

189th Swedenborgian Annual Convention

Chaplains Host Gathering at Urbana University

Arriving delegates and guests joined ministers, who had been meeting for several days, on Wednesday evening, June 26, 2013, at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio, for the 189th Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America—Heaven Is Now—Living Spirit in Service.

Opening Ceremony

The Convention commenced with the traditional procession of banners of the churches and groups that comprise the Swedenborgian Church, followed by a worship service led by the Chaplains Group, who were the hosts of the convention along with the Urbana Society of the New Church. The choir was conducted by Kathy Speas.

The chaplains performed a moving scene, dramatizing chaplaincy in a hospice setting, after which Rev. Renée Machiniak brought greetings and welcome (page 106) from the Chaplains Group. President Ken Turley delivered the keynote address (page 92), setting the tone for the convention.

The first of nightly receptions followed the opening ceremonies; convention delegates and guests mingled to greet old friends, make new ones, and discuss the issues raised in the opening ceremony.

Worship Services

Each morning began with early-birds attending a short musical meditation led by Rev. Ken Turley and a short chapel service. On Thursday morning, delegates gathered after breakfast for the annual Memorial Communion Worship Service, led by Rev. Kevin Baxter, to remember those who have passed fully into the spiritual world.

Friday's service was designed and

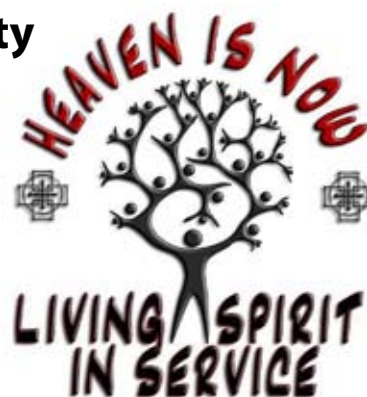
led by the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL). Always creative, the teens conveyed their theme of caring and compassion through Bible readings, music, and a skit about counteracting bullying. The Convention Communion Service, led by 2013 convention preacher Rev. Jane Siebert, was held on Saturday evening (page 98). Communion was administered by newly-ordained ministers Dagmar



Rev. Jane Siebert & Rev. Cathy Speas display the chaplains' banner



Revs. Jenny Caughman & Gabriella Cahaley enact a hospice scenario



Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention, June 26–30, 2013, Urbana, Ohio

Bollinger and Betsy Coffman, and the convention choir was led by Laurie Turley, accompanied by Paul Deming and Ken Turley on guitar, David Fekete on bass, and Steve Ledingham on percussion.

Business Sessions

Business sessions convened on Thursday and Friday to conduct the business specified in the constitution and bylaws. The first session was preceded by a panel of chaplains. Renée Machiniak spoke about being an on-call, ride-along chaplain with her local police department; Betsy Coffman spoke of her experience as a chaplain to students, faculty, and staff at Urbana University; and Gabriella Cahaley spoke of her work in a hospice setting.

Treasurer Polly Baxter gave a presentation on the composition of net assets in 2011 compared to 2012 and

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More Inside:

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The Editor's Desk



It Takes a Convention

We are small but we are strong. We gather each year—those who are will-

ing and able—to renew our bonds to friends, the Swedenborgian Church, and the New Christian Church (as defined by Swedenborg)—and testify by our presence and participation that our church is worth perpetuating. The Chaplains Group were the sponsoring hosts, and many others also worked to make this convention possible and successful—we haven't room to name them all, but without them we would not have had a venue, music, worship

services, youth programs, mini-courses, receptions, audio-visual support, or outings. The result was a product of all those people working as one. Everything went smoothly, was kept well-oiled, by Convention's operations manager, Renée Helenbrecht.

Urbana University

Returning to Urbana University for the annual convention for the third time since 2000 was a pleasant and gratifying experience. The campus has looked better each time and the venues were more accommodating and comfortable. Urbana has striven over that time to enlarge and improve its academic offerings, increase the size of its student body, become more economically sustainable, and improve its infrastructure. Its success is evident. But Urbana is not sitting back; they continue to move ahead with new programs and funding sources as they make the school more available and known to all the levels of community they serve.

—Herb Ziegler

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Iungerich Fund Grants

The Iungerich Fund is accepting grant proposals for 2014. For more information or to submit a proposal contact Chris Laitner at 989.430.7687 or chris.laitner@gmail.com. Grants will be announced December 1, 2013.

Correction: Sage Currie's (now Cole) surname was misspelled as Curry in the June 2013 *Messenger*.

Church Calendar

- September 12–15: Gathering Leaves FNCA • Fryeburg, ME
- October 11–12: SHS Board Meeting • Bryn Athyn, PA
- October 31: Proposal deadline for Iungerich Fund grants
- November 1–2: General Council Meeting • Framingham, MA

The Boston Church of the New Jerusalem

An article in the June *Messenger* referred to the “former Boston Swedenborgian Church.” The Boston Church of the New Jerusalem has, in fact, always self-identified as a Swedenborgian Church, even in the depth of its recent troubles. Since the arrest and departure from the church of Edward MacKenzie, the leadership has moved to strengthen their Swedenborgian identity. *The Messenger* was attempting to avoid conflating the crimes perpetuated at the Boston Church with General Convention. The article should have read “former General Convention member church.”

the Messenger

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Letter from the President



Dear Friends,

The subject of “change” has been a hot topic now for so long it seems to be becoming a constant. So I’d like to share a few signs of the times and some observations on the subject.

This summer, the Bangor Theological Seminary, located here in Maine, closed its doors. It no longer exists as a degree granting institution. The demand for traditional ministers, and hence the demand for traditional seminary training and degrees, has changed so drastically that they are no longer able to exist financially. They have transformed themselves into an educational center that provides opportunities for the kinds of learning and training that will allow lay people to be effective leaders in their own churches.

This is exactly the goal of our action at this past annual convention: to create the means for lay leadership emerging from small churches to engage a manageable educational process in order to serve a pastoral role in their own churches. And yet, while Convention is right on point with this response to changing need, our seminary, the Swedenborg House of Studies (aka SHS), continues to function effectively with stable numbers. In large part, that is because we have been out there on the leading edge of new ways to deliver seminary education. Our development of long distance learning via video conferencing preceded many other similar institutions. Our development of partnering relationships with other seminaries in other parts of the country has also allowed students to engage the educational process within their choice of geographical, as well as theological environs. We owe a debt of thanks to the dean of SHS, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, and all of the members of the Board of Trustees of SHS, for being so forward thinking and courageous in moving our seminary education and our denomination

forward in such an effective response to the changes in our world.

The above observation was brought about because of a seemingly insignificant occurrence. The Bangor Theological Seminary library had been home to a complete set of the Rotch Edition of Swedenborg’s writings, including a beautiful custom built glass fronted cabinet. With the closing of their library, they are divesting themselves of all of their books. So, at their request, I retrieved the set of volumes and cabinet and delivered them to the Portland Church. When I had it all inside the sanctuary and stepped back to admire my work, I realized, that the value of this set and cabinet was strictly historical, possibly aesthetic in the way people enjoy antiques as a kind of art. As fascinating as this collection of volumes is, almost a hundred years old, and as much craftsmanship as the cabinet displayed, it dawned on me with a disturbing mix of emotions that the entire works of Swedenborg are readily available online, in far better translations and with all of the collateral commentary one could ask for. What I was looking at, was a complete and utter anachronism! Interesting and beautiful, and perhaps useful in their way, but of diminishing interest to almost everyone. Just one more affirmation that the world is rapidly changing all around us.

At the end of July, I travelled down to Wilmington, Delaware, and attended the retirement ceremony for Rev. Randy Laakko. For forty-nine years Randy and his wife Millie have served faithfully the Church of the Holy City. The Sunday worship service was attended by close to fifty people, almost all of whom joined together at the reception following the service to honor Randy and Millie. They, and as a result the church, have become seemingly permanent fixtures in the life of the community. Never big and flashy, but caring and present with a constancy that is becoming more and more of a rarity in this changing world. In our culture today, loyalty to institutions and traditions is a concept that is fading from the list of qualities that are held of value. Randy’s ministry, nearly fifty years to the same church, to the same community, and in a surpris-

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President's Address to the Annual Convention

BY PRESIDENT KEN TURLEY

We are ending "The Year of the Spiritual World—Heaven is Now," and heaven is now because we live spirit in service. And this is transitioning into the Year of Providence. Coincidentally, this transition is the mid-point of my term as president of Convention. You elected me! And I thank you for the affirmation. I for one, am counting on Divine Providence, because all I have to offer is more of who I am. My one redeeming quality is that I love God and I love people and I want to be of service in a useful way. Beyond that, I am simply an aging hippie, a guitar-playing, tree-hugging, gun-toting hunter and conscientious objector with a bad temper and a short fuse; someone who loves to garden and write songs and who works as a minister. Anything good that comes out of that is simply the Lord making the best out of a bad situation. But I am here for you, and I am here for this church. And I'm pretty much a living example of the how the Lord will turn any situation to good use if your intentions are good and you have the courage and willingness to say *yes*.

I tell you all this not because I like to talk about myself but because the only way I know how to lead is by being willing to go first—by being willing to be used by God as an example of what can happen if you are willing to be led by Divine Providence. I was told by someone that they were looking forward to the president's state of the church address. Well, I'm not going to do that for two reasons: first, I'm so pleased with the good things that are happening and the progress we are making in dealing with our problems that if I did, we'd be here till midnight; and second, if you read the *Advanced Reports* and pay attention for the next three days, you will learn more than I

could ever tell you about the state of the church.

What I want to do is tell you a couple of stories.

I hope these stories will help us all as we engage one another in the work of the church at the Convention level, in our local churches and communities, and also as individuals. I have to preface these stories with a comment a good friend once made to me. He said, "Ministry would be great, if it weren't for the people!" I think the same thing can be said about church. The joke of course is that ministry, and the church, *is* the people! Dealing with our differences, and our difficulties is what church and ministry is all about. And we can all find ourselves dealing with, or in fact being, difficult people. But we all have our gifts and our uses. So I want to share with you what it is that gives me hope. And the way we have to look at ourselves.

There once was an old man who lived alone high in the desolate mountains. To get water, he had to walk about a quarter of a mile down the path to the stream. And he had two water pots that he would tie to his staff and put across his shoulders. And he would walk down the path to the stream and fill his pots and then walk back up the path with them full. One of these pots had a big crack in it. And when he came out, he would tie the good one on with a single loop, but with the cracked one he would have to put two or three extra turns around it to hold it together. He would put the staff across his shoulders with the good pot on his right and the cracked pot on his left and walk down to the stream, fill his pots, and then walk back. Along the way the cracked pot would be leaking water. When he got home, the good pot would be full



but the cracked pot would be barely half full, it had lost so much water. And this went on day in and day out.

Well, the cracked pot felt so bad about losing all that water and would bemoan the fact that he was broken and leaky and just not a very good water pot. Of course the other pot never missed an opportunity to remind him that he never spilled a drop. One day the old man, being a very sensitive soul, noticed the two pots and how the one was feeling so bad. And he asked the pot, "Why are you so sad?" The broken pot responded "Oh, I'm just not a very good pot, I have this big crack and I leak water all over the place. You should probably just get rid of me and get a new and better pot."

