



## Christmas in Wilmington Means Lobsters Annual Sale at Church of the Holy City Becomes Tradition

BY JERRY POOLE

**A** lobster dinner the week after a huge turkey dinner? A stunning wreath for your front door?

There are many in Wilmington, friends of the church as well as members, who say they begin their holiday season with their participation in the “migration of the lobsters” from Friendship, Maine, to the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware. When they receive their flyer or email, once again, announcing that “The Lobsters are Coming,” they know that Thanksgiving is near and that Chanukah and Christmas are not far behind.

It all began over thirty years ago. In 1980 the first one hundred lobsters travelled south in Susan and Jerry Poole’s VW van. The delicious specimens of the *Homarus Americanus* species created a fan base that clamored for more lobsters and other seafood from the Muscongus Bay region of mid-coast Maine. By 2007 the migration had grown to over two tons of seafood, composed mostly of live lobsters, sea crabs, clams and mussels, and frozen lobster and crab meat accompanied by several hundred Balsam Fir wreaths. Each year the “goodies from Maine” have been delivered to and sold from the Church of the Holy City, at Pennsylvania Avenue



Max Stroh, grandson of Millie and Randy Laakko, and John Kalmer fill an order

and Broom Street, during its Annual Lobster and Wreath Sale—always the Friday and Saturday following the four day Thanksgiving weekend. This year, again, the proceeds benefited the church, the Emmanuel Dining Room, and Contact Delaware.

It’s a festival; because it is certainly more than a sale, many even refer to it as the Lobster Festival. On Friday of the sale, two trucks with trailers arrive at the church. Over the next several hours, the Genthners, Leroy and Mary, and their two sons, Kyle and John, with other friends from Friendship, work with church members to unload the seafood and bundles of

wreaths, and set up the cloister, which runs from the church tower door back to the parish hall, for weighing and packaging the seafood and even cooking lobsters, for those who would prefer their critters to be fully at peace before heading home.

Inside the church is bustling as well. Pies and cookies have been baked and are now being carefully and artistically arranged on tables. Throughout the fall, several individuals have created Christmas tree, table and windowsill ornaments that will enhance the holiday spirit in area homes. Maple syrup,

and . . . oh, the many varieties of cakes and candies from so many kitchens . . . are being placed on tables while a fire is being built in the fireplace at the end of the long parish hall.

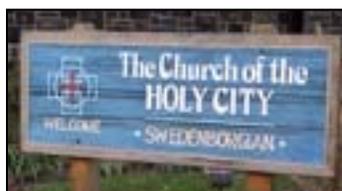
It’s the workers at the far end of the hall, those under the tall lead and glass windows, look-

ing down at the green balsam wreaths they’re holding as they decorate them with pine cones both large and small, dried flowers, holly, sea shells—whatever the cheerful customer designs and desires—they’re the ones who will keep the pulse of activity going within the parish hall this afternoon and eve-

*Continues on page 153*



Millie and Randy Laakko ready for action



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It’s Elemental, My Dear SPLATz! • Book Review: *Starting Science from God*  
2012 Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Association • Online Community News  
General Council Fall Meeting • Spirit Without Walls: Part 2 • A Pilgrimage to Iona

## Letter from the President

Dear Friends,

As we enter the Advent Season, I wish that this season will bring a rebirth of Christ's spirit within you and among your family and friends. May the peace, joy, and wonder of the blessed event be with you always.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

## Bath Church Joins Convention

The Bath Church of the New Jerusalem has been welcomed back into the Maine Association, in the hope that, following the lead of Gathering Leaves, it may serve as a little bridge between the General Convention and the General Church. It will be spending the coming year in a process of self-study, in the light of the vision of the "new church" of Revelation 21, with the goal of issuing a call for a settled pastor within the next two years. ☩

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## The Path of Integrity, a New Church Journey Program

The newest New Church Journey program will challenge participants to become a community of people committed to working together to become more honest with themselves and each other, to be kinder, to be more compassionate, and to pursue their dreams. The biblical story that it follows is taken from Genesis 1–35 and covers the powerful story of Joseph as he suffers abuse by his own brothers, is falsely accused, enslaved, and imprisoned. Still, he overcomes with dignity and a conviction of God's presence. On another level, this story has long been known as a foretelling of Jesus' life on earth, facing hardships with truth and compassion, and ultimately breaking down barriers that had separated people from God. The story is also about us. It depicts an internal restoration. It shows how to break down the barriers between God and ourselves. It reminds us that when we feel broken, when our dreams have been thrown in a pit, or when we're enslaved by some addiction, hope is only a prayer away.

The framework includes individual study, worship, and small group meetings. Materials are available for purchase on a congregational or individual level. Individuals can join online groups if a local group is not available.

Participants will have the opportunity to watch live discussion of the weekly material on line. Each Sunday evening, beginning with the launch date, the authors (Sasha Silverman and Rev. John Odhner) will be available on a Google+ Hangout to discuss the week's most intriguing themes in greater depth. For those who can't make the hangout, the sessions will be recorded and available on line.

There will be a coordinated launch on February 3, 2013. If your group is interested in participating or you want to learn more about The Path of Integrity program or order a copy of the workbook, go to [www.newchurchjourney.org](http://www.newchurchjourney.org). ☩

## Church Calendar

- November 10–December 30: *In Company with Angels* exhibit • Urbana University • Urbana, OH
- December 27 –30: SCYL Winter Retreat (ages 13–18) • Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center • Almont, MI
- May 4–5, 2013: SHS Board Meeting • Berkeley, CA

## the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America  
Published monthly except July and August by the Communications Support Unit of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America), Ken Turley, president.

December 2012

Volume 234, No. 10 Whole Number 5375

Editor: Herbert Ziegler

Design and production: Herbert Ziegler

Copy editor: Robert Leith

Proofing: Beki Greenwood & Renée Helenbrecht

Communications Support Unit: Ros Taylor, Steve Sanchez, & Kristina Madjerac,

Reproduction: Gnomon Copy, Cambridge, MA

### Editorial Address:

Herb Ziegler, *The Messenger*  
2 Hancock Place  
Cambridge, MA 02139

Tel: 617.491.5181

Email: [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org)

### Business and Subscription Address:

The Messenger, Central Office  
11 Highland Avenue  
Newtonville, MA 02460

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org)

Subscriptions: free online subscription at [www.swedenborg.org](http://www.swedenborg.org). Printed and mailed to US address, \$20/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$35/year; single copies, \$2.00. Libraries, prisoners, free. Other requests, write Central Office.

**Deadline for submissions** is six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the Communications Support Unit, or the Swedenborgian Church.

## A Pilgrimage to Iona

BY ROBERT REBER



The Isle of Iona, off the northwest coast of Scotland, has attracted pilgrims for more than two millennia. It is a place, described by George MacLeod, where the veil between heaven and earth is very thin. This windswept island with its thirteenth-century abbey and nunnery and rich history of Celtic Christianity embodies the sacredness and oneness of all creation in ways that are overpowering, deeply personal, and communal. Today, it is a vibrant center of renewal attracting visitors and pilgrims from around the world who come to experience the beauty and wildness, the solitude and community, and the inexplicable and inextricable presence of God in all creation.

