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# THE MESSENGER

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January 1995

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## Communicating with the Diverse Parts of the Swedenborgian Community



Carol Skinner Lawson

*Outward-looking  
Swedenborgians believe  
that this community of  
seekers . . . searching  
for God's love and for  
life's meaning . . . is  
the new "church"  
predicted by St. John  
and by Swedenborg.*

The Swedenborgian community today can be divided into three basic populations: members of Swedenborgian churches, nonsectarian readers of Swedenborg, and academics who study Swedenborg.

I am an example of the first group. I'm a "card-carrying Swedenborgian"—born into the church, as were my mother and grandmother. In my family, my great-grandmother was the original reader of the Writings. As a child, the Swedenborgian world to me was the Cincinnati New Church. When, as a young woman, I served as associate editor of *The Messenger*, the Swedenborgian world became national—the General Convention. When much later I began to work on the journal *Chrysalis*, I discovered there were readers looking to Swedenborg for insights to supplement what they find in their own (not Swedenborgian) churches, organizations they value. In working on the 1988 Tricentennial Symposium, I found there were non-Swedenborgian scholars who studied Swedenborg's theology. So, in the course of my editorial career, the Swedenborgian community is turning out to be far more diverse than my original conception of it.

### New-Church Members

Some years ago my daughter Laura called me up late one night from Vermont, where she was attending college. She said, "If anyone asks my religion, I always say I'm a Swedenborgian." I said, "Of course!" She went on ". . . but what does that mean? What does that mean for you? What's the most important aspect of being a Swedenborgian?"

Even though I was very sleepy, I didn't need to think for a moment. I just said, "Angels. They are all around us. You know that yourself. Whenever we call on them, they surround us in God's stream of love. I've counted on them all my life. Angels live in communities. They wear clothes. They have no wings."

Actually I knew much more than this because my great-grandmother had read Swedenborg's reports of heaven and hell and had passed down to all of us what Swedenborg describes. It was in my family tradition that Swedenborg had said that angels are with us from birth through death, that the most important tasks in life are growing spiritually while being useful. All this I knew—not so much by my intellect, but almost by instinct—as part of my acculturation within my mother's family.

To complete my own portrait as a Type I Swedenborgian, I've worked on various denominational projects related to communications and publishing, including differentiating General Convention's receivers into

*(Continued on page 3)*

## Moving Toward the Light

While visiting my son and his wife recently, my son and I fell into one of our late-night discussions that range over many things, but often wind up with his pronouncement that "the world" is deteriorating. He cites many examples of atrocities, wars, profiteering, and mass attitudes of willful ignorance and selfishness to prove it. He concedes that good works and good people abound, but doubts that it is enough to stem the tide of planetary destruction. I argue that our minds, our individual attitudes, *are* powerful indeed, but they *can* be changed, often with lightning speed, and we are each of us a far more powerful influence on each other than we are aware. So, don't we unwittingly contribute to the evil in the world when we see it as real and powerful, when in fact, evil has only the power that we choose to grant it? If, in fact, we work on our own daily attitudes, which are the only things in our control (i.e., stay centered, be fully present in the moment, respond, don't react, cultivate love, ask God for help, change ourselves and then work from that change of heart), we will change our consciousness, and that is the only real way anything can be influenced. He counters that I am in my own little world of wishful thinkers who tend to ignore what's really going on out there. (I warned you that these are late-night discussions, with all that implies).

These debates as to whether the world is going to the dogs (my apologies to our canine friends) are surely as old as humanity itself; nevertheless, I vow to begin sending him good news items as proof that good can and will, overcome.

Some days later, I received a letter from Merry Browne, a correspondent who often sends me interesting items. This one, titled, "The Noble Global Paradigm," states:

Science has discovered all creation is consciousness.

Education has begun to teach character.

Business is promoting synergy.

Law suggests settling differences rather than suing.

Medicine offers attitudinal healing.

Psychology teaches transpersonal method of acting and reacting from highest self.

Research is exploring aspects of higher consciousness (ESP ability) plus Near-Death Experiences.

Religion is moving toward Interfaith.

Art, as usual, is imitating the new Life.

Her references are not detailed, but of course I recognize names such as Bohm, Jampolsky, Jung and Assagioli. The information is not new to me, but laid out so tidily, it is an encouraging reminder that these frontiers of spiritual progress are real, they're happening. It is a heartening New Year's present.

Recently, while out on my daily walk, I happened across a favorite neighbor I hadn't seen for several weeks. I was delighted to hear that she had not moved to another area, as she had been planning to do, but instead had rented the much larger, prettier house in back of the one she and her family had been living in. She was ecstatic about this turn of events, and I was eager to know how it all came about. She said she had been increasingly distressed about the small house they had been living in, had never wanted to move into it, and was becoming more and more resentful. She had been praying every night to God for help to get them out of that cramped, horrid house, and she watched with mounting frustration as nothing materialized. Finally, she said, a few weeks ago a kind of peace came over her and she let go and *blessed* the house, and gave thanks to God that there was a roof over their heads, gave thanks that they had been provided for, and would be again when the time was right. She reported that two days later the woman living in the larger house announced that she needed to move to Arizona, and that house became available. My neighbor's husband, who was between jobs, was also given the opportunity of moving the woman and her belongings out of state.

Once again, it seems that when we are able to muster the faith to act from our higher truth, divine order is affirmed and manifested. So we can add to that list of things to do, *bless what is*. Act as if, and know that all is well. A joyous and creative New Year to all!

—Patte LeVan

## The Messenger

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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.