Now this conversation was taking place sometime about the end of May, and spring was well under way. And the old man said, "Oh my old friend, I am not throwing you away. Look down the path."

And they looked down the path, and on the side of the path where the good pot came back full of water it was rather dry and scrubby with a few plants and bushes growing. But on the side where the cracked pot came back, leaking water all the way, the grass was green and thick, and wild flowers grew in a profusion of color all along the path from the stream right up to the door of the old man's house. And he said, "You may be old and cracked, and you may not bring back that much water, but the water you spill along the way allows the beauty of God's earth to flower and bloom."

With Divine Providence, even our imperfections are put to God's good uses.

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Now, this next story is true; it actually happened to me. I primarily heat with wood. Cutting and splitting wood is one of my favorite tasks. Someday I'll tell you about Swedenborg's memorable relation of the spiritual world about the man chopping wood on the outside of heaven. There's a big pile of wood, and once he gets that all split, he says he'll go in. Of course the pile never gets any smaller no matter how much he splits. But that's another story.

So anyway, I was gathering kindling. This is a necessary part of heating with wood. You have to have your tinder to start the fire, and you have to have your logs to keep the fire going nice and warm. But if you don't have kindling to get you from the tinder to the logs, you can't get a fire to work! So kindling is an essential item. And I was picking up sticks and I had gathered a pretty good load which I was holding with one arm while picking up and adding to the pile with the other. But there was this one stick that was a little shorter than the rest and it wouldn't stay in the pile I was holding. It kept falling out. And I'd reach down and stick it back in, and before I knew it, it had fallen out again. And as the load of kindling I was carrying got bigger, every time I reached down to pick up the stick that kept falling out I'd lose two or three other sticks. I was starting to get pretty annoyed. Finally, after this had gone on for a while, in frustration I grabbed that stick by one end and took hold of it with both hands. And low and behold I could hold that whole bundle of sticks no problem! I could even let go with the one hand to pick up sticks on the ground and by using the stick that had been falling out and was now securely held in one hand I could hold an even bigger bundle of sticks. And by the time I had a huge bundle of kindling by holding that problem stick with a hand on each end

and my arms around the bundle, I got the whole thing back and stacked in the wood pile without dropping a one.

The source of many of our problems can actually become the solution if we are able to look at them in a different way and help them find their use. It may not be the use we expected or had in mind in our original plan, but by letting go of our own expectations and being open to new possibilities, by trying something different, we often find that that quality that was once a problem becomes the very solution for solving the problem.

As a church and as individuals we have imperfections. We have problems. Some of us *are* problems. But we have God, who is willing and able to use our imperfections to good use in ways that we can't even see. As long as we are willing to continue to be used we have God, who is able to turn the source of our problems into solutions if we are able to see things in ways beyond our original perceptions, if we are willing to try new ways of doing things, if we are able to let what doesn't seem to fit in one given situation, find a different way of being and doing that allows those unique and sometimes difficult qualities to serve in a way we hadn't tried before.

We're here together for the next three days, cracked and broken, unruly and sometimes difficult to handle though we may be, but if we are willing to work together, to be open, to be courageously creative, and if we keep loving one another and trying to understand one another, then we create the opportunity for God to do wonderful things. God will make even our little church a wonderful blessing in a world that is in such need of blessing. So let's be here together, and hold these stories in our minds and in our hearts, as we work together. Even with our limitations and our problems and difficulties, let us let God work through us all and let us see what happens. ☞

General Council Meetings

Pre-Convention Meeting

General Council (GC) met all day before the opening ceremony on Wednesday, June 26. The Council received reports from the president and the treasurer, the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU), and the Placement, Social Concerns, and Visioning Committees.

The independent accountant's consolidated year-end financial report of General Convention could not be completed in time for the annual convention because the Wayfarers Chapel report was not ready due to its transition from modified cash to accrual accounting; the consolidated financial report will be received and placed on file when available.

The Council discussed the report of the National Church Trustees. The trustees are exploring the process and impact of selling the National Church in Washington, DC. An appraisal estimated the market value between \$7.5 and \$8.5 million. A sale of the church requires agreement of both the Washington Society and General Council. Before action can be taken, questions about the deed of the church will be submitted for review by an attorney. GC voted to approve a letter of engagement with the firm Sullivan Worcester and to ask the Council of Ministers to provide pastoral support for members of the Washington Society.

GC discussed the structure and functioning of the support units and the Cabinet (the support unit chairs comprise the Cabinet) considering that Cabinet meetings haven't worked for years and there is no commonly-held understanding or direction of the support units. The cabinet was designed to set priorities for funding for the year, but few support units other than Min-

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God Is Not Nice

Ordination Address by Rev. Dagmar Bollinger

God Is Not Nice

God is not nice.
Frankly I would think twice
before inviting her to tea.
She would bore us with long silences
and sit and crumble cake
and eye us owlily.

I am sure I would be hard-pressed
before I would make a house guest
of this hallowed queen. She would
untidy
my chaste rooms with sudden
gusts of splendor, and I would be
picking up
all day after the Holy One.

In truth I would become delirious
living with this imperious companion.
She would rip the fine design
I have stitched for my pleasant days,
saying, "I must be rude if I am to be
divine."

*A gender-adapted reading by Bishop
Robert F. Morneau from the book
Gift, Mystery, Calling—Prayers and
Reflections*

Earlier, during the Taizé service, you heard me recite the poem "God is not Nice." You may have been perplexed or maybe intrigued, as I was when I first read it. I liked the poem but wanted to test someone else's reaction, so I sent it without explanation to Rev. Renée Machiniak as part of the first service bulletin layout and received the following email: "Dear Dagmar, I am wondering about the last poem selection? Can you explain what it means to you? With loving thoughts and support, Renée."

I had a good laugh at the gingerly-worded and diplomatic response to this seemingly irreverent poem and I decided to take Renée up on the challenge. So . . . as I pondered the words, trans-

lating them into the female gender of the Divine, as I sometimes like to do, I was struck by how much the poem reflected my own relationship with God. It reminds me of how God keeps swooping into my life in unexpected ways, rudely disrupting my careful plans. To illustrate the point: here I am, about to be ordained as a minister

at a time when I thought I would be enjoying my retirement after toiling for more than three decades in the automotive industry. But God had something else in mind. She said: "I want you to be a blessing and serve your neighbor." Is that nice? Don't I deserve to finally do what I want to do, rather than what I have to do? Or consider the fact that with all the knowledge and skills I have accumulated in my life, God said, "I want you to go back to school." By that she meant seminary—six years of it! Is that nice?? How would you like to be the oldest student in class, older than even the professors . . . well, with the exception of Rev. Dr. George Dole, that is. Or how about this one: In my younger years I traded my Lutheran religious training for the teachings of the Buddha because they made more sense to my science-programmed mind than the Bible. But God said, "You are a Christian! Go read the writings of Swedenborg . . . and then read the Bible again." Is that nice??? Couldn't God have picked a less prolific and less profound visionary for me to study? Imagine my relief when I dis-



covered that Swedenborg and Buddha were perfectly compatible in truth and wisdom. And so it happened that through the book *Buddha of the North*, as D. T. Suzuki called Swedenborg, I found my way back to my Christian roots without having to abandon the Buddha. Now Rev. Renée calls me a "Buddhaborgian."

I could tell you of many more incidences when God swooped in to "untidy my chaste rooms with sudden gusts of splendor"—although some of these gusts did not feel so splendid. In fact, they felt more like tornados knocking down everything I had built, including my ego, leaving only my spirit unbroken in the rubble that was then my life. Not too nice, mind you! But very necessary for what I now know to be the work of the Spirit to help along my regeneration. And as I stumbled along my stony and twisted spiritual path, I sometimes wondered how Swedenborg really felt when his well-ordered and comfortable life was so rudely disrupted by his encounter with the Lord. Did Swedenborg think God was nice? Or did he too wonder, "Why me? Why now?" One thing is certain: without these acts of Divine Providence, I would not be standing here and there would not be a congregation to talk to.

Which means that God knew exactly what she was doing. She knew that growing up in war-torn Germany would make me abhor all types of

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violence—physical, mental, and spiritual—and send me on a search for truth. I remember in religion class asking inconvenient questions such as why God would allow evils like the Holocaust. There was only stony silence, so I turned to the philosophers and mystics for answers. In retrospect, I believe that God allowed my youthful rebellion because she knew that it would bear good fruit some day. She knew that I would develop a voracious appetite for learning, compelling me to leave home as a young adult, travel the world, and study in different countries before settling in the US. She knew that by embracing the world I would come to see all people as God's children, regardless of nationality, religion, ethnicity, or gender among other definitions. I saw how the rich lived, and I saw places ravaged by poverty and misery. It would instill in me strong humanitarian values and a yearning to help make the world a better place. If that sounds like the idealism of the late sixties and early seventies—it is. Like our president, I am a product of the Woodstock generation. It means that if I was a rebel without a cause back then, I am now a rebel with a cause. I am a Swedenborgian. Now, isn't that nice?

So what is my cause? In a nutshell, it is to help people find their inner center, the sanctuary where the Divine resides in each of us, where we find God by whatever name we call God, and from where we transport God's influx of good and true, of love and wisdom into our external lives. Although I am still a fastidious planner, I have learned to paint my cause in broad brushstrokes because now I expect God to swoop in and change the course of my life. Indeed, I would be disappointed if she didn't, because this hallowed queen is now a permanent houseguest in my interior castle. Indeed, she rules the castle as a queen should, and if she decides

to "rip the fine design I have stitched for my pleasant days," so be it, because the Holy One knows me better than I know myself. When I am tuned in to her, I know that I am exactly where I need to be right here, right now. In that moment I feel God's pure creative power permeating all of creation as it unfolds in each instance of existence. And because she gave us freedom of choice, I believe that God's nature is continuously evolving alongside that of humankind toward God's ultimate goal of creating a heaven from the human race. And, as Swedenborg taught us well, we all know that our intentions and actions co-determine whether we find ourselves in heaven or in hell—not just in the hereafter, but right here and now.

Today, I stand humbly before you, ready to serve this imperious God, ready to serve this church that I have grown to love, and ready to be a blessing to my neighbors in all the useful ways that God and her servant Emanuel Swedenborg has laid out for us. God knows that I work best when I love what I do because as Swedenborg said, we are what we love. So she leads me toward my loves of studying, writing, teaching, preaching, and creating. She feeds my passion for seeking harmony between science and religion, for teaching contemplative practices in a hectic world, for advocating right action in an unjust world, for treating our fragile planet with gentleness, and for caring for the spirit of those in need.

These loves and passions are vital ingredients in my ministry, called Tools for Inner Fitness, and they are firmly embedded in Swedenborgian theology. I believe that my ministry will prosper in a world hungry for true spiritual food and that it will help our church find new ways to reach out to post-Christian twenty-first-century seekers. I believe this, because God formed me in her own image, and she is asking nothing less of me than to be a co-

creator and a minister in building the New Jerusalem. Considering the rich choice of opportunities, I think that God is pretty nice after all, don't you?

