
THE MESSENGER

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June 1994

Congregations Take Steps Forward

Eric Allison

It is inspiring to see how much is done by so few. I feel certain that the giving spirit will continue to grow. It seems that the threat of our extinction as a denomination has brought us to our senses. There is a long way to go but our churches *are* changing.

It is odd how looking at what we do "to serve" has made me realize that it is sometimes easier to serve food in a soup kitchen than it is to get along with someone in our own church or even in our own kitchen. I hope that my articles on the churches have not given the impression that social action is the *be all* and *end all*. Perish the thought of our chasing after yet another shiny object because it is popular. Serving the community and the world is an obligation, and we could do much more than we do. Some congregations, I would say, are rather derelict in this duty. It is my conviction that each of us owes ten percent of either our time or income to the church and/or charities and that congregations should also tithe. It was frustrating when people got angry at me for suggesting that we follow what is clearly spelled out in the Word. Now, it seems we are warming to the idea. It is encouraging to see that giving in congregations has increased across the board. It is still a long way from tithing but it has improved.

Keep up the good work.

Having said that we have obligations to the neighbor, it is essential that we do not forget that our greatest gift is our unique teachings. We

*They want to plumb the
depths of the Bible
and their own souls.*

do not have to march to the same tune as all the rest. Even if we sold every church and liquidated every denominational asset and gave it all to the poor, the poor would—as Jesus said—"always be there." Such a gift might be gallant or even inspirational, but in reality it would be mostly a symbolic and futile gesture. It is indeed good that many of our congregations are trying to do their part for the local community. It is genuine Christian charity and it is heartwarming to see. Of equal importance are our teachings and the programs we offer that are consistent with our teachings. They still offer help to the spiritually frightened and confused, to the seekers and those inwardly wanting. There are millions of people spiritually frustrated because they want more than generic Christian pabulum. They want to plumb the depths of the Bible and their own souls. They not only want

a personal relationship with God but they also want to make sense out of the mysteries of the divine plan. These age-old questions still have relevance today and this is one way we can feed people. We *do* have some answers to their questions.

When I look at the faces of older lifelong Swedenborgians, I see in their eyes devotion to ideas as well as doing. Many of them have been spurned by friends and associates because their New Church beliefs were not standard-brand religion. Some of the older people still zealously pass out pamphlets because they hold the conviction that what they believe has importance in this world. They have not only given of themselves but studied the Word and the writings. They have given not just in their acts but their words. It is true that actions speak louder than words. However, sometimes enlightened words said at the right time are the only action needed. I'm glad that so many congregations still offer doctrinal study and require classes before one can join the church. Our message really does stand apart and it is still the best gift we have to give.

The following describes what is happening in more of our convention congregations. If you would like to share what you are doing, please write to me.

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Moving Toward the Light

Parting Rite

In 1992, when our annual convention was held in St. Louis, Ann Westermann was the facilitator for our spouses' group that meets every year. Sometime during the three-day session, Ann and I got into a conversation that led to her sharing some of her background. She gave me a copy of her article, "Release from Vows of Marriage" (see p. 90), which had just been published in the *International Forum for Logotherapy*. (Developed by psychotherapist Viktor Frankl during and after his three years in Nazi prison camps, Logotherapy became known as the Third Viennese School of Psychotherapy, following Freud and Adler, and was the first therapy to take the human spirit into consideration. Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*, chronicles his death camp experiences and introduces the basic concepts of Logotherapy).

I was moved by Ann's article and the depth of sharing involved, but more than that, I was convinced that a ritual, a service of some kind, can be a vital component in closure and a move toward healing the trauma when there is a parting of the ways.

At the time my first husband and I separated over twenty years ago, we had not progressed enough in our growth to seek out this sort of help, had it even existed. If some enlightened soul had come along and offered such a service, explaining it to us, I don't know that we could have brought ourselves to participate—but it might have planted a seed. As it was, we suffered in isolation (as did our children), not only from our own ignorance and immaturity, but from a society in denial. It wasn't until years later, during a time of intensive work on myself, that I became aware of the many things I was grateful for in that marriage. I had the overwhelming urge to write a letter to my ex-husband and simply express that gratitude. Before I could talk myself out of it, or become concerned about what his reaction might be, I wrote the letter and mailed it. He wrote back, a very nice acknowledgment. Then I later heard from my son that his dad had called him and read the letter aloud over the phone, and cried. Just that small, solitary peace-making effort produced a ripple effect that softened attitudes, creating opportunities over the years for further healing of our family traumas.

I recently read an article by Jeffrey Jay in the May/June 1994 *Common Boundary* that explores the Jewish approach to trauma, an approach he says, "that provides psychotherapy with a model that allows the victim to feel less isolated and to receive a meaningful response from the community. In just the past decade," Jay observes, "it has become psychologically easier to be a person who has suffered trauma . . . it is now possible to define oneself as, for example, an abused child, a Holocaust survivor, or a sufferer of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. But despite these labels, psychology has not advanced our understanding of the role of the community in responding to the traumatic suffering of others . . . Without a meaningful response from others, the victim is left isolated in the meaninglessness of trauma, and thus becomes further traumatized."

Interestingly, Jay's article doesn't include mention of divorce in his examples of trauma. But divorce is certainly a trauma—interpersonal, intrapsychic, intrafamilial—even the most "civilized" divorce. And according to today's projected statistics, more than half of all marriages will end in divorce. It occurs to me that a healing ceremony such as Ann Westermann and her pastoral psychotherapist have put together can provide, among its other benefits, an opportunity for a meaningful response from others. What is the role of the spiritual community in this most common of modern-day traumas?

Patte LeVan

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Opinion

In this section of *The Messenger* we are pleased to present the varied views of our readers. Letters published here do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the Editor, the Communications Support Unit or the General Council of the Swedenborgian Church. Published letters may be edited for brevity and clarity.

When you see an opinion with which you agree or disagree, please send your own views to the Editor so that *The Messenger* can be a forum for individual viewpoints. We welcome letters on all pertinent topics.

Are We Missing the Boat Again?

To the Editor:

I'm sitting here at my desk, wondering about this and that, and a series of thoughts come to mind that I'd like to share with *Messenger* readers. Mostly I'm thinking about missed opportunities, and what we can do about them.

Readers will recall that about 15 years ago Raymond Moody came on the scene in a big way with his book, *Life After Life*. It sold millions of copies; Moody was on all the talk shows; for a few years the subject of life after death was in vogue. I can recall that at the time, some of us lamented that we missed the boat. As a denomination we didn't really capitalize on this opportunity. Some attempts were made, mainly by the Swedenborg Foundation, but there was no general, coordinated program

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Congregations . . . Step Forward

(Continued from front cover)

SWENDBORG CHAPEL
CAMBRIDGE SOCIETY



Cambridge

The Cambridge church is an architectural treasure that seems as if it is part of the Harvard campus. As part of the Harvard Chaplaincy the Swedenborg Chapel is the official representative of our denomination to Harvard.

During the last several years, the Rev. F. Robert Tafel and members of the congregation have worked hard to create intellectually and spiritually challenging programs which could feed those thirsting for the spiritual waters. Dr. Eugene Taylor, Mr. Tafel and other well known speakers have presented a wide variety of topics related to our faith. They have worked with the William James Society to co-sponsor events. Also offered is the well-attended annual Wilfred G. Rice Memorial Lecture on psychology and religion.

The contributions of our Cambridge congregation are not just for the intellectual. An experimental worship service is held monthly. Communion is also monthly. By vote of the congregation the other two Sundays of each month have moved from a penitential worship style to one of praise. People are excited about the uplifting spirit of the services. Weekly Swedenborgian Bible studies are attended by 10 to 12 adults preceding the Sunday service.