## Survey Commentary

To the Editor:

I am writing to prevent a possible misunderstanding of a section of the report of the General Convention Survey published in the November *Messenger*. On page 132 there is a heading in very bold type: **E. MOST IMPORTANT ACTION/PROGRAM FOR 1995**. The survey summary then goes on to say that "programs for youth, a focus on church growth, Temenos and more Stonehouse/type programs were most frequently mentioned." The report fails to point out that the number of people mentioning these four things is very small, considering that 271 completed surveys were returned. Furthermore, in the case of Temenos, while seven people men-

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## Communicating with the Diverse Parts of the Swedenborgian Community

(from front cover)

two audiences: New-Church people and non-New-Church people. In this connection we invented J. Appleseed & Co., the denomination's publishing program aimed especially at non-Swedenborgians.

This Type I component of the Swedenborgian community contains about 6,000 Swedenborgians belonging to Swedenborgian churches in the U.S. today; we are divided among three Swedenborgian branches. These some 6,000 New-Church church-goers are interspersed along a continuum ranging from members with highly conservative beliefs to those who interpret Swedenborg quite liberally. The more traditional of us believe that the Swedenborgian church is *the* new church described by John in the Book of Revelation with its growth predicted by Swedenborg: that our own New-Church organizations, totaling perhaps 40,000 worldwide, are *it*. That was certainly my own position when I worked for *The Messenger*. In contrast, less literal Swedenborgians are convinced that our spiritual well-being is not only *not dependent on religious institutions*, but that the new church predicted by John and by Swedenborg is in evidence throughout America today in the current transformative focus on spirituality.

People who may or may not have any affiliation with a church are drawn, for example, to programs sponsored by the Institute of Noetic Sciences, Common Boundary, Esalen, the Omega Institute for Holistic Studies, and many other non-religious organizations. Twelve-step recovery groups abound and serve millions of people. Hundreds of thousands of people meet to see and discuss videocassettes of John Bradshaw. An international organization has been founded on the near-death experience. Workshops on the studies of Raymond Moody and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross continue to attract large groups.<sup>1</sup>

Outward-looking Swedenborgians believe that *this community of seekers*—the multitudes of people searching, often via non-church-related paths, for God's love and for life's meaning—is the new "church" predicted by St. John and by Swedenborg. Both the liberal as well as the conservative "card-carrying" Swedenborgians, however, continue to belong to Swedenborgian church organizations and to attend their annual or biennial North American conventions.

## Nonsectarian Readers of Swedenborg

**T**he second basic group of Swedenborgians—people strongly influenced by Swedenborg who are not members and are not connected to any Swedenborgian organization—are readers who might be called nonsectarian Swedenborgians. Perhaps the relationship of William Blake's life and work to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg is a good example of this population.

When Blake was in his twenties, he read Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*, and the comments he wrote in the margins of his copy indicate a sense that he had found a kindred spirit. This is probably why he attended a meeting in London where readers of Swedenborg were to take the first steps toward founding a distinct church organization. Blake signed the register on the first day but apparently never came back.<sup>2</sup>

Nevertheless, Blake drew upon Swedenborg as a central influence and guide to his spiritual life and his art, and, in this sense, Blake may be seen as a nonsectarian Swedenborgian.

By this type of nonsectarian influence, Swedenborg has influenced our present culture enormously. His influence is felt, though its source is mostly unknown, in literature, art, philosophy, science and religion, women's values, and other fields. Those with some familiarity with this influence will recognize the names of important writers such as Helen Keller, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, John Greenleaf Whittier, Edwin Markham, Henry James, Sr., and Czeslav Milosz. There are painters like Howard Pyle, who used to read Swedenborg at the end of the day to students, such as Jessie Willcox Smith, N.C. Wyeth, and Maxfield Parrish; and crusaders against slavery such as Lydia Maria Child. Most of these considered themselves Swedenborgians, though they were not active members of a Swedenborgian church.

These important cultural figures may be viewed as part of a historical stream, not a tradition, which, for want of a better term, might be named nonsectarian Swedenborgians. These people, by *unobtrusively* working Swedenborgian ideas into their artistic, literary, and social achievements, have contributed to the greater "New Church" in its nontraditional form.

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## Communicating with . . . Swedenborgians (Continued from page 3)

Many in England at the time of the earliest formation of a specifically Swedenborgian church [the meeting that Blake attended] felt strongly that it was never in the vision of Swedenborg that such a church come into being: that the predicted new church would consist of those who aimed at living a life of good and of usefulness to the whole of humanity. Some of these nonsectarian Swedenborgians were in Anglican congregations in Manchester, but others felt that the life of good uses was its own calling and did not require any corporate worship at all. And so, it seems, have numerous others in the more than two centuries since the earliest Swedenborgian parish was formed in London.<sup>3</sup>

**T**oday, in our work of publishing the Swedenborgian Foundation's journal, *Chrysalis*, members of the Foundation's staff have come in contact with about eleven thousand spiritual seekers searching for fresh perspectives on significant life issues. Many of these seekers are not looking for corporate worship or organizational ties with a new church; many are not Christian. Like Blake, Helen Keller, the Brownings, and the Transcendentalists, these people are looking for ways that lead toward a direct individual relationship with the divine, and for practical ways to apply spiritual principles to life. *Chrysalis* threads Swedenborgian ideas unobtrusively throughout its pages, and this careful weaving seems to meet the needs of many *Chrysalis* readers who, as I mentioned earlier, are looking for insights to supplement what they find in their own churches. If some of these seekers become Swedenborg readers and Swedenborgian principles thus become especially useful in their lives, they are what we may call nonsectarian Swedenborgians.

Perhaps, for the conservative, church-member Swedenborgian, the nonsectarian Swedenborgian presents a particular dilemma: We would really

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ways that lead toward  
a direct individual  
relationship with the  
divine, and for practical  
ways to apply spiritual  
principles to life.*

like to say that our theology is best for everyone.<sup>2</sup> Yet, time after time we are faced with Swedenborg's clear statements that God is present in all religions.<sup>2</sup> Outreaching Swedenborgians will probably insist that God is at work everywhere, not just within the bounds of Christianity, but wherever people try to live by principles of good and truth that they regard as coming from a divine source.