In closing, I want to thank all of you who have supported me on this journey. At the risk of sounding like I am at the Academy Awards, I want to acknowledge my family, both in far-away Germany and in this room: my daughter Johanna, my son-in-law Steve, and my precious grandson Zachary—thank you for your love and patience. I want to thank my mentors: Chris Laitner, who is my friend, my advisor, and my rock; Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell, who believed in me from the very beginning; Rev. Renée Machiniak who is my model for pastoring and who represents my congregation at the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak; Rev. Carla Friedrich for guiding me through my two-week internship in San Diego; Rev. Ron Brugler, who shepherded me through the Almont Camp experience; all the members of CAM who guided my ministry path, including Susan Wood-Ashton for her caring supervision and president Ken Turley for giving me a constructive hard time; my teachers, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, who first encouraged me to enroll at Claremont School of Theology and Rev. Dr. George Dole, in absentia, without whom I might not have grown to love Swedenborg (and George) as much as I do; and last but not least, my classmates at Earlham School of Religion, Gabriella Cahaley, Jenny Caughman, and in the last year, Anna Woofenden. Thank you for your peer support and your continued friendship. A special thank you, in memoriam, to Rev. Marlene Laughlin, who inspired me to become a minister in the first place and who has helped me in spirit through rough spots on the ordination path. Finally, my deep gratitude to the ultimate teachers in my life—our Lord Jesus Christ and the Buddha.

Bless you all, and Namaste! ☸

Answering the Call

Ordination Address by Rev. Betsy Coffman

The word of the LORD came to me, saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." "Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you," declares the LORD. Then the LORD reached out his hand and touched my mouth and said to me, "I have put my words in your mouth. (Jeremiah 1:4-9) [It has been interpreted that Jeremiah "spiritualized and individualized religion and insisted upon the primacy of the individual's relationship with God."]

I remember when I was five years old I was attending morning kindergarten, but still considered young enough by my mother to need an afternoon nap. I have one particularly vivid recollection of hiding behind our car on the driveway while my mother stood on the porch and called for me to come in to take my nap. "Betsy, Betsy, time for your nap." And so, of course, I pretended that I wasn't nearby—that I didn't know she was calling me—I didn't get away with it for long. Eventually I was "found out," gave up, and gave in. I'm sure that, in spite of my initial resistance, that daily nap did me a lot of good after the rigors of kindergarten! I wonder, can any of you identify with "selective not hearing," with resisting when called to do something you don't want to do, even if it may be good for you?

Friends, fifteen years ago, in June of 1998, I stood before the Convention body at Leesburg, Florida, and received my Lay Leader Certificate, followed a few months later by my consecration for service in the Urbana Church. At that time, I had no thought or inten-

tion of being here again today, about to be ordained into the ministry of our church. Fifteen years before that (1983), although I was a very active member of the church, I had no thought or intention of becoming a consecrated lay leader. The Lord truly does work in mysterious ways and has brought me to this time and this place in a way that still amazes me when I think about how I got here. I am reminded of the words from an opening call to worship we often use: "This is the place and this is the time; here and now God waits to break into our experience; to change our minds, to change our lives, to change our ways." ("Here and Now," Alan Gaunt, in *Be Our Freedom Lord*, edited by Terry C. Falla). As I look back on my journey, I see the truth of this—and I see that the Lord, often without my conscious awareness, was "breaking into my life" all along the way, continually calling me and leading me on a path that has gradually changed my mind and my life in such a way that I am now here, in this moment, about to be ordained as a minister in the church I love so much, standing before my family, friends, and this faith community that is my true spiritual home and that has nurtured and supported and taught me from my earliest memories as a child in the Sunday school of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario.

In the five-year-old recollection, I first described, I consciously and deliberately resisted my mother's call—but as I look back on my spiritual path, I was not always conscious of resisting

the Lord's call. Instead, it appears to me that over time, I have been drawn forward inexorably in a way that Swedenborg actually describes in a passage from the *Arcana Coelestia* (§6472)—a passage that has always fascinated me. Essentially, it states that in the process of our spiritual growth and development, we are never forced to accept what the Lord is constantly offering us—yet, "as far as we allow . . . while respecting our freedom . . ." we are "gradually guided away from our illusions and resulting false assumptions, and led to what is good." And although, all along we are being guided by the unseen hand of the Divine, "we experience it as our own doing"—the reason for this being the importance of maintaining our free will—for the Lord never forces us as that is totally against the nature of love. Instead, we are told, the Lord leads us "through delights."

As I was pondering this passage I wondered how it might have been if, as a child, my mother had called me in, offering to read me a story (which I would have been delighted to have her do), knowing that once lying down, listening to something so pleasurable, I would probably fall asleep on my own—or at least have some good quiet time. And that brings me to the rest of the story about the Lord's leading. Just as I might have willingly and with enthusiasm gone in to hear a story read to me, resulting in getting the rest I needed, so we are told that the Lord, who



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obviously knows what we love and “delight in,” is able to guide us to greater outcomes in our lives through our involvement in those things which we enjoy. And much of the time, we are not aware of the larger purposes that are unfolding as we just move along, thinking we know what we’re doing and where we’re going. Wow, isn’t that an illusion?

That awareness really struck me—because when I look back, I can see that I pursued a career path early on, in an area that truly attracted me—that I found deeply meaningful and gratifying work in a profession that focused on helping people in the healing of their emotional and psychological wounds—and at the same time, in another area of my life, I was very active in the church and in my own personal spiritual development. Over time, it became clear to me that all brokenness is, at its core, spiritual and that whether or not we have a spiritual basis in our lives makes a great difference in how we heal and in how resilient we are in the face of life’s inevitable challenges and difficulties. And so, without making a conscious decision about it but with this enlargement in my way of understanding the human experience, I gradually incorporated skills and knowledge from each area into my work in the other and saw that both were enhanced as a result. And so, what seemed to be two separate areas of my life have now become more like two overlapping circles. But I only began to see this in retrospect. And I realize it had to happen gradually; I can see at this point, that the foundation of experience upon which I now stand took many years to develop. Where I now feel a sense of confidence and comfort in certain abilities, I could not have looked forward and imagined myself being at this point without fear, trepidation, and resistance. You know,

we just can’t look into the future from “here and now” and really know what that will be like—because we will not be the same in the “then and there” as we are at this point. And so we can be frightened—things can look “too big” for us to handle. We may want to run and hide from our own potential. I am reminded of what Marianne Williamson said in her book *A Return to Love; Reflections on the Principles of a Course in Miracles*.

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, “Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?” Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It’s not just in some of us; it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

This call to develop and live out our potential in leadership and service can be frightening—we can shrink at the responsibility involved—because it asks us to risk going beyond our present level of comfort—to “stretch our spiritual muscles,” to grow and develop in ways we might not initially be able to imagine. Surely Jeremiah felt this same trepidation, as we see in the passage at the beginning. Yet, this ancient message to him is still relevant today. I certainly see its relevance in my own journey. For the Lord and Creator of us all speaks to each of us personally in the same way and asks the same of us as He did of Jeremiah. He tells us, “Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must

go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you.” But just as importantly, he says, “Do not be afraid, for I am with you.”

I have finally come to the place in my life where I have both heard and accepted the call. I feel the love and support of all present here with me tonight. I am so blessed to have my daughter, Corina, and my beloved husband and constant support, Bill, by my side, to participate in the “laying on of hands” along with Rev. Wilma Wake. I also feel the love of family and friends who, although physically distant, are here in spirit. I’m awestruck that Skype is “beaming” this service to my 98-year-old mother Elizabeth, who when she heard I was to be ordained, said simply, “It’s about time!” And I feel with me, from the world beyond, the very real spiritual presence of my late father, Rev. David Johnson, my dear brother Worth and my “mentor-in-spirit,” Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey.

I feel so blessed to be part of this church family and faith tradition which believes that as “spiritual beings clothed in earthly bodies” we are here to develop and use our spiritual gifts in love and service to each other—that as sojourners in this earthly existence we are part of the great and grand design of our Maker, and that each of us has something of rich value to contribute to the whole. In the words from a sermon of my late father, the Lord “has called us each by name and in whatever degree it may be, great or small, God may use each human soul as a tool to reveal his truth.” Thus,

In any age, in any race or nation, God’s self-revelation goes on wherever he can find the human instruments to use. We, then, are all “the chosen people” in the sense of Scripture. Ours is not to be a mere passive reception of religious doctrines and dogmas. We are, if ready—and anyone may be ready at any time—the ongoing agents by which God pro-

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The Book of Life

Sermon by Convention Pastor Jane Siebert

Bible readings: John 14:15-27
and Revelation 20: 11-15

Revelation—the vision of the Apostle John, exiled to the Isle of Patmos. God told him to write down his vision, and people have been trying to figure it out for 2000 years. When the books of the Bible were compiled, many wanted to leave

thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20: 11-15)

What did you see as I read these verses from the 20th chapter of Revelation? A white throne? Did you see the One on the throne? Did the One sitting there look pleased or angry? Could you imagine that lake of fire? And the dead, great and small? What did the books look like and what about

would be thrown into a lake of fire to burn forever. I wasn't really sure what I could do to get my name in that book, but I sure knew what would blot it out, and that was to be a *sinner*.

This was also the "Christian" teaching of Swedenborg's day from which he wrote another view and called it *True Christianity*. This old teaching didn't make sense to him, and it didn't make sense to me as I grew older and began to question this image of God. As I have told others, I do not know if I



Revelation out because they did not understand. It is a big part of the internal sense of the Word and has much to teach us, as Swedenborg wrote in *Apocalypse Explained* and *Apocalypse Revealed*. As I read it again, relax, take a breath and let yourself envision what John is describing.

I saw a great white throne and the One who was sitting on it. When the earth and sky saw his face, they ran away. There was no place for them. I saw the dead, great and small, standing in front of the throne. Books were opened. Then another book was opened. It was the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what they had done. The things they had done were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in it. And Death and Hell gave up their dead. Each of the dead was judged by what he had done. Then Death and Hell were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not written in the Book of Life was

the Book of Life? Was it scary? Was it dark or light?

Do you think about judgment, or, like me, prefer to close your eyes and not think about it and just trust in our loving God that it will all come out OK "in the end"? If I can just get my foot in the door then I can go on from there after I die.

I grew up in the Baptist Church and I remember going to revivals as a child and coming out so scared of the wrath and judgment of God, promising in my little heart to never do anything wrong again. Those of you who grew up in the Swedenborgian Church may not understand what I am talking about, but others will know. And it is still going on, trying to scare people into heaven or scare hell out of them. Literally, I was taught that I would remain in the grave until some final day, when I would be raised up and brought before a throne on which this vengeful God would be seated. He would open a book, and if my name was not in it I

would be a Christian today had I not married into this church and found a different way of understanding the Bible—a loving way, a personal way, a spiritual way that opened a God I could believe in and wanted to get to know and follow.

But still, when I read these verses from Revelation, I wonder, what is this all about, and what is the message for us, today, right now and right here? If we look at these verses through the lens of Swedenborg, a new understanding of John's vision is opened, a positive way of looking at it. And that is what I want to explore with you this evening.