Responding to an invitation from Bexley Hall and Seabury Western Seminars to join in a week-long pilgrimage to Iona, a group of laity and clergy travelled together by air and land and sea to reach this remote island in the Hebrides. We stayed at the St. Columba Hotel with fabulous views of the sea and surrounding islands and the ancient abbey next door, which has been restored and houses year-round members of the Iona Community headquartered in Glasgow.

Under the able leadership of John Philip Newell, renowned Celtic theologian, scholar, poet, liturgist, and former warden of the Iona Community, we explored the theme of "A New Harmony: the Spirit, the Earth, and the Human Soul." His wife Ali, for many years a spiritual director and now a campus minister at the University of Edinburgh, joined us and provided leadership in learning music from

the Celtic tradition and movement to ground us in body and spirit.

Our time together each day was marked by times of silent prayer in the St. Michael Chapel in the early morning and early evening where we sat in candlelight to keep watch and listen for the new harmony within and beyond ourselves. Then we gathered for meals in the hotel dining room where we shared our daily experiences through conversation, storytelling and laughter while enjoying food from local gardens and pastures prepared by a fabulous chef and staff.

Morning and evening prayer services within the soaring walls of the abbey were filled with worshippers from the island, the MacLeod Center, and our small hotel named to honor St. Columba, who arrived on these shores in the sixth century. Most days, we heard presentations by John Philip Newell and then engaged in quiet reflection and discussion in small groups. During lunchtimes and early afternoons we could explore the island, stroll through the gardens and the village, visit historic sites, and even take naps.

On Wednesday we participated in a pilgrimage over the island that was led by John Philip. With packed lunches, rain gear, and colorful layers of clothing, we trudged as a motley crew along gravel roads and dirt paths, through pastures dotted with sheep, and over rocky hills with beautiful vistas of land and sea and the heavens filled with shifting clouds and rainbows that seemed to bless our journey. We stopped for meditation, prayer, and Celtic chants on the bay where Columba and his monks arrived; at the cross of St. Martin erected in the eighth century; at the Augustinian nunnery ruins built at about the same time as the monastery, for which no written record remains; at the chapel of St. Oran, which

is the oldest building on the island and named after the first Columban monk to die; and the Hermit's Cell, now only a secluded ring of stones said to mark the place where Columba sought refuge from the busyness of life. The pilgrimage was an experience of affirming the oneness of all things, how matter and spirit truly matter, and how we yearn for the true harmony that is at the heart of all creation.

Drawing on sources from the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim traditions, John Philip helped us to explore and reflect upon the essential harmony of all things: the brokenness of the harmony in ourselves, church life, the human community, and the planet itself, and the rebirth of the essential harmony that may be reborn in new and radical ways. We were challenged to "bring into relationship what has been broken, to have the courage to feel the brokenness, and to move into transformative action." He reminded us that the future of hope has not been decided and that we may have a part in shaping it. We reflected on the resources available to us, what gifts we have to give, and the deepest treasures that we have to bring for the healing of the world.

At our closing celebration on the beach, with the sun shining in full glory, the wind blowing, the sky and the sea as blue as ever, we chanted, "The blessings of heaven, the blessings of earth, the blessings of sea and of sky. On those we love this day and on every human family the gifts of heaven, the gifts of earth, the gifts of sea and of sky." John Philip reminded us more than once that we are asked to take up the cross, to remember that we come from the One who is our true center, that the way is one of love, that we are called to make whole and holy all of creation, to bear the cost of this moment in time. ☩

The Rev. Robert E. Reber is a trustee of SHS and a former dean of Auburn Theological Seminary.

## 2012 Annual Meeting of the Pacific Coast Association

BY Robert Carr

The San Francisco Church was very pleased to host the 2012 annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Association of the New Jerusalem (PCA) over the last weekend of October. Moreover, we were pleased with its success, from the programming to the food, from the hotel accommodations to the home stays with parishioners (home stays that many out-of-towners took advantage of), and from the abundant bonhomie seen and felt wherever one looked. And none of this would have been possible without the generous support and motivation of PCA itself and of all its members and friends who took the time to attend this annual event in the midst of very busy lives. Bravo!



Although the self-evident purpose of the annual gathering is to meet the corporate requirement of an annual meeting, a good look at the actual weekend in light of PCA's stated mission and function is heartening. Paraphrasing the PCA handbook, PCA's mission is to promote the union of societies and isolated members, to promote mutual consultation and cooperation between member churches and ministries in helping one another (and our fellow man) to know the Lord, to draw attention to the study of Swedenborg, and to distribute grants to member churches and recognized ministries for their programs that promote the Swedenborgian message and encourage growth in these same churches and

ministries.

How well did we do? Well, there is no question of whether or not "union" was achieved, as many churches, ministries, and isolated members were all well represented. The following churches were in attendance: Puget Sound, Hillside Community Church (El Cerrito), San Francisco, Wayfarers Chapel, San Diego, The New Church of the Southwest Desert, and the Swedenborgian Church of North America, represented by the president, Reverend Ken Turley. Many ministries and ministers were represented by the attendance of: Revs. David Brown, Erni Martin, Harvey Tafel, Jonathan Mitchell, Junchol Lee, Kathy Speas, Paul Martin, Rachel Rivers, Sky Paradise, Steve Sanchez, and Susan Turley. And the isolated members were more than brought into union by the attendance of over forty lay members and friends of all the above-listed churches and ministries. Everyone was quite clearly cooperating, consulting, and delving into issues and talk both Swedenborgian and Christian, coming closer to the Lord through abundant intellectual intercourse as well as through the fellowship and intimacy that abounded. PCA grants were approved for three worthy ministries to promote their message and growth.

Attention was drawn to the study of Swedenborg by the Saturday morning sessions presented and facilitated by our seminary, the Swedenborgian House of Studies, as led by Reverend Dr. Jim Lawrence, professors Devin Zuber and Inese Radzins, and student Yudai Hori. Devin Zuber presented his "Sermon in Stones," a talk that excavated

the hidden presence of Swedenborgian thought behind the history of American environmentalism, from Johnny Appleseed's early proto-conservation on the Ohio frontier to the circle of Swedenborgian artists and writers in the background of the Sierra Club at the close of the nineteenth century. It was a beautiful blending of Swedenbor-



gian theology, historical literature, and environmentalism. His talk was followed by two breakout sessions: Inese Radzins' "Nones on the Rise," a lively workshop

in which participants took a look at making sense of the "new" American religious landscape as presented in a recent survey by the Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion & Public Life and Yudai Hori and Jim Lawrence's "Heaven and Earth: A Swedenborgian View of Ecology," an exploration of Sweden-



borgian eco-spirituality. Interestingly, North Point gallery owner Alfred Harrison's Friday night welcome presentation with its focus on William Keith, his art, the Reverend Joseph Worcester, and Worcester's building of our very church in 1895, dovetailed beautifully into Saturday morning and Devin Zuber's presentation.