## Nonsectarian Scholars of Swedenborg

**S**wedenborg was among the last of the great scholars who grew out of the Renaissance. A man whose mind was charged with a vital spirit of inquiry, his works were first scientific and philosophical and finally theological. He wrote for whomsoever in general, and not for the purpose of founding a church. Members of the third basic population in the Swedenborgian community, like Swedenborg, are scholars. Among them are theologians, professors in other seminaries, ministers in other Christian churches, rabbis, philosophers, specialists in nineteenth-century literature, scientists, and psychologists. These academics, who study Swedenborg's theological writings now published in thirty volumes, belong to their own religious, professional, or university organizations. They probably regard Emanuel Swedenborg as a valued resource but have no desire to become involved with our community. On the other hand, it is in keeping with Swedenborg's universality *for us* to communicate in nonsectarian terms with this segment of the Swedenborgian community.

People who study Swedenborg academically find that there are two broad concepts in his theology.

The first is the concept of a *distinguishable oneness*. For example, while the form and the substance of an object can usefully be distinguished from each other, they cannot be separated from each other in actuality. Swedenborg held that love, wisdom, and action can usefully be distinguished from each other, but cannot be separated from each other in actuality. He extended this principle to all of reality, insisting that nothing exists in isolation, and particularly that the Divine is essentially one in the special sense that it is wholly present everywhere and always, in an infinite number of distinguishable forms.

The second underlying key concept that may help define the subtlety is that of *the reality of spirit*. For Swedenborg, there is nothing vague or amorphous about spirit. It is substantial,



crisp, and clear, and potent. Angels are in human form, with marvelously acute senses, experiencing themselves and their environment as solid. By comparison, the physical world is cloudy, ambiguous, and sluggish.<sup>4</sup>

In their studies of Swedenborg, scholars and theologians find order and beauty in the entirety of Swedenborgian thought. As resources for contemporary scholarship, the Swedenborg Foundation offered the 1988 Symposium on Science and Spirituality, the Tricentennial anthology *A Continuing Vision*, and Henry Soderberg's book on Swedenborg's airplane; the Foundation is now beginning publication of a series of scholarship monographs being edited by George Dole, and is developing fresh materials for scholars on Swedenborg's influence on nineteenth-century thought.

To be aware of the three basic components of the Swedenborgian community gives us the background to fit what we hear and read into a meaningful structure for ourselves as Type I Swedenborgians. To understand that there are nonsectarian Swedenborgians will help us when we get questions from people outside the church who may ask about Blake or Emerson's relation to our New Church, or if we are called upon to describe the Swedenborgian community.

Those influenced by Swedenborg are attracted to Swedenborgian principles in different ways. As I said to Laura on the telephone, those from the old-line, inherited Swedenborgian tradition have an unshakable belief in the ever-present reality of the spiritual world and in the oneness of God's love and wisdom as is evidenced by being useful while growing spiritually. I can thank providence to have been born into the New Church which has given me a delightful focus for trying to lead a useful life. But in the same mode, nonsectarian Swedenborgians pick and choose from our spiritual tradition to incorporate whatever from Swedenborg gives them help on their own spiritual paths and in their own work.

I trust that my own regeneration has prospered as I have gradually allowed myself to believe that the path of the nonsectarian seeker is as valid as my own New-Church path. If there are other Type I Swedenborgians among *Messenger* readers who can let themselves underwrite the validity of nonsectarian paths to truth, there are helpful non-evangelical introductions to Swedenborg just now becoming available. Why not give nonproselytizing introductory books to people you know who are happily ensconced in their own churches but who nevertheless seek beyond them for help in regeneration? The Foundation's new book on angels by Bob Kirven, *Chrysalis*, George Dole and Bob Kirven's compact biography of Swedenborg, the new edition of Helen Keller's *My Religion*, the Foundation's new monograph series, and *Awaken from Death* are all titles that will appeal to the earnest nonsectarian seeker; they may be purchased from the Foundation by

calling 1-800/355-3222.

Perhaps it is time for us to open our hearts to the following words of Dr. Howard Davis Spoerl, a New-Church clergyman, active in the first half of the present century:

Now that effective human relations (psychology) are replacing theological adherences, and informal association is replacing church members, we have a golden opportunity (a providential "second chance") to give the world, in a modest way, some of the help it needs, instead of purveying what we like to think it ought to want.

In this spirit, your gifts of books targeted to the nonsectarian reader will gradually draw some readers into the Swedenborgian community; a few will become Swedenborgian church-goers, but many others may begin to use Swedenborg's teachings on their life paths. This is a non-evangelistic way of nurturing Swedenborg's influence. If we acknowledge the broad outreach of the Swedenborgian community and act on behalf of enlarging it, we will expand the New Church.

#### NOTES

1. Martin, Ernest. Spirituality is not church-dependent. *Chrysalis*, 9,(1): ii-iv.
2. Dole, George F., *Sorting Things Out*. San Francisco: J. Appleseed & Company, 1994, 263 pp.
3. Hitchcock, John L. Introduction to Blake and Swedenborg; three nonsectarian studies. In *Swedenborg Studies: Monographs of the Swedenborg Foundation*. No. 5., West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1995. (In press.)
4. Dole, George F., and Robert Kirven. Key concepts in Swedenborg's theology. In *A Scientist Explores Spirit*. New York City and West Chester, Pennsylvania: Swedenborg Foundation, 1992.
5. Spoerl, Howard Davis. Our distinctive faith. *Our Daily Bread*. October, 1989: 30.