Anita Dole wrote in the last of her six volume *Bible Study Notes* that the doctrinal points from Revelation 20: 11-15 are: "We are all writing our own 'book of life' daily by the moral and spiritual decisions we make," and "This 'book of character' will determine our eternal state, either in heaven or hell," and "With the aid of the heavenly doc-

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trines, the Word can be for each of us an inexhaustible source of truth about the way and purpose of life.”

We are concluding the second year in our seven-year cycle of annual themes: “The Year of the Spiritual World – the nature of Life.” And these verses from the 20th chapter of Revelation are speaking of the completion of our time in the Spiritual World and the final judgment where we move on into heaven or into our own created hell. It all depends on what is written in our own “books” and if our name is in God’s “Book of Life.”

So how do we write in our “book of life,” and how do we know if our names are in the Lord’s “Book of Life,” capital B, capital L?

The scripture we read, basically tells us, “The dead were judged by what they had done. The things they had done were written in the books.” We each have our book, and then there is another book, God’s book. But note, it is a book of Life; God doesn’t keep a book of doom. Those who are not written in that Book are those who have chosen their character formed by a love of self and love of the world, and from this choice have cast themselves into the lake of fire. There is a big difference in thinking of God as throwing people into hell. We can manage that quite well on our own. It is God who never gives up on us, trying to keep us from our own selfishness and worldliness.

In reality we know God creates us all for heaven, and it is what we write in our books that matters. Our books need to come into alignment with God’s Book of Life, which is the Word. Our name written in the Book of Life means our character which is formed by our choice to live a life according to love of the Lord and love of the neighbor.

Let’s pause a moment and think about our books. It is easy to be overly

concerned with the cover. The cover is about what we want people to see of us and think of us. It is doing good works for praise and to look good to others and even doing good to try to earn our way into heaven and make God happy with us. It is easy to fall into this and think it is all there is. Swedenborg reminds us, “Before we are reborn, we do not know even that we have an inner self, let alone what it is like. Submerged in bodily and worldly concerns, we imagine there is no difference between the inner self and the bodily/worldly self.” (*Secrets of Heaven* §24)

Recently, a principal reminded me of my daughter Casana’s last day of her senior year of high school. He had commented to her graduating class the week before that he had never had any trouble with their class and they always did what was right and followed the rules. Casana and a group of her classmates talked about this and did not want to be remembered as goody-two-shoes, so the last day of the year she rallied the senior class to have a food fight in the school cafeteria. And boy did they. She told those that did not want to get in trouble to leave early—and some left, but the rest of them had a riotous time and were of course caught and had to stay after their last day of school and clean the cafeteria.

So, the cover of her book has a bit of food on it, not really affecting who she is or the interior, but coloring the way she thought others saw her, and now we laugh about it. The cover of the book is only the binding in which our real book of life is written. But remember what we read in our scripture, “and the books were opened.” The essence is in the inner pages where the intent of our actions is written and where the Lord writes in our hearts if we open the book and work with God to build our character.

This is truly what we are searching for because this is where the difference comes in our lives here and now. It’s

like the difference between living in heaven now vs. living to go to heaven. It is not an either/or; it is a both/and. We are called to look inside to be reborn, not only to know who we are and why we act the way we act, and why we say the things we say, and why we love the things we love, but also God is giving us the choice to change. For “Everyone’s God is that which he or she loves above all things.” (*Secrets of Heaven* §935) If I truly think that all I need to do is get my foot in the door of heaven and that is enough, I miss the blessings of a heaven-filled life in this world. It is my responsibility to build the character I want to take into the next, so when my book is opened I will not be afraid of what is in there.

When we stand before God (the throne) this does not need to be a scary thing. It can be a blessed thing when we understand our loving God—One who only wants the best for us and created us for heaven. God enables us to see the truth of our lives when the books are opened. And (this is one of the big “ands”) this should not be an end of life thing. It is a now thing, an ongoing thing that brings our lives into harmony and brings us into a heavenly state. Like the egg cracking, good comes from the inside out.

So, where do we begin? Swedenborg tells us to search for one thing at a time. If we could see all our inner turmoil and imperfections, we would be overwhelmed. So God shows us one at a time.

In simple prayer with all honesty and willingness, we say, “Lord, show me what is written in my book.” And, believe me, you will be shown and have the opportunity to work on that part of you that is not in accord with the Lord’s will for your life, that part that reflects more a love of self than love for others.

Last weekend my grandchildren were visiting for four days, the longest

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SHS Corporation Meeting

BY JANE SIEBERT

The 123rd Corporation meeting of the New Church Theological School, now known as the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS), was held at Urbana University Thursday evening, June 27, 2013. A large crowd attended to hear the latest news from our seminary, and we appreciated their attendance.

The Board was well represented, with Karen Conger, clerk; Tom Neuenfeldt, vice-chair; Herb Ziegler; Bill Coffman; Rev. Carla Friedrich; John Titus; Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, dean; Rev. Ken Turley, president of Convention, and Rev. Jane Siebert, chair. Dr. Devin Zuber from the faculty was the guest speaker for graduation.

A joint presentation was given by the dean and chair as an update on SHS. While the mission of SHS remains the same the vision requires constant revisiting and adapting to our changing student body. Our three current visions are a flexible educational program to serve the diverse needs of our seminary students, leading-edge Swedenborgian scholarship at a renowned institution, and outreach online classes for anyone anywhere.

It was announced that Rev. Dr. George Dole will be leading an online outreach course this fall and spring. The fall course is called "The Newer Church" and is open to all, with limited enroll-

ment, for \$100.

Looking back, it is interesting to follow the students who have graduated from SHS since its move to Berkeley in 2001. SHS has produced twenty-six ordained ministers and has eight current students studying for ordination. Fifteen are serving or have served



The SHS Board of Trustees with graduate Dagmar Bollinger

a Convention church. Fourteen have at-large or entrepreneurial ministries. Five are chaplains, and two are serving in other denominations.

The graduates this year were Rev. Dr. Hunter Roberts, D.Min; Rev. Dagmar Bollinger, M.Div.; and Yudai Hori, M.Div. Yudai has returned to Japan and will complete his ordination requirements there.

Our students are located throughout the U.S. and are studying in a variety of seminaries. At SHS our concentration is on all aspects that are unique to the Swedenborgian tradition and are fulfilled by the students through completion of the certificate in Swedenborgian studies. Professors Devin Zuber, Inese Radzins, George Dole, and Jim

Lawrence teach in person, online, through video-conferencing, and in intensive residential for-

mat. They support students in their studies no matter where they live.

Rebecca Esterson is our scholar-in-training at Boston University. Rebecca is a Harvard Divinity School graduate and active lay leader and past president of the Cambridge Swedenborgian Church. She has completed two years toward her doctorate.

The annual budget of SHS remains fairly constant at around \$500,000;

we continue to maintain a positive bottom line. The main expense, as planned, is faculty support and benefits at 57%. Student services, which includes scholarships and direct student support adds another 20%. Library costs have decreased from 30% of

budget to 10% with the renegotiating of our rental space at Pacific School



L to R: Dean Jim Lawrence, graduate Dagmar Bollinger, and chair Jane Siebert

of Religion in exchange for additional faculty, which serves SHS and PSR. We have become a major player at PSR and a valued partner in education.

We appreciate your support both financially and with attendance at our Corporation meeting. ☙

New LaPorte Website

The LaPorte (Indiana) New Church has launched a website for members and visitors at laportenewchurch.org. You can view it or register to leave comments.



To standing applause, Tom Neuenfeldt presents retiring board member Bob Leas with a certificate for 13 years of service.

Convention Creates Status of Licensed Minister

At the 2013 Annual Convention in Urbana a motion was passed to amend General Convention's bylaws. It was accomplished according to procedure, albeit with much discussion about a suspension of the rules motion to enable passage of a bylaws change without the required three-month advance notice, and ultimately passed by an overwhelming majority of the delegates.

The motion was developed by the Placement Committee and presented for discussion to the Council of Ministers (COM) in their pre-convention meeting, who then voted to recommend the motion to General Council. General Council discussed and voted to present the motion to the delegates at the business session, where it was passed as mentioned above. The motion was to amend the bylaws by adding the following section to Article 14 of the Bylaws:

Article 14, section 5 [after "Lay Leader"]

Upon application by a member of the Swedenborgian Church and an eligible and recognized body of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, and with preparation recognized by the Council of Ministers as adequate, the candidate upon recommendation of the Council of Ministers, and after affirmative vote of the Swedenborgian Church, may be given license to pastor a society by the Ordaining Minister for two (2) years. Said license empowers the bearer to provide all sacerdotal duties necessary to fulfill the pastoral role. Such persons shall be known as "Licensed Pastors." The license may be renewed by vote of the Council of Ministers upon recommendation of CAM. A Licensed Pastor must maintain a mentor relationship with an Ordained Minister of the Swedenborgian Church and follow the guidelines for ministerial work. The two year license period will have educational objectives that will prepare the "Licensed Pastor" for Ordination over an extended period

of time if the licensee wishes to apply to CAM for Authorized Candidacy for Ordination. A licensee may make application to the ordaining minister to become a "Lay-Leader" if they wish not to renew a license.

This bylaw allows a church without the means to hire a full-time pastor to recommend a member of their community for training and authorization to serve as a licensed pastor for their community and their community only. Though not an ordained position, the licensed pastor designation confers a publicly recognized role of professional ministry leadership. The designation requires approval by the Council of Ministers and an affirmative vote on the floor of the annual convention. Once approved and engaged in the educational process deemed "adequate" by COM and receiving the license from the ordaining minister (president of Convention when an ordained minister), such candidates may then begin serving their church as pastor under the supervision of an ordained minister, and these privileges include performing weddings, baptisms, and offering the sacrament of communion. The license is valid for two years. A variety of options are available at the end of two years, which include a renewal of the

licensed pastor designation, which involves ongoing training; converting to designation as a lay leader, which does not require further training; pursuing the further training that would lead to ordination; or leaving the path of official leadership designations.

At present, the primary variable in all of this is the educational requirements deemed "adequate" by the Council of Ministers. These will be developed by a special committee from COM in consultation with the Committee on Admission to the Ministry and approved by COM. But the details are unspecified in the motion because it is expected that within and around a core of consistent expectations, what is considered adequate may vary according to local situations and resources and may evolve with the passage of time.

There will no doubt be discoveries and adaptations as we engage the application and practice of this program. But that is exactly how we learn and grow. It is our purpose to facilitate spiritual leadership and the practice of ministry to a changing world. To begin the process, a church community and candidate must make an application to the chair of the Committee on Admission to the Ministry. ☩

10-Week Online Course on the Apostle Paul

Taught by Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete

September 30–December 8: Tuition only \$55

The Apostle Paul isn't all that bad—in fact, he's fantastic! Some of the things he says you wouldn't believe. I think Swedenborgians are prejudiced against Paul—I was. But with an open mind, we will find Paul's letters inspiring, beautiful, and in places quite in accord with Swedenborg. This 10-week course is a topical survey of Paul's letters in the light of Swedenborg's theology, as Protestant Christianity sees him, and as we find him in the letters themselves. To enroll, email Rev. Dr. Fekete at: revdrfekete@gmail.com. Deadline for enrollment is September 25. The course is limited to 15 students.





