ministry.

In the third phase, commonly called "bargaining," I suddenly found myself describing to the board all the ways we could arrange my continuation of ministry. Soon, however, the awareness came that I was to move on.

Then came the fourth, depression, with all of its ramifications. For me this phase was one of a silent irritable mood. Outwardly, it seemed to me, not much had changed, but inwardly, a cross-over into another spiritual state had definitely taken place. But this was not the state I was accus-

tomized to dwelling in, nor the state I wanted. "No, oh no, not this," a voice seemed to cry from deep within. I had, it seemed, nowhere to go. I returned again and again to prayer and meditation. The words, "They that wait upon the Lord, He shall renew their strength," came to me almost as if the old prophet were speaking directly to me! So, waiting meant being honest with the denial, the anger, and the bargaining that came with it. I waited and waited, until one ill-defined day, some new light came and with it a door opened, and I walked in.

Through the open door I am finding the fifth phase, acceptance, more and more every day, sometimes in

great abundance! Life is once more as it should be. I did some very practical things, such as building a large deck out from the kitchen of my house into the great trees—a place to enjoy my morning coffee as I wait for the sun to come piercing through the trees, filling the north end of my deck in bright splashing sunshine. I am retiring, and I am happy—thanks be to God and to the good people of LaPorte New Church for their blessings.

To them and to all of you, I say "May the Lord's peace be with you, always . . . ALWAYS. . . Amen.

—Rev. Freeman Schrock

This article first appeared in the September 2012 *LaPorte Report*.

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## Investment Committee Sets Rate

The Investment Committee of General Convention met on October 27 in Newtonville, Massachusetts, to review and revise the investments and investment plan for the Common Fund.

The Common Fund was established to pool the investments of General Convention and member bodies (SHS, associations, and societies) in a single managed fund. The goal was to gain the benefits of investing larger sums, employing professional managers and providing a stable payout for income while maintaining growth equal to the sum of income, fees, and inflation.

The fund is managed to balance returns with risk and to minimize volatility. The risk and volatility levels of the fund are low in keeping with a conservative investment policy, but this policy presents a constant challenge to find returns that maintain a suitable level of payout and a fund balance that keeps up with inflation.

As of September 30, 2012, the year-to-date net yield of the fund is 9.5%. The performance in the third quarter (4.5%) made up for the poor performance of the second quarter.

Over time, the committee has maintained a distribution rate target of 4.5% of the fund, although in some years the committee allowed payout to exceed this. The payout rate for 2012 is 4.6%; the committee voted to decrease the payout rate to 4.5% to preserve capital in an increasingly difficult investment environment.

The fund policy is to invest 48% in domestic equity, 13% in international equity, 14% in global equity, 8% in real estate, 20% in domestic fixed income, and 2% in cash, and current investments are close to those percentages.

The future challenges include low rates of return on fixed income securities and a volatile stock market. The committee is exploring investing in some alternative instruments. ☩

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## Spirit Without Walls

Continued from page 129

and the view of the River Danube.

God's grace found me everywhere I went, and so I never felt alone. I was fortunate in that the one longtime friend I had when I arrived was generous in her introductions. People I met through her invited me to events, from the local Hash to salon concerts and wine tastings, where they introduced me to other interesting people, many of them leaders in business, academic, civic and artistic life in Budapest. Here I found a community of Internationals and expats, who know what it is like to be a stranger in town and take pains to assist the newly arrived. Knowing people's tenure here can be transient, they tend to be more open to new friends than a more settled population might be.

Making it a policy to accept any and all invitations that were not prohibitively expensive or threatening to life and limb, I went to clubs, dinners, concerts, yoga classes, luncheons, hikes, shopping excursions, and parties. Within weeks of arrival I was traveling in a social circle made up of many nationalities: Filipino, Finnish, Russian, British, Scott, Serbian, German, Austrian, African, Chinese, Canadian and, of course, American and Hungarian.\* One of the differences in life here is a sort of formality, which I found refreshing coming from a world of pot-lucks on paper plates. People cook, entertain, and invite, and one is expected to reciprocate, which was fine with me, as I, too, like to cook and entertain.