*This article has been modified for Messenger readers from a talk presented to members of the Unitarian-Universalist Church in Lynchburg, Virginia. The members had been reading Swedenborg and wanted to know something about the Swedenborgian community in North America.*

*Carol Skinner Lawson is editor of Chrysalis, chair of the Swedenborg Foundation's outreach/marketing program and co-chair of the Temenos Challenge.*

### Important Church Calendar Dates

January 20-21	Temenos Board of Managers—West Chester, Pennsylvania
April 2-4	CAM—SSR, Newton, MA
May 5-6	SSR Board—Temenos
May 7	Mass Association Annual Meeting
May 19-20	Temenos Board—Temenos
July 2-9	1995 Convention—San Francisco

*Do you know why the people of Israel  
wandered in the wilderness for 40 years?  
Even back then, men wouldn't stop  
and ask for directions.*

# Is Swedenborgianism a Cult?

Eugene Taylor

Readers of *The Messenger* will hardly be surprised to discover that, while Swedenborgian thought was widely known throughout the nineteenth century, Swedenborg is hardly a household word anywhere in America today. However, they may be surprised to discover that in numerous circles where there is at least name recognition, Swedenborgianism has the reputation of being a cult.

One such circle is that of scholars in American church history within the American Academy of Religion, the group that puts the stamp of approval on what all college and theological students shall learn about religion in America. A scholarly battle has recently taken place there in which Swedenborgians everywhere emerged as the victors, whether they know it or not.

Briefly: The New Religions in America Study Group within the American Academy of Religion convened a few years ago and determined that an in-depth study of cults in modern America was needed. The Study Group set up an editorial board and put out the word to scholars around the U.S. that they were looking for appropriate experts on cults. Robert Stockman, the historian of the Bahai faith in Wilmette, Illinois, was contacted for a chapter on Bahai, an American variant of Islam. Because we were divinity school students together at Harvard many years ago, Stockman recommended me for the chapter on Swedenborgianism, because he knew of my connection to the New Church through my William James work.

The editors contacted me and I agreed to do the chapter, but I objected to the emphasis on cults. I told them that Swedenborgianism was not a cult, and besides, the word *cult*, I thought, was a term only used by prejudiced persons about some

*A scholarly battle has recently taken place . . . in which Swedenborgians everywhere emerged as the victors, whether they know it or not.*

group they really know nothing about. Over the two-year course of the project, the center of gravity of the book shifted away from cults and moved toward alternative religions in America. This occurred once the editors realized that they were letting the stereotypes of popular journalism dictate the interpretation of American religion to the scholars, instead of the scholars informing the journalists about American religious history.

The editors were quite adamant, however, about Swedenborgianism. They classified it as a New Age Religion and determined that they were going to put it in the table of contents in a section by that name, placing it between Satanism and Witchcraft. I objected, but after they huddled with their experts, they informed me that everyone had agreed it was definitely a New Age Religion. In fact, they said, Swedenborgianism is classed as one of the American spiritualist churches in the *International Encyclopedia of Religions*, so their view has prevailed for more than a century.

I proceeded anyway. The assignment called for a short article, fifteen pages maximum, including bibliography, not a page more. All the other authors wrote twenty and thirty-page papers which had to be edited. I wrote them a paper that was exactly fifteen pages. In this paper, I gave a sketch of Swedenborg's life, the ecclesiastical history of the New Church as a Christian denomination in America, and ten

examples why Swedenborgian ideas were so popular in the American folk culture during the nineteenth century; hence revealing the historical source of the present confusion of Swedenborgianism as a New Age cult.

The editors declared it one of the best written papers in the book. But more importantly, recognizing right away that they had never read Swedenborg in the original and that they knew nothing about New Church history, (despite the fact that their board contained preeminent scholars of religious history in America), the editors graciously conceded that they had been in error. In the table of contents, they have moved Swedenborgianism out of the category of a New Age Religion and put it more appropriately in between Quakerism and Unitarianism within a section called 'Variants of Christianity.' The book is edited by Professor Timothy Miller from the University of Kansas, and will appear in the spring of 1995 under the title, *America's Alternative Religions*, published by SUNY Press/Albany.

## What Can We Learn from This?

It seems to me that there are at least three important lessons from this episode. First, members of the New Church should little wonder why converts do not come flocking in on their own to join the church if the general perception, especially among people who are knowledgeable about religion in America, is that Swedenborgianism is a cult. Even the best face put forward cannot possibly hope to overcome such an ingrained and unspoken image of the church being perpetuated beyond its borders.

Second, the question is, what can anyone possibly do about it? After all, this is not a problem that

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## Is Swedenborgianism a Cult?

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appeared yesterday. It seems to be that if the solution is one of education, enhancing ecumenical connections with other denominations within such organizations as the National Council of Churches would be an important venue for righting this misperception. It also seems to me that a special responsibility rests with the faculty of the various New Church Theological Schools. After all, how can students be adequately prepared for the ministry if forces inherently working against them in the culture at large are not identified and addressed? From a sociological standpoint, the type and level of objective scholarship required in standard theological education today should be able to identify the problem and help rectify it with scholars and theologians of other denominations and religious traditions. But will the faculties view this as an important enough task to take up?

Third, Swedenborgian ideas may possibly appeal to New Age audiences, especially young people seeking a liberal and open spirituality that speaks to their personal experiences in ways that traditional denominations do not. The key is, however, how to appeal to those audiences and still preserve the unique identity of the church.

So, is Swedenborgianism really a cult? If it is perceived that way, perhaps this misperception could be turned to some advantage. A discussion is cordially invited to take up this important question and set the record straight.

