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Wayfarers Chapel, Rancho Palos Verdes, California
(Read "The Miracle on Seventh Street, p. 161)

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Moving Toward the Light

Celebrating Advent

Guest Editorial
Paul Martin-Grumman

In the United States, Christmas is the only religious holiday to be a national legal holiday. This is a result not so much of its great popularity, but of the lack of clarity regarding the purpose of its celebration. The date of Christmas was chosen in large part to coincide with pre-Christian festivals which had probably originated with even earlier festivals marking the winter solstice. Christmas was intended as an alternative to pagan festivals, but often the practices of those festivals were just incorporated into the Christian celebration. Consequently, the confusion over whether it is a religious or secular holiday has been there from the beginning. The radical commercialization of Christmas in this century has heightened the tension between its religious and secular aspects. In the U.S. people spend 35 billion dollars on Christmas gifts each year. Advertisers exploit our deep religious emotions by channeling them toward buying gifts.

The increasing gap between the rich and poor worldwide, but especially in the U.S., cries out for a re-evaluation of the Santa Claus theology. This theology is best expressed in the song, "Santa Claus is Coming to Town," in which Santa is omniscient, like God, knowing who has been "naughty or nice," and judgment day comes every year at Christmas. The "good" children are rewarded with lots of expensive presents and the "bad" children are punished with few. Poor children get the message that they are bad because they are poor and rich children get the message that they are good, or chosen, because they are rich. The truth is, of course, that presents are not distributed according to who has been good and bad, but by who has money and who does not. I saw a poster which stated simply, "Santa doesn't come to the poor, Jesus did."

There is a great book entitled, *To Celebrate—Reshaping Holidays and Rites of Passage*. In its exploration of alternatives to commercialized Christmas it says, "Expect your religious community to provide resources and opportunities for members looking for ways to resist the pressures of commercialized Christmas—then act to see that your expectation becomes reality." Have your church put together a holiday basket for an underprivileged family, go carolling together, or collectively make a donation toward housing a family. Find creative ways for your church community to express the love they feel at this time of year by reaching out to the larger community, especially to those who are most in need of feeling loved.

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The Miracle on Seventh Street

Carl E. Yenetchi

I have always wanted to believe in visions and miracles. Over the years my studies of the Bible and the theology of the Swedenborgian Church have encouraged these desires. I have gone vision questing on the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota and in the mountains of western Montana. I have found visions. Miracles, however, were for me only a matter of faith; I had never been a witness to one. That was to change. My introduction to miracles was to be quite different from my introduction to visions. Whereas, I had gone questing to find visions, the miracle on Seventh Street caught me quite unaware. But let me take you back to the beginning of our story.

Paul Garcia wanted to do something for the homeless and hungry people in his community of San Pedro, California. San Pedro is a harbor city located just south of Los Angeles. San Pedro has more than its share of hungry and homeless people as do many American harbor cities since the trade deficit continues to humble our one-proud merchant fleet.

Paul's desire to help people comes from his faith. He is a devout Roman Catholic, whose rosary hangs from the rear-view mirror of his van to remind him that some things are more important than other things. Lately, Paul has been interested in the visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary that have been occurring to children in Medjugorje, Yugoslavia. Paul is a believer in miracles, visions, and the wondrous power of God in Jesus Christ.

Paul is employed as the Buildings and Grounds Manager at the Way-

farers Chapel which as a national memorial to Emanuel Swedenborg is an ecumenical ministry of the Swedenborgian Church in Rancho Palos Verdes, California, an affluent suburb of Los Angeles. Working in a church setting each day, I think, might have heightened Paul's desire to help the poor of his community, but no matter, he was the first to see the Wayfarers Chapel as an instrument to help feed the hungry of San Pedro. Paul knew of a group of people in San Pedro who were feeding the hungry three nights a week. He also knew that they were looking to expand their ministry to all seven nights. This group of ecumenical Christians had organized themselves as the "Crossing Ministry." Their system was simple. They provided the dining hall, the coffee and the doughnuts and asked local church groups to supply the home-cooked meals. Paul thought that the Wayfarers Chapel should be involved with this ministry.

Paul approached the senior minister at the Chapel, Rev. Harvey Tafel, with his idea. Harvey was enthusiastic and made time on the Chapel Board of Managers' agenda for Paul to present the idea to the board. Paul was nervous before his presentation. He had written his talk out, and as he read it to the board, I do not remember his ever looking away from that paper. He concluded his talk with several Bible verses and as he read them, he began to cry.

The board, moved by the sincerity of Paul's presentation, voted \$1,000 to be spent on organizing the Wayfarers Chapel involvement with the "Crossing Ministry." Paul's dream was coming true.

One of my concerns as we entered this project was that Swedenborgian theology is considerably different from that of the conservative Christians who made up the bulk of the people who worked at the Crossing Ministry. In many ways, I felt the preaching that went on at the Crossing Ministry was somehow not appropriate when dealing with, for all intents and purposes, a captive congregation. I questioned using hunger and physical needs to force the people to listen to sermons as a price for their food. While I was struggling with this aspect of the Crossing Ministry, Paul gave me a copy of the newsletter, *Miracle at Medjugorje*, to read. In this newsletter there is an interview with Ivanka, one of the children who have been having the visions of the Blessed Virgin Mary in the Yugoslavian city of Medjugorje. The interviewer said to the child, "It is important that people of good faith, regardless of denomination, not be turned against each other. But tell me more about this. What did the Madonna say about this?" Ivanka replied, "The Madonna said that all religions are accepted by her Son." These words reminded me of those of Emanuel Swedenborg, . . . *no one who believes in God and lives well is condemned* (HD 244). My anxiety on this issue dissolved: everyone was acting according to the best they knew. I had no right to judge the people or the theology of the Crossing Ministry. Maybe this humbling was to clear the way for my witness of a miracle.

It soon became evident that we were going to need more than the \$1,000 that the board had voted.

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The Miracle . . .

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The restaurant-sized pans and thermal food carriers alone were going to cost all of that and more. Harvey quickly came up with the solution. He provided special Christmas envelopes, and a letter explaining the needs of the hungry in San Pedro. These envelopes were included in the worship folders that were handed out at the Chapel each Sunday during Advent. The donations together with generous donations made by the Social Actions and Concern Committee of the Swedenborgian Church (SACC), and the Friends of the Wayfarers Chapel (FOWC), a Chapel support group, provided the extra money that we needed.