During Saturday afternoon's board meeting, besides taking care of business, we said thank you to Lon Elmer, outgoing treasurer, and to Mare-

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ta Tafel, outgoing vice-president, both after many years of dedicated service. Current members Robert Carr and Helen Barler were elected as treasurer and vice-president of the board respectively. Two new members were elected



to the board: Sky Paradise of Southwest Desert and Michael Robbins of Puget Sound.

Saturday evening wound down with a provocative session by Barbara Pieper of Wayfarers, “Creating You—Becoming Co-creators of Ourselves,” and storytelling and Kirtan chanting in the sanctuary with Unni de Presno of Wayfarers, where we heard the ancient Indian tale “Ganesha Goes to Lunch” and, amongst other chants, chanted



“Om Gum Ganapataye Namaha” 108 times! It was back to Swedenborg and the church on Sunday morning as the Reverend David Brown facilitated the live-

ly and very well attended discussion, “How Are We Advancing the Descent of the Holy City?” This was followed by a moving communion worship service, led by Reverend Junchol Lee, with Reverend Ken Turley delivering the spiritual message and Reverend Rachel Rivers doing the communion

## SF Church Hosts California Retreat

BY MARETA TAFEL

The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, with financial help from Pacific Coast Association, hosted a family-friendly holiday spiritual extravaganza over the Memorial Day weekend (May 25–28). The setting at St. Dorothy’s Rest in Camp Meeker, California (in Sonoma County), was peaceful, serene, and soul-enriching. It was a fabulous experience. The theme, “Playing in God’s Garden,” came to life among the redwoods of Bohemian Valley.

Each morning, afternoon, and evening had an exceptional variety of session choices. Some examples included morning S-T-R-E-T-C-H, meet and greet, matins, arts and crafts, dream work, spiritual/musical play, campfire singing with s’mores, vespers, Sunday worship, excursions, children’s activities, etc. Members of the San Francisco

liturgy. And all this was followed up by the last of many fine meals, a buffet luncheon in the parish house.

Special thanks to the following: the PCA Board; the SF Church staff (Dana Owens, Jenny Son, Charles Calhoun, and Rev. Junchol Lee); the kitchen team (Danielle Orthwein, Larysa, Daria Liubimsky, and Emily Murray); Alfred Harrison and his wonderful opening night address; Barbara Pieper, Unni de Presno, and Carol Whitney for their presentations; the compost crews; the worship team (Revs. Junchol Lee, Ken Turley, Rachel Rivers, Jonathan Mitchell, Kathy Speas, Sky Paradise, and Paul Martin) for their

and Hillside churches provided leadership. There was even a session about Swedenborg’s “Garden of Theology,” led by Rev. Junchol Lee.

Oh, did I mention the food? One

word—glorious. We were served buffet-style with lots of choices for lots of diverse needs. The cheese-filled ravioli Alfredo was my personal favorite. The dining room has windows overlooking the Coastal Red-



woods, so it was an

inspirational place to share mealtimes. We ended with a planning session for next year. The group wants to expand participation which could include the whole US and Canada. One of the pluses was having families attend. It was a joy having the youngsters present.

Please plan on joining us next year for another wonderful Memorial Day weekend retreat in the paradise that is Northern California. ☪

deeply moving Sunday worship; Bette McDonnell for registration; our seminary, SHS, (Rev. Jim Lawrence, Devin Zuber, Inese Radzins, and Yudai Hori); Laurie Carlson for breakfasts; the field trip leaders (Joy Barnitz, Andrea LoPinto, and Robert Carr); and Carey Smith, Devon Carberry, Carolyn O’Brien, Bob, Nancy Foegelle, and Nick Leras for some table heaving, chair moving, and table setting; Robert Carr for housing five guests, emergency store runs, late night chopping and food prep, late night laundry runs; and to everyone who was in the right place at the right time (that means everyone who attended). ☪

## It's Elemental, My Dear SPLATz!

### The October Tween Retreat in LaPorte

BY LORI STEINHISER

**W**ater, Earth, Air, Fire, and nineteen SPLATz (Super Powered Lovable Almost Teens). That's a lot of energy to pack into one weekend at Manna House, the LaPorte New Church Spiritual Growth Center, on the last weekend of October; but, it was done with much joy and success thanks to a terrific group of kids, fabulous leadership by denominational youth director Kurt Fekete, and a dedicated, hard-working team of youth workers from both near and far.

There were squeals and laughter and hugs all around as kids trickled, and then poured, into Manna House Friday night. Once everyone was there, and after some much needed race around time in the empty parking lot we take over twice a year, the group gathered for a fun ice-breaker, sharing who they were, where they were from, and which of the four basic elements, water, earth, air, or fire, they most identified with. Our retreat theme was "The Four Basic Elements: Water, Earth, Air and Fire," and we wanted to embrace and study these four elements as often and in as many ways as we could.

From the ice-breaker we merged into our first session where we reviewed the four classical elements. We heard about how the ancient Greeks believed that everything in existence was comprised of these four fundamental substances and that a god ruled over each one (Zeus with air, Hera with earth, Ha-

des with fire, and Nestis/Persephone with water). We learned why these elements are still important today, and some history, divinity, and symbolism about the elements (the subsequent sessions were each entirely dedicated to a particular element). Much of the rest of the night was spent figuring out sleeping arrangements (trickier as the size of our group grows), snacking, playing sardines, and hanging out.

Losing the space we normally use for crafts and meals to Rev. Kit's office (challenging but worth it to have Kit!)



The Splatiz group with faces painted to represent their favorite element, water, earth, air or fire (face paint helper Holly Bauer back, 3rd from right)

and having a few events to work around made us a bit of a nomadic group, but creativity, flexibility, and teamwork made it all happen. After a continental style breakfast, we traipsed over to the Fellowship Hall for Kurt's session on the element water. We learned facts about water and talked about how when we read about water in the Bible it relates to either truth or falsity. We looked at Bible stories about water, like Noah and the ark (Genesis 7:17-21) and water from the rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:3-6). We talked about how these stories are meaningful to us today.

The rest of the day, in various locations, went something like this: play, session, craft, meal, play, session, craft, play, session, craft, meal, play, library trip, meal, bonfire, hayride, worship service, moving up to SCYL service for our thirteen-year-olds, and collapse to try and get some rest in before Sunday morning service and a final session, with rousing games of charades and Catch Phrase sprinkled in liberally. Whew. It was great!

We learned so many facts and so much spiritual truth about each element throughout the retreat. With earth, we discussed the Bible story of the Sower (Mark 4:1-9) and how we can be like the different kinds of earth. We can be like rocky soil, thorny weeds

or we can be like good fertile ground where truths take hold, grow and flourish into a rewarding crop of useful actions. We learned that air, which is usually described as wind in the Bible, relates to heavenly or hellish influences and used stories such as Moses parting the Red Sea with a strong east wind (Exodus 14:21) to show how the heavens can drive away falsity and deceit. The last element we discussed was fire, and we discovered that fire is the Lord's divine love. The kids were fascinated with fire; its unpredictable na-

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## Prayers by Rev. Jenn

### Water

Dear God,

We thank you for the ability to learn and grow from your truth, history and collected memories from all time. May we be mindful of what we give back to your seas and oceans—knowing that future generations will drink it in.