*Dr. Eugene Taylor lectures in psychiatry at Harvard Medical School and is the faculty sponsor of the Harvard-Radcliffe Chaplaincy.*

## Joining the Church Late

Elizabeth Loewald

Recently I joined our church. At the age of seventy. The first church I've joined. In the spirit of Diversity—that vibrant tenet of our Swedenborgian Church!—let me explain how good it feels to be at this end of the rainbow of our congregation. It's always been easy for me to talk to non-joiners. Especially if they were non-joined for decades. If their hair, like mine, turned grey in the process. They could understand leeriness. "How can we announce our allegiance to a faith we may not be able to live up to, or into? Or only part of the time? Hasn't it gotten progressively harder to know *anything* for sure? Do these other people actually know why they are here? Isn't Real Life out there—not here? Or actually—don't all these people look as if they've *truly* joined? Aren't they Whole, and we are Fragmented for good? (Even the children here know more than we about belonging) . . ."

After I'd come here for a while, I began to suspect I might join the congregation. Converse with members. Be a member. The fog of all those old thoughts began to lift. I think our singing first blew it away.

Look at what I *had* joined, before this:

- Professional associations. They did offer work companionship; a sense of identity too. Being useful and included. What, though, is included? A very small piece of me; a very small piece of you.

- The Democratic party! Fifty years, more or less. Fun/ stimulation/triumph/misery/built-in frustration. There is some idealism, some humanity there, but not so you count on it.

- The food co-op on my island. We do have ideals! We work together, all kinds of us. We have fun, it feels fine. A good guild. . . but what we reap are groceries. Not enough.

- My family. I didn't join it, I was born into it. I added to it. It added to me. I will never resign; and you can't. It's as essential as air, as earth, as the universe. But I didn't choose it. And in the family we just *are*, we don't discuss it.

So, fellow member, congregation, I'm so glad to meet you. First, because I think we're all wanting to form a guild for spiritual work. There really needs to be one. And where we can talk ad infinitum. Second, because here I'll just be me, and you'll just be you. A radical idea.

To others who might read this, but haven't joined—take your time, really. If you come here, sing, work, pray, wrangle, enjoy—a critical mass may gather in you as it did in me. You'll join then. If it hasn't yet—wait. *It's such a fresh choice.*

*Elizabeth Loewald was confirmed into the Portland Swedenborgian Church in October. Dr. Loewald is a semi-retired psychiatrist who recently moved to Peaks Island, Maine, from New Haven, Connecticut, where she was as associate clinical professor at Yale. She also writes poetry and is currently working on a book of short stories. "Joining the Church Late" is reprinted with permission from the November Portland church newsletter.*

## Nominating Committee Seeks Candidates

The Nominating Committee of the Swedenborgian Church is seeking qualified, interested people to fill the following positions in our offices and Support Units:

General Council (1 minister, 2 lay persons)  
Communications Support Unit  
Education Support Unit  
Financial Planning & Resource Support Unit

Growth and Outreach Support Unit  
Information Management Support Unit  
Pastoral Ministries Support Unit

Nominating Committee  
Committee on Admission to the Ministry  
Convention nominees for SSR  
Board of Trustees

If you are interested in having your name considered for nomination or wish to suggest a potential candidate, please notify the chairperson of the Nominating Committee at the following address: The Nominating Committee, Rev. Skuli Thorhallsson, Chair, 825 W. Mercer's Fernery Rd., Deland, FL 32720 904-734-7378

# Creativity Unlimited

Eric Allison

**Y**ou may recall seeing a T-shirt at the annual convention a few years ago with the Swedenborg quote "Within every idea a multitude of new ideas is lying dormant." This was noticed in a Mercedes Benz ad in *The New York Times*. So, the quotation found its way to Swedenborgian T-shirts via the Mercedes Benz advertisers and it proved its point. Creativity begets creativity. It is very important to share what we are doing. It gives other churches the opportunity to emulate successful programs. Sometimes the sharing of ideas spins off a multitude of new ideas. Whether it is what we do for the community or for the general well-being of the congregation, a good idea is a good idea. So, just do it and then pass it on. I remember in the early stages of my ministry being very excited about a new idea I had for a worship service. I wrote it down and hoarded the idea as something to hold until the time was right. I feared that if I did this great service the people would expect more, and I wouldn't be able to deliver. My standard would be raised to a level that I couldn't maintain. The people did expect more. But, I was wrong in believing that I couldn't keep up with the standard. The more creative services I did the more creative ideas I got. Other people gave me ideas. I discovered numerous new books with great examples of dynamic worship services. Certainly the spirit of the Creator which works through us is creative. The more we are open to it, the more creative we become. A heavenly momentum is set in motion when we decide to go ahead and "just do it." The more we experiment, the more willing we are to try new things, the more ideas we try the more we have. So show us the colors of your rainbow. Tell us what you are doing, and you will see it in *The Messenger* or in *What's Happening Now*. \*



Church of the Open Word - Swedenborgian St. Louis, Missouri

**St. Louis, Missouri:** The Church of the Open Word and Garden Chapel is a busy place.

On Saturday mornings the chapel is used by a Jewish congregation. On most Saturday afternoons you will find a wedding taking place—118 were celebrated last year.

During the week the Waldorf Preschool fills the church with youthful energy. Tuesday nights are adult Bible study sessions led by Dave Rienstra. Wednesday nights Nada Bradshaw leads a spiritual growth group.

Our church in St. Louis is quite different from most of our churches because of its large beautiful garden. Much like the Wayfarers Chapel, you can walk around the grounds and absorb elements of the Divine by contemplating the beauty and correspondences of nature. The

gardens gained such a reputation that they have started to serve as a public park. This was an idea of Carole Reinstra that has blossomed into fruition as a source of spiritual nourishment for everyone.

The Church of the Open Word is also well known for its concerts and annual flower and music festivals.

During the flood of '93 the church was listed as an emergency shelter and raised over \$1,500 for flood relief that was given to the **Salvation Army** and the **Red Cross**.

Twice each year the congregation holds a food drive for the **Loaves and Fishes Food Bank**. Each year that which is not sold at the rummage sale is given to the **Loaves and Fishes Food Bank**.