We waited patiently, and sometimes not so patiently, to be called to prepare and serve our first meal at the Crossing Ministry. Finally, we were asked to fill in for a group on Saturday, February 10. We (Paul, Barbara Norris, Terry Jimanowicz, Harvey Tafel) began preparing the food at 3 p.m. that day and despite underestimating how long it takes to boil 15 gallons of water, the food was ready and at the Crossing Ministry building on Seventh Street in San Pedro on time.

I was unable to be at the opening of the meal because I was waiting at the Chapel to perform a wedding. The wedding was running late because the bride had forgotten an essential part of her wedding garb. Paul, his wife, several friends, Terry and Rev. Tafel were already there and serving by the time I arrived. Kim Erickson, who had to wait for the bridal party to leave the Chapel grounds, and her husband came about 20 minutes late. When I arrived, my first thought was that there were more people there to be fed than we had expected. Paul and I had gone to the meal the night before and we had counted only 70 people. We had, therefore, prepared food enough to serve 80. At least 125 people had come. We did not have anywhere near the amount of food we needed. I found Paul and voiced my concern. He told me to

relax, we had plenty of shepherd's pie. I remember thinking that was odd because we had spent the afternoon preparing spaghetti and meatballs, tossed salad, and rolls, which somehow didn't add up to shepherd's pie. I went to work serving the spaghetti while a gospel singer and lay preacher recruited by the Crossing Ministry took turns at the mike regaling our guests with their understandings of the wonders of Jesus.



*What else is it
but a miracle
that we can
love and care
for each other.*



Suddenly I realized that the plates which were being handed out were filled with shepherd's pie. There was plenty of food for everyone.

When later I asked where this food had come from, I learned that the church we were filling in for had

neglected to inform some of its members that they had the night off. Two families of their parish had prepared as always. It was their shepherd's pie that we had served. I also learned where our extra guests had come from. A British petroleum tanker had run into its own anchor the day before and many of the beaches in the South Bay area had been covered with oil. People had flocked to San Pedro hoping to find work in the cleanup operations.

The Lord had known that we would need more food and had supplied it. To me, it was a modern-day example of the loaves and the fishes. I had witnessed the hand of God work a miracle.

It had been a fine night. We finished feeding the Lord's people, cleaned up, and went home.

The problems of San Pedro are still there and there are still days when the Crossing Ministry cannot serve food. But, because of Paul's faith, one more night is covered. Which in its own way is also a miracle. For what else is it but a miracle that we can love and care for each other.

Postscript

Several weeks later, the volunteers from the Wayfarers Chapel were told that because of our liberal theology several of the officers of the Crossing Ministry were questioning our participation in the program. We met with Mr. Harlan Hyer, president of The Crossing Ministry, and he told us that he would get back to us. A few weeks later he called and told Paul that we would no longer be able to be a part of The Crossing Ministry. Paul in short order made arrangements for us to feed at the Beacon House, which is a more liberal feeding ministry. On our second visit one of the residents of Beacon House gave us this poem that he had written several years ago. It reminded us that our ministry at the Wayfarers Chapel has many aspects, some that we may not always be aware of.

Rev. Carl Yenetchi is a minister at Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California.

The Chapel By The Sea

(To those of the Wayfarers Chapel)

*High upon a majestic hill,
there stands a great Cathedral;
Whose belfry loomed to beckon me
To The Chapel By The Sea.*

*There is a peace prevails in a pew,
The high-noon sun passing ivy leaf,
In heavenly ray shines through.*

*If God be anywhere at all,
He is surely In this hallowed hall
His presence steeps in ivy leaf,
He whispers from a fall.*

*I take in fond memory, this revered
place
With renewed hope and feeling blessed.
For I wayfared there in my loneliness
and left
Burdened free; The Chapel By The Sea.*

Lopaka

The Homeless Man Who Lives Near Me

Charles D. Pfeifer

A homeless man lives in a building that I frequent. No, he doesn't really live there. But for me he does. He sits on a plastic couch by a little-used stairwell. (I think of it as his couch because it is marked by the burns of his cigarettes.) Often, books and magazines are spread by the couch—his reading material.

When I pass, I nod and say, "Hello." He responds in kind. We talk little more than that, although I wonder about him. Does he have a place to stay at night? How does he stand this dreary hallway with his cigarettes and magazines? Does he lack in resources or ambition? I don't know.

I don't pry. It seems important just to let him be. If he asked for help, I would respond. But he doesn't.

I pass another homeless man from time to time. He, too, sits smoking. I know him less well than the first, but I fear him more. He seldom looks at me, and I return the favor. His dirty face and slowness of speech embarrass me. We are so different.

Near him there are others, men and women who sit in the shadows. I cannot see them, but I sense their presence. The women have children, young things, with potential unrealized. Nausea rolls over me when I am in their presence.

The homeless people live inside. They are a part of me. They are my insecurities, my uncouth patterns that I yearn to ignore. They are my early rejections and experiences of ridicule. They are those personal, "unrealistic" visions which I banish to the dark recesses of my soul where they wither and die.

Oh yes, the man in the hallway distresses me, because he reminds me of my inner homeless ones. I treat him as I treat them. I pretend he's not there. I try to make him "presentable." I institutionalize him. I curse his existence. But he will not

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He's Here!

James F. Lawrence

We hear the reports that the long night is over: He's here! The Messiah has arrived! The period of waiting is over. The blessed reality of God's love and peace and joy can now be realized. Praise God, hallelujah! Our Savior is here!

But I know what so many secretly feel. There's no *real* change in anything. It's just another round of an ongoing ritual. Pleasant enough, but this cosmic stuff seems like rhetorical overkill. Life is as it always is. Year in, year out, the great wheel keeps turning, the sun keeps rising and setting, and things are about like they've always been.

Long before Frank Capra, Swedenborg had the same nugget of genius that makes *It's a Wonderful Life* such a terrific movie. How easily I can imagine Swedenborg stroking his chin, saying, "So, you don't really believe in the incarnation, do you? It all seems a little far-fetched, does it?" And I can imagine him looking up and saying, "Now *that's* an idea! Oh, but can we really do this? Is it orderly? I see, yes, this sort of experience can be allowable. My goodness, this should be interesting."

And then I can see him turning to us and saying, "You are going to get a very rare privilege. You're going to get to see what the world would be like, if Jesus had never been born."

What Would the World be like if Jesus Had Never Been Born?