Our lovely chapel is a refuge for passersby as it is open during the week for meditation and prayer. Each Sunday visitors attend the worship service. Now, a visitor follow-up system is in place. Recently the small congregation has begun to grow and is reaping a harvest of new members and people who have more than a casual interest in Swedenborg's writings.

The building seems to be buzzing with activity. Four AA groups meet weekly at the church as does a Twelve

Steps Spiritual Growth Group.

T-CAP or the Tibetan Community Assistance Project has a variety of programs which they hold at the church. One such program is the Chi-gong meditation group on Wednesday nights.

The congregation makes regular donations to the Food Pantry and is one of the sponsors of the Harvard Square Meal Program held at Christ Church.

Last year forty-five weddings were held at the Cambridge Chapel.



SWENDBORG CHAPEL
CLEVELAND

Cleveland

I don't think any congregation has worked harder at trying to get out the message of the New Church than these determined people. The church committee has been meeting twice each month. Pastor John Billings and company have watched a lot of people come and some go. Now they seem to have turned a corner and a new influx of people want the Swedenborg Chapel to be their spiritual home.

The central focus of the church has been spiritual growth through worship, counseling, prayer, discussion, study and sharing.

The well-attended Bradshaw Video Series was presented several times. The presentations on Near Death Experiences drew large crowds. Other programs have also drawn in large groups. Currently the four-week seminar *Are You Getting the Love You Want*, the three-part series *Angels Among Us*, and *Healing Services* are examples of programs which are spiritual and psychological in nature. There is a monthly *Heaven and Hell* study group and a weekly *Twelve Steps of Spiritual Growth* session. Adult Bible study meets every Sunday before church. John has referred to the more emotionally and spiritually powerful events as being spiritual food. Indeed it is. His counseling often involves work with those from very dysfunctional back-

grounds and is truly a healing ministry dealing with some things we would often rather forget about.

Once each month members of the church help to feed the needy a full-course dinner. They also have monthly dinners to raise money for the church. The attendance at these has always been good even in the worst snow storms. There is also an ongoing pierogi sale as a fund raiser and community builder. By the front door of the church is a box where the people leave canned food for the poor. It seems symbolic that the first thing a person notices when entering the door is that the Swedenborg Chapel is a place where people give.

The church also provides weddings, baptisms, and funerals for non-members.



ROYAL OAK WOMEN'S
CLUB, HOME OF THE
DETROIT NEW CHURCH

Detroit

Our church in Royal Oak rents the Royal Oak Women's Club for Sundays and special occasions. It is sometimes difficult to have programs because the Women's Club is used by so many groups. However, this has not stopped our congregation there from serving the community and creating an active program. The congregation has participated in a *Shelter Program* for the homeless. Many of the churches in the community take a week each year to house and feed the homeless. Because they don't have their own building, they have helped other churches. Church president Barb Penabaker said, "Our people provided transportation to those who needed rides to their jobs. We will be back in this program in 1995. Each year at Christmas our church has provided gifts, a tree and food for an inner city family. We also participate in the annual Crop Walk for hunger in our community. Even though we are small we have been told we have one of the largest numbers of participants per capita."

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Congregations . . . Step Forward (Continued from page 83)

Barb goes on to describe even more activities. She continued, "The Women's Alliance in Royal Oak has for many years supported children through World Vision. They have provided remedial reading classes for an inner-city child. Scholarships for Almont Summer School have been provided for needy kids. Several of our ladies sew quilts and lap robes for cancer patients, while others sing and perform in bell choirs at nursing homes."

During the last few years the Royal Oak church and the Rev. Steve Pults and Kim Kearns have had an active Sunday School, teen group, Tuesday guild, (young women's group), Transitions, (those in their twenties) adult doctrinal study, and other events designed to offer spiritual sustenance. One popular series was "Life Questions", which drew nearly a full house to hear the Swedenborgian view.



CHURCH OF THE NEW
JERUSALEM, FRYEBURG

Fryeburg

The Fryeburg New Church is one of our few self-supporting congregations, and they pull their own weight in the community as well. Our congregation is known to the community as an active church which does countless acts of charity. Our church offers ongoing contributions to the Fryeburg Food Pantry run by the town offices. Special offerings at Thanksgiving and Christmas are also received for the needy in the region. Each year the entire community attends the annual Thanksgiving service at the Fryeburg New Church. Half the proceeds of this ecumenical service go to a local cause. Last year half the offering went to the Dinner Bell and the other half went to the Food Pantry. The Dinner Bell is a weekly dinner organized by the local churches. It is held at the Catholic Church but members of our congregation help set up tables, cook the food, and wash the dishes. Everyone

who can comes out for the good food and fellowship but they, of course, give a donation. For those unable to pay, the dinner is free. Everyone is grateful for such high quality food prepared by loving hands. Over 100 meals are served each week.

The church, like the community, wants to help those who face a crisis. When the need arises, the church puts on a benefit supper for a family or individual who has lost their home to fire or suffered a serious accident or loss. The congregation donates and prepares the meal and then charges everyone including themselves \$5.00. The proceeds go to a specific need. There is a long-standing tradition of people helping people. That's what people do in Fryeburg.

One church member annually coordinates the Wreath Program to decorate the main street of Fryeburg for Christmas. City employees cut the pine boughs from a nearby forest. A member of the Fryeburg Church coordinates the team of volunteers who make and hang the wreaths on the lampposts of the main street.

One very important contribution made to the town is the large Sunday School which makes a significant contribution to the town's moral fiber. The church may be best known for the delicious pies sold each year at the Fryeburg Fair. The fair is probably the biggest single fundraiser in the denomination.



URBANA SWEDEN-
BORGIAN CHURCH

Urbana

When driving through Urbana, Ohio, one cannot miss the Swedenborgian church. Located on South Main Street, this beautiful building is a replica of a church in Italy. Its lovely stone structure and high tower make it an irreplaceable addition to the architecture of picturesque Urbana. The congregation has been without a minister for several years, but they have worked hard to maintain a Swedenborgian presence. This small

congregation has had to cope with some expensive structural problems in the building. They have rallied to fix water problems and the stained glass windows, have added a room in the basement, and kept the church looking lovely. Walking in the front door, one instantly gets the feeling of being in a place that is well cared for. The Champaign County Historical Society and Urbana University sponsor a tour of historical homes. Our church is part of the tour. It has also been used by the Champaign County Arts Council for special programs. The Weekly Sunday services have recently enjoyed an influx of new people. The service concludes with a discussion of the sermon and a healing circle.

A project in progress is the restoration of the Tracker organ. The church already has a large Tracker organ given by the Pittsburgh church. When the other one is restored the Urbana church will be able to do what only four other churches in North America can do—present Tracker organ duets. Organ enthusiasts will come a long way for such a concert.

Healing and prayer have long been a focus of the congregation. When the need arises, lay leaders and others go to homes offering healing prayers.

Dick and Pat Sommer regularly represent the church at the Caring Kitchen which provides meals, clothing and shelter. Twice each week an AA Group meets at the church. As a service to the community, weddings are held in the church. A meditation group holds weekly sessions and a doctrinal study class gathers monthly. Recently they have had "visioning days." People gather to receive a vision of what the church can become and then share what they have seen and begin to make concrete plans and commitments. These sessions reportedly produce very creative ideas. The three-part series *Angels Among Us* drew about twenty people from outside the church who needed to share their experiences or just listen.

The Easter sunrise service is held every year at the Harvey Chapel on Urbana University Campus. Students and faculty are invited to the service and the potluck following. □



Blairhaven Interfaith Retreat Center Duxbury, Massachusetts

Within walking distance of Miles Standish's homesite, on 5 1/2 wooded acres along the shore of Kingston Bay, Blairhaven has been a Swedenborgian retreat since 1939. In 1988, Blairhaven's board of directors decided to make it an interfaith retreat, opening it to people of all religions. At that time they hired the retreat's current directors, Phil and Donna Berry, who are Unitarian Universalists. The church subsidizes the operation of the retreat house to keep the costs down, and lets local groups, such as the Cranberry Hospice, the Duxbury Teachers Association, and the Visiting Nurses Association use it free during the week.