My blog for the *Huffington Post* also served as an entrée to opportunities. I soon began writing for a new, edgy Central European monthly, called *THINK*, thus introducing my think-

\* Roberts, W. Hunter, "Notes of a Temporary Ex-Pat #5: In Praise of Ex-Pats," *Huffington Post*, May 5, 2010 [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/w-hunter-roberts/notes-of-a-temporary-ex-p\\_b\\_560788.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/w-hunter-roberts/notes-of-a-temporary-ex-p_b_560788.html)

ing to a wide local audience. So I went about my days, following my quirky interests of poetry, art, yoga, classical music and jazz, food, conversation, travel, and wine, enjoying my social life and cobbling together my professional life out of things I have long done: counseling, coaching, and writing. Ministry did not seem an option in a secular community in a foreign land, far from church offices and supports.

But when you are a minister, you give your life to something that can have some surprises in store. In a church or not, I was still a minister in my being and in the community of people I encountered, filling priestly, prophetic, and pastoral roles. So as I proceeded to construct a life in Budapest, I did

**Like a GPS, God was calling me back to a path and a ministry suited to my gifts and loves, which was to prove fulfilling and joyous beyond my wildest dreams.**

what I love, what was and is a self-expression for me: spiritual counseling and coaching; presiding at weddings; bringing people together in community; singing God's praises; speaking my faith; talking about spiritual values and meaning; addressing correspondences; talking to and about the soul. I held dinners and salons where people could come together to talk about things that matter. Within months, I had hosted a Christmas dinner for twelve, a New Year's salon on the state of the world, and a multi-cultural tea and poetry reading, all out of my tiny galley kitchen. At the request of friends, I even began breaking bread and serving communion at dinners. People loved it, as they felt free to share goodness and truth in the tradition, but without the exclusionary baggage, of their ancestors. I held women's luncheons and teas, in my flat and then other places.

Perhaps because I had no agenda, other than loving people and sharing my love of Life Itself, the love, wisdom, and generosity of spirit, and sense of fun that have infused my life since moving here, I attracted people. They gathered around, relating to me as guide and wise woman, much like I imagine people related to priestesses of old. This is not an authoritarian position, but a position of natural authority. In the reflections of my new friends and compatriots, I began to see who I am for people: someone who listens with interest and compassion; supports people's gifts and loves without judgment; empowers the feminine; asks tough questions in a loving way, allowing people to see themselves and the world newly; creates conversations that would not otherwise happen; engenders community; critiques consumer values; lifts up the sacred in all its forms; expresses gratitude; and celebrates Life Itself, even in the face of difficulties.

I had been residing in Budapest for several months when I realized that I was doing ministry in spite of myself. People said they were having conversations that mattered, conversations they did not usually have. I began to think, maybe ministry is a form of conversation. After all, isn't that what Jesus did with his disciples? Eat, drink, and have conversations?

I was doing what was natural for me, almost as if I couldn't help it. Ministry was what I do because of who I am. Like a GPS, God was calling me back to a path and a ministry suited to my gifts and loves, which was to prove fulfilling and joyous beyond my wildest dreams.

When the opportunity arose to write a proposal for funding to expand and develop what I was already doing, I took the chance, with my heart in my throat. I had no expectations of winning the grant. But, at the urgings of a few colleagues, I wrote: "How could

*Continues next page*

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I not apply for the start-up grant for Swedenborgian Spiritual Entrepreneurship, when that is what I am?" A couple of weeks later I got the word: my proposal had been accepted by PUSH, as the first grantee under the spiritual entrepreneurship grant, and Spirit Without Walls Swedenborgian Ministry (though it had no name as yet) was born.

Now I would have to become intentional and thoughtful, instead of operating by instinct. I asked: What would ministry consist of in a secular society, when there is no church, no congregation, no Sunday morning, and no ready body of people looking for such things? And, as the grant was only for one year, I also had to figure out how to make the ministry self-sufficient financially. Fortunately, PUSH had wisely appointed Rev. Rich Tafel as my coach, so I had someone to think with about this very interesting problem: how to create a new church in the old world. It was, and still is, a challenge, starting with the location.