More photos at
[https:// 2013swedenborgianconvention.shutterfly.com/](https://2013swedenborgianconvention.shutterfly.com/)

SCYL Memorial Day Retreat—May 2013

BY RACHAEL SBROCCO

Eleven teens from near and very far gathered for a cold and wet Memorial Day weekend retreat at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) in Maine, to learn about “The Thrill of Heaven and the Agony of Hell.” So we each put on the one sweatshirt we brought, borrowed some socks (some of us only brought sandals, not naming names), borrowed extra blankets, threw another log on the fire, and we were good to go. What’s better than good friends sitting around a warm fire anyway? When you are at a retreat,

nice weather is a plus, but truly, these teens don’t care. They just want to be together.

same things.

Lee had us think about what part of “us” will still be “us” after we rid ourselves of these physical bodies and move into the spirit world. It was interesting to find out what aspects of themselves everyone felt quite sure that they would be keeping, what they were sure they would leave behind, and the gray areas where they really weren’t sure at all.

Susannah capped off the retreat sessions on Sunday by bringing every-



Teens and adult facilitators on the FNCA front porch

Of course, they want to learn too! And learn they did, with an all-star lineup of session leaders including Rev. Sage Currie Cole, Rev. Lee Woofenden, and Rev. Susannah Currie.

Sage kicked off Saturday by discussing what is heaven and hell for each one of us in this world. We don’t always agree on which things we find to be heavenly activities or hellish ones. For example, some love the exhilaration of climbing high into a tree, and others find that activity to cause them great stress or fear. When we pass into the next life, we will live in a community

in the spiritual world where those around us have similar loves. Later, the teens made posters using words and pictures to represent their heavenly loves on one side and what

they dislike or find hellish on the other side. They came to realize that life sure would be boring if we all liked the

one a bookmark with one of the seven Tiffany window angels representing one of the seven churches on it. She gave us some background on the windows and the angels’ meanings, and then we broke into pairs to learn more about our friend who had chosen the same angel.

As the weather cleared on Sunday, we could see just how beautiful the Fryeburg New Church Assembly property is, and I would say that I certainly felt the closeness of heaven looking out onto the Saco River and mountains. What a breathtaking view!



Finding examples of heaven and hell

It would have been nice to be outside a little more, but Kurt suggested that

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Getting There Is Half the Fun

BY BEKKA LANGE, AGE 15

Memorial Day retreat is one of my favorites: lots of fun, great memories and good company! Since I am from Michigan, it is a long two-day trip up to Fryeburg New Church Assembly in Maine. It’s all worth it though. The van ride is just the other half of the fun and anticipation for the retreat.

Heaven and Hell was the theme this time. The ministers focused on different aspects of the theme and led activities with the group.

Leaving is always the hard part of the retreat. Saying goodbye on the porch and watching my friends run after the van while it pulls away is when it hits me—the retreat at Fryeburg this year is over. And you have a long ride back home, back to reality again. Looking forward to the next church event is what keeps me excited to do it all over again!

SCYL Teens Gather at Annual Convention

The Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) members attending convention, guided by youth director Kurt Fekete, designed and led a creative worship service on the theme of bullying. Two teens wrote about their experience at the convention.

Convention was awesome! We had a great worship service and everyone had a lot of fun. I can't wait till Almont!!!!

—Skylor, SCYL activities officer

This year's convention had a pretty large group of teens, and as always it was incredibly fun to hang out and get to know them all on a more personal and spiritual level. My favorite parts were our worship service where our talents shone and our late night when we spent hours talking and sharing deep thoughts and words of love with each other. Any event with the teens is a fun time, howev-



Top: The SCYL teens
Left: Alice Henderson and Danny Pera sing a duet

er, and an incredible part of convention is that the youth get to interact with the older members of the church so much more. We appreciate so much the warm welcome and the kindness we received from everyone there.

—Celie, SCYL president



Continued from preceding page

cool weather was a bit of a blessing because it kept the bugs at bay. Maybe he's right; one spider on my pillow was enough for one weekend! With the Sunday worship service at the Fryeburg New Church with Rev. Sage officiating, a hike through the camp's woods to the State Line store, Rev. Susannah's session, candlepin bowling, and an evening communion worship service lead by Rev. Jenn Tafel around the fire, the last day was just perfect!

One more heavenly aspect to this retreat was the amazing food prepared by Sonia and her husband Bill. Much thanks for the delicious and nourishing meals, especially for the soup that awaited us after the thirteen-hour drive on Friday night.

Thanks to all who made this retreat possible for these young people. The list is long but I will name Kurt Fekete

(our national youth director), Rev. Sage Currie Cole, Rev. Lee Woofenden, Rev. Susannah Currie, Rev. Jenn Tafel, Tammara Mounce, drivers, parents, and all who donate to the Swe-

denborgian youth programs. What the teens have learned and experienced and the friendships they have made are helping them to grow in immeasurable ways. ☞

My Heaven Might Be Your Hell!

BY CADE SBROCCO, AGE 13

It started at midnight when a van full of people showed up at my house. They spent the night, and the next morning we packed up and headed for Fryeburg, Maine. This was my first teen retreat. The thirteen-hour van ride was quite fun for me, but not for anyone else in my row. The point was made during a session about heaven and hell that riding in the van with me was hell. I guess they didn't like the way I stretched out and took up too much of the seat!

We finally got there and all the others greeted us. Everything was a lot of fun. This included the sessions, being with my friends, and the activities we did. Two of those activities were candlepin bowling and crossing the state line to go to the store. I also really enjoyed the food at Fryeburg.

At the end, we said goodbye to our friends. Everyone in my group went back to being in hell: riding in the van with me.

This was a great first retreat. I can't wait until next time.

Chaplains' Welcome

BY RENÉE MACHINIAK

Welcome, everyone! My name is Rev. Renée Machiniak. I am the pastor of the Royal Oak, Michigan, Church of the Holy City and serving also in hospital and police chaplaincy. I am giving the welcome this evening

for the Rev. Kit Billings, who is home with his wife Penny, following her recent accident and surgery. Let us keep them close in our prayers this week.

It is my joy to welcome you on behalf of all of Convention's chaplains, who are hosting this year's convention at Urbana University. Our chaplains serve in a variety of capacities: hospitals, fire, police, hospice, military, nursing homes, and universities; Betsy Coffman is serving as a university chaplain right here at Urbana University.

As I serve my congregation on Sunday mornings, the New Church specific, and then go out into the world and serve the New Church universal, visiting hospital patients and people in need on the streets with the police force, it is abundantly clear to me that serving in both realms of the New Church offers creative cross-fertilization for ministry. Whereas once I believed that the increasing numbers of New Church clergy training for chaplaincy positions signaled the decline of our denomination, now I believe with all of my heart that new life and creative reorganization of our church will emerge out of this trend.

On Sunday mornings, I come "home" to the familiar faces I love as I lead congregational worship in the New Church specific; as a spiritual leader I am strengthened and recharged on Sunday mornings. Then, I go back out into the world, the New Church



universal, to serve the larger neighbor beyond the reach of our local church. I experience the Lord's healing presence among strangers who are deeply grieving losses, the opportunities for new life that illness presents, and the

transformative power of forgiveness. I then gather these experiences, learn new ideas and perspectives, and return to church more expanded to offer relevant and inspired ministry. This intermingling of ministries gives life and light to our faith tradition.

Now, let us orient to our spiritual theme for this annual convention: Heaven is Now—Living Spirit in Service. We are in the midst of the second year of a seven-year cycle of spiritual themes as a denomination, inspired by the Rev. John Maine. The convention theme reflects our second-year focus on the year of the spiritual world; heaven is taking place right here and right now. For the purpose of feeling more connected as a denomination, for continuity and creative ministry, we follow the seven themes: 1) the Year of the Lord; 2) The Year of the Spiritual World; 3) The Year of Providence; 4) The Year of Regeneration; 5) The Year of Spiritual Uses; 6) The Year of the Word; and 7) The Year of the New Jerusalem.

Chaplaincy ministry is an opportunity to experience and to help to draw out others' meaning and faith in order to aid in their healing. As Swedenborgians, we honor the diverse, multi-dimensional, and eternal nature of life. We honor differences and the reality of the spiritual world—of heaven, hell, and the world of spirits—intermingling with us. We recognize that we all walk with both angels and demons,

from this life on into the next, and that the freedom we are given by God greatly affects our connection to heaven and hell as we journey and grow.

As New Church people, we can enjoy together the gift of learning about heaven and hell and the world of spirits, and that it is through our own choices that we either grow essentially closer to what is good and true or farther away into what is evil and false. Personally, it means so much to me that our church recognizes the inherent spiritual nature of reality, and that we are spiritual beings who have a physical body for a while. We are blessed to have God's ongoing presence and support shepherding and enlightening us through life. How helpful it is to know that our choices, day in and day out, affect and determine the quality and character of our spiritual lives and future and that each day we are blessed to have on earth an awesome opportunity to engage with the Lord—to be filled with and act upon God's spirit of love, wisdom, and power so that we might be useful with others. How helpful it is to know and understand that heaven is now and hell is also present right here and now. We are empowered by God to choose a life centered on love for God and service with our neighbor, for indeed, as we do this, the Lord's Spirit lives and thrives through us.

I am so happy and thankful that as this grand adventure continues forward, the Lord continues His saving work of gradually regenerating our hearts and minds. Through time, God is transforming us into angels, the way little caterpillars are transformed into butterflies and human beings become beautiful living images and likenesses of God. I love our New Church theology, which honors the reality of the spiritual world and brings into deep connection the realms of both the spiritual and natural worlds. Understanding life in this way adds vital meaning to our

Continues next page

Introducing the Visioning Team

BY DAGMAR BOLLINGER

The Visioning Team presented an interim report of its progress as part of the 2013 Convention business sessions. There had been a good amount of curiosity about the team's activities, and although the team was not yet prepared to present a first vision at Convention 2013, the team members felt it was important to let the membership know what the initiative was about.

The inspiration for forming a visioning team came late last year during a conversation I had with President Ken Turley about how we might refresh the image of our aging denominational website. I suggested forming a visioning team to begin conceiving a twenty-first century vision for the church that would be meaningful to Sweden-



borgians and non-Swedenborgians alike. Ken liked the idea and set out to recruit the team members (see box).

The team organized quickly around a proven visioning process that I had used in my work at the corporate University of Toyota. The goal was to sketch a first vision and share it with the 2013 Convention attendees. However, it became obvious rather quickly that the scope and purpose of the vision needed to expand from one intended primarily to strengthen our web presence to one that would lead to an overall comprehensive vision for the church. This realization grew partly out of the understanding that our standing resolutions had not been updated since 1989, whereas the world had changed dramatically since then.

Working as a geographically dispersed team and communicating mostly in writing (except for periodic conference calls) is not an easy feat. Nevertheless, by January, 2013, we had completed a first round of data-gathering for a high-level analysis of the *as-is* state of our church. The insights from the analysis served as a baseline for envisioning a first *to-be* state. This took place at the only face-to-face team meeting in January, 2013, graciously hosted by Barb and Dan Halle at their home in LaPorte, Indiana.