Blairhaven can house groups of 10 to 30 people overnight, and up to 125 for a daytime event. Guests share rooms, and may choose to bring their own linens and cook their meals or let the center furnish them. The retreat also sponsors an ecumenical day camp and gives scholarships to Duxbury residents. Rather than offer planned retreats, Blairhaven allows groups to hold their own programs—either for a day or overnight. Since becoming an interfaith center, Blairhaven has hosted groups ranging from Buddhists to Jews and from Catholic missionaries to the local Congregational Church.

For reservations or information, phone (617) 934-7131 or write to: Blairhaven, attn. Philip Berry, Director, 20 Howlands Landing, P.O. Box 1414, S. Duxbury, MA 02331.

Letter from Blairhaven

Dear Patte:

I have just received the latest copy of *The Messenger* and, as usual, have read it cover to cover; it is always very interesting and informational. It is intriguing to read about people we have met in the past 5 1/2 years here at the Center.

Donna and I found the article "Our Churches Serving the Community" very inspiring.*

As you know, we are an interfaith retreat center, which offers a safe refuge to all. In the past, we have had 19 denominations use Blairhaven. Our goal is to help create an atmosphere of acceptance and tolerance of all retreatants no matter what their religious beliefs are.

We want to show the Swedenborg Church in action, rather than by rhetoric. Our retreatants bring their fears and problems of today and yesterday; but leave with a renewed love of life and spirituality.

Following are a few comments our retreatants have made to us about Blairhaven:

- "I came as a stranger and am leaving with caring friends. I know we have created friendships that will last a lifetime."
- "As I drove into the driveway, I knew I was home."
- "Thank you for letting us use Blairhaven. It is a special gift. May God bless you all for sharing it with our group."
- "It was wonderful. I hate to leave."
- "A soothing, healing place, where the best of people and nature come together."
- "Love the remodeling—hospitality, food; excellent as always."
- "I enjoyed the homey atmosphere and the wonderful food you folks prepared and presented. The sensitivity in the kitchen (quiet) was not only noticeable, but greatly appreciated. I hope to return again. That you so much."
- "Being at Blairhaven is like going

home for reunion. I've never experienced being at a retreat with all the ambience of home. Phil and Donna are superb hosts. I look forward to coming back. Thank you."

- "Phil & Donna, you are always so respectful of our space and need for privacy and yet so present and apart. It's really a joy to be here! The food was wonderful. The renovations are spectacular (Thanks for the extra room). There were 26 of us in a circle and so comfortable. It really makes a difference."

After a weekend here at the center, the people leaving are hugging, crying, laughing, all emotions are open. They have experienced something so powerful. One woman said, "No words could ever describe how free I feel. It's like I'm another person with the weight of the world lifted off my shoulders. I've learned 'to let go and let God' back into my life."

In Eric Allison's article "Our Churches Serving the Community"—as the churches are community-involved, so is our center:

Duxbury Council of Churches
6 years
Secretary to the Council of Churches 5 years
Duxbury PTA/PTO and Teachers Association
South Shore Ministers Association
Road to Responsibility — Down Syndrome Adult Program
Amaryllis Foundation for AIDS counseling
CURA-Visiting Nurse Association
Christmas Food and Gift Donations
Duxbury School Music Boosters Program
Cranberry Hospice
AIDS Healing Service
Duxbury Make-A-Wish Program
Food Basket Distribution—
Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter
Community Thanksgiving Sunrise Service
"DARE" Drug Abuse Program

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Survey Sample Comments

In late March, a survey about denominational programs and funding was sent to all who receive *The Messenger*. According to President Edwin Capon, there has been a 20% response so far, larger than responses to past surveys. Many people added comments in the margins and at the end of their surveys. The following comments are random samples only; they are all the comments taken from approximately 60 surveys as they came in to Central Office in one five-day period. (Out of 1200 mailed, 261 have been returned thus far).

The preliminary publication of these comments is intended to spark discussion at convention. A full report of the survey will be presented at convention and will subsequently be published in the September *Messenger*.

- "I would like to see Convention direct funds to sponsor newly ordained ministers to serve for a period of time in parishes which are without trained leadership—funding coming, of course, as well from that parish."
- "Why is Temenos not mentioned? The largest financial investment we have!"
- "Perhaps a simplified Treasurer's Report . . . would allow the general membership to understand why all proposed programs using unrestricted income cannot be funded."
- "The bulk of our financial resources should go toward establishing centers for classes, workshops and retreats, for members and non-members, within or apart from existing churches. This is the future of the church!"
- "In looking at the programs provided through Temenos, I see that most of them have little to do with Swedenborgianism, or the mission of our churches and the General Convention. My question is WHY? Why are we spending this kind of money on this effort when many of the local churches are in need of basic repairs and have many other needs?"
- "Don't sink another dime into Temenos! This program is costing millions and has only a very low probability of teaching many people about Swedenborg. . . . Hire a good (i.e., professional) publicist or public relations firm to promote Swedenborg's ideas at both national and local levels. . . . My guess is that \$100,000 spent on good PR would be much more beneficial than \$5 million spent on Temenos."
- "Fund ministers, not buildings. *Sell* the Washington Church building. *Sell* Temenos. Use the money to educate new ministers. . . . Fund enlightenment and spiritual growth activities. Send children to Almont. Expand *The Messenger*, don't cut it. Share the good news about our church. . . . Share the light and the church will grow."
- "We have too many committees and planning groups for a small denomination."
- "Convention . . . needs . . . greater respect for, and use of, the writings of Swedenborg; more stress on education, in and out of the home; a more authoritative clergy; . . . It must cease trying to be 'all things to all people'."
- "We are too small as a church to implement all these good things you list—so must join these efforts in non-church groups. . . . I give financial priority to supporting the ministers and existing parishes as the church organization will go down without them. Next priority is to maintain programs for children."
- "*The Messenger* is the only connection between Convention and societies and associations that has continuity. It should be sent to every family in (the denomination) at no cost. . . . The *Daily Bread* is an important form of worship to the many members of (the denomination) without available church services."
- "We need to work more cooperatively with the (Swedenborg) Foundation and not duplicate their work. . . . Stop the practice of paying the ministers to do very little while expecting lay persons to work for free."
- "If we concentrate on personal spiritual growth, as at the Stone House and Temenos, as we become more spiritually aware and developed, people will flock to us, because *they* want to grow, not because we do."
- "The need to focus limited funds in ways that make a knowledge of New Church ways of life available to everyone, starting in families, and progressing through local churches, is crucial. If our knowledge is non-existent or very limited, how can we choose!"
- "The exchange of ideas at convention I find valuable."
- "I feel strongly that *The Messenger* should continue to be published monthly."
- Where is the emphasis on strong internal unity and support? How can we give it to others if we don't have it for ourselves?"
- "Stop flying people all over the country and arrange a group discount for computer hardware to make it affordable to those who need it for electronic meetings. This denomination seems to like real estate more than parishioners."
- "The important mission of our church is to provide us with the *truth* in the church teachings to make us *better* human beings."
- "I do not believe our youth retreats are receiving enough *doctrinal* instruction. We are losing an important opportunity to strengthen our ranks. Kids need to know *why* our church is different."
- "I believe we should develop new forms of ministries and support them. Local churches should be supported where potential is indicated."
- "(We) must operate within (our) means. The writings are the most important element of the church."
- "In seeking to foster personal and ordained ministries which facilitate the spiritual well-being of people I believe we should not forget that the members of our local church(es) are people and have a right to expect to be ministered unto."
- "It is important to keep the works of Swedenborg in print, and available to the public."
- "I do not understand why such a large amount of money has been poured into one retreat center (Temenos). I see this as poor use of our limited funds."