Hungary is caught between the forces of striving to become a modern European democracy as a recently admitted (2004) member of the EU, and regressive forces pulling to return to authoritarian values<sup>\*</sup>. Twenty-five years after the end of the Russian occupation, the economy is in serious recession. People feel angry and resigned that the promise of capitalism, as seen on "Dallas," was not fulfilled, and many are just trying to survive with rising prices and a shrinking market.

The prime minister, Victor Orban, officially declared Hungary a Christian nation. So the churches, or at least the ones that are officially recognized, are supported by the State. Religion is not so much a matter of personal spiri-

tuality, as it is of institutional affiliation. Consider the gap between belief and belonging, which is the opposite of the gap in the US. Where in the US, you have far more people who profess a belief in God, or a higher power, than those who are actually affiliated with a church or denomination, in Hungary, 56% of the population register officially as Catholic and 16.8% as Protestant, leaving a mere 25.6% unaffili-



Rev. Hunter Roberts promoting the wedding ministry of Spirit Without Walls in Budapest

ated. Yet, when asked in a Gallop poll in Europe, "Does religion occupy an important place in your life?" 59% of Hungarians answered "No." To further confound the statistics, consider that when asked, not about affiliation (which determines what percentage of the State funds each denomination gets), but about religious identification and attendance, the figures change substantially. According to the most recent European Values Study, reported in the *Journal of Contemporary Religion* (Draulans and Halman 2005), 42% of the Hungarian population was un-churched, splitting the population almost evenly between Roman Catholic (40%) and secular (42%).

It would seem to my analysis and observation that people who are religious go to church mostly by rote, rather than for meaning and guidance. Where, then, is the depth dimension?

Where do they find the ground of their being in such a world?

Budapest is a city pulled by past and future. Many of Hungary's traditions, rooted in village life, are being lost and lamented, as the younger people flee the villages and head for the city or beyond. It is noteworthy that many of them go back to their villages on weekends, and those living abroad usually return here to marry, often with their foreign-born betrothed. Thus, educated young people living in cities seem caught in fragmented identities, with strong family ties on the one hand and a paucity of economic opportunities for them here on the other, trying to cope with traditional expectations and the heightened ambitions associated with being part of the EU in a global economy. This is further complicated by the rhetoric and actions of the government raising the specter of a bygone golden age and, many people believe, attempting to return to the past, or worse, turn away from Western Democracy altogether.\*\* After its heralded and celebrated acceptance into the EU less than eight years ago, Hungary seems to be turning away from European economic ties, and ignoring EU sanctions and mandates, going its own way.

Let me share an anecdote, which shaped my understanding of the people. On a summer evening in the outskirts of Budapest, I shared a picnic with two Hungarian women in the hills, overlooking the ruins of a castle where there was to be a jazz concert. It was the birthday of one of the women, so I asked her my standard birthday questions: What are you happy to leave behind from the past year? What did you learn in the past year? What do you want in the coming year?

She seemed baffled by my questions, unable to answer with anything beyond a circumstantial response. "Learn?" she repeated, shaking her head, "I didn't

Continues on page 142

\* Gati, Charles, "Hungary's Backward Slide," New York Times Op Ed, 12 Dec. 2011

\*\* Gati Dec. 2011, op. cit.

## Spirit Without Walls

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learn anything.” She had no reflection on any life lessons, nothing she would do differently if she had the opportunity, no spiritual, psychological insights or even relational reflections. This woman, a lawyer, had had a tough year. She had been unemployed, and had been dealing with various other personal and family challenges. Yet her answers indicated that she attributed her circumstances to nothing but dumb luck, and the same of her future prospects. In other words, she invested neither past nor future with meaning. In her mind, it was all random, and neither she nor any force, divine or otherwise, could change it. She was powerless in the face of circumstance and without hope. It is meaning that elevates suffering and makes it bearable. If there were no meaning, there was nothing to learn and no possibility of regeneration or spiritual evolution. The coming year would be different, or not, depending on chance and the whims of fate.