**Edmonton, Alberta:** It gets mighty cold in Edmonton, but the church is hot with activity even in the depths of winter. The winter does not stop the people from having a full program. One look at their newsletter will tell you that it offers a wide variety of programs for spiritual growth. For a small congregation it is very impressive to have something going on almost every day.

Hank Korsten has periodically offered the series **How to Talk so Kids Will Listen**. Public lecture series on Life after Death, Angels and other topics have been regular events. During the last few years interest has steadily grown in the course on Therapeutic Touch which Hank also offers. Tai Chi is now held weekly. Crystal Bartlick is leading a weekly meditation class. Later in the year Ted Duffy will be leading a spiritual growth group entitled "Know Yourself."

Both the adult and children's Sunday school classes have been following the **Whole People of God** series. Hank Korsten teaches the adult Sunday school. The Sunday school is slowly but steadily growing. Last year the church spent \$2,000 on a new sign which served notice to the community that they are expecting a bright future as a neighborhood church.

In September of this year members of the congregation went door to door delivering information about the church to 2,000 homes. This is the third time this has been done; each time the result has been that several new people have come into the life of the church.

**Bridgewater, Massachusetts:** The Bridgewater congregation is, of course, saddened by the fire which nearly destroyed their church. What do you do when your church catches fire? Be creative, trust in the Lord and look for the silver lining. The fire has actually ignited something very encouraging. As church moderator Larry Conant has told me several times on the phone, "The support of the community has been just incredible."

The day after the fire Ray Guiu reported that our bookstore in Boston received 425 calls from people asking how they could help.

The church received more publicity that week than it has received for decades. The story of the fire was on all the local radio and T.V. stations, in every area newspaper



and was even covered as far away as India's New Delhi edition of *U.S.A. Today*.

The accounts of communities' outpouring of love for our Bridgewater church are inspiring. The Roche Bros. Supermarket gave \$2,500. The Catholic Church in East Bridgewater held a benefit concert which amounted to \$1,450. The St. Thomas Aquinas Catholic Church of Bridgewater took a special collection of \$1,250. Collection cans placed on the counter in public places around town brought in \$550 in change. Residents from the Silver House addiction treatment center donated at least six hundred person-hours to the cleanup. Children were so moved to help the church that they went around the neighborhood collecting small amounts of money. The local liquor store organized a bottle drive in which the Boy Scouts collected over ten thousand bottles. Massachusetts New Church Union forgave a loan of \$2,100 and donated one hundred new hymnals. The town of Bridgewater sponsored a raffle and a golf tournament which is expected to raise over \$10,000. These are just some examples of the generosity that has been showered upon our church. Larry Conant and others can tell you of countless individuals who offered time, talent or funds to restore this lovely landmark on the square in Bridgewater.

Surely it was divine providence that the church increased its insurance policy to \$300,000 just a few months before the fire. However, the insurance funds and all the donations will not provide enough funds to restore the church to its original condition. They expect to at least have a roof over the sanctuary before snow flies. The Sunday school wing was not as badly damaged as the sanctuary. About 35 people crowded into the Sunday school hall October 23 for the first worship service since the fire. Those wanting to offer substance in addition to their prayers may send contributions to treasurer Gus Newcomb, 669 South St., Bridgewater, Mass. 02324. Make checks payable to The New Jerusalem Church.



**Portland, Maine:** In May the Portland church began offering two worship services each week. The Wednesday service has slowly increased its attendance and now has more worshippers than the Sunday service did only four years ago. The "road kill" program has provided the meat of twenty deer and three moose to local soup kitchens—total of 1,500 lbs. of hamburger. In addition to the many small-group programs, the summer schedule included a rafting trip, and an evening of poetry reading. Coming up this fall is a forum on sexuality, celibacy and spirit.

**Detroit:** The church is now without a minister, but they are still maintaining an active schedule. Computer wizard Barbara Penabaker produces an attractive and informative newsletter. The services are led by lay leaders and

clergy from around the denomination. This fall Ed Van Baalen is trying to keep the church in the public eye by advertising. He and others had a Swedenborgian display at a wholistic fair in October where books and information were distributed. The church is planning to offer a six-part evening discussion series on angels.

**Cleveland:** Now without a pastor, the laity have cleverly found a way to provide a public service and keep new people coming into the church. Calls came in for weddings—the church responded creatively. They discovered that in accordance with the laws of the state of Ohio, those who are so designated by a church congregation have legal right to perform weddings. So now, Norman and Jean Bestor, Cynthia Holden and Chuck Winter perform wedding ceremonies at the church; they are doing a fine job.

I had an afternoon training session with those involved in the wedding ministry. They showed me a video tape of the first wedding performed by Jean Bestor. She did a very good job. We went step by step through the video commenting on the strengths and weaknesses. I shared with them what I have found to be the most important aspects of this ministry. I think we all felt very good about this training session. Seeing how sincere they are about this ministry, I left Cleveland with a good feeling about the services they will perform.

**Puget Sound:** How does a minister know what people really need and want? Ask them. That's what Steve Pults did. A written survey was given to members and those associated with the church. The result gave Steve some important information. It provided a "safe" way to ask people if they wanted to join the church. It also helped Steve discover who wanted to help and where their interest was in church activities.

Churches are still drawing crowds when angels are the topic. Our church in LaPorte, Indiana, offered a series on angels this fall which was very well attended, and Paul Martin tells us that books on angels are still big sellers at the Stone House Book Room in Redmond, Washington. If you would like a poster, advertising or information about how to invite the public to an angelic discussion or lecture series, contact Eric Allison at the address below.

Are you looking for the magical time slot that fits every schedule? There may not be the perfect time for the event you want to schedule. However, Erni Martin, director of Temenos, has learned that Sunday afternoons between 2:00 and 5:00 seems to be a good time for many people. Erni said that workshops scheduled on Sunday afternoons have generally proven more successful than those scheduled all day on Saturday.