New Perspectives Gained from Church Growth Workshop



Some of the workshop participants (L to R around table): Rev. Dr. George Dole, Rev. Dr. Ted Klein, Dr. Mary Kay Klein, Leif Nordberg (student, SSR), Kit Billings (student, SSR), Gloria Toot (church secretary), John Perry (church treasurer).

The Rev. Dr. Roy Oswald, church growth expert from the Alban Institute led a workshop for members of the Council of Ministers, faculty and students of the Swedenborg School of Religion, and some of the lay members of General Council. The workshop, held at St. Stephen Priory in Dover, Massachusetts, was sponsored by SSR through their grant from the Lilly Endowment.

The following observations were made by John Perry, one of the participants:

My overall impressions were very favorable, this workshop having been well thought out and ably conducted. The following topics deserve special mention:

- The seminar was conducted by a member of the clergy and aimed generally toward the clergy. This viewpoint was very informative for church lay people such as myself as it gave insight into views and problems of which the laity are not generally aware. Knowledge of this view is important in developing coordinated solutions to common problems.
- The idea of development of a strategic plan to be revised every four years by each church is very stimulating. The review and revision of goals and priorities followed by a two or three-month sabbatical for the minister is a new and refreshing approach. Most important is that the church would be expected to continue its programs in the absence of the minister *without outside ministerial support*.
- The concept of the importance of *attitude* of the church members and the *willingness* of the "old guard" to let go of "power" and to welcome new people is a must if a church is to grow!
- Ministers need outside peer relationships. The idea that these relationships *need not* be within their own denomination seems to be a new concept for our church.
- A church should not be self-satisfied when growth reaches the 100 to 150 member range. Members must be willing and eager to move through this range even if it means employing assistance for the minister.
- We must be willing to put forth and explain our Swedenborgian *differences* from other denominations.
- We must be aware that when the correct factors all come together, growth may be very rapid and we must be prepared to move with it.

Blairhaven (from page 85)

Camperships for our "Kids Kamp" through the Council of Churches

These are some of the areas in which we have become involved in the community.

During the month of July we have the tradition of "Kids Kamp" which has been very successful. We have two sessions. This year's schedule is:

July 3 to 13, 1994

for 8-9-10-year olds

July 17 to 27, 1994

for 11-12-13-year olds.

It is an overnight 11-day camp which has a limit of 22 campers, so anyone interested should make reservations now.

The other eleven months we are a retreat center, which draws retreatants from all over the world. We have had people from Ireland, England, Scotland, Australia, Austria, California, Florida—and even Duxbury. Last year we had 78 groups that used the center; this year we are already at 72 groups, with some available mid-week days. Last year we gave out over 700 pamphlets/literature on the Swedenborgian Church.

These pamphlets, books, leaflets and sheets were from the Boston Swedenborg Book Store and proved very interesting to our guests. Our retreatants took these because they were interested in the information, not because someone was knocking down their door to force them to take it.

This past year we had 2,107 people who came through Blairhaven Retreat Center.

Our greatest recent accomplishments are: our renovations of the conference area, handicapped bathroom and entrance area. We have also increased our parking capacity, so there is no need to take parking off site. Your center is something to be very proud of.

Philip A. Berry, Director
Blairhaven
Duxbury, Massachusetts

*Editor's Note: "Our Churches Serving the Community" was the third article (April, 1994 *Messenger*) in a series by the Rev. Eric Allison, our church growth consultant, who was reporting on our churches' outreach and social action activity.

Mr. Potts Goes to (Mt.) Washington

Louise Woofenden

The name "John Faulkner Potts" brings to mind a row of six fat volumes known familiarly as "Potts." In this exhaustive concordance to Swedenborg's works the entries are so complete that the student is tempted to be content with reading in Potts without going to the writings themselves.

The Rev. John Potts, ordained in the New Church in England in 1866, served briefly in Manchester, and then for twenty-five years in Glasgow. In 1879, in a three-month pulpit exchange with the minister of the Providence, Rhode Island, Society, he came to the United States, and that is where our story begins.

Potts fell in love with this country. He kept a detailed journal, which he published in book form in 1880 as twenty-five *Letters From America*. Everywhere he went, he was reminded of Liverpool, or Glasgow, or Manchester. But then he would remark how much more comfortable, clean, quiet and modern everything was here. He marveled at how very clear and blue the skies were, not obscured by clouds of coal smoke as in every city in Great Britain. Of New York he remarked, "The general whiteness of everything struck me very much. This, I said to myself, is a very bright London."

Potts visited many churches here and noted that the members were well versed in the doctrines. He visited Boston and the suburban societies, and also Brockton, Bridgewater and Elmwood, sometimes serving as guest preacher. He went to Philadelphia, and attended Convention in New York. He described each church building in detail, often mentioning that the sanctuary was *carpeted*, implying bare floors in

British churches. He was amused and a little shocked that at summer services the preacher was faced by a fluttering sea of fans, used by both men and women.

In July he made a trip to New Hampshire, where he was a guest at the Rev. John Worcester's summer home at Intervale. He describes going with Mr. Worcester to nearby Fryeburg, Maine, to visit the church there, and to have tea with the minister, Baman Stone.

This trip to New Hampshire was mostly a sightseeing tour, however, and so enthralled him that no fewer than five of the twenty-five letters describe its mountains, views, rivers, and hotels (he was surprised to find the waiters to be college students working for the summer). Though he could not resist comparing the White Mountain scenery to the Scotch Highlands, his commentary is nothing short of a rave review. He made every minute count, going through the notches on the railroads which, he reported, "permeate the White Mountains in all directions." He went to the end of one line where he was to climb Mt. Carrigain with an Appalachian Mountain Club group as guest of Mr. Worcester. The party clambered into an open truck, which was pushed by a locomotive up a branch line to a lumber mill, then hiked several miles up a logging road to the base of the mountain. Potts made it to the top, but realized at the outset that he was not in very good shape. "American ladies are commonly supposed to be less active of limb than our own," he said, "but I must say that I never saw even a Scotch lassie plod for hour after hour up a mountainside with more untiring agility than some of the

ladies of the party did that day, and I am quite sure that they suffered much less than I did."

The next day when the railway deposited him at the base of Mt. Washington, he did not attempt to go to the top on foot, but boarded the cog railway. He chose a seat on the last car, facing to the rear. As more and more of the spreading landscape came into view, he said with wonder, "It was as if I was watching the gradual creation of the world." Potts stayed two days at the Summit House, exploring the top of the mountain and minutely studying the whole panorama of mountains and lakes. He spotted "the white speck that represents Mr. Worcester's house," saw spectacular sunrises and sunsets, and told his British readers, "It would do us all a great deal of good to stand for a few minutes on the top of Mt. Washington. We should learn there more about the real character of America in five minutes than we usually do in our whole lives."

As Potts reluctantly recrossed the ocean he vowed to return to the United States some day. In 1891 he moved to Pennsylvania with his wife, seven daughters and two sons. He became a member of the Swedenborgian Church, living first in Philadelphia, then in Bryn Athyn. In 1901 he completed the famous concordance, begun in the British Isles twenty-seven years before. This might well have sufficed for a life work, but later he made a new revision of the twelve-volume *Arcana*. He died in 1923 at the age of 85, clearly a larger-than-life figure in our history.

Louise Woofenden is a writer and retired Swedenborg School of Religion archivist. She lives in Sharon, Massachusetts.

Opinion

(Continued from page 82)

put forth to seize that moment. We missed the boat.

In the last two years there has been an enormous surge of interest in angels. Both *Time* and *Newsweek* featured pre-Christmas articles on angels. Most book stores now have a whole section on the subject of angels. Some of the talk shows are jumping on the bandwagon. This is "hot" right now. But are we, as a denomination, positioned and ready to take advantage of this golden opportunity? It is gratifying to hear that the Rev. Ernest Martin has led some workshops on this subject, and some of our local churches are providing discussion groups on the theme of angels, but could we be doing more as a national body to publicize our unique understanding of angelic beings? Are we missing the boat again?