In literature and in daily life, Hungarians tend to see themselves as victims of cruel, meaningless and capricious fate, under which their nation and people have always suffered, and always will. Simultaneous with the legacy of the past, the forces and phenomena of high tech and other post-modern influences are at work here, especially in the capital city, as everywhere in the Western World, leading to a population dealing with the following assumptions and attitudes, strangely in common with other Millennials in the developed world:

- A distrust of authority, in this case, due to the legacy of forty years of Russian communism, and twenty years of corruption since
- A dependency on authority, due to a highly authoritarian educational system and society

- An especial distrust of religious authority, due to the high number of pastors who succumbed to Communist pressure to inform on their flock
- Fragmentation of identity between the traditional family, the opportunities associated with being part of the European Union, and moving into a global economy
- A legacy of atheism and Biblical illiteracy tending toward nihilism and sense of life being hard and meaningless
- Moral cynicism, grounded in the belief and evidence that everyone else is out for him- or herself
- Media and entertainment industry as a force for moral apathy and decline (Hungary is known as the pornography capital of Europe).

So what can I do here, and how can such a modest effort hope to impact life in such a complex set of problems and forces? Contradictory forces are at play on all levels: a high divorce rate, in a social order in which single women are marginalized and the only accepted unit of participation and trust is the couple and family; a falling birth rate in a society with tremendous pressure to have children; strong family ties keeping young people at home, and an exodus of many of the brightest to other countries where they have greater opportunities to advance their careers.

Add to this a large group of people living here who barely speak the language, have different customs, and very different expectations of life. These are the estimated 40,000 expatriates from all over the world. Some work for international corporations, some are refugees, some are married to Hungarians, many have family ties and ancestors here, some are retired, and some, like me, just came, because we like the life here. There is art and beauty, concerts, covered markets, and little cafes. Also, to be frank, our money goes further here. On the other hand, many of

these people seem to feel cast adrift, without meaning or roots provided by home and family.

I cannot hope to begin to alleviate, or even to understand, the various causes of suffering of all these people, caught in a cyclone of social and economic factors affecting their lives and prospects for the future. Rather, what I hoped to do is to bring a sense of connection with the sacred, so that the people served by this ministry, be they Hungarians or Internationals, could come to know and experience the force of Life Itself as benevolent, a presence providing a sacred context for their lives and existential choices, and redeeming their suffering. In a society where nihilism is the norm, in which a spiritual understanding of ones situation is all but non-existent, I hoped to provide living hope and regeneration. In the truest sense, I hoped to bring faith to the faithless. It was out of that commitment that I designed the ministries of *Spirit Without Walls*. The purpose was to create a Swedenborgian, post-modern ministry serving people who don't go to church, modeling ways to minister to spiritual needs in secular society. ☩

The Rev. Hunter Roberts is a Swedenborgian minister and a D.Min. candidate at the Graduate Theological Union.

Part 2 of this article will appear in the December Messenger.

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## Former Home of Rev. Dorothea Harvey Wins Award

The charming Arts and Crafts home that Rev. Harvey bequeathed to SHS has won *The Boston Globe's* Best Addition of the Year award for the sensitive restoration and addition by the new owners. Go to <http://www.bostonglobe.com/magazine/2012/10/20/best-addition/ny0A1sp6ohGL310VgrpvfJ/story.html>. ☩

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## Minister Transitions

In late 2011, Rev. Junchol Lee was installed as the minister of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church



Rev. Junchol Lee's installation at the SF Church (l to r): search chair Robert Carr, Rev. Lee, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence (SHS dean), Judy Moran (then president)

after serving the Western Canada Conference and the Calgary New Church Society. He resides in San Francisco with his wife and two young children.

Rev. Freeman Schrock retired from ministry after eight years in the Laporte (Indiana) New Church pulpit. (See Rev. Schrock's message and photograph on page 138.)

Stepping into the pulpit at LaPorte New Church, Rev. Kit Billings moved to LaPorte this past summer with his



Rev. Kit Billings and Rev. Susannah Currie

wife and daughter from Omaha, Nebraska, where he had been a hospital chaplain.