In the following weeks, the team continued the visioning exercises, which included writing individual vision statements along with rationales and objectives, "round-robin" reviews of all teammates' writings, and consolidation of individual statements into a first-draft team vision statement. These exercises were repeated through a second-draft vision statement, at which

Visioning Team Members

- Dagmar Bollinger, team leader
- Karen Conger, recording secretary
- Kurt Fekete, budget administrator
- John Maine, writer/strategist (John regrettably resigned from the team due to health reasons)
- Gard Perry, lead strategist
- Ken Turley, conference coordinator

point we found that there were fundamental theological, philosophical, and strategic differences in the thinking of the team members.

Rather than being dispirited, however, the team was encouraged by Gard Perry to look at these differences, which he named "resolvable polarities,"¹ as a positive development to arrive at an authentic vision. Instead of waiting until we could agree on a vision, it was decided to share the polarities, along with the rationale (presented by Karen Conger) as a first step and an invitation for the membership to participate in the visioning activity.

Our team hopes that these modest first visioning efforts will generate a groundswell within our church to create a common vision that will guide and support us in the twenty-first century. To this effect, we will share details and insights from our visioning process and in turn hope to learn from similar activities wherever they may spring up throughout local congregations and work groups. Making this happen will take time and resources given the logistics of our geographically dispersed membership, but our team believes that patience, will, and inspiration will combine with Divine Providence to create a sustainable future for our church. Please look for further articles on these developments in upcoming issues of *the Messenger*. ☩

¹ Thanks to Dr. Page Morahan, we have since learned that the objective of "managing polarities" is not to resolve them as we do with problems, but to hold them in creative tension, where either/or thinking and both/and thinking is desirable and itself a polarity to manage.

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lives, it adds to our understanding of the resources we are given to grow, and it adds to the way we understand our purpose here.

Our chaplain team hopes that you will have lively discussions and engage this year's theme, which ultimately leads into next year's theme: The Year of Divine Providence. And most of all, we hope that through our journey together this week, we each may choose to walk with the Lord and each other ever more closely, for indeed, heaven is now. In this moment, as we begin our meetings and worship together, we see signs of heaven everywhere: in the beauty of the music we are sharing, in the call to serve within the hearts of our ordinands and delegates, in you and in me . . . every moment. Welcome, everyone, to this year's convention: HEAVEN ON EARTH! ☩

Convention Highlights

Continued from page 89

2012 performance of investments. She noted reason to celebrate due to market performance, cost cutting, and increased income. Secretary Susannah Currie reported on the General Council pre-convention meeting. Advance reports were received from the officers of General Convention; the support units; the representative to the Nation-



President Ken Turley and recording secretary Susannah Currie

al Council of Churches of Christ, Rev. David Fekete; the Trustees of the National Church; Wayfarers Chapel; and SwedenborgianCommunity.org. (Reports will appear in the *2013 Annual Journal*, which will soon be available by request from Central Office.)

Chair Karen Conger reported for the Nominating Committee, and Nadine Cotton announced the mission of the Social Concerns Committee. Chair of the Mite Box, BJ Neuenfeldt, announced that the Mite Box last year totaled \$1361 and was donated to pre-teen-youth retreats. The Mite Box collection this year will be donated for children's travel to church camps.

Kevin Baxter reported on the Council of Ministers meeting (page 111), announcing that the Council recommended Betsy Coffman and Dagmar Bollinger for ordination.

The Visioning Committee made a presentation explaining its history, process, and future direction (page 107).

The last business session, on Friday morning, was dedicated to elections, a pledge appeal from the treasurer, and new business.

The sole item of new business was a motion by the Council of Ministers to

create an alternate path to a new category of minister (page 101). Because this action was a change to the bylaws, and any proposed change in the bylaws must be presented to General Council and announced three months before the annual convention, a motion to suspend the rules to allow consideration of the motion was made. A suspension of the rules requires a two-thirds majority vote. A vote was taken, and the motion to suspend passed. President Turley asked the parliamentarian for a ruling on whether the requirement in the bylaws for "... two-thirds of the delegates present and voting" referred to a majority of delegates on the floor or a majority of delegates registered at the convention. The parliamentarian ruled that the words in the bylaws meant the majority of delegates registered, whether on the floor or not. An objection from the floor led to overturning the ruling. After some discussion, the convention voted to pass the motion proposed by the Council of Ministers.

Marjory Leas, chair of the Credentials Committee, announced that eighty-one delegates were in attendance.

Guest Speakers

On Friday, Morgan Beard, operations manager of the Swedenborg Foundation, gave a brief presentation about the ways in which the Foundation is working to increase engagement with Swedenborg's writings and ideas. Some of the highlights were the launch of a new website, which features free and low-cost e-book downloads, increased presence in social media through the *Heaven and Hell* Facebook community, and a new series of short YouTube videos that explore spiritual topics through a Swedenborgian lens. The most popular video to date, *You Are the Lungs*, was shown and received hearty applause.

Gary Ferguson, founder and CEO

Election Results

Vice-president: Betsy Coffman
Secretary: Susannah Currie
Treasurer: Polly Baxter
General Council: Debbie Dolley
Tom Neuenfeldt, Rev. David Fekete
COMSU: Kristina Madjerac
EDSU: Sherrie Connelly, Paul Deming
FPRSU: BJ Neuenfeldt
IMSU: Drew Siebert
MINSU: Alison Longstaff, Sharon Williams, Jane Fullerton
CAM: Jennifer Tafel
SHS Trustees: Carla Friedrich, Sage Currie, Terrie Crenshaw, Tom Neuenfeldt
NomCom: Linda Tafel

of Pathway for Veterans, shared his personal experiences as a veteran and recovering alcoholic. He had come to the annual convention after hearing about it from contacts at UU and then investigating Swedenborg and General Convention. Pathway for Veterans provides programs for veterans and their families to sidestep and escape the pitfalls that commonly visit veterans on their return home. Gary revealed that the organization is partnering with UU to provide Pathway for Veterans programs at the school. A key element of his proposal is the renovation of three disused buildings at the center of the UU campus, including the Dorothea Harvey Memorial Chapel.

UU President's Welcome

Dr. Kirk Peterson, the interim president of Urbana University (UU), welcomed the annual convention to the campus. He expressed



Dr. Kirk Peterson

his gratitude to Rev. Ken Turley, Betsy Coffman, and John Titus for their wisdom, guidance, and counsel as members of the UU Board of Trustees. He said, "We are proud of our church affiliation and look forward to embracing

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the future and continued branding of Urbana University.” He continued,

Great things are happening on campus. Like practically every college or university—especially small, liberal arts institutions—Urbana is meeting the challenges of the rapidly changing landscape of higher education. In addition to our main priority of providing academic excellence, we are focusing on maximizing opportunities to retain, enroll, and graduate students, to maximize development efforts, and to implement infrastructure improvements.

With the support and direction of the Urbana University Board of Trustees, and with partnership with Pathways for Veterans, this University is committed to a complete and permanent renovation of the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey Chapel. We are proud of our heritage on campus and vow to make the chapel as great as it once was. The chapel chimes remain strong and I look forward to the finished result.

Women's Alliance Luncheon

The Womens Alliance Luncheon, a mainstay event of annual conventions, featured a talk by Dr. Devin Zuber, professor of American Studies, Literature and Swedenborgian Studies at SHS. His talk was titled “Sufficiently Large and Noble: Swedenborg and Nineteenth Century Feminism.” The luncheon was well-attended and sparked a lively discussion.

SHS Annual Meeting

On Thursday evening, at the annual meeting of the Swedenborgian House of Studies, Dean Jim Lawrence and SHS Board of Trustees chair Jane Siebert addressed the members (members of the Swedenborgian Church who have signed the SHS membership book) and announced the graduation of three students, Dagmar Bollinger,

Yudai Hori, and Hunter Roberts (page 100).

Mini-Courses

A broad array of mini-courses was enthusiastically attended over two sessions. Delegates regretted the fact that they could not attend more than two of them. (See the May 2013 *Messenger* for descriptions.)

Ordination

The ordination service on Friday evening was in the format of Taizé worship and music meditation featuring accompaniment by Paul Deming, Ken and Laurie Turley, and Barb Mackey. Betsy Coffman, who has been the lay leader of the Urbana Church for many years and a chaplain at UU, and Dagmar Bollinger, who recently received her M.Div. degree from Earlham School of Religion, were ordained into the ministry of the Swedenborgian Church (ordination talks on pages 94 & 96).

Five Wishes®

Jane Siebert introduced the Five Wishes® program, a method of expressing one's wishes for medical care if and when one is unable to communicate, and distributed Five Wishes® forms. (See the May 2013 *Messenger* for more information.)

Urbana Spiritual Heritage Tour

Saturday afternoon afforded an opportunity for conventioners to explore and enjoy aspects of the town of Urbana and the university that are of special interest to Swedenborgians.

The Johnny Appleseed Museum at the school held an open house where many came to take in the exhibits and discuss Johnny and his work. The Swedenborg Memorial Library at UU held an open house to display its Swedenborgian collections, art, and artifacts and hosted an exhibit of art works by Swedenborgian artists nationwide. To

the delight of many, they offered a vast array of historical works by Swedenborg and collateral works for free to the visitors; the books were duplicate copies from the library's collection.

Betsy Coffman addressed a group that gathered in the shade of a European Beech tree planted by Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey on the occasion of being ordained as the first female Swedenborgian minister in 1975. Standing in front of a photo collage of Dorothea's life, Betsy reviewed Dorothea's contributions to the school, the community, and the denomination. Former students and others shared memories of Dorothea, eliciting smiles and laughter.



John and Bev Titus led a group to Freedom Grove, a recent project of the Rotary Club. A long, curved, gently sloped walkway leads to a circular resting spot, in the center of which is a fragment of torn and twisted structural steel from the wreck-

John Titus speaking at Freedom Grove, in front of an artifact from the Twin Towers

age of the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York. The site commemorates the lives of those lost in the 9/11 tragedy as well as those who have lost their lives defending America. A prominent bronze commemorative plaque honors Alicia Titus, John's and Bev's eldest daughter, who died working as a flight attendant on United flight 175, which crashed into the second tower.

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Pretty Prairie Seeks Minister

The Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church in Pretty Prairie, Kansas is searching for a new minister.

The Pretty Prairie Church is one of four churches

located in a town of approximately 700 in rural South Central Kansas. Sunday worship services are offered September through May and weekly Sunday school classes for adults and children year-around. Periodic study groups meet on Wednesday evenings.

"The name says it all" is the town's motto. Pretty Prairie, Kansas, is located within easy commuting distances from three nearby cities: Wichita (pop. 380,000); Hutchinson (pop. 42,000); and Kingman (pop. 3100). Each offers opportunities for cultural, shopping, entertainment, and dining experiences. Sports fans can enjoy collegiate sports at Wichita State University or professional teams in Wichita. Pretty Prai-



rie boasts the Civic Theatre, which shows classic movies and hosts live entertainment in a small town atmosphere. In the summer, Pretty Prairie's many community volunteers host Kansas's largest night professional rodeo, a four-day event. Nearby Cheney Reservoir offers prime sailing as well as boating and fishing opportunities throughout the year.