### Earth

Dear God,

We thank you for the strong foundation that provides for our thinking, intelligence and our character. May we do our best to be good stewards of your planet in order to help nurture and develop who we are.

### Air

Dear God,

We thank you for the breath of life that creates and sustains all of your creation—including us. May we do our best to be mindful that when the wind blows it carries with it our thoughts and actions—both good and bad.

### Fire

Dear God,

We thank you for the love and wisdom that lives within all of us. May we remember to be responsible for the fire we create—the love and wisdom we share with the world.

ture, destructive potential, and blazing allure instills passion and excitement in youthful hearts. We illustrated the ardor of fire with the story of Baal, the false God (1 Kings 18:22-39), and how the false prophets of Baal could

## The SCYL 2012 Winter Retreat at Almont New Church Assembly.

**December 27–30, 2012**

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

### Our retreat theme: Oremus: Practically Praying

"Long before Moses parted the Red Sea, before Buddha described the path toward Nirvana, before Christ died on the cross, and before Mohammed revealed the message of the Qur'an, there was prayer. When men and women were created, they stood in awe at the life that had sprung up before their eyes. This mystery, this curiosity, could only lead in one direction, and that was to prayer. Consequently, prayer came to predate organized religion and serves today as a common thread among all of us. No matter what our different faith traditions might happen to be, the fact remains that we share this most common element with one another." (An excerpt from an essay by James P. Moore, Jr., Author, *One Nation Under God: The History of Prayer in America*, Doubleday Religion, November 1, 2005)

Oremus is the Latin word for "Let us pray." At this retreat we will look at how to make prayer more meaningful and practical in your life. We will look in depth at the Lord's Prayer and flush out new meaning, comfort and power in the words. We will discover ways that other faiths and cultures pray and how we can find a deeper and more vital connection with the Divine through the practice of both conventional and unconventional prayer. Come to this retreat and find simple new ways to communicate with God. See you there!

not bring fire to their altar while Elijah could. The Lord's love is always burning as love inside those that look for his guidance and listen to and obey his commandments.

Rev. Jenn Tafel wrote prayers of thanksgiving for each element to conclude each session (see sidebar).

Many thanks to Dwayne for the hayrides and Tam for sodas at the Halloween Party, and to youth workers Rev. Jenn Tafel, Rachael Sbrocco, Kate Pruiett, and Heather Guzik for

cooking, cleaning, crafting, supervising, and loving these SPLATz! A special thank -you to surprise helper Holly Bauer who led the Elements Make-up activity and good-naturedly allowed herself to be decorated. As always, with much gratitude, thank you to Kurt for his devotion to the youth of our church! We are so lucky to have him.

Can't wait for the next SPLATz retreat in January! ☩

Lori Steinhiser is a member of the LaPorte New Church.

## Book Review

# Starting Science from God

REVIEWED BY JIM LAWRENCE

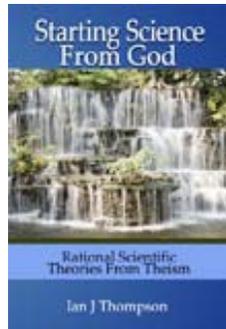
**Starting Science from God: Rational Scientific Theories from Theism**

Ian J. Thompson  
Eagle Pearl Press

To my knowledge there are only two Swedenborgian Ph.D. physicists alive who have worked as college professors: Gregory Baker, now retired from full-time teaching at Bryn Athyn College, and Ian Thompson (see end of article). Both have published a volume on physics with Cambridge University Press (Thompson's is titled *Nuclear Reactions in Astrophysics*, 2009), among dozens of other publications.

Scientists for the most part assume the universe arises from physical processes only and do not permit theoretical consideration of a proposed causal force lying outside of or beyond the physical universe itself. Seeking to open a fresh line of inquiry in the "science and theology conversation" into the basic questions of purpose (if any) and direction of the universe and of human life, Thompson has been developing a framework he calls theistic science. His approach explores models of physical science that emerge when one begins with postulates from theology, instead of with accumulated facts of science, and then sees how it correlates with natural science. To reductionists of all stripes but especially to that legion who are professional scientists, he offers this challenge: "A change needed is for science to give up assuming the causal closure of the universe" (p. 26).

In *Starting Science from God: Rational Scientific Theories from Theism*, Thompson invites his readers into an adventurous romp through historical theology, philosophy of nature, contemporary physics, and (Swedenbor-



gian) theosophy along the way toward an interpretation of modern physics that more than accommodates visionary spirituality. He creates a theological manifesto driven by a core postulate that proposes love as the fundamental substance and propensity of all that is. Since theology is primarily concerned with the nature of human life as it relates to God, Thompson also incorporates modern psychology as a critical element in a picture framing both

**A change needed is for science to give up assuming the causal closure of the universe.**

modern science and good theology. *In nuce*, Thompson argues that from known properties of physical materials and their dispositions one can quite plausibly project a multi-level structure of reality held together by a divine love that involves a human consciousness contemplating questions of meaning and purpose and evolving upwardly into creative participation of that love. Of its six parts two are titled "A Scientific Theism" and "Theistic Science," which provides an indication of how the author angles into his subject from both sides.

Even though *Starting Science from God* often enters the abstractions basic both to philosophy of nature and of God, the book is written in a clear and comprehensible style. In its 300 pages one encounters dozens of important thinkers from Plato and Aristotle

to such modern titans as Alfred North Whitehead, Roger Penrose, and Nicholas Saunders. Swedenborg is represented explicitly in several places by direct reference, but implicitly the Swedish theosopher is everywhere and undergirds Thompson's entire theological manifesto.

The princely payoff in reading Thompson's quite courageous book lies in the opportunity to think about some very profound matters in the science and theology conversation in the deft hands of an esteemed nuclear physicist who also happens to be of Swedenborgian persuasion. *Starting Science from God* is not what one would call an easy read, but it qualifies nevertheless still as a beginners guide to a the big "religion and science" conversation and many of its component parts.

I highly recommend buying not just one copy of this book, but more to share with others. For a spiritual tradition that has so often boasted of its compatibility with modern science, we should all be immensely grateful to Ian Thompson for explaining resourcefully and insightfully why this is in fact true. ☩



About the author: Ian J. Thompson is a nuclear physicist in the Nuclear Theory and Modeling Group at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California, having until 2006 been professor of Physics at the University of Surrey, UK. His research deals with coupled-channels and few-body models for nuclear structure and reactions, especially concerning halo nuclei. He is a fellow of the Institute of Physics.

Dr. Thompson maintains an excellent website for Starting Science from God that continues commentary on many issues and offers a blog: [beginningtheisticscience.com](http://beginningtheisticscience.com).)

The Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, is dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion.

## Online Community News

### Christmas On line

Can't make it to a church to celebrate Christmas? Join us on line!

- December 23: A special Sunday service on miracles and angels will be posted. We'll have a live prayer service and fellowship hour on line.
- December 24: Check our website for a Christmas Eve service you can download and use at home.
- December 25 Check our website for a Christmas Day service you can download and use at home.

### 2013 Pledge Drive Begins!

We thank all of you who contributed in 2012. We are now accepting donations and pledges for 2013. Please consider a pledge.