Rev. Susannah Currie was installed as pastor of the Bridgewater New

Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts in 2011. She lives with her husband in Barrington, Rhode Island.

Rev. Andy Stinson was called to ministry at the Second Congregational Church of Warren, Maine, in August. The church is an independent Congregational Church that belongs to the National Association of Congregational Christian Churches, a national association of independent congregations that is not affiliated of the United Church of Christ (UCC). Andy was recently in active military service as a chaplaincy captain in Iraq and remains a chaplain in the US Army Reserve. Andy lives in Woolwich, Maine. ☩



Rev. Andy Stinson

## Angels Coming to Urbana University

In *Company with Angels: Seven Rediscovered Tiffany Windows*, the unique exhibit of seven stained glass windows, was created by Tiffany and Company in 1903 for the Church of the New Jerusalem in Cincinnati. In 1964, the church was razed to make room for a highway; the windows were rescued and then stored in members' homes for decades. A nationwide fundraising effort in the nineties allowed the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos in West Chester, Pennsylvania, to buy the windows and save them.

In 2005, when the widows were confirmed to be Tiffany artwork, the nonprofit organization, In Company with Angels, Inc., was formed to fin-

ish the restoration and eventually share the windows with others.

Urbana University and the Miller Center for Visual Arts will host an exhibit of the windows from November 10, 2012–December 30, 2013, in the Swedenborg Memorial Library on campus in Urbana, Ohio. The exhibit and a variety of symposia, programs, and tours are open to the public.

On Saturday, November 10, 2012, at 7:00 PM., Rev. Susannah Currie, pastor of the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, will present a program on the history of the windows and the In Company with Angels organization. The exhibit will officially open to the

public at 8:00 PM.

The grand opening weekend will continue with a public presentation entitled "Angel Music" by Reverend Ken Turley, president of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem, on Sunday, November 11, 3–4 PM, in the library. Following the presentation, Revs. Currie and Turley will be available to answer questions.

A full schedule of the hours of the exhibit and programs are listed at [www.urbana.edu/resources/community/angels.html](http://www.urbana.edu/resources/community/angels.html).

For information, contact Julie McDaniel, director of Library Services at Urbana University at 937-484-1337 or by email at [jmcdaniel@urbana.edu](mailto:jmcdaniel@urbana.edu). ☩

### 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.

## New Swedenborgian Outreach Website

BY LEE WOOFENDEN

You are invited to visit "Spiritual Insights for Everyday Life" at: <http://leewoof.org/>.

The goal of this website is to reach out to ordinary non-Swedenborgians with spiritual insights and inspiration that will help in negotiating the questions, issues, and struggles that we face every day during our spiritual apprenticeship here on earth.

As stated on its "About" page, "Spiritual Insights for Everyday Life" provides new material at least once a week offering:

- Satisfying answers to big (and small) life questions
- Spiritual viewpoints on current events
- A deeper look at popular culture
- How-to articles on practical spiritual living
- A Christian perspective that will engage your heart and your brain

Please stop by and browse for a while. If you like what you see, you can sign up to receive updates when new articles are posted.

Everything at the "Spiritual Insights for Everyday Life" is written as if the reader knows nothing at all about Swedenborg or the Bible. It approaches Swedenborgian and Biblical topics from the angles of media events, popular culture, stories in the news, life questions, and practical issues of spiritual living. It doesn't require readers to know a specialized Swedenborgian vocabulary. Instead of expecting people to come to us conceptually, it brings our beliefs to people where they are.

When you talk to friends and family, neighbors and co-workers, does the conversation ever turn to spiritual issues? Do you wish there were something you could give them to read, or some website you could send them to that would really click for them?

My hope is that the expanding library of contemporary articles at the Spiritual Insights for Everyday Life website will give you a place to send your friends where they can learn about our beliefs in an approachable, enjoyable, and practical way.

The Rev. Lee woofenden is a Swedenborgian minister living in Middleboro, Massachusetts.