And now, faced with this prospect, any collection of Americans would find themselves represented into two very general categories. For those who believe that the power of

Jesus lay in the words of wisdom he spoke, the philosophical platitudes that he uttered, the world would be little different. Some surface features, of course, would be gone. All the Christian symbols, for instance. But there would still be colorful winter rituals, because dressing up trees and making bright the winter solstice pre-dated the Christ-mass, which was tagged on to it. And there would be churches, for there are as many founders of religions as there are tastes in the human psyche. Jesus' absence would be easily accommodated by other sages and would-be saviors. For those who believe Jesus' value lay merely in his words of wisdom and spiritual viewpoint, then only surface features would be any different today if Jesus had never been born.

For those who believe Jesus' significance lies precisely in the divinity of which he was begotten, the movie version of Swedenborg's theology would reveal a world as starkly different as the shift from the basically wholesome Bedford Falls animated by George Bailey to the cold and mean Pottersville which never had the benefit of George Bailey's life. In the movie version of Swedenborg's theology, the importance of the incarnation is *infinitely* more significant than spiritual truisms added to the world's store of Golden Rules to Live By.

Cosmic Crisis

Swedenborg tells us that long ago there was a real crisis occurring in physical space and time, in real history, between the forces of good and evil. The balance providing the spir-

itual freedom that the Lord always maintains as our natural habitat was in danger. The encroachment, of course, was from the evil side—the forces of Mr. Potter, if you will. Though goodness cherishes freedom, evil craves slavery—needs it, in fact, to perpetuate itself. And since the Lord never allows our freedom to be placed at risk, a dramatic and crucial action was taken to be effective for all time.

The galvanizing event that protected the balance was the infusion of the divine into the human and physical realm in a wholly new way, a way that would effectively prevent forever an inappropriate advance of evil. A poor but perhaps helpful analogy would be something like a vaccination. The whole system is permeated by the presence of a protective agent, put in place through the divine incarnation, enabling us to pursue and maintain spiritual health in spiritual freedom.

Without the incarnation, the world would've had no chance of escaping total capitulation to evil, once a certain line was crossed. The magnet of evil would have had no equal repelling force in which we would have the power and grace to resist the life that evil offers us.

For those who believe in the movie version of Swedenborg's theology, we would be taken on a tour of a hideous world. With two thousand years of an inexorable slide into spiritual quicksand, this world would have become increasingly deaf and blind to spiritual truths, would have adopted more and more aggressively selfish ways of living, would have lost its conscience and moral compass altogether. Our world

would now resemble the social system of a penitentiary.

Extreme characterization, you say? Swedenborg claimed to have had the privilege of touring realms where the Lord was totally absent from the hearts and minds of people. For long eons people had confirmed sinful behavior and now lived in a social atmosphere of complete repression. These were hellish states of being: colors were drab and everything was unkempt. Especially sobering was the cruel light that shined from the eyes of the people: people on the make, people whose whole being had been given over to calculated self-interest.

In the movie version of Swedenborg's theology, that's what would have become of this world if Jesus had never been born. And so today, whatever effort we pour into the celebration of this birth, we can give but faint praise in relation to the magnitude of the event.

Linking Christmas and the Second Coming

But we stand at a very different place in history than the wise men and the shepherds. Two thousand years later, we cannot joyously celebrate the Lord's birth into our world without a deep commitment to the Lord's Second Coming. Without the second coming, as understood by the New Church, the first advent would be a failed attempt.

The New Church teaches that the Lord's promised Second Coming is not a physical return of the Lord in the Eastern skies, but is an ongoing spiritual development of the human population. To the extent that God's love and wisdom are truly received, then to that same extent the Lord is truly here among us, and to that same extent the incarnation is proven effective.

The first advent we celebrate as a great cosmic event. The second advent we *participate in*, and are partially *responsible for*. We are midwives for the Lord's second coming. It is *our* hearts, *our* minds, *our* hands upon which that coming relies. And so it is in mindfully linking these two advents of Jesus Christ that Christmas takes cosmic, rather than merely cultural, meaning for us.

We Are the Chosen Planet

Have you ever visited the site of a famous event or the home of a famous person and been fascinated by being in the actual place where something great had occurred? Since this is a day for cosmic theology, I'm not going to be shy about saying that our world holds a similar fascination for creatures of other worlds, because Earth is the place where God incarnated as a preserving and saving act for all physical realms everywhere. *This* world, *our* world. We were chosen for an unflattering reason—namely, that we were in about the worst shape—but our world is the place where God walked and lived and spoke in a way that has not occurred elsewhere in other worlds.

These great cosmic truths can move us, if we open ourselves to them. But it requires seeing with new eyes. George Bailey was given the privilege of seeing what his little world would have been like if he

had never been born. We will not likely be given similar privileges to witness what the world would be like if Jesus had never been born. But we can imagine it.

Being able to see our world, not as the same old world we've always known, but a world kept and maintained beautifully in balance for us—for *us*. Yes, it is even evoked by looking across the street and seeing all the shops and places of business with new eyes, grateful that they are there instead of who-knows-what, and yelling in our hearts, "Merry Christmas, Village Variety! I love you!" It is looking around and sensing something of greatness happening, something eternal and immortal, and you're part of it. In *that* seeing the Christmas message finally comes home:

God is here.

Rev. James Lawrence is co-pastor with wife Rachel Lawrence at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church and director of J. Appleseed & Co.

Some Highlights from Local Parishes

*Changes, Transitions,
News and Ideas*

Rev. Dr. Ivan Franklin reports a narrow escape from the Painted Cave Fire that raged in Santa Barbara this past summer. His house was miraculously left standing. Ivan has moved in the last year from San Diego to Santa Barbara, where he continues his Czech-Russian Outreach Ministry...

Rev. Ron Brugler, Urbana, Ohio, has accepted the ministerial post at Church of the Good Shepherd, Kitchener, Ontario, and is taking up residence there December 29, 1990...

Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry began work in September as pastor of the Fryeburg Church in Maine. He also received his doctor of ministry degree this past summer, conferred by the Center for Advanced Pastoral Studies, Detroit. Ordained in 1979, Gard

first served the Detroit church, then embarked upon a special ministry in the world of sports, which met with considerable success...

Revs. Jim and Rachel Lawrence, lately of Fryeburg, Maine, began their ministries in September 1990 at the San Francisco Church.

Rev. Edwin Capon, senior minister of the San Francisco church for 11 years, retired this past June. He and his wife Esther plan to spend the warmer months in Maine and the cooler part of the year in Pleasant Hill, California.

Rev. Susan Turley-Moore, former associate minister of the San Francisco church for eleven months, is seeking new options for ministry in the San Francisco area.

The Cambridge (Mass.) Church

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A Diamond on the Hillside

Rhett Billings

I stepped off the elevator onto the second floor of the hospital. Looking for the intensive care unit, I knew I must be close. Everything was so quiet. The faint beeping of a heart monitor caused me to chill. I was becoming afraid and beginning to wonder if I should do this after all.