### Why pledge to SwedenborgianCommunity.org?

**Prayer and Money:** We often don't

take to God in prayer how we will spend our money. Yet God can give us guidance on setting the priorities in our lives.

**Swedenborgian Community.org and Congregations:** Are we an on line church congregation? Yes and no. Like a congregation, we are a community of people who worship together and are on a faith journey together. We are an outreach ministry of the Swedenborgian Church of North America but rather than offering "membership" we have over 600 "registrants" who use of the features of our site!

**Financial Reality of Swedenborgian Community.Org:** We received a grant from our denomination for 2012 for 81% of our \$26,170 budget and we had many generous contributors from the community that enabled us meet our budget. Thank *you!*

We created a bare bones budget of

\$26,000 for 2013 and received a grant for 65%) of this. Therefore, we need contributions (\$9,000) from our community to provide our weekly worships and pastoral care and education in 2013.

### Why Do Spiritual Communities Have Pledges?

One reason is financial. A pledge allows us to anticipate our annual income and prepare a realistic budget. The other reason is spirituality. For many people, pledging something to their faith community is a spiritual discipline.

Pledging is an important decision, spiritually and financially. We only ask that you pray and bring God into your process of making decisions about giving.

We very much appreciate your support of this unique pastor-led online spiritual Swedenborgian community.

To make a contribution, visit our Collections Plate page. ☩

## Christmas Lobsters

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ning and all day Saturday.

The sanctuary too is being prepared for the event. At the back of the church are the tables at which folks, who have pre-ordered their seafood, will be greeted from a long line stretching from below the chancel and running down the aisle. Each will get a confirmation of their order and while the order is being fulfilled they'll head to the parish hall to shop.

So many come early and linger. In fact, a number have been gathering over the last several hours. It's easy to understand why. The excitement, the congeniality, the Christmas music, both live and recorded, and the aromas. And, the beauty of our church building itself. It's truly festive; it's truly heavenly. As a working church member, you may not be able to rest un-

til tomorrow evening or Sunday; as a guest enjoying the experience for the first time, or once again, you can quietly sit in a front pew, focus on the scene of the First Christmas so beautifully depicted in the lower portion of



Darren Stroh introduces some lobsters prior to their sale

the stained glass window just above the altar, and rejoice in and feel the Advent. Your heart and senses will tell you something good is happening.

Everything is ready! The cashiers are at their places. The stacks of wreaths in the front yard are manned and already several shoppers are choosing the cir-

cles of sweet smelling evergreens they will have decorated. Steam is pouring from the big cooker, set up on the grass level just outside the cloister; the first boil of lobsters has only fifteen minutes to go. Folks are entering through the front door and assembling in the aisle of the sanctuary; others are weaving through the crates of crustaceans and bivalve mollusks, asking questions of the lobstermen on their way to the marvelously prepared parish hall. The fire is roaring, someone is playing carols on the church organ, mulled cider is being poured and passed out along with samples of cookies; and the many guests are talking with one another, most for the first time since last year's Lobster and Wreath Sale.

Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays. ☩

The Rev. Jerry Poole is a member of the Wilmington Church of the Holy City.

# Spirit Without Walls:

## Spiritual Entrepreneurship in Budapest

### Part 2: The Spirit Without Walls Ministry

Part 1 of this article, "A New Home and a New Ministry," appeared in the November 2012 Messenger.

BY HUNTER ROBERTS

Instead of beginning with the structures of church, like Sunday worship and study groups, I considered the forms for ministry from the perspective of people's spiritual needs. I began with the belief that people without formal religious affiliations have the same needs for meaning, community, usefulness, values, spiritual development, comfort, and hope that people have always had. Examining the functions of a healthy church, I asked, what spiritual needs are being met through the various ministries of such a church?

A ministry of any sort, with or without a church, might offer people

- Comfort when afflicted and challenge when becoming complacent
- Ceremonies (weddings, baby blessings, and funerals) to mark life's passages
- Hope, through a connection with the sacred
- Spiritual community and service
- Teachings and pathways for spiritual regeneration
- A safe place to wrestle with questions and doubts
- A way to make sense of their lives
- A way to celebrate Life Itself
- An opportunity to reflect on what matters
- Meaning and value in living
- Conversations that make a difference

The next step was to develop ministries, or activities and offerings, that would fulfill these functions outside of church walls. We (Rev. Rich Tafel, my

project coach, and I) spent the first few months choosing the name and developing the mission, working out a strategic plan for financial sustainability, and forming strategic partnerships and alliances to help me reach my goals.

I met with many groups and spent much of my time producing community events, getting my name and the name of the ministry into the public eye, and experimenting with various forms of ministry to see what would succeed. I was like a cook throwing pasta at the wall, seeing what would stick. Rich called this market testing and pointed out that it is a necessary and important part of all entrepreneurial ventures. He also pointed out that the first priority must be the financial sustainability of the ministry.

The key activities in the first year of building this ministry were: 1) Visioning and discerning, 2) Market testing, 3) Networking and promotion, and 4) Systematizing. Certain activities predominated in each quarter. I have made them sequential here, in spite of overlap of activities in each of the phases, for purposes of intelligibility.

#### Phase One: Vision and Mission, July through September

I looked for a name that would describe what I felt called to and would fit with Swedenborgian theology in understandable language, and a mission statement that would fit on the back of a T-shirt. I did not want to sound like a church but I did want the spiritual nature of what I was offering to be evident. I determined that the ministry would be called *Spirit Without Walls*, referring to the Holy Spirit moving among us, around and through walls, whether church walls or the walls be-

tween us. I thought this fit our theology of the New Church, where the temple has no walls in the Holy City.

The mission statement took longer, but finally I honed a simple statement: *Celebrate the Body, Feed the Soul, Awaken the Spirit*. This fit with everything I hoped to do, from holding beautiful, celebratory communion dinners to having theological discussion groups and doing spiritual counseling and coaching.

I also had the task set before me of managing, in a year's time, to make such a ministry financially sustainable. With Rich's help and prodding, I worked out a financial plan to make sufficient income by year's end that I would not need further funding from the denomination.

#### Phase Two: Market Testing, September through December

I tried many things before determining what would be the key support factors. Some of these are alive and well, some have faltered and have to be re-started or discontinued, and some are still in the planning stages. The first ministries that I decided to plant were the following:

- **Feminine Spirit** teaches and empowers women to live with beauty, courage, and passion, bringing the feminine to a world dying of expediency.
- **Weddings and Sacred Rites** designs and performs meaningful weddings and other rites of passage designed to lift up love, commitment, and a sense of the sacred.
- **Written commentaries** in the *Huffington Post*, *Interrelo Newsletter* and *THINK Central Europe*, reframing personal and social issues in a spiritual and moral light. *THINK* has since closed, but a new online women's magazine was recently started by the former editor of the most popular print women's magazine,

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and I shall be a featured columnist, writing with a spiritual perspective.

- **The Common Table** feeds the soul through inclusive celebratory meals, offering the sacraments and creating community, plenty, and joy in the midst of alienation and scarcity. God is having a party, and everyone is invited!
- **Hallelujah Flash Mob Choir of Angels** creates moments of worship and awe when and where it is least expected, awakening us to wonder at the mystery of Life Itself.
- **Soul Counseling** works through the body and mind to open and regenerate the soul.