*The Rev. Eric Allison is Pastoral Ministries church growth consultant. He may be contacted at 180 Highland Crescent, #12, Kitchener, ON N2M 5K5, Canada. \*What's Happening Now is a PMSU-sponsored periodical detailing resources which is mailed several times a year to members of the Council of Ministers, General Council, support unit chairs, and presidents and treasurers of congregations.*



God, in  
this  
theology,  
is loving,  
caring,  
nurturing,  
and con-  
necting.

# Making a Positive Difference in the Swedenborgian Church

*Ted Klein*

**H**ow can people make a positive difference in the Swedenborgian Church?

How can the Swedenborgian Church encourage people to make a positive difference?

We can make a difference by example and practice, the way we live and act. We can make a difference through how we act in a role, such as church president, minister, teacher, or church treasurer. We can also make a difference through sharing from our experiences and what we have learned from our experiences.

Another way we can make a difference is by speaking out, challenging, and raising issues. We can make a difference by working to bring people together and build cooperation as situations are faced and decisions are made.

Local churches, groups within local churches, associations, the overall Swedenborgian Church, and other groups within the church can recognize and value such ways of making a difference. The church and groups in the church can draw on the varieties of strengths all of us bring in ways of making a difference.

To seek ways of making a difference that are productive, we can be committed to cooperatively working together. Cooperative approaches to a situation can support the growth of each person involved and help to further growth beyond the immediate situation. Cooperative approaches can value and expressly appreciate each participant, be welcoming, and bring about a sense of our being in growth together.

This visioning relates to a Swedenborgian theology of relation and community. God, in this theology, is loving, caring, nurturing, and connecting. People, in this theology, are relational beings who can grow in connection with God, other people, and other beings on the earth. Where we have turned from these possibilities, God continually works to support processes of rebirth that lead back to renewed opportunities. We can choose again. A church community in harmony with this theology practices caring in the world, among members, and among others with whom contact is made. Making a difference in such a church community goes with caring, supporting growth, and building connection.

Making a difference can involve a range of experiences from sharing of joy to compassionate

moving through pain. There are joys in working together, being included, being part of something, finding that others are part of something that has meaning for us. Yet making a difference can also involve moving together through situations that are difficult and painful.

A welcoming approach to making a difference in the Swedenborgian Church would involve facing changes. Facing changes can be frightening, but the fears themselves can be faced, and we can find ways of moving forward in spite of fear. Also, openness to those making a difference goes with our being willing to face and move through conflict.

Conflict can involve control and efforts to maintain or take control, and such efforts need to be resisted in the Swedenborgian Church and elsewhere. On the other hand, those of us in the church and elsewhere can learn healthy ways of moving through conflict that are cooperative and vital for growth, and are not centered in the need for control.

We can approach a situation of conflict with the view that things cannot continue to go on as they have been, change is necessary, and cooperative ways of moving through the conflict need to be found. Finding ways *through* a conflict are quite different from denying there is a conflict, or seeking to control the situation so that one can "win" in it, or acquiescing in order to "maintain harmony." In our church and elsewhere, we can seek to make a difference in conflict situations by approaching them as opportunities for growth and working to find cooperative ways through them.

There seem to be many situations in the Swedenborgian Church around which there are and will be conflicts.

One area of conflict is the reality of limited financial resources and questions of what priorities should be followed in drawing on those resources.

Another area of conflict is around what new programs or new developments within existing programs are most needed and deserving of support.

Another conflict involves how to address social action needs and what responsibilities we in the church have for this, individually and collectively.

There is conflict around what our identity as a church should be and what commonalities should go with our acceptance of diversity.

Still another area of conflict involves how to address children, youth, and all generations in educational programs.

And there is the conflict that involves what worship, devotional, or ritual experiences with the church can bring energy and rejuvenation in relating with God, others, and the world.

How can we approach such challenging areas in the church? We can seek to move through conflicts cooperatively, recognizing differences and seeking ways that bring us together to face things and grow together. This calls for honesty in presenting where each one of us is, along with a willingness to truly *hear* where others are, and a willingness to *continue* hearing, speaking, sharing, and searching.

As we approach challenging situations, we can seek to make a difference that goes with moving together with others through the situation. This kind of movement is a vital part of the Swedenborgian Church growing, maturing, and becoming more of what it can be. With this kind of movement, we can be part of learning and growing together and building toward further learning and growth.

*These views of conflict were much influenced by Jean Baker Miller, Toward a New Psychology of Women, second edition (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1986), and Judith V. Jordan, "Courage in Connection: Conflict, Compassion, Creativity," Work in Progress, No. 45 (Wellesley, MA: Stone Center Working Paper Series, 1990). Psychologists Jean Baker Miller and Judith V. Jordan are associated with the Stone Center at Wellesley College. The work of the Stone Center has been concerned with women's development, and in recent years has expanded to include a greater diversity of women and women's experiences along with some explorations of men's development.*

*The Rev. Dr. Theodore Klein is professor of theology and philosophy at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, Mass.*

## Social Concerns Education Committee Created

I have volunteered to chair the new Social Concerns Education Committee which is being formed under the Education Support Unit. Ideas and suggestions are most welcome! The beginning of this committee was delayed because of the budget situation in the Swedenborgian Church, and I am not sure what that situation will be for 1995 and following years. Still we can begin sharing and exploring ways of responding to needs. A vision of what could develop is a large social concerns network including individuals and groups within the Swedenborgian Church working with and connected with individuals and groups not within the Swedenborgian Church, the committee having a coordinating role. Individuals, local churches, or other groups could approach the committee and be connected with persons in the larger network who could offer assistance and programs already being tried from which we could learn. If you would like to know more about the committee and be part of a social concerns network, please contact me or one of the other committee members. Other committee members are Brenda Hollweger, Susan Poole, Lorraine Sando (Education Support Unit Liaison), Marilyn Turley, and Manon Washburn.