I see a third boat appearing on the horizon. Recently, Robert Schuller was on Larry King Live. At one point King asked his guest, "Where do thoughts come from?" The reply was, "From our intuition." Then he went on to say that he had known both Viktor Frankl and Karl Menninger very well (arguably two of the finest psychological minds of this century), and he asked them, "What is intuition?" Both men answered, "I don't know."

All of this triggered off a series of thoughts. Such as: Where do thoughts come from? What is intuition? How does the conscience work? What are the dynamics of spiritual growth? What is the nature of the powerful attraction between a man and a woman that grows into love? How do we remain more open to the possibility of genuine marital love? How can we further develop our perceptive abilities? What really motivates individuals or groups to want to change for the better? How do we care for the soul? This list could go on and on.

We're talking about a wide range of spiritual conditions and states—our inner, real world. My hunch is

that this is the wave of the future. If so, I hope we won't miss the boat again. Swedenborg has given us a lot of tools to work with in this whole area of what makes people tick, and I wonder if we are making the best possible use of all this information from heaven! Wasn't this one of Swedenborg's primary missions or purposes, to shed light on the internal, real world of the spirit!

If so, what can we do in a more intentional, organized way to address this challenge? A few thoughts come to mind. Is it possible to establish a Think Tank to explore this whole area? We need more scholars in the church—how does this come to pass? We need more writers who are able to express these ideas in winsome, compelling language for our 21st-century audience. Then, how do we break into the major publishing world? And, perhaps even get on the Larry King Show! Can we somehow get our act together and at least begin to move in these directions? Before it's too late?

Paul Zacharias
Kitchener, Ontario, Canada

Response to "Open Letter to Swedenborgians"

Dear Editor:

Wilson Van Dusen's "Open Letter to Swedenborgians" in the April *Messenger* is golden advice, treasured information for us to keep. We can look to Steve Koke's valuable article, "Between the Lines," in the February *Messenger*, for how to get the most from the reading Van Dusen reminds us we must do. Because of the stage of development we are in now as a denomination, I wonder if we are in a position to successfully receive such celestial advice without, in part, misinterpreting what Dr. Van Dusen is offering us.

He is right that our ultimate maturity and consequent growth as a church will come when we "finish our reading." However, I would like to build a bridge between where we

stand now and what he suggests we must accomplish. In doing so I am not arguing with anything he is saying; I am offering a *both/and* perspective.

I hope we won't stop anything we are doing now, even "recruitment," while we are learning how to live as Swedenborg recommended. There is a certain way that life has been arranged for us by our Creator which means that many things go on simultaneously that we fail to see as "success" or "progress" because human beings perceive things unilaterally, partially,—impatiently. As our impatience propels us forward, the chaos of many things happening at once drapes a protective veil around the Divine Providence in it all.

Betty Eadie, author of *Embraced By the Light*, gives us a vision of what this looks like from 'above' in the conclusion of her book:

"I saw the earth with its billions of people on it. I saw them scrambling for existence, making mistakes, experiencing kindness, finding love, grieving for death, and I saw the angels hovering above them. The angels knew the people by name and watched over them closely. They cheered when good was done and were saddened by mistakes. They hovered about to help and give direction and protection. . . ." (page 121).

While we have tried historically in so many ways to "grow" our denomination over time, we have renewed our commitment to work on our identity and outreach in the last several years. Witness all the discussion that has been taking place about this issue in *The Messenger*. There are those of us who will say they have seen this happen in the past and "nothing ever came of it." But Swedenborg was very big on asking us to remain in the stream of life, because he understood that regeneration, (in this case not only of ourselves as individuals, but as members of a denomination), is a *process* that takes place every day of our lives, on mundane as well as on lofty levels. (Continued on page 91)

Release from Vows of Marriage



Although we would all love "to live happily ever after" once we have said "I do," many marriages do not survive "until death do us part." Mine ended painfully after 26 years, and I wanted to bring closure with dignity to a marriage that held great meaning for us for a long time. This ceremony helped me express what I wanted to say to my husband, my children, my friends.

I was fortunate to have had a sensitive pastoral psychotherapist, who is also an ordained minister. Creating this special service was a collaborative endeavor between us. For me, this was the culmination of a long process through loss, grief, pain, and guilt. It was tearfully written and rewritten over a period of many months. It is offered here to those going through the process of separation and divorce, and to therapists in divorce counseling, to help bring about a peaceful parting of ways.

This type of healing rite, done in an attitude of reverence, served as closure to an irrevocably severed relationship. It can also build a goodwill bridge for the future. By emphasizing positive aspects of the past, the still-remaining meanings, future relationships with children who were the result of the union, and ongoing caring for extended family and friends, much of the hurt can be healed and antagonistic attitudes transformed.

This kind of ritual may not have much value unless it is created by the participants as a result of their own process of dealing with their losses. Each marriage is unique, the needs of each couple are different and, to be meaningful, content and location for this rite of passage should be individually determined.

When my own process of therapy had reached the stage of relinquishment, I felt the time was right to make a public declaration via this

ritual. The right setting for me was a church. Since my therapist was also a minister, it was arranged to hold this special private service in the sanctuary of the church. Thanksgiving was the anniversary of our engagement, and it seemed the appropriate day for the closure of a commitment made long ago. To my deep regret my former husband felt too uncomfortable at the last minute to personally participate in the service, and we had to proceed without his active participation. Even so, the ceremony brought healing and meaning to me, the children, and those present. For me, it was this service that "put the marriage to rest" far more than our day in court. The civil decree of divorce appeared as a legal formality compared to the deeply felt "farewell" expressed through this service.

In retrospect, I cannot say that our three-year separation and divorce process was always "friendly," but it was by and large characterized by an attitude of goodwill, which I attribute to keeping the focus on "what's best for all concerned" and this is precisely what creating the ceremony helped to foster.

Excerpts from the Ceremony

Minister: Ann, you and Pete once stood in a place like this and exchanged marriage vows made in good faith and earnest commitment. But sometimes the most earnest vows cannot be kept; sometimes a marriage cannot endure, in spite of the greatest efforts of the partners to save it. You have struggled hard and have borne grief and pain on the long path to this difficult decision. It is time now to accept and affirm that decision and to be accepted and affirmed in it. In doing so it is fitting that you stand again before

friends and declare release from your vows of marriage.

Ann: I, Ann, do now solemnly and respectfully release myself and you, Pete, from the bond of marriage. I sever the ties that have united us.

I am I, you are you. We are separate and free to be ourselves; free to go our separate ways; free to pursue what we each value in life.

Pete, I release you with love. Go in peace.

Minister: As a minister, I now declare that this marriage has ended. Pete and Ann are no longer husband and wife. Let us therefore humbly respect the breaking of these ties. You are set free to face new futures as separate persons. Carry no burden of guilt or recrimination for what is past; accept grief as it may come, but release the past into the past and receive the future as a gift of new possibilities.

Ann: Pete, I have released you as my husband and ask you to be my friend. I am no longer your wife but I affirm again my love and respect for you. I thank you for the good things you have brought into my life and which nothing can wipe away. I ask you forgiveness for the pain I have caused you and offer you mine for the hurts we have done one another. Your life will always be important to me.

Minister: Though Pete and Ann are no longer husband and wife, they do remain father and mother. What began as a marriage became a family, as Ralph, Audrey, Curt, and Kenny came into the life that Ann and Pete made together, and into the marriage they have now brought to an end. As they do that, it is important to know that the bonds between parents and children do not end with the ending of a marriage.

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Release from Vows

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Ann: Pete, I cherish you as the father of our children, and I call on you to continue to be faithful to that trust. I ask you to love them always and to the utmost of your ability, to protect, guide and care for them as long as they shall need or want that from you.