The biggest problem I faced was a sort of apathy about spiritual needs and events that feed the soul. Even though people enjoyed them immensely when they attended and found them enriching, they did not directly enhance people's economic survival. They only make life more worth living—not many people's highest priority, unfortunately. Generally I find people to be so caught up in the thrall of everyday survival that they will not stop for reflection and depth. Even those who value it and have positive experiences when they do, the next time resist it as a state change. What ministry offers is in direct antithesis to the consumer society in which we find ourselves, and which Hungarians aspire to. How do we invite people to get off the treadmill, even briefly, to consider the meaning of their lives and the longings of their souls? Even more challenging, how do we get them to pay for it, when they do not even know, beyond a vague restless and emptiness under the stress, that something is missing?

I also had to balance this experimentation with the need for financial sustainability by promoting my spiritual coaching and counseling practice and the wedding ministry, based on

the Wayfarers Chapel model, as these seemed to offer the highest likelihood of financial return.

I put a lot of energy and resources into a project called Feminine Spirit, which I thought would be successful and profitable. I saw a need for groups to empower women of all ages and nationalities, and to connect women with each other in a positive, supportive way. I began holding regular events (luncheons, teas, clothing exchanges, girls' nights out) where women could gather, talk about being women together, and using some of the principles of *Conjugal Love*, get in touch with their feminine power. I expected this to turn into coaching clients and paying workshops, but it did not. After six months of experimentation and free events, I let it go, sadly. One of the things I learned from this was that seeing a need in the community does not mean that need is felt, or that meeting it is desired.

By mid-year, we had identified two key components as financial supports for this ministry: weddings, and spiritual coaching. There is no one in Budapest doing wedding ministry with creative, personalized ceremonies that reflect the meanings and values of the people getting married. Rich identified this as a niche that I, as a seasoned ritualist, could readily fill. Due to my writing and extensive networking, I was asked to perform a wedding for a prominent family, the grandson of the first post-communist president of Hungary, to his German bride. It was an international wedding in three languages (English, German, and Hungarian) in a hall at the big castle on the hill, attended by many guests from around the EU. This was the break we needed to put the Spirit Without Walls Wedding Ministry "on the map." I followed up by getting brochures printed and reserving a booth at the big wedding show in January, where I was the only celebrant with a booth. This event

served to introduce me to other service providers, like photographers and wedding planners; but it has been slow going in spite of all this.

My coaching practice has long been a mainstay of my ministry. I was invited to join a group of women healers (there is a surprising number of alternative healers here, from homeopaths to spiritual healers), which was a breakthrough in developing international, English-speaking clients in Budapest. I developed a program in smoking cessation with a local wellness and fitness medical practice, where I became the well-being coach. I also continued to see clients on SKYPE through my referral networks in the US.

In addition to developing the financial supports, I began in this phase to develop the networks and resources for public events, especially Communion dinners and flash mobs. I developed teams of people who were willing to work with me to produce such events, hosting Communion dinners and pot-lucks in my home and visiting the Hungarian student Gospel Choir in the church where they rehearse. I made connections with food and beverage managers at five-star hotels, who agreed to give us their leftovers for our public Communion dinners.

### Phase Three: Networking and Promotion, January through March

While juggling all these activities, I added to the roster.

- **Monthly salons, discussions, and literary events:** In January, for example, I held a poetry reading and dinner on the Romantic Era, inviting people to bring poetry or prose from the Romantics. The reading of Wordsworth's "Intimations of Immortality" and subsequent discussion provided an opportunity to talk about the spiritual world and to introduce Swedenborg's teachings about the journey from the in-

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## Spirit Without Walls

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nocence of ignorance to the innocence of wisdom.

- **Theological discussion group:** a safe place for people to bring their doubts and questions and talk about the issues in their lives from a spiritual place. What is God? What do we mean by that word? What do we think about the Bible? This gave me an opportunity to share the ideas of Swedenborg in ordinary language, without proselytizing. People found the discussions interesting, but the group was not well attended. Once again, while people enjoyed it, it did not help them to pay the bills.
- **Sound Meditation:** At the request of a small, spiritual group, I began leading sound meditations and prayers in small groups, in a private studio, and in the park.

Throughout the year I networked. I was invited to join clubs, and I did, from the Friday night invitation-only happy hour at the British Embassy, to the English-speaking Rotary Club, the International Women's Club and the North American Women's Association, and the World Class Fitness Club. I joined, and was then asked to run for the steering committee of Democrats Abroad, the Hungarian chapter of the US DNC, and am proud to have been a force in building that into a larger organization. Most recently, last Sunday, we hosted a non-partisan Independence Day Celebration and burger fest in cooperation with Republicans Abroad and the support of the American Embassy, where Americans, Canadians, and friends came together and celebrated our common values and what we love about our country.

I have also networked with other ministers. I have close associations with a small group of ministers serving the younger members of the English-speaking communities, one Lutheran

and a couple of missionaries here from FourSquare Church, who have a weekly Bible Study and dinner at their home, which I often attend. We have formed a loosely knit group, along with a young, innovative Lutheran chaplain who pastors a vital student community.

I have spoken about my ministry and spirituality at Rotary, Elte University, and a private arts club called Brody House. I wrote, not only for the *Huffington Post* but for an artsy, free, Central European monthly magazine called *THINK*, which, unfortunately, closed this year. But writing for it was useful to put my name in the public eye. I also wrote a column for a newsletter aimed at international expats relocating to Budapest, *On Culture Shock*. All of these listed Spirit Without Walls, and the Swedenborgian Church in my bio.

Most of all, I developed relationships. I put myself in places where I would meet the "movers and shakers" in Budapest. I networked with wedding planners, image consultants, and caterers for the wedding ministry. I went to charity events. I supported causes. I hosted parties, dinners, and open houses. I took people to lunch regularly. By spring, many people commented in amazement that, in such a short time, I seemed to know everyone. I had links with the local Fulbright scholars, the former American Ambassador, the leaders of local arts associations and clubs, and holistic healers.

It was during this phase that I worked with a web developer, designing and writing the content for the *Spirit Without Walls* website ([www.spiritwithoutwalls.org](http://www.spiritwithoutwalls.org)).

### Phase Four: Systematizing April through June

In this final phase, we worked with a book recommended by Rich called *The E-Myth*, to make my ministry more than me, to separate it from myself and develop replicable systems. This was

the least glamorous and most difficult phase for an entrepreneurial type like me and probably the most important. Without this phase, which we are still working with, I would have remained in formulation indefinitely, creating each day anew. However, with Rich's help, I wrestled my ministry into job systems for doing things, which I now keep.

### Where We Are Now

It has taken the better part of a year to develop all the connections in the religious, spiritual, arts, and business communities, and the reputation as a trusted, reliable provider of events and services.