The funny thing, though, was that my legs seemed to be disconnected from my mind. They were walking willfully and peacefully down the hall, as if nothing unusual was going on. Fear was taking all sorts of little jabs at my mind, but my will-driven legs, completely oblivious, never questioned what I had decided to do that night.

Arriving at the I.C.U. nursing station, my heart was beating wildly with anticipation and fear of the unknown. Face flushed and hands cold, the words came from my mouth with resistance. "I work in the Activities Department at the Champaign Nursing Home, and a friend of Gladys Murphy asked me if I'd come and sing her a few Christmas songs."

The nurse marveled that yet another representative of the nursing home was there to comfort Gladys. A work-front pride filled my soul, and I began to feel lighter inside. The nurse explained to me, however, that Gladys' condition was very serious, and that she was surprised Gladys made it through the day.

Replying that I understood, I tried to put on a mask of calm; I won-

dered what she would look like. I had never been with someone who was about to die.

Walking into Gladys' room, the full volume of the heart monitor seemed to scream in my ears. I have always waged fierce battle with the monster known as stage fright, and that monitor would not make it any easier. Mustering all the courage and calm I could, I took off my jacket, moved to the side of her bed and said, "Hello there, Gladys. It's Rhett."

Her eyes flew open and a smile danced across her pained countenance. It took me by total surprise, and I was deeply, deeply moved. Her appearance made me want to cry. She was swollen all over, retaining so much water she looked twice as heavy as before. But her warm greeting renewed my confidence and strength. Playfully, I said, "Ol' Paul, back at the nursing home, is really concerned about ya, and he asked if I would come and sing you a few Christmas songs tonight. Would that be OK?"

◆
*Taking hold
of this gift
blew my life
wide open*
◆

She nodded, yes, and I began to sing, "O Holy Night", my favorite Christmas song. After my first song, an astonished nurse noted that Gladys' blood pressure and heart rate had come down noticeably while I was singing, and asked if I would sing at her next wedding if she ever had another. We all laughed heartily, and Gladys giggled. I sang "The Christmas Song" and "Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas", and then bent over Gladys and said, "Well, Gladys, I'll tell you what. If I don't get home to my wife, right quick, she'll surely serve me up on a platter." She smiled and giggled

again.

About six months ago, the Lord placed a spiritual diamond on the hillside of my unmoving life. I picked it up, recognized its beauty, and knew I had to leave a job I detested to follow a low-paying little star gleaming in the want ads: "Activities Aide wanted at the County Nursing Home." The ad called for a "fun-loving, outgoing, energetic people-person who can motivate, inspire, and lead groups of elderly people in numerous activities."

Compared to my highly-paid but unfulfilling work as a house painter in an emotionally cold, macho environment, this looked like food to a starving traveler. But there was one problem. I was afraid. The fact that I would be making almost half what I was making as a painter was nothing compared to the problem. I am ordinarily a shy, withheld, cowardly kind of person. I don't like to take risks or try new things, not to mention attempting to inspire the oppressed people who are forced to live out the remainder of their lives in a nursing home. But something was calling from within and calling loudly. I applied for and got that job at the nursing home.

Singing is one of my favorite things to do in life. I sing all the time: doing the dishes, driving in the car, taking a bath, folding laundry, anytime I am alone or with my wife. Singing *in front of people* has always been another story. My wife says I'm blessed with a voice of gold. This may be true, but the gold has always tarnished when I tried to share it with others. Stage fright put a clamp on my throat.

After working at the nursing home for about a month, Linnie Johnson, a resident there, was growing very dear to my heart. One day on our way back from the chapel, she told me that "Peace in the Valley" was her favorite gospel song. When we arrived back at her room, I sang the first line of the song for her, then stopped, because I couldn't remember any more of the lyrics. She cried when she heard that one little sentence. "It was just so beautiful," she said.

In the next few months, I went on a rampage, singing at dozens of bed-

sides. At last, I had found a place in which I was secure enough to sing in front of people without so much fear. There was something about how gracefully and gratefully these elderly people were accepting my gift of song. Day by day, my stage fright was diminishing. I discovered that when I'm singing from my heart, focusing only on giving the gift that I'm able to give, the stage fright disappears.

It does something for you when you see what music can do to people, faces lifting, eyes smiling, bodies relaxing, socially closed souls opening up. It showed me what kind of power the Lord placed in the jewel of music.

One nonresponsive resident in the late stages of Alzheimer's Disease opened her eyes and turned her head toward me as I sang for her. Nothing I or anyone else had tried has evoked

this kind of response. Another resident who frequently gets into screaming fits calms down and relaxes when I sing. Still another will call me every dirty name in the book when I walk into her room, and then wind up kissing my fingers after a beautiful religious song. It is miraculous.

One of my favorite experiences occurs about once a week when I wheel Linnie into the room next door. There we are joined by Sally Smith and Susie Bean. We close the door and I sing for them. The Lord lifts their day through my music, while they teach me what singing is really all about. It is a mutual relationship of harmony and love, and I thank God for these three ladies and what they are doing for me. I thank Him for all the residents at the home, all the beautiful staff there who have become my close friends, and most

of all, the Lord, for placing that diamond on the hillside.

What if I had not picked up that diamond and applied for this job? What if I had let my fears stop me? I have to ask myself how many other sparkling jewels the Lord has placed before me that I have not grasped. Taking hold of this gift blew my life wide open. I am becoming a risk-taker. . . I am learning to dream and reach to make my dreams come true. In other words, I am learning to follow the Lord.

Yes, it can be very scary at times. But when you reach out and claim one of the Lord's diamonds, He helps you. After all, it sure wasn't *my* will driving my legs at the hospital that night, but His.

Rhett Billings is a student at Urbana University and the son of Rev. John and Sharon Billings, Cleveland Swedenborgian Church.

'Twas the Night Before Trash Day

'Twas the night before trash day, and all through
the alley,
All the neighbors were stirring, except neighbor
Sally.

The trash cans were heaped, the bags were piled
high;
In hopes that the garbage men soon would come by.

Some trash cans were tin; and others were poly;
All in a row, they looked very jolly.

You could hear the lids rattling way out to
the street;
And the scampering and shuffling of quick
neighbor feet.

Safe in the warmth of her snug little bed,
Neighbor Sally lay covered clear up to her head.

When out of the blue the dogs started howling,
Sally rushed to her window, grumbling and scowling.

That strange little neighbor who'd torn out her floor
Was now dragging a water heater out her back door!