Ralph, Audrey, Curt, and Kenny, I cherish you as my children and give thanks for your being. I pledge to love you always.

My dear children, I am sad for the pain that this separation has caused you. I ask you not to blame yourselves or to feel guilty about this, because you are not its cause. I hope that you, too, will be able to forgive us for the pain you have felt.

You are the best children in the world (to use your dad's phrase). Although we are no longer married, we are still your parents and we love you very much.

To you, my friends, I give thanks for your love and faithful support and ask that you continue to care for each of us, not to pass judgment or condemnation, but to accept this decision confirmed here today, and to continue in your caring support.

Ann Westermann is an ordained, ecumenical minister, a diplomate of the Institute of Logotherapy, and a member of the Swedenborgian Church in St. Louis, Missouri. "Release from Vows of Marriage" is reprinted, with author's permission, from The International Forum for Logotherapy, 1992, 15, 50-52.

Swedenborg Scientific Association Contest Award Change

By the action of the SSA Board, the award amount for the Annual Essay Contest has been altered:

The winner in the undergraduate and graduate categories will each receive both a \$100 certificate toward the purchase of SSA publications, and an award of \$100 cash.

If the winning essays qualify for publication in *The New Philosophy*, there is yet a further honorarium of \$100 cash. The total award per person could thus amount to \$300.

Please see the March 1994 Messenger for details of contest or contact the Swedenborg Scientific Association, Box 278, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009. (215-947-4200)

Opinion

(from page 89)

Dr. Robert Kirven tells a story about our church in St. Louis in his Fryeburg lecture, "What's the Use?" (pun intended). He and others worked for years to "grow" the church there—building community relations, contributing countless hours, singing "We Would Be Building" every Sunday, devoting their all, only to see it, for a time, appear to fall apart due to difficulties with a minister. From the perspective of time and distance, Dr. Kirven said he was able to see that even if the church hadn't survived after that, (it did, eventually), the experience of working together to build the church was also what "church" is all about.

Both the achievement of our goals and *the process by which we get there* are equally important to our regeneration as a denomination. The Rev. Robert McCluskey gave a sermon at the New York New Church called "The Furnace is For Gold," dealing with biblical metaphors of purifying gold. Gold cannot be refined without going through the furnace to separate out the impurities.

When we are filling out a survey about our church's priorities, when Marilyn Turley calls us to greater social action, and the Rev. Eric Allison responds with a picture of our progress so far, when we debate over Temenos—all of our efforts on all levels are going "into the Lord's furnace."

As Robert McCluskey concluded in his sermon at our church, it is difficult to perceive the refinement process while our efforts are still in the furnace. "Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him; on the left hand I seek him, but I cannot behold him; I turn to the right hand, but I cannot see him. But he knows the way that I take; when he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." (Job 23: 8-10)

*Mona Conner
Brooklyn, New York*

Cambridge Church A Window to the World

To the Editor:

Several years ago, the Rev. Randy Laakko, our president at that time, stood before our convention sessions and urged us to seriously consider the future of our denomination. One of his thoughts made a deep and lasting impression upon me. He said, "When we close a window to the world, that window is gone forever." He went on to challenge us to keep as many windows open as our resources will allow—both the windows of our established churches and those that may open themselves for new people in new locations.

It has come to the attention of the Pastoral Ministries Support Unit (PMSU) that the board of trustees of the Swedenborg School of Religion is considering the sale of the Cambridge church. Located in the midst of Harvard University and in the center of a thriving metropolitan area, this church offers our denomination a remarkable opportunity for growth, outreach programming and service. It may be true that we have struggled with just how to capitalize on this potential, but the opportunities remain. There is more at stake here than just the financial needs of our theological school.

The Pastoral Ministries Support Unit strongly urges that this decision be made following deep and prayerful consideration by as many people as possible—the trustees, corporation members, Cambridge church members, and the membership of our denomination. We sincerely hope that during our 1994 convention sessions there will be an opportunity for an honest and open discussion of this critical matter.

"When we close a window to the world, that window is gone forever." Please, let's make this decision together, in the best interests of the entire church.

*Ron Brugler,
Chair of PMSU*

Embraced by the Light

by Betty J. Eadie (with Curtis Taylor)
Placerville, California: Gold Leaf Press, 1992.

Reviewed by Mona Connor

Twenty-five years ago I had an experience that changed my life. I was walking home from school on a sunny spring afternoon, when I had what is called a spontaneous "out-of-body" experience. I felt my eyes open up like holes, my spirit slipped out of my body through the 'holes' in my eyes, and I turned around and looked at "myself." The moment I began thinking how much fun this was, and realized what was happening to me, I found myself back inside my body. This experience felt so easy and natural that I hoped I could recreate it. Every day after school for weeks, when I reached that same bend in the road home, I paused, hoping it would happen again!

For five or six years I had nothing to relate my experience to until one day my father handed me a copy of Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*, the first classic about near-death experiences. I was fascinated. Here were scores of people whose experiences were similar to mine, but went much further. Since then I have read every book I could find on the subject of NDE's. The more I read, the deeper became my conviction that those who have experienced NDE's have valuable spiritual information to share with us, not just about their experience, but about how it has changed their attitude about life—how it can change ours.

With her book *Embraced by the Light*, Betty J. Eadie has elevated the NDE experience to the level of spiritual revelation in a way that is genuine and compelling enough to

have kept it on the *New York Times* bestseller list for forty-nine weeks (at this writing) since the book's release in 1992. The comparisons to Swedenborg's theological perspective and vision of the spiritual world are no less than stunning, and I am certain this book will be the focus of much attention and interest by Swedenborgians in the future.

Because Eadie at once provides a perspective so similar to Swedenborg, and also reveals things he did not, her book will also arouse controversy. Rather than point out the parallels, I prefer to focus on the impact of this book in general, and address what seems more important, and more controversial about what Betty Eadie reveals.

In talking with friends and family, I was surprised at how broad the response to *Embraced by the Light* has been. After sending the book to my sister in London for Christmas, I was amazed to discover that by April it had been read and passed on by three people, and even sent to another country in the process. But the part of the book that Swedenborgians may find difficult to accept is the author's notion that *we were spirits before we were born*; that we took part, in a manner of speaking, both in the creation of the earth, and in the choice to become human in order to further our spiritual growth.

In a chapter titled 'Selecting a Body' she recounts, "I was told that we had bonded together in the spirit world with certain spirit brothers and sisters—those we felt especially close to . . . we covenanted with these spirits to come to earth as family or friends . . . we understood the influences we would have upon each other in this life, and the physical and behavioral attributes we would receive from our families . . . we had

actually chosen many of our weaknesses and difficult situations in our lives so that we could grow." From this perspective a mentally or physically challenged person could be an advanced spirit seeking greater growth; the 'black sheep' of the family could, in fact, be the 'chosen one.'

If your mind is not already reeling with the attempt to fit these ideas into your current belief system, let's go on to my favorite chapter of the book, 'The Drunken Man.' Ms. Eadie is shown a scene on earth where a man lies drunk on a street corner. Her spiritual guides reveal that this man was, in fact, a spirit "greatly admired in the heavens" who had come to earth "as a teacher to help a friend that he had spiritually bonded with." His friend was a prominent lawyer who passed that street corner each day. Seeing the drunken man would increase his compassion, and cause him to exercise important charity in his work.

With what we have known up until now, many of us would think we were doing right to direct the drunken man to an AA meeting! But Eadie was told by her heavenly guides that "because (we) lack pure knowledge (we) should never judge another . . . there are angels who walk among (us) that (we) are unaware of, prompting us," helping us to be true to the spiritual obligations we have made to the Lord, to our neighbor, to ourselves.