Even as many small communities are losing their local schools, Pretty Prairie proudly continues to have a solid foundation of community support for its high school, middle school, and grade school. That strong community support also provides backing for the town's post office, the Prairie Sunset (retirement) Home and the Links at Pretty Prairie golf course.

Visit our website for more information: prettyprairiechurch.org. ☞

General Council Meetings

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istry Support Unit (MINSU) and the Augmentation Fund Committee (AFC) submit budgets. Among ideas generated for a remedy were including chairs of support units in General Council meetings (limited to part of meetings at pre- or post-convention) and GC liaisons to support units engaging with them and reporting back. There was agreement that support units need direction from GC and that expectations of the support units have changed in the twenty-first century.

Post-Convention Meeting

At the post-convention meeting, General Council voted that FPRSU will outline existing program funding and develop a proposal for future policies, practices, and procedures.

Focussing on the Communications Support Unit (COMSU) and Information Management Support Unit (IMSU), GC agreed that because of changes in technology, publishing, and social media, IMSU and COMSU could be merged. It voted to authorize COMSU and IMSU to meet, beginning

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Launching "Seven Practices of Peace" A New Church Journey Program

New Church Journey programs are step-by-step, Bible-based, spiritual growth programs designed to assist participants in applying God's teachings to everyday life. Each program provides a guide for reading, discussing, and celebrating spiritual transformation.

Seven Practices of Peace focuses on the creation story, made personal with insights from the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, and provides opportunities to reflect on bringing peace into our lives and relationships. The program's workbook offers seven weeks of readings, questions, and reflections, and is geared toward small group or individual study. The framework supports individual study, community worship, and small group meetings.

The coordinated launch dates for Seven Practices of Peace are Sunday, October 6, 2013, and Sunday, February 2, 2014.

Visit www.newchurchjourney.org to learn more about participating in Seven Practices of Peace. Talk to your local pastor about your church's participation, how to get involved in local program leadership, and how to sign up for a small group.

Betsy Coffman

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vides an ever-continuing deeper revelation of spiritual truth and good in the world." (David P. Johnson, *Our Daily Bread*, p. 30, July 2000).

My pledge, as I seek to discern and follow the Lord's leading in my life and in my ministry, is to continue to answer the call, expressed so well in this lovely song by Father Daniel Schutte:

"Here I am, lord, is it I lord?

I have heard you calling in the night

I will go Lord, where you lead me

I will hold your people in my heart



Council of Ministers Meeting

The Council of Ministers (COM) met on Monday and Tuesday, June 23–24, with twenty-seven ministers in attendance, chaired by Rev. Jonathan Mitchell.

An educational program focused on the issue of sustainability and its connection to faith and happiness was presented by Rev. Jenn Tafel and panelists Revs. David Brown, Carla Friedrich, and Alison Lane-Olsen.

The Council heard the vision of ministry from student Anna Woofenden and gave consent to the Virginia Street Church (St. Paul) to hire Gordon Meyer as its pastor on an annual basis.

Election results were as follows: Kevin Baxter, chair of the Council of Ministers (three-year term); Rich Tafel, unexpired term on the Executive Committee ending in 2015; Kathy

Speas, three-year term on the Executive Committee; Sage Currie Cole, unexpired one-year term on the Executive Committee; Alison Lane-Olsen, nominating committee for the unexpired term ending in 2015; Sherrie Connolly, Nominating Committee for a three-year term; David Fekete, Convention preacher for 2015.

COM recommended to General Council to amend the Bylaws of the Swedenborgian Church to create the category of licensed minister (page 101).

COM acknowledged and welcomed The General Convention of the New Church in Korea and minister Kee-hyun Joh into the Lord's New Church on earth.

COM voted the following motions:

- Recommend that Raghil Khailil Rizq (ordained in 1962), presumed to have entered into the fullness of the spiritual world, be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers.
- Recommend that Dagmar Bollinger be ordained into ministry, her name, after ordination, to be placed on our Roll of Ministers.
- Recommend that Betsy Coffman be ordained into ministry, her name, after ordination, to be placed on our Roll of Ministers. ☩

Continued from preceding page

ning this summer, to develop a proposal for their merger. They will submit a progress report for the fall meeting of General Council.

In response to questions from the Visioning Committee about the continuation of their work and clarification of their charge, GC voted to refer these questions to the Executive Committee.

GC voted to charge the Committee on Amendments to formulate proposals bylaw amendments, to be submitted to GC for its fall meeting:

- Establish the Committee on Inquiry as something other than a General Council committee
- More clearly define the terms of waiver of notification for bylaw

changes (Articles VII & XXIII).

General Council appointments stand from last year except for the following: Retirement Committee, John McIntosh for a three-year term; Board of Directors of Wayfarers Chapel, Lon Elmer for a three-year term; Building Fund Trustees, Marie Benoit.

The next GC meeting will be held November 1–2, 2013, in Framingham, Massachusetts. ☩

Free Books

Books from the former Swedenborg Library in Boston will soon be available for free. The Massachusetts Association is offering many titles for just the cost of shipping. If you are interested in receiving the inventory list, please email messenger@swedenborg.org.



Back row: Albert Cowen, Kevin Baxter, David Fekete, Rhett Billings, Dick Tafel, Betsy Coffman, Bill Coffman, Dick Sommer, Michael L. West. Front Row: Missy Donaldson, Alison Lane-Olsen, Sage Currie, Sharon Williams, Renée Billings Machiniak, Karen Cowen, Eric Allison, Karen Conger, Cinda Lewis Anderton, D. Steven Ledingham.

Communion Service

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I had had them at the house. Days one through three went pretty well, but by day four I was exhausted. As we were eating breakfast the last day and I was trying to gather all their things from all over the house and get them ready for the three-and-a-half hour car ride to take them home, Camryn, the three-year-old, spilled her cereal and milk all over her and the table and the chair and the floor. It flashed before me many a similar incident with her father at that age and how angry I would get at his clumsiness, almost as if I thought it was intentional, when it was just spilled milk. Cecil, who just turned two, looked at me to see how I would react and then said, "Oopsy daisy!" We all laughed and a negative ending to their wonderful visit was averted. I can't erase the way I wish I hadn't treated their father in the past, but I can now look back and think "oopsy daisy," and that is my new mantra when things don't go just like I have planned or think they should go. That page has a lot of red ink, but at the bottom it says "oopsy daisy," and that is the character I want to be now and to take to heaven.

The second piece of advice comes from our scripture reading from John. As Jesus tells his disciples before His death, He is telling us, "I will not leave you. Because I live, you also will live. I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you. . . . I will teach you all things. . . . Peace I leave with you, my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

It often seems like it is all up to us, that we are doing all the work of repentance and regeneration. Someone asked me the other day, "Which part is God and which part is up to us?" Swedenborg tells us to live as if it is all up to us, at the same time knowing it

is all God. What we do matters, but what matters most is why we do it and the character we are building, or really God is building in us. For Jesus tells us He is in the Father. We are in Him. He is in Us. We are all in this together. God is within.

When we make the effort to look at the meaning behind our actions, it can be depressing and deflating and a bit overwhelming. There are some not-so-pretty things driving us—pride, greed, coveting what others have, control—you know, bits and pieces of our selfish lives that like to hide in dark corners. The bad news is, we can't deal with them until we open up the book enough to look inside and find these hidden plagues.

One last point I want to make. The scripture reads, ". . . each person was judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books." It is easy to get off track here, especially we Swedenborgians that are so caught up in "uses." We are so busy "doing for God" that sometimes we miss the "being with God."

I want to close with a psalm-prayer that speaks to me and, I hope, will speak to you. Psalm 132, the Psalm of the Great Reversal, by Jerry Weber, taken from *Fingerprints on Every Moment*:

*I remember God, Your servant David,
and the vow he made in the midst
of grief and shattering loss,
A pledge that he would build
a home for You in the Holy City.*

*He loved You so deeply,
was so thoroughly committed to You,
that even when his own life was falling
apart . . .
rebellious children,
death threats,
kingdom crumbling . . .
he wanted to build a house of worship for
You,
a place where his people could
offer their devotion to You.*

It was the least he could do—so he thought—

*replacing what had become a portable
shrine
with a permanent residence for God,
a place for Your rest and worship,
a true home.*

But that's not how it turned out.

*For all of David's good intentions,
for all his desire to sacrifice for You,
that was not what You desired.*

And my life . . . like David I ask:

"What can I do for You?"

"What sacrifices do You want me to make?"

"How can I build a structure

or a program

or a ministry

or a relationship

that will glorify God?"

*"Are there ascetic penances that should
represent*

my surrender to You?"

"How much money shall I give?"

"How much time shall I spend?"

"How much energy shall I invest?"

*For all my grand intentions
this is not ultimately what You have
desired.*

Then comes this Great Reversal:

*I've lumbered through life with this
illusion*

*that the center of life is about what I do
for You,*

*that I need to find great and small things
to do for You.*

When all along,

You've wanted to do something in me!

*You've desired to build a life of meaning in
me,*

*a life animated by Your Spirit,
and lived from the soul,
inside-out!*

David had it backwards;

he didn't need to build a house for You.

*You wanted to build a house
inside him!*

*Others through the years misunderstood as
David did . . .*

Peter at Mount Transfiguration,

St. Francis at San Damiano,

And Jerry (me) in the contemporary world.

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*You are renovating my interior,
remaking me from the inside-out.
My concern for doing – even good and
Holy things—in the outside world,
Distracts me from the first work
You have initiated within me,
in my soul's interior.*

*This is my own Great Reversal:
The shift in consciousness
to which I open myself daily,
as You build a life of meaning
within me;*

*A house where You dwell,
that becomes a home of peace
for the world.*

*To this Reversal, I open myself.
(and my Book of Life) ☩*

Letter from the President

Continued from page 91

ing number of cases even to the same families if not individuals, has become a rare thing. I have heard that the average pastorate is between five and seven years. What was obvious at this event was how many interconnected lives are touched and influenced and blessed with a constant pastoral presence of that length. It was a time of happiness and joy, and at the same time it was tinged with the sadness and even pain required by the mutual letting go that was taking place. It was something we all silently wished was not happening, even as we reluctantly acknowledged the necessary rightness of it.

It was a heart-rending affirmation of the inevitability of change. And yet, it was also a spiritually uplifting affirmation of the inevitability of a fundamental dynamic of our theology. As a community we were witnessing, in fact participating in, nothing less than spiritual regeneration. And this regeneration was happening within each and every one of us, just as it was happening within Randy and Millie, just as

it was happening within the church community of Wilmington, just as it was happening within our denomination, and just as it is happening in the wider world in which we live, here on earth and in the spiritual realm where life itself exists, even if now known only in part. Things are born into life, things come into the fullness of life, and things pass away into what, while seeming to be the end of life, is in fact the beginning of the birth of new life. It is a concept so fundamental to what and who we are, with implications so large and inevitable, that most of the time we simply prefer not to think about it. Yet it informs and impacts every aspect of life at all levels.