**Networking and promotion:** I put up a Facebook wedding page and will be buying ads for it. I am developing a joint venture with a relocation agency handling corporate accounts for NATO and Boeing in Hungary, to help people face the existential crisis of being in new surroundings without their familiar anchor points, which can be an opportunity for spiritual regeneration. And I am beginning a campaign of introducing my wedding services to embassies.

**Community building:** Everything formal slows down in the summer here. People go to the lake or sit in outdoor cafes and bars, listening to music in the streets and drinking lemonade. Because of this, I instituted the community-building activity of weekly Sunday barbecue on my balcony, inviting friends to invite their friends to these multi-generational, multi-national gatherings. Now they may be inclined to attend other events in the fall, which are soon to begin, with Sunday dinners and poetry salons.

**Systems:** Systems are in place, so it will now be possible to have someone help me implement and maintain them. I have hired a part-time assistant, who is helping me with systems

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maintenance and social media.

### Lessons

I have learned a lot in the past year. Most of all, I learned what it takes to be a spiritual entrepreneur. In spiritual entrepreneurship, you are representing a way of being that few people know, or maybe that they are cynical about. Here is a list of principles and practices that need to be present.

- *Show up!* (Woody Allen says eighty percent of life is showing up.)
- Network like crazy
- Keep commitments
- Support people in the place they are at
- Be in relationship authentically, not transactionally
- Speak to people in their own “language” or map of reality
- Write thank-you notes
- Reciprocate invitations
- Be polite; be especially scrupulous about protocol and etiquette in a new place
- Take time to appreciate things about people and places, and mention what you appreciate
- Get people together with others for their benefit
- *Care* about people; be interested in them
- Be authentic
- Create “games” that people will want to “play”
- Have your events be appetite- or loves-driven, rather than obligation- or duty-driven
- Love and accept people for who they are
- Encourage people’s gifts
- Listen first, then invite
- Produce quality products and events
- Maintain systems
- Accept any and all invitations that are not immoral, prohibitively expensive, or a threat to life and limb

(bungee jumping is not required)

- Spend the money to join groups and attend events where community leaders gather
- Love everyone, but move with the movers
- Have the wardrobe to show up at public gatherings in the style of the people you want to attract. (If your ministry is to motorcycle gangs, have a couple of good sets of leathers; if it’s to vegans, leave the leathers at home.)
- Go the extra mile
- Follow up, follow up, follow up
- Model generosity of spirit
- Pick up the check when you request the meeting or ask for a favor
- Be gracious
- Come from a sense of abundance
- Keep showing up

My largest inspiration for this model of ministry was what Jesus did: He ate and drank with people—all sorts of people! He did not have a church, or any sort of a building. It was at the table and around food and drink that he did much of his teaching. So I began to eat and drink with people—all sorts of people. As we know, he served Communion at his last supper, so I began to do that, too. I knew I had passed a milestone when two gay men who invited me to their home along with other guests for an American Thanksgiving dinner, asked if I would be willing to pray and serve Communion at the dinner.

Jesus healed, so soul and wellness coaching became central to my ministry. I did not cast out demons in the way that the Lord did, but I did name and cast out toxic thoughts and emotions, demonic forces keeping people in spiritual bondage and physical unwellness.

Jesus gave to the poor, but not just to the poor. He gave to everyone. So, one of the most fun experiments I have done here was to give gifts to strangers at Christmas. I asked my

friends to bring something beautiful and wearable to my Christmas party in a wrapped package, and to identify whether it was for a man or a woman. I then attached gift tags to the packages, which said, in Hungarian, “Merry Christmas from Life Itself” (which, of course, is how Swedenborg describes God), and gave the packages to strangers. I knew something miraculous had happened when the sullen woman behind the window selling metro tickets on Christmas day, came out of her booth and hugged me (people never hug strangers here). In this, I use the model of the woman with the ointment, who is an inspiration for this entire idea of a ministry not of utility, but of beauty—we are serving the Lord with beauty.

Jesus was criticized because he praised God with celebrations, thus the Communion dinners and Flash Mob Hallelujah Choir. These will be our prayers in public—using not only Handel, but also the complicated words of Leonard Cohen’s broken “Hallelujah,” with which the wounded Hungarian soul resonates. (There are several already recorded versions in Hungarian, as the people here love it!)

### Moving Forward

All the things I had hoped to do are slowly coming into being. I will be doing a number of joint events with the Lutheran student-chaplain colleague. I was funded for one year through the good grace of the Augmentation Fund Committee, which allowed me to do the planning and experimentation I needed to found a new model of ministry for the secular world. It will take another two years to really do what I set out to do, but with God’s help, Spirit Without Walls will be standing and stable in 2014, a little model of a new church in Budapest, Hungary. ☩

The Rev. Hunter Roberts is a Swedenborgian minister and a D.Min. candidate.

## General Council Meeting

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conference call meeting.

The trustees of the Augmentation Fund, known for a time as PUSH, reported that as they fulfill their purpose of distributing ministerial support for ministers serving Convention and its constituent bodies, they continue to face the ongoing issue of what constitutes a Convention ministry. General Council reaffirmed that the responsibility to approve ministries rests with associations, with the two exceptions of Wayfarers Chapel and Swedenborgiancommunity.org. General Council agreed that, in order to address future needs, more discussion is required on how groups are accepted as member bodies in Convention.

Other affiliated bodies reporting were SHS and SwedenborgianCommunity.org, both reporting progress in ongoing plans and Wayfarers Chapel, which reported the retirement of Rev. Harvey Tafel at the end of 2012 and their pro-active efforts to co-create a vision for the future with dedicated staff participation through surveys and interviews.

Under new business, changes and clarifications were made to existing policies and new policies were established.

- A new credentials reporting form was adopted for use beginning at the 2013 Annual Convention
- A Document Retention Policy submitted by the Committee on Library and Documents was approved to provide guidance and consistency in how records are evaluated for storage or disposal.
- The Conflict of Interest Policy was revised and its use expanded to boards and committees.
- The Confidentiality Policy was adopted as revised

Friday evening's informal gathering focused on the question "What do we

feel is the State of the Church?" and responses were divided into strengths, weaknesses, and hopes.

*Year of the Spiritual World: Heaven is Now—Living Spirit in Service.* The annual convention will celebrate the cul-

Strengths	Weaknesses	Hopes
Openness to diversity	Economic health—Paypal option	MeetUp.org usage
Youth retreats	More structure—Transitions in need	Youtube outreach, social media
Sharing gifts	Multigenerational Communication	Vision for COMSU: Facebook, blogs
Love of worship & music	Future leaders—how to inspire youth	Engage youth in church development
Connection & community	Isolation	Leadership growth
Authentic "us" small is good	Multigenerational worship	Face to face experiences

Other New Business discussed included the following:

- COM was directed to get an outside review of the "Misconduct Procedures and Guidelines for Ministerial Conduct" adopted at the July 2012 Convention to be sure it will suffice for legal purposes.
- National Church Trustees were asked to schedule the appraisal of the church in Washington, DC, with the funding that was previously voted.
- Budget items included the Wayfarers Chapel 2013 budget, which was accepted as presented and the 2013 Convention budget, which was approved as revised with a deficit of \$121,252, a lower deficit than previous years due in part to appropriate fees assessed to manage restricted funds.