Read with care not to miss her clear statement (page 93) that she is not a reincarnationist. In explaining her view of this she also appears to agree with Swedenborg's concept of hereditary evils which she describes as 'cellular memories', "passed down through genetic coding" and accounting for "many of the passed-on traits in families such as addictive tendencies, fears, strengths, and so on." She says that "we do not have repeated lives on this earth; when we seem to 'remember' a past life, we are actually recalling memories contained in the cells."

I can give you several reasons for

"There are angels who walk among us that we are unaware of . . . prompting us . . . helping us to be true to the spiritual obligations we have made to the Lord, to our neighbor, to ourselves."

believing that what Eadie says—that we were spirits before we were born—is probably true. First, her story is written with such conviction and clarity, that I don't think it is logical from a practical standpoint to believe part of it without believing all of it.

Second, when reading Swedenborg, and finding things which at first seem disparate to me, I have been encouraged to "try on" a new idea theoretically, giving it time and thought to see if my comfort with it increases. I have been doing this with the new information from Eadie's book, thinking about how it explains to me things I have previously been unable to understand about Divine Providence and difficult situations, in my own life and the lives of others. Even without working out all the logical and technical details of how different everything would have to be in order for this information to be true, (and I do have a lot of questions!) it does feel right to me on a deeper level.

Third, we are living in difficult times. One of my minister friends likes to say that anyone living now gets 'brownie points' in the spiritual world just for being part of the twentieth century! Could it be time, once again, after several hundred years for some new light to be shed? It is interesting to point out that Eadie did not write and release her book until almost twenty years after her experience. While, spiritually speaking, time can seem irrelevant, in the physical world, often timing is everything. Toward the end of her book she says, "More experiences have come to me since November 18, 1973, but I am reluctant to share them here . . . Everything has its time; for this book, the time is now."

But my strongest reason for believing Betty Eadie takes me back to that bend in the road walking home from school. When I left my body for the briefest time, I could swear I was remembering a state more familiar and somehow prior to my life that made being a physical being seem brief and strange by comparison. Reading certain things in

Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* was in part for me an emotional experience of 'remembering' information I used to know but could hardly access. Throughout her book, Eadie speaks repeatedly about remembering: ". . . I remembered the Creation . . . I sensed that I was 'back' in my native environment and was doing only that which was natural . . . And all of this was a remembering, a reawakening. I knew that I had been to these places before."

If we do accept her experience as valid, even in part, this time the vision has come to us through a very different sort of person: a woman instead of a man, a mother with a large family, who is humbly educated and situated, instead of a solitary scientist/politician of wealth and social standing. Rather than a detailed, factual account we have a warmer, softer version, written from the heart—a positive confirmation of Swedenborg that breathes new life and color into an already wonderful vision of the spiritual world. And Christ, she attests, (as I'd always hoped!) has the best sense of humor of all.

M s. Eadie says, "I knew that each of us who made the decision to come here was a valiant spirit. Even the least developed among us here (on earth), was strong and valiant there (in the spiritual world)." What a thought to carry us through our most discouraging day!

I hope that, as a denomination, we might be willing to receive this book, *on its own terms*, for the gift that it may be to us. By that I mean, in part, we need to be willing to separate the message from the messenger, to consider that the length of her revelatory experience compared with Swedenborg's or the extent of her education *may not be the measure of her message's importance*. We must forgive her for occasionally lapsing into repetition (i.e., ". . . love is joy!") when trying to describe an experience of rapture for which there are no adequate words. Swedenborg was also repetitious in conveying his excitement.

More importantly, we must think about what it means for us that a book so parallel to Swedenborg is on the bestseller list. How can we connect ourselves to the people whose interest it is generating? At the New York New Church, we have decided to begin to do this by holding a one-day seminar on the Near-Death Experience, with a panel of experts, bringing in the Swedenborgian perspective. One person at our church envisioned a new magazine article about Swedenborg. The title, she was asked? "Embraced by the Light for Twenty-seven Years."

Mona Conner is a member of the New York Swedenborgian Church.

Care of the Soul: A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life

by Thomas Moore

New York: Harper Collins, 1992.

Reviewed by Perry Martin

Imagine that you open the Sunday paper to the ENTERTAINMENT section and instead you find the heading *Care of the Soul*. You are looking for some ways to spend time to deepen your inner life: what activities and suggestions might you expect?

What is truly amazing is that there is a book entitled *Care of the Soul* and this book has not only found a commercial publisher but is being read and talked about. Ten years ago a single copy could have been relegated to a religious section of the bookstore to gather dust.

Subtitle: *A Guide for Cultivating Depth and Sacredness in Everyday Life*. What does author Thomas Moore mean by soul, and how and why do we take time and effort for the soul's nourishment? On the first page of the introduction, Moore admits that it is impossible to define precisely what the soul is. "Definition is an intellectual enterprise

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anyway: the soul prefers to imagine. We know intuitively that the soul has to do with genuineness and depth . . . Soul is revealed in attachment, love, and community, as well as a retreat in behalf of inner communing and intimacy." Soul, he tells us, "isn't about curing, fixing, changing, adjusting . . . It doesn't look to the future for an ideal, trouble-free existence. Rather it remains patiently in the present, close to life as it presents itself day by day, and yet at the same time mindful of religion and spirituality.

We live in a world of splits: secular vs. sacred, psychology vs. religion, science vs. spirituality. Swedenborg helps us recognize that inner realities find outer expressions. Thomas Moore says, "Psychology and spirituality need to be seen as one." Until we reconcile science with ancient wisdom and mythology, we suffer soul alienation. Our symptoms can be seen as voices from the soul. "Soul is not a thing, but a quality or a dimension of experiencing life and our selves."

Sounds a bit like one of our favorite quotes: *All religion has relation to life and the life of religion is to do good.* Or, as we may say, be USE-ful. We all perform many uses everyday. We drive to work and do our jobs, we wash dishes or windows, we visit our friends in the hospital or take them a meal when they come home. We do these things, but do we do them from and with soul? How could that be different? And how could we move toward caring rather than curing? Care of the soul "recovers a sense of the sacredness of each individual life; the unfathomable mystery that is the very seed and heart of each individual." We have grown up in a world of rationality and science. Swedenborg, we like to explain, brought rationality back into religion. But what happened to the magic, the mystery that signals the sacredness of life. I think of the Thurber cartoon when He says to Her, "Well, who *made* the magic go out of our marriage—you or

Rather than clinging to fixed and unchanging beliefs, we are challenged to find a faith which is a response to angelic presence.

me?" Swedenborg experienced the mystical, the magical, and that is what draws the seeker back toward soul care.

If we set out to care more deeply for our souls, the problem we immediately encounter is an accusation, inner or outer or both, of selfishness, a preoccupation with ourselves to the exclusion of others. Moore offers an insightful way through the dilemma: "The negative image that we have of narcissism may indicate that self-preoccupation contains something we need so badly that it is surrounded with negative connotation." The paradox is that narcissistic persons don't really love themselves. We have to learn to love and accept ourselves before we can learn to be lovable and to love. As we move toward loving our own souls, our personalities flower. Then we are free to love and, we are reminded, "Love releases us into the realm of divine imagination." We can learn to care for our souls in times of love as well as times of failure, loss and separation. "There is no way toward divine love except through the discovery of human intimacy and community. When we know what love feels like with another person, we can experience loving and being loved by God. The soul is hungry for life in all its mysterious depths. Even if life is empty, the soul is willing to feel fully that emptiness. Moore explains how the soul may respond to depression, illness, work, and creativity, which is a way of participating in God's creation of the cosmos.

Recognizing how our modern life tends to take us away from the sacred, he encourages us not only to enter the presence of the holy in church, but to see the sacred dimension of everyday life. In our dreams also we encounter our own special demons and divine figures as well as

finding symbolic meaning in the ordinary objects. The soul is less concerned with intellectual understanding than it is with relatedness.