Meanwhile next door with a sack full of glass,
Mr. Black came a-staggering through his high grass.

In the next house you knew there's a baby inside;
For disposable diapers you just cannot hide.

Now there's little Tommy followed close by his
mommy;
Their arms were all black from the newspaper stack.

An innocent evening, so quiet until—
Little trash hills appeared, the alley to fill.

Sally stood watching and sobbed in dismay:
"My neighbors are throwing this good garbage
away!"

So at midnight she dressed, and with giggles and
grins
Threw open the garage door: O look—recycling bins!

The glass jars she gathered in piles white and green.
The aluminum cans best collection she'd seen!

Down the alley she rode on her recycled cycle
And I heard her exclaim: "Recycle, recycle!"

Linda and Joy Mahler

Linda Mahler heads the typesetting department at Town and Country Press, Inc., where The Messenger is printed. She has also been a free lance writer for over twelve years. Her daughter Joy is a sophomore at Bethel College, where she writes for the school newspaper, the Bethel Beacon. For your information, Town and Country Press uses recycled papers and is concerned with preserving the environment.

Cabinet Reports *a Breakthrough*

The Cabinet of your national church met October 18 to 21 at the denomination's offices in Newton, Mass. Purpose of the meeting was to think through and advise your new president, Dick Tafel, on the directions the church should take during 1991 and 1992 in the denomination's key program areas. Dick proposed that we carry out an intensive planning process with budget considerations reduced to a minimum for the time being. Toward this end, we expect General Council in January to budget essentially for six months (but in a way that allows continuation of salaries, etc.), with a longer-range budget being adopted after the results of the planning process have been presented to church members at the 1991 convention.

After you have read this "breakthrough" report, which proposes the policies and priorities guiding our long-range planning, we urge you to share our vision by responding to us with your visionary hopes and dreams for your own Swedenborgian group. We want to know if our proposed policies seem valid to you and useful in your local church program.

Besides the president, the Cabinet consists of the denomination's vice-president (Betsy Young), and treasurer (John Perry), and a representative from the Council of Ministers, from the General Council, and from each of the six programs that support the church's work in: (1) growth and outreach, (2) education, (3) communications, (4) pastoral ministries, (5) management information, and (6) managing our financial and physical resources.

Just prior to the Cabinet meeting, some of us had the opportunity to

hear the religious leader Matthew Fox as he spoke to the board members, faculty, and students of the Swedenborg School of Religion. One of the exciting concepts Fox conveyed to us is that, as a denomination, we have much to offer the world. Fox challenged us to accept risk by saying that unless we become willing to face our own death, or be willing to die, we cannot live. Thus, our gifts to the world for the spiritual well-being of other people and ourselves will not happen. How revolutionary! Dick Tafel said this pointed to the advisability that, if we want to become transformed as an organization, we follow the advice of Jesus: Unless a kernel of wheat fall to the ground and dies, it abides alone; if it does fall to the ground and does die, it bears much fruit.

Perhaps what Fox's advice says to us is that to live, we must begin to evaluate our old formats and begin to develop some new ways of doing things. To etch the First Order of Service in stone, for example, may limit the potentials for development in spiritual growth.

It was in this environment that the Cabinet met to evaluate where we have been, where we are, and where we are headed in the next five years. One of the glaring realities that became manifest was our need to interconnect all people within the Swedenborgian Church. In this article, we are seeking to take the first step in doing that by sharing with you the results of the Cabinet's visioning and what we are thus proposing to begin in 1991 and 1992.

The Cabinet reaffirmed as our purpose *the Swedenborgian church exists to facilitate the spiritual well-*

being of people. But after that we made a lot of false starts at listing priorities, confusing them with goals, purposes, strategies, and generalities. We did some storytelling, pointing up successes and failures, finding a good deal of evidence that successes tend to be linked with getting free of traditional church buildings (although some of our successes defy that). Eventually we ended up with *growth, programs, and connectedness* as our three priorities. Naturally the growth of our tiny organization seemed to be the first priority. We have been urging that upon each other for a long time. Programs were second priority, and connectedness was third. But about ten o'clock or so Saturday evening—after time out to celebrate with former Cincinnati Dick Tafel, the Cincinnati Reds' win of the World Series—we began to question those priorities. We began to see that a focus on organizational growth *per se* is self-serving and that there are other things we need to do first. That even concentrating on our members' personal growth is self-serving. And we heeded the message of Matthew Fox. To our great surprise, we rearranged the order of our priorities, putting growth in the *third* position!

Our new paradigm looks like this:

- I. INTEGRATING
RELATIONSHIPS (LOVE)
God
Neighbor
Self
Community
Environment
Larger Church

- II. ONGOING PROGRAMS TO
HELP PEOPLE (USE)

Study Groups
Spiritual Growth Groups
Family Ministries
Etc.

III. GROWTH

Personal (Vigor, Joy, Vitality,
Spiritual Awareness)
Numerical (SSR Students for
Ordination, for Lay
Leadership,
in Swedenborgian Studies)
Numerical (Groups)
Financial (Fundraising)

The Cabinet's suggestion is thus that *love*—toward God, the neighbor, the self, the community, the natural environment, and the larger church—be the first priority in our lives and in our organization. First, we *must* move toward wholeness and integrating our relationships. We propose that we next use our energies to make widely available to the public, as a national service to others, the programs people need today to facilitate spiritual well-being. These may be, for example, Alcoholics Anonymous and other twelve-step programs, study groups, spiritual-growth groups, and family ministries. The latter program may start with a wedding ministry and go on to include birthing and parenting support groups, family healing, and resources for dealing with death.

David Rienstra then beautifully expressed how this two-priority focus (on integrating and building our relationships and on offering ongoing programs to help people lead better lives) will dispel many of the negative fears that have perhaps made us feel we are "letting down the New Jerusalem." The Cabinet members joined in expressing faith that, if we put our energies in the non-self-serving priorities I and II, the Lord's influx can better flow in our organization.

We have faith that healing will take place. We have faith that spiritual and numerical growth will follow. All of us were close to tears as the meeting ended with a prayer thanking the Lord in advance for healing our relationships and inspiring us with an enabling vision—a vision that puts the people in

our church to work in facilitating the spiritual well-being of all people. As Jesus said, "I am the Resurrection and the Life: Anyone that lives and believes in me shall never die."

Please let *The Messenger* or any one of us know how you feel about the priorities proposed for our na-

tional organization and therefore for you.