General Council approved the following appointments:

- Ben Phinney was appointed to the Committee on Library and Documents
- Rev. Erni Martin was appointed to the Building Fund Trustees
- Betsy Coffman, Dagmar Bollinger and Kurt Fekete were appointed to the Standing Committee on Electronic Meeting Guidelines

General Council reaffirmed the Convention theme for 2012–2013, *The*

mination of *The Year of the Spiritual World* and the beginning of *The Year of Providence* in the seven-year cycle. The annual convention will be held at Urbana University, in Urbana, Ohio, from Sunday, June 23 to Sunday, June 30, 2013; the opening celebration will be on Wednesday evening, June 26, 2013.

Appointments to the Convention Planning Committee are

- Chair: Ken Turley, president
- Worship and music: Rev. Kevin Baxter, COM Secretary
- Local coordinating committee: Bill Coffman, Urbana Church and Urbana University
- Host group: Rev. Kit Billings, Chaplains Group
- Programming: Rev. John Maine, EDSU

Saturday afternoon's brainstorming was centered on the question, "What would you like to see Convention doing?" The council members were challenged to bring their love into their understanding of "what is" to articulate what they desire. A variety of loves were shared and some even shared what they planned to do and how they planned to do it. From this and Friday evening's session, GC decided to appoint Dagmar Bollinger, Rich Tafel, Kurt Fekete, John Maine, Gard Perry,

*Continues next page*

## Passages

### Deaths

**Virginia Mardis Flynn Branston** entered the Spiritual World June 17, 2012, leaving a near-century's worth of adventure, challenges, commitment, and a deep love for her faith, the arts, family, and friends.

Virginia was born in Cleveland, Ohio, to Russian immigrants from St. Petersburg. As an only child, she grew up in the mining towns of West Virginia and Kentucky. She excelled in sports and academics in high school and moved to New York City, attending Hunter College where she met her husband, Francis Flynn. They had four children: twins Joseph and Joan, Virginia, and Francis. Her husband died at age thirty-two, leaving Virginia a widow with four young children. It was at this turning point in her life that she began to ask deeper spiritual questions that could not be answered or supported by her Catholic priest. She found the Swedenborgian Church in Manhattan, where her questions were answered through the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and she immediately felt at home.

Virginia became an active member of the Swedenborgian Church, both locally and nationally, serving in many capacities. As a lifelong member of the New York New Church she devoted

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and Karen Conger to an ad-hoc visioning committee, whose primary charge is to focus on an articulate description of Convention's purpose.

Finally, an invitation by the San Francisco Church to hold the annual convention there in 2014 was gratefully accepted; Bette McDonnell will head the host committee.

—*Susannah Currie, recording secretary*

her time and expertise to maintaining its finances. She attended the Swedenborgian annual convention each year and held positions on the Women's Alliance, the board of the Swedenborg School of Religion, and the board of Urbana University as treasurer. Virginia and her four children, along with many of her grandchildren and great-grandchildren later in life, vacationed at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, in Fryeburg, Maine, where they experienced the unique combination of enjoying the beautiful surroundings of Maine with morning religion classes in a warm family atmosphere. In the late 1950s, Virginia became manager of the Swedenborg Foundation, a non-profit, then located on Fifth Avenue in New York. The Foundation publishes the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and the works that relate to Swedenborg's influence on the arts, religion, theology, psychology, and literature. During her twenty plus years of dedication and vision, Virginia has been credited in helping build the Foundation to its current status as one of the more public and growing aspects of the Swedenborgian movement. She formed life-long friendships with many Swedenborgians, such as Bill and Louise Woofenden, Leonore Tafel, Bea and Al Geis, and Eric and Adrienne Frank.

During a remembrance of Virginia's life and presence at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly in August, 2012, words were spoken of Virginia's character as practical, methodical, adventurous, strong, and loving. These qualities characterized Virginia throughout her life; raising a family as a single mother, forging a career in corporate America, and volunteering and serving with organizations that she held dear to her were all done with the same integrity. Starting as an office manager, she became a comptroller. She was one of the first women to rise to become an executive at Marconi Instruments LTD. In the evenings, she completed

a degree at Hunter College and went on later to get her Masters in Business Administration. She was a very organized mother, cooking meals on weekends for the following week and relying on her children to do their assigned jobs to keep the apartment in order and supplied. Though there was very little money, after church, she often had members join her family for Sunday dinner in her home. She loved people and entertaining.

Arthur Branston and Virginia married in the New York New Church in 1951. The marriage lasted ten years, and they remained friends until his death in 1984. After her children had stepped out into the world, she began to travel. For forty years, she took trips all over the world, visiting all continents and over fifty countries. On these many journeys, she collected art works and artifacts which filled her apartment walls and shelves. People visiting her would often comment that it was like a museum. She had many friends and spent her retired years taking advantage of all that New York City offered culturally. She attended plays, ballets, concerts, and museums, and kept an active social schedule, playing bridge every Wednesday evening. Virginia continued her volunteer work, serving on the board as treasurer of Tri-State Media, an ecumenical Christian organization that formed to balance the rising fundamentalist Christian movement.

Virginia loved her children and grandchildren dearly, and expressed her love with encouragement. At the age of ninety, Virginia left her beloved New York City to live with her youngest son, Frank, in Phoenix. Four months shy of her ninety-ninth birthday, Virginia succumbed to injuries due to a fall; she passed away peacefully surrounded by family members. She leaves behind her four children, nine grandchildren and fourteen great-grandchildren. ☩

### 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.

## General Council Fall Meeting

The General Council (GC) met at Temenos Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania, on Friday and Saturday, November 2–3. Pre- and post-convention General Council meeting minutes were approved, reports were received from officers, guests, and other bodies, old and new business was attended to, brainstorming sessions were held in the evenings, and the final day was reserved for the approval of the budget and committee appointments. Items generated from reports were added to the new business section of the agenda for later in the meeting.

President Rev. Ken Turley reported on the activities and initiatives in our churches, how they are riding the wave of the movement in today's changing world, and how small groups are doing amazing things. He feels that his support is helping them feel good about what they are doing given their size.

Vice-president Betsy Coffman reported that the Central Office Review Committee would soon be sending out a request for proposals for visions of the future Central Office.

Treasurer Polly Baxter reported that Convention was under budget for expenses year-to-date, and that there have been strides made in fundraising throughout the denomination.

Reports from guests began with the Council of Ministers' (COM) chair Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell, who raised for ongoing dialog the existential question, "What is Swedenborgian ministry as a paid profession today?"

Another guest, Michael Shone, advisor to the Common Fund for twenty years, presented the General Council with some basics on Convention's investments and the policies and procedures he follows as directed by the Investment Committee.

Convention committees and boards submitted reports and some decisions followed.

- The Placement Committee is addressing a need to get creative about matching ministers to churches.
- The Investment Committee reported a one cent per unit decrease in the Common Fund distribution rate for 2013.
- The Central Office Review Committee received affirmation that they are charged by the General Council to ensure the annual evaluation of Convention-paid employees.
- COMSU was empowered to create a policy on fund appeals in *the Messenger* and to create an editorial review board to submit to at the GC April

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