*Rev. Dr. Ted Klein  
Chair, Social Concerns  
Education Committee  
48 Sargent Street  
Newton, MA 02158  
617-244-0504 or 617-325-1214*

## General Council and Cabinet Report

General Council and Cabinet met in joint session November 19 and 20 in Newton. The following items of business, among others, were addressed:

- It was voted, upon request of the Council of Ministers, to fund additional training for Kenichi Kuniyeda, so the Committee on Admission to the Ministry can recommend his ordination.

- Because of the changing political situation, it was voted to set up a contingency fund to help transport Pavel Heger and his family back to Czechoslovakia when the time is appropriate.

- IMSU reported they are going to undertake the indexing of *The Messenger* on computer.

- Temenos reported they have raised over \$200,000 to date in their Temenos Challenge fund drive. They feel confident they will have reached \$300,000 before January. There was lengthy discussion about Temenos.

- Funds were appropriated from the Tirell Fund for repair of the roof and windows at the National Church.

- The theme for the 1995 Convention, "Doing Justice With Mercy—Where Heaven Begins," was chosen and speakers and program ideas were discussed.

- After much deliberation, the 1995 budget was adopted.

- The Rev. Carl Yenetchi and Esther Nicastro-Capon were appointed to fill the vacancies on GOSU.

- Bylaw amendments regarding lay leadership were agreed to, in principle, to be recommended to Convention and were referred to the Committee on Amendments.

- Some concerns regarding the SSR bylaws were discussed and some changes will be recommended to the SSR Board of Trustees.

- Stewardship was addressed and the Pastoral Ministries Support Unit was directed to help edit a stewardship issue of *The Messenger* next fall. They also suggested sending out services for a Stewardship Sunday to the churches. The next General Council meeting will be held prior to the start of the 1995 Convention in San Francisco.

*Gloria Toot,  
Secretary*

# Zardo and the Land of Colors

[Editor's Note: Again, we are happy to publish another story from the Sunday School Association story-writing contest. "Zardo and the Land of Colors" is the second-prize winner. Other top stories submitted will be published in subsequent issues of *The Messenger*, and will also be collected in an anthology to be presented at the annual convention in July.]

Zardo awoke early—before dawn. He was excited and eager to be on his way. He loved trips exploring the lands of his universe, and today was another adventure!

Everything was packed and ready—he had seen to that before he went to bed. He always liked to have an early start. So he bounded out of bed, dressed quickly, had a bite to eat and then wakened his Mum and Dad to give them a hug and a quick "Good-bye, I love you!"

His spacemobile was fueled and ready—he was off in a flash—just as the sun was rising on the horizon.

Zardo lived in the Land of Talents—one of the many lands which formed his universe. Everyone in the Land of Talents had a special talent—an ability to do something very special in a unique way. Zardo's talent was singing. Oh, how he could sing! His voice was clear and sweet with tones like a flute. Zardo loved to sing and it made him happy to know that everyone enjoyed his songs. But then, in the Land of Talents, everyone appreciated the talent of others. Each one knew his talent was special and was meant to be shared. Each one knew he was equally valuable, so no one ever needed to 'show off' his talent.

And now Zardo sang as he rode along in the sunshine, his sweet notes ringing out so clearly that all the creatures of the universe were struck with awe at the beauty of the notes.

Zardo thought, "I'll go a bit further today to find a new land." So he passed by some of the lands he'd already seen, and searched for a new one. It wasn't too long before he saw a sign—"THE LAND OF COLORS." "That sounds interesting," he thought. "I think I will visit THE LAND OF COLORS."

He docked his spacemobile in the space dock and went to the gate to ask permission to visit.

"I am Zardo from the Land of Talents, requesting a visit to your land," he said. "My purpose is only pleasure."

"But," said the gatekeepers, "you have no color! No one is allowed in this land unless he has a color."

"Well then," said Zardo, "please give me a color and then I will enter."

"What color will you be?" they asked.

Zardo thought about this. He liked to be dif-

ferent. So he said, "If you please, I think I shall be purple."

Now the gatekeepers were very puzzled. "Purple?" they asked. "What is purple? We have red, blue, yellow, green and brown only. We cannot give you purple."

Zardo replied, "Well, I think if you mix a little red and blue, that would be just fine."

The gatekeepers said, "This is most unusual—but if you wish, we will see what we can do."

So they consulted the color keepers. The color keepers said, "This is a most unusual request, but if the boy wants to be purple, let us try." So they mixed a little red and blue for him.

Zardo thought it seemed fine, so he immersed himself in the tub and he was as purple as could be! "My, how elegant I am!" he said.

So the gatekeepers gave him a visitor's pass and said, "Welcome to our land. May you find pleasure here."

As Zardo walked along he noticed the people. How interesting it was to see everyone in color! Everyone was red, blue, yellow, green or brown. "This is most unusual," he thought, "but very pretty. It looks like a flower garden!" As he passed a small yellow girl, Zardo smiled in a friendly way. To his dismay, the little yellow girl ran from him. She seemed to be afraid. Then he noticed a group of red boys playing. When they saw him they giggled and pointed at him. Zardo thought, "My goodness, what can be the matter?"

Zardo continued along until he reached a playground. There were many children of various colors playing on swings, slides, space saucers and teeter-totters. Zardo thought, "Oh, perhaps I will stop here a while to play and eat my lunch." But as he approached, the children ran to their mothers, and the mothers and children left the playground.

"Now," thought Zardo, "something is terribly wrong." Then he heard one of the children ask, "But, Mother, why is he such a funny color?"

The mother answered, "I