—PAT BASU, DICK BAXTER,
BOB KIRVEN, CHRIS LAITNER,
CAROL LAWSON, JOHN PERRY,
DAVID RIENSTRA, DICK TAFEL,
BETSY YOUNG, DOROTHY
YOUNG

R.S.V.P.

ARE YOU AWARE that your presence is earnestly requested? Where? At the meetings of the committees (Support Units) that plan and manage the denomination's six key programs. These committees look for hospitable Swedenborgian societies, located wherever it may be economically feasible to hold the Support-Unit meetings.

The effort to meet at various geographical sites is intended to enable local Swedenborgian groups to participate in decision-making for our national programs. It also gives Support Units opportunities to meet with the individuals and groups they serve. The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, for example, was invited to attend the November 1 to 4 meetings of the denomination's Communications Support Unit. Hosts were Joanne and Harold Jaffe' at their home on Lombard Street in downtown San Francisco. Following the work sessions, COMSU members

Lorene Lederer and Jim Lawrence invited the committee to their church on Lyon Street for Sunday worship services.

Most of the national Swedenborgian committees hold two meetings a year. The work of each committee is focused on one of six functions that help to support the Church at both national and local levels: growth and outreach, communications, education, pastoral ministries, business-management information, and managing our national physical and financial resources. Let your minister or Dick Tafel, new president of the national church, know if your Society would like to attend and host one of these Support-Unit meetings. It will create an opportunity for you to help make the decisions in the programs that affect your church life.
R.S.V.P.!

—Carol S. Lawson, Chair
Communications Support Unit

Convention '91

Healing Ourselves—Healing the Earth
is the theme of Convention '91
June 26-30 in Kitchener.

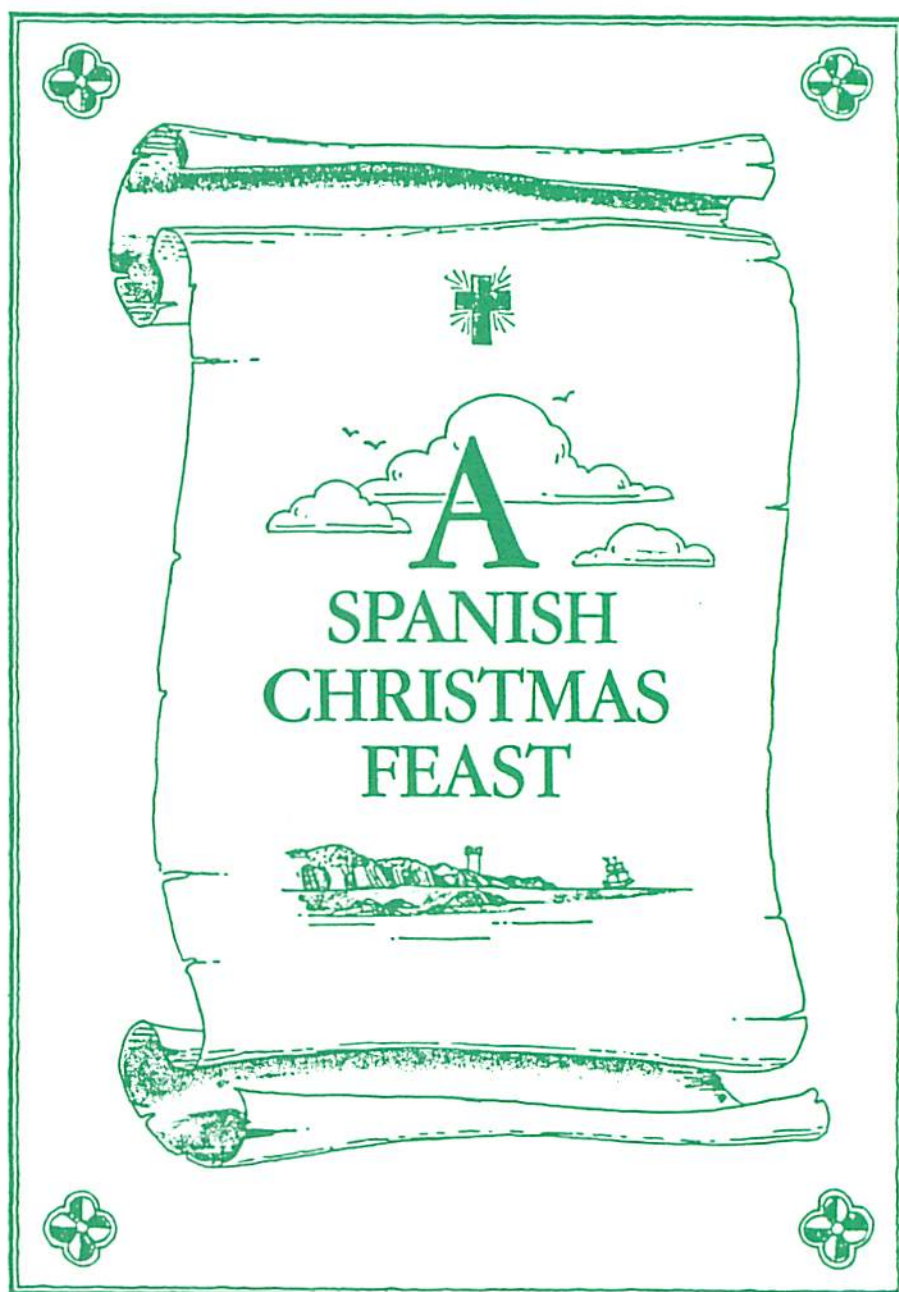
Plan to attend!

On Fundraising

A Celebration in the True Spirit of Christmas

The Emmanuel Dining Room and the work that is done by the Ministry of Caring is well-known to many here in the Wilmington area. Under the direction of the Capuchin Friars hundreds of hungry and homeless are fed daily. Most churches and many other organizations and individuals assist them by volunteering to prepare and serve dinner one day a month. This system has proven to be very satisfying, but the number of needy continues to grow, and our Church of the Holy City and the Cool Springs neighborhood felt that we could do more. As a result, in 1985, the Emmanuel Dining Room Christmas Celebration was born.

The plan was to honor the Brothers and Sisters at a very special dinner and at the same time fund-raise for the Dining Room. The Committee planned an Old English Medieval Feast for our first event. For authenticity a local caterer was contracted to research, prepare and serve the food of that period. Menus were carefully recorded by a calligrapher and the menu covers were individually hand-tinted so that no two were the same. Pre-dinner music as well as the brief entertainment between dinner and dessert was selected with care to compliment that period of time as well. Those attending were encouraged to come in costume and parish hall was decorated with evergreen, holly and many candles. With the fireplace lit, 55 people shared a dinner commemorating the true spirit of Christmas. Each year thereafter, concentrating on a different country, the same format is followed and now we have added to the excitement and the fundraising by auctioning the



A sample of one of the menu covers used by Emmanuel Dining Room.