The essence and living of life is found in regeneration: heart-rending loss and spirit-lifting possibility continually tied together and inevitably unfolding in the palm of the hand of God. We can try to deny it and fight and resist it or we can welcome it and openly engage and embrace it. Either response will not change what is hap-

pening all around us; it only changes the quality of our inner experience of and the nature of our outward contribution to what is happening all around us. I, for one, am glad that this church is filled with a bunch of huggers!

With courage bolstered by faith, and creativity inspired by hope, and hard work motivated by love, God will indeed bring new life into and out of our part to play in the creation of heaven on earth. Change is happening all around us, but it is also happening within us. It is a sign of the times and it is the unmistakable sign of life.

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

Starting Science From God

An 8-week SHS Outreach Online Course

October 21–December 15, 2013

Tuition free. Course enrollment limited to 15 students

Dr. Ian Thompson, Nuclear Physicist and Swedenborgian Author

Many of us sense there is something real beyond the scope of naturalistic science. But what? Must mental and religious lives always remain a mystery and never become part of scientific knowledge? Can theism ever be connected with science? This course will explain a new rational approach to combining science and theism, using ideas from Emanuel Swedenborg. It presents theism as a scientific theory, explaining its basic postulates, consequences, and predictions as simply as possible and without paradox. Dr. Thompson will show how a following of core postulates of theism leads to novel and useful predictions about the psychology of minds and the physics of materials which should appear in the universe. Students will see if those predictions agree with the world as they observe it, both externally in nature and internally in our minds. In fact, they mesh surprisingly well with the structure of reality already revealed by modern quantum field theory and by theories of developmental stages in human minds. The result is a promising new rational theory encompassing theology, psychology, and physics.

Email course@theisticscience.org if you are interested.

For more information go to
www.theisticscience.org/Courses.html

Harvey Chapel Fund

Donations from the Sunday worship service were given for the Dorothea Harvey Chapel restoration project at Urbana University. Additional donations should be made out to the Swedenborgian Church, with "Harvey Chapel" on the memo line, and sent to Central Office.

Convention Report

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Owner Lin Riley explaining the history of the Frank Sewall House

Saturday afternoon was capped by an open house and tea at the former home of Rev. Frank Sewall, president of Urbana College in the 1850s. This is the home so vividly brought to life by Sewall's daughter, Alice Archer (Sewall) James, in Alice Skinner's biography, *Stand by Me Roses* (reviewed in the March 2012 *Messenger*). The owners of the house, Tom and Lin Riley, graciously invited guests to wander freely throughout the house, and they discussed the house at great length with those interested. The experience was heightened by the trio of Ken Turley (mandolin), Laurie Turley (piano), and Barb Mackey (cello) playing chamber music.

Coffee House

On Saturday evening, after the reception that followed the Convention Communion Service, conventioners gathered for an evening of music, led by Ken and Laurie Turley, Paul Deming, David Fekete, Gordon Meyer, and Steve Ledingham. Others were invited



Paul Deming, Laurie Turley, and Gordon Meyer at the coffee house

Interested in Swedenborgian Spiritual Direction?

Greetings friends! As I settle into my new home in Anchorage, Alaska, my new marriage, and my new job working at St. Mary's Episcopal Parish with Children and Family Ministries, I am a swirl of excitement for all that is ahead. And simultaneously so much has not changed: my faith, my sense of call, and the deep connections I feel to my Swedenborgian spiritual family.

As I enter my second year of training in spiritual direction with the Haden Institute I would like to offer myself up as a spiritual director in-training to this beloved community.

Are you looking for a spiritual director and would like to work with a fellow Swedenborgian? Have you felt a prompting to look more closely at your spiritual life and relationship with God? Are you at a crossroads? As a stu-

dent I would not ask for any compensation but only a commitment to working together once a month for about an hour and a desire to do this sacred work.

If this is of interest to you email me at sageserene@gmail.com. Let me know a bit about where you are on your journey and what you are seeking. We can then set up an initial time to talk to explore how we might work together and discern if we would be a good fit. I will be limited in how many directees I'll be able to accept.

I am grateful for technology's shrinking of space, so that even from my remote outpost we can make these deep and close connections. Many blessings to all; if this invitation speaks to you, I look forward to seeing how the Lord might move between us.

—Rev. Sage Cole (formerly Currie)

to share their musical talents as well, so Joe Machiniak, Renée Machiniak (in a duet with her husband Joe), Rhett Billings, Alice Henderson and Danny Pera (a duet), and SCYL president Celie Bauer sang for the crowd.



The Urbana Church

Closing Worship

The closing worship service at the Urbana Swedenborgian Church was well-attended. This beautiful and historic gem provided the perfect atmosphere for a service led by Sherrie Connelly, music by Jenny Caughman, Paul Deming, and Steve Ledingham (who distributed percussion instruments to the congregation),



Rev. Sherrie Connelly and Karen Conger addressing the closing service.

and parting words from President Ken Turley, including recognition for service performed by those whose terms of service had ended.

Certificates for recognition of service were presented to Matthew Fleming for six years on General Council, Rev. Dave Brown for six years on IMSU, Susan Hemmerich for three years on MINSU, Lem Putnam for six years on the Wayfarers Chapel Board, Rev. Nadine Cotton for three years on the Committee on Admission to

Continues next page

Passages

Baptisms

Kaylee Susan Stuart, born May 23, 2012, to parents Kerry Lynn and Kevin James Stuart, and grandparents Susan Lemee and Mr. Lindsey Harris and James and Penny Stuart, was baptized March 2, 2013, at the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Malachi Rafael Clish, born December 24, 2012, to parents Caitlin Costello and George Clish, grandparents Donald and Gloria Guiu Costello and great-grandparents Rafael and Betty Guiu, was baptized March 31, 2013, at the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, the Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Serena Elyse Greenwood, born February 9, 2011, and **Nathaniel William Greenwood**, born October 10, 2012, to parents Beki and Jason Greenwood and grandparents Merrilee Phinney and Martin Vojtko, were baptized June 9, 2013, at the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, the Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Weddings

Sage Serene Currie, former pastor of the Fryeburg New Church in Maine, was united in marriage to **Cecil (Ted) Cole, Jr.** July 19 in a small ceremony at St. Mark & Matthew's Episcopal Church in Barrington, Rhode Island.

Continued from preceding page

Ministry, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell for three years as chair of the Council of Ministers, Rev. Kevin Baxter for two years as secretary of the Council of Ministers, Rev. John Maine for five years on EDSU, and Barbara Boxwell for three years as a Building Fund trustee. ☩

Officiating the ceremony was the groom's good friend and colleague, Rev. Mally Lloyd of Plymouth, Massachusetts. The couple will make their home in Anchorage, Alaska, where they will both serve as ministers at St. Mary's Episcopal Church.



The bride is the daughter of Rev. Susannah and Deane Currie of Riverside, Rhode Island, and Denmark, Maine, and granddaughter of Melissa and Will Barbeau, and Claire and Albert Currie.

Ministry Transitions

Rev. Allison Longstaff has accepted a call to serve the Bath (Maine) Church.

Rev. Allison Lane-Olsen has accepted a call to serve the Fryeburg, Maine Church. She has departed the Pretty Prairie (Kansas) Church and moved with her family to Fryeburg in August.

Rev. Randy Laakko retired as minister of the Wilmington (Delaware) Church after forty-nine years of service.

Rev. Susannah Currie and **Rev. Ken Turley** have joined the ministry team at Portland New Church in Maine. Either or both lead the service on the first Sunday of each month. The second and fourth Sundays are led by ChIME (Chaplaincy Institute of Maine), and the third Sunday is led by members of the Portland New Church Ministry Team. Rev. Currie is now the administrative minister for the church; she continues as minister of the Bridgewater New Church in Massachusetts.

Graduations

Dagmar Bollinger received the Mas-

ter of Divinity degree from Earlham School of School of Religion.

Yudai Hori received the Master of Divinity degree from Pacific School of Religion.

Hunter Roberts received the Doctor of Divinity degree from the Graduate Theological Union.

Deaths

Dorothy (DeBruyn) Young passed away July 30, 2013, at the age of 96. She was a long-time member of the Boston Church of the New Jerusalem and lived in Easton, Massachusetts. She was predeceased by her husband, Lawrence C. Young and her children Bruce and Roger Young. She is survived by her children, Andrea Martin, Allan Young, Lawrence Young Jr., Pamela Gardner, and Dorothy Pugh; twelve grandchildren; four great-grandchildren; eight great-great-grandchildren; and several brothers, sisters, nieces, and nephews. Dorothy worked for twenty-five years as the secretary at the Boston Church. She also worked in real estate and at General Motors in Detroit. She and her husband formed the Brockton Area Retarded Childrens Association.

In Memoriam

Raghib Rizq and his wife Tafeeda came to the New Church Theological School in preparation for Raghib to complete studies leading to his ordination in 1962. They were congenial hosts to fellow students, offering hospitality of Turkish coffee and pastries while resident at the school.

Upon ordination, Raghib and Tafeeda returned to Port Said, Egypt, and dedicated their lives to the spread of the New Church, within the constraints of Egyptian culture and governmental restrictions. Due to such constraints, communication has been limited over the years. ☩

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.

Visit SwedenborgianCommunity.org this Fall!

It's a new worship year in Convention, and the annual theme for 2013–14 is Divine Providence. Our upcoming SwedenborgianCommunity.org worship plan follows our denominational theme:

September: How did Divine Providence work in the life of Johnny Appleseed?

October–November: How is Divine Providence working in *your* life?

Join us every Thursday 9–10 PM Eastern Time in the New Chat Room

- The 1st Thursday, we read and discuss Swedenborg's *Divine Providence*.
- The 2nd Thursday, we have a mini-mini-course on a Swedenborgian concept.
- The 3rd Thursday, we have a chat on the theme of the month.
- The 4th Thursday, we have an interview with a special guest.

And of course on Sundays, we have our weekly prayer-service chat, 9–9:30 PM Eastern Time, and "Coffee Hour" chat, 9:30–10:30 PM Eastern Time.

We are happy to announce that Val Brugler is our new tech support person at SC.org. Val worked for a number of years with denominational boards in the capacity of secretary, graphic artist, office manager, web designer, and denominational representative with the Governing Board of the National Council of Churches—and she designed the new logo for SC.org. Val says, "I look forward to serving SwedenborgianCommunity.org."

We led a mini-course at the annual convention, "Touching the Spirit in New Ways," exploring SC.org and other non-traditional ministries. The presenters were the minister (Rev. Wilma Wake) and Central Committee (Page Morahan, Chris Laitner, and Rev. Jonathan Mitchell). We talked about the process and the seven-year success story of this ministry, and also about other alternative ways of doing ministry in this twenty-first century. ☩

Gathering Leaves: September 12–15, 2013

Fryeburg New Church Assembly, Fryeburg, Maine

**The fifth meeting of the minds and hearts of Swedenborgian women
from all branches and locations**

Workshops, small groups, and outings

**For more information go to www.gatheringleaves.weebly.com
or call Roslyn Taylor at 267.679.6596**