Our spiritual practices point us toward discovering that "All emotions, all human activities and all spheres of life have deep roots in the mysteries of the soul, and therefore are holy." Moore suggests that we need to connect what goes on in church with the deepest place of the heart. Perhaps, instead of trying to remember what was said in the sermon, we could ask ourselves, what happened that touched my heart, that helps me recognize the divine love within me. "Truth is not really a soul work; soul is after insight more than truth. Truth is a stopping point asking for commitment and defense. Insight is a fragment of awareness that invites further exploration." If we are afraid of spiritual heights, we will seek forms of religion that "temper and contain the spirit that potentially could transform our lives." Rather than clinging to fixed and unchanging beliefs, we are challenged to find a faith which is a response to angelic presence.

Our spiritual practice of caring for the soul will take us deeply into our inner mysteries, offering us understanding of our unconscious desires. We will see the shadows as well as the sunlight. We will learn to feel our existence and all that life holds. The journey of soul-making requires time, effort, skill, knowledge, intuition and courage. As we tend our souls, we learn to tend also to the soul of the world, the soul that resides in nature. We will care for the earth, for in beauty our souls are nourished.

Perry S. Martin, Ph.D., is a psychotherapist practicing at Temenos, the Swedenborgian growth center in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

PCA RETREAT

The Pacific Coast Association held its annual Southern California Retreat March 10-12 at the Center for Spiritual Development in Orange, California.

Perry Martin asked us, "How do we live life wholeheartedly? What has heart and meaning for us? How can we find the courage to be who we are?"

We used our creativity in this loving supportive community to find our own answers and learned to speak our own truths. We explored some of the universal means of healing: music and movement, creative expression with art materials and imagination and touch.

We came away feeling nurtured and fulfilled and aware of a sense of deeper spiritual growth.

Thank you, PCA, for your continuing support of this unique opportunity for spiritual growth.

Plan for March 10, 11 and 12 in 1995, same place!

Manon Washburn
Secretary, Los Angeles church

Women's Material Sought for Book in Process

The Swedenborg Foundation is preparing a book, *Songs of Innocence/Songs of Experience*, on the ideas and ideals of women in the New Church from its beginning. Especially wanted are letters, diary excerpts and other writings which show the thoughts of all age groups toward childhood, adolescence, career choice, partnering and friendship, home, family, spiritual growth, losses and aging. Do you have any meaningful material that should be shared with the world? Contact Louise Woofenden, 48 Highland Street, Sharon, MA 02067, as soon as possible.

Passages

Baptism and Confirmation

Ross—Dawn M. Ross was baptized into the Christian faith and confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church March 27, 1994, at the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis, Missouri, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

Confirmations

Breer—Roger Breer was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church March 27, 1994, at the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis, Missouri, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

Costello—Caitlin Elizabeth Costello, daughter of Gloria and Don Costello and granddaughter of Raphael and Betty Guiu, was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church April 10, 1994, at the Bridgewater New Church, Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Mr. Kit Billings, third-year SSR student, officiated.

Curtis, Heath, Kiesman, Largey, Leach, McFarlin, Steadman, Swett—Jane Curtis, Dale and Nancy Heath, Janet Kiesman, Ruby Largey, Melissa and Nancy Leach, Sandra McFarlin, Lorraine Steadman, and Douglas Swett were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church March 27, 1994, at the Church of the New Jerusalem in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Hanley—Rebecca and Michael Hanley were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church at the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware, the Rev. Randall Laakko officiating, with parish president Jeffrey Watt present to receive and welcome them into membership.

Deaths

Cuthbertson—Hugh Cuthbertson, longtime devoted member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada, entered the spiritual world March 19, 1994. Confirmed in 1930, Hugh served as a board member, past president, and was Sunday school superintendent for 20 years. A resurrection service was conducted by the Rev. Ron Brugler.

Schneiderheinze—Louise F. Schneiderheinze, 81, devoted and longtime member of the Manchester, New Hampshire Swedenborgian Church when it was in existence, entered the spiritual world March 1, 1994. The funeral was conducted at the Cain and Janosz Funeral Home in Manchester, the Rev. Harold Jenkins officiating. Memorial donations may be made to Massachusetts New Church Union, 79 Newbury St., Boston, MA 02116.

Williams—Dr. Robert E. Williams, 73, a longtime member of the Church of the Holy City, Washington, D.C., entered the spiritual world February 18. Dr. Williams was co-founder (with the Rev. Brian Kingslake) of the church's Sunday Morning Forum discussion group and its dedicated leader for many years. He was professor of education and psychology at the University of the District of Columbia and also served for several years on the board of trustees of Urbana University. A memorial service was conducted February 25, the Rev. Randall Laakko officiating.

Church Family News

Carole Rienstra has received a diagnosis of a recurrence of cancer, on one of her ribs. She has had surgery, and an extended schedule of chemotherapy, and probably radiation treatments, has been set up. Carole's spirits are good; she has cut her work to part time, and because of the treatments, she and David have decided not to attend convention this year. Carole is most appreciative of all our prayers, cards, letters, and calls; she says she can feel all the good energy coming her way and she knows it helps the healing process.

The Swedenborgian Church Statistics as of December 31, 1993

Associations	Churches		Ordained Ministers			Authorized Lay Leaders	Members			Number of Delegates
	Active	Inactive	Active	Inactive	Retired		Active	Inactive	Total	
Canada	1	0	3	0	0	0	168	48	216	18
Connecticut	0	1	0	0	0	0	9	5	14	2
Illinois	5	1	3	1	0	0	134	44	178	15
Kansas	1	1	1	0	1	0	105	0	105	12
Maine	2	0	2	0	0	0	100	186	286	12
Massachusetts	7	0	7	4	3	0	217	44	261	23
Michigan	1	0	1	0	0	0	86	29	115	10
Middle Atlantic	3	0	4	0	0	0	114	49	163	13
New York	1	0	1	0	0	0	24	42	66	4
Ohio	3	2	1	0	0	0	92	0	92	11
Pacific Coast	5	0	7	1	3	1	230	0	230	25
Southeast	1	1	3	0	1	0	36	29	65	5
Western Canada	7	0	2	0	5	0	199	0	199	21
Gulfport (as of 12/31/92)	0	1	0	0	0	0	15	0	15	3
Guyana	1	0	0	0	0	0	21	13	34	4
TOTALS	38	7	35	6	13	1	1550	489	2039	178

A Special Opportunity

*for personal or family time at Temenos before
or after the convention session in Arlington, Virginia*

Personal or family accommodations are available for individuals from across the continent at Temenos either before or after Convention '94 in the Washington, D.C. area this July.

Temenos is only 2½ hours from Washington by car or train, and affords individuals an opportunity to explore the historic Chester County and Philadelphia areas at one's leisure. Philadelphia is only an hour away by car or train; Valley Forge National Park is only about half as far; and world-famous Longwood Gardens is a mere fifteen minutes' drive.

Temenos can be reached from Washington, D.C., by taking I-95 to Wilmington and then taking Route 202 to West Chester. Or you can take Amtrak to Wilmington, Delaware, and rent a car at the railroad station.

You will want a car to get in and out of Temenos, but rail transportation to Philadelphia or New York is available only 10 minutes away. Temenos is also only a half-hour or so from the focal points of the Pennsylvania Dutch country in Lancaster County, home to many who eschew the forms of modern life including electricity, automobiles, and post-elementary education.

Rooms at Temenos are available at \$30 per night per person, and kitchen facilities are available for visitors' use. A local host or hostess will assist in touring and visiting the area.

Reserve early! Rooms are on a first-come, first-served basis, and not all are air conditioned. The swimming pool awaits your use, along with the miles of heavily shaded hiking trails, especially along pristine Broad Run. Call Temenos at 610/696-8145 today to make your vacation reservation.

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 15 years after his death. This 1787 organization eventually spawned the present General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's own spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church today 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 would conclude, "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.



TEMENOS AT BROAD RUN

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of North America
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