CHRISTMAS DINNER 1988
A FRENCH COUNTRY
CHRISTMAS FEAST

Appetizers:

Hot Mulled Wine
Assorted Cheeses and Fresh Fruit
Crackers

Entrees:

Country Pate
served with
Cumberland Sauce and Condiments

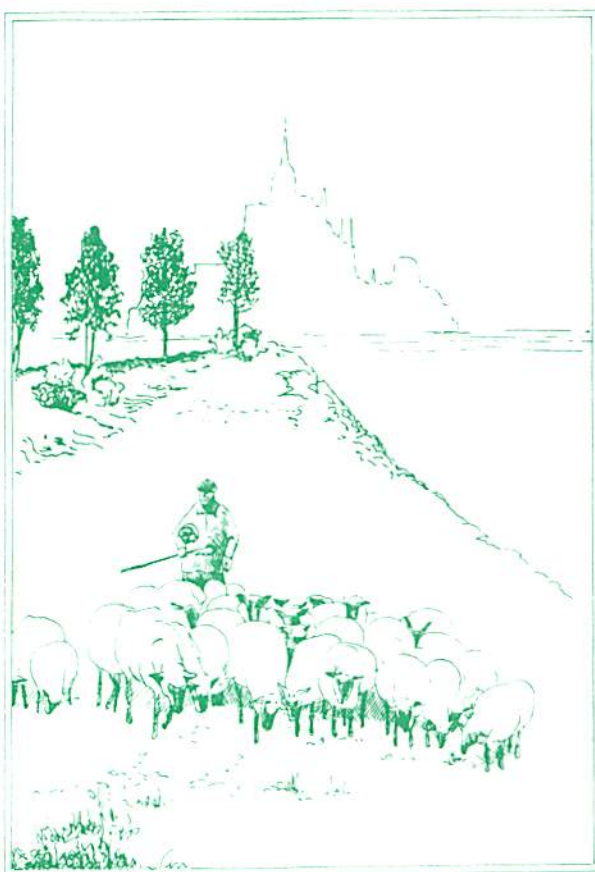
Watercress Salad

Cassoulet
with
Duck, Chicken and Sausage
Warm Fall Vegetable Salad

Dessert:

French Apple Tart

Christmas Dinner 1988



Each year's menu features a hand-tinted original drawing.

original drawing of the menu cover. This year we also sold figures of the Three Kings which were made by church members to decorate the tables for our Spanish Christmas Feast.

In five years a total of \$13,000 has been raised to help those less fortunate than ourselves. By way of the music, poetry, readings and dance presented for entertainment we have learned much about the customs and traditions of other countries. We have been delighted to honor the Brothers and Sisters and to have shared in the special joy that can only come from helping others.

Because this event embodies so much that is the very essence of Christmas we will continue this practice and look forward to the years ahead.

*Irma Reinhold
Church of the Holy City,
Wilmington, Delaware*

The Homeless Man

(Continued from page 163)

go away because my inner ones will not go away. He carries them for me.

What if I crossed the gulf between us, risked his rejection and scorn by saying more than "hi"? What if I met him halfway in the places of his life—at the shelters, meal sites, and food pantries? What if I went, not to "do good," but to know him and to know the homeless within me?

Self-knowledge is a painful thing, as is growth and change. That is why I deal with the man in the hall and

(Continued on page 173)

Parish Highlights . . .

(Continued from page 165)

council has decided to participate in the "Save the Children" project by sponsoring a Native North American child. The child assigned to the group is a Navajo boy named Brandon. Brandon is in third grade and has four brothers and two sisters. The cost of sponsorship is \$20 per month. . .

The Church of the Holy City, Wilmington, Delaware, presented a program focused to the public around psychologist John Bradshaw's video series, "The Eight Stages of Man" in October and November, with discussions following. Other Bradshaw series and Joseph Campbell's "The Power of Myth" videos are planned for 1991 as a means of offering resources for personal insight and growth to the membership and the public. . .

The Cleveland and Cincinnati Churches have continued throughout the fall to present the "Bradshaw on the Family" video series, with great success. . .

The public was invited October 28 to the commemorative planting of two apple trees in the churchyard at LaPorte (Indiana) New Church's Johnny Appleseed Festival. A dramatization of John "Appleseed" Chapman's life was performed in the sanctuary by local children's librarian Kathy Krause, followed by apple refreshments. . .

From the Royal Oak, Michigan, Swedenborgian Church, some great suggestions from members—still in the idea stage, but with great possibilities:

- A men's club. . . a group not only for doing projects and planning events, but for providing an opportunity for the men of the church to have time together to share the issues and problems they face together.
- A "god-grandparents" program where each of our older members becomes a special friend and god-grandparent to one of our church children.
- Saturday retreats with guest teachers and speakers who are specialists in helping us deal with the many real-world problems we

face day to day. Marriage weekend retreats. Family retreats.

Rev. Steve Pults also reports: "We received a letter from the Christian Communication Council of Metropolitan Detroit churches with an idea how our church can play a significant part in combating racism in our city. The idea is to become a "Covenant Church" where a church that is predominantly white joins with a church that is predominantly black to share in activities and to learn from each other. Over 2,000 churches in greater Detroit are being asked to participate. I've learned in talking with the council office that the response has been overwhelmingly positive. I would like to see our congregation play a part in this exciting program."

The following letter, from a new member of the Portland, Maine, church is reprinted from the church's August newsletter.

An Open Letter to Friends and Members

"Why all the meetings? Why all the need for a legal definition of who we are as a church? Why does all of this matter to me?" These are questions I have asked during the last months and perhaps they have crossed your minds as well. As I have become more and more involved in the process, I have found a few answers for myself which I hope might be of help to you too.

As a relatively new member, having joined the church in January of this year, I am struck by the impact that each and every member and friend makes on the dynamics and substance of this church. In meetings, as well as on Sunday, each person I have come to know as a member of my "church family" whether present or absent has been in my thoughts and their feelings have been considered in my opinions. This communion of caring can occur when the members of the community become close through sharing their insights, concerns, experiences and fears. This feeling has grown with each Sunday service, meeting and potluck supper. The meeting format has never for me been strictly "business" but a deeper sharing in

the process of becoming a spiritual community.

The attempt to clarify our legal structure and to clearly state our faith is a further extension of this sharing. The individuals who currently are involved in the church have stated, not for some obscure legal document, but for ourselves what we believe to be true. This has empowered us to repeat these words to friends, acquaintances, visitors, relatives or co-workers who may ask "What's a Swedenborgian?" with the strength of a group vision of our faith.

All of this matters to me because I joined this church as a creative act. I came to the community to give and grow in return, to receive and share with others the trials and joys of opening up our deepest selves in a caring, safe, understanding environment with God's blessings.

This brings me to a question that I'd like to toss out for letters of response: "What does having a 'minister' mean to you?" After the years without one, is the job's description clearly defined? Stepping back from personalities and not specifically speaking of Rev. Ken Turley, I have recently found myself using the phrase "my minister." Do you? Do you think of him or her as someone to call on in times of confusion, sorrow or grief? I began to have many questions in my life about stages in myself. My children, my career, my marriage and my spirituality. I found understanding and support talking to my husband and my best friends. I called others in similar situations in certain circumstances. All of these perspectives were of great value, but in calling on "my minister" I felt that I was really calling upon myself and finding the answers that I had within me, with God's light shining more brightly upon them to guide me. So I repeat, do you call on your minister? And did you know that the job description is to be a mirror for you to see the answers that you hold within yourself? Think about it. This is one woman's opinion and I'd like to hear more from others.

*In warmest friendship,
Susanne Lorraine*

Celebrating Advent

(continued from page 160)

Other suggestions:

- Restrict exposure to the commercial propaganda by watching less TV.
- Make fewer trips to the malls.
- Get "Christmas" catalogues out of the house (one half of all advertising dollars are spent on Christmas publicity).
- Set aside time, individually and with family and friends, for reflection on the meaning of Advent (we, as Swedenborgians, believe Christ can be born in us, and we need to use this season to prepare ourselves for that birth by opening not our pocketbooks, but our hearts and minds to Love and Wisdom).
- Include in your church and family celebrations people who would otherwise be alone.
- Reawaken the true spirit of gift giving by giving of your time and energy. Host a gift-making party. Give gifts of service especially to children and senior citizens.
- Take a percentage of what you usually spend on presents and give to the really needy.

Make your celebration of the Christmas season be a true reflection of your values and a real Coming of the Lord to you, your family, your church, your community, and our planet.

Rev. Paul Martin-Grumman is Minister of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound and Director of the Stone House Book Store and Spiritual Growth Center. Write or call the Stone House for a list of organizations which support the hungry and homeless or to order a copy of "To Celebrate" (\$11.95). 206-883-7825, 16244 Cleveland St., Redmond, WA 98052.

Commencements

Birth

Thorhallsson—Rev. Deborah Winter and Skuli Thorhallsson announce the birth of their daughter, Solrun Alexia Thorhallsson, born October 28, 1990. Solrun (pronounced soul-roon) is an old Icelandic name meaning *Mystery of the Sun*. Parents and child doing fine.

Confirmation

Barber—Barbara Barber was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church September 30, 1990, at the Royal Oak Swedenborgian Church, Royal Oak, Michigan, the Rev. Stephen Pults officiating.

Death

Noda—The Rev. Yuzo Noda, of Tokyo, entered the spiritual world October 25, 1990, after a year's bout with cancer. Mr. Noda, ordained in 1973, had successfully effected his Tokyo church's shift to a spiritual growth center. He is survived by his wife, Akiko, and two daughters.

Change of Address

Rev. John and Sharon Billings
4728 South Hills Dr.
Cleveland, Ohio 44109

(Editor's Note: Don't be confused, folks—it turns out they changed the name of the street!)

The Homeless Man

(Continued from page 171)

his compatriots only as aggregates. "Two thousand homeless people received shelter in Madison last year." "They ate twenty thousand meals, took ten thousand showers in shelters, and stayed an average of seven days." "Two hundred found jobs." "One hundred and fifty found permanent housing." Aggregates are easier to deal with.

I look at the books of the man in the hallway. Among them are cook books. Why does he read cook books? Is he hungry? Is he a chef? I know nothing of his hopes and dreams. Does he want a job? Is he afraid? Where did he live as a child? How did he become homeless? Who labeled him this way?

If I dared to make contact with

the man in the hall, my inner homeless might not frighten me so. If I knew him as a person, maybe I could do the same for myself?

Wouldn't it be strange if self-knowledge was his gift to me?

Charles Pfeifer is the director of Madison Urban Ministry (MUM), Madison, Wisconsin, where he has served for 17 years. Mr. Pfeifer has been involved in the development of a shelter for homeless individuals as well as other social action programs in the community. He is presently working on projects dealing with jobs and racism. He writes a monthly essay in the MUM Newsletter.

Reprinted with the permission of the Author and Expressions, March/April, 1990, St. Benedict Center, Madison, Wisconsin.

The President Reports

November Highlights

Your National Council of Churches' delegation, Rev. Robert McCluskey, Ms. Linda Baker, Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey and I led the opening worship service November 14 at the Governing Board meeting of the NCC. November 14 was also the 40th anniversary of the founding of the NCC. It was quite appropriate that the Swedenborgian Church led that service. Swedenborg was probably the first ecumenist, holding that there is good in all churches and that God's truth transcends man-made organizations.

My NCC involvement this past year has also included serving on the Executive Coordination Committee and as a member of the search committee to find a new General Secretary for the NCC.

On November 4, the San Francisco Society voted not to sell the El Ceritos property. Discussions are underway to facilitate both groups in obtaining autonomy and becoming independent churches of the Pacific Coast Association and the Swedenborgian Church.

The Elmwood (Mass.) Swedenborgian Church has called the Rev. Dr. Donna Keane to be its part-time minister. The work on the church building is in the final stages, and it really looks good!

One of the highlights of my November West Coast trip was the visit to the Stone House Growth Center and the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound. Their exciting outreach venture has resulted in new people joining the church. I'll be reporting more about that in January.

Another highlight was my visit to San Diego, where I had the honor of installing Mr. Eldon Smith as the lay leader of the San Diego church. It was a wonderful occasion, starting with the dinner Saturday night which included a skit by Henry and Ethel Swanton, and ending with the worship service November 4. In addition to members and friends of the San Diego church and Eldon and Annella Smith, representatives from our churches in Riverside, Los Angeles, Wayfarers Chapel and San Francisco were present, with a total attendance of over 60 people.

I send you all greetings for a most wonderful and worshipful Christmas and a fulfilling New Year. God bless each and every one of you.

Love and Peace,



Richard H. Tafel, Jr.
P.S. The cup is still half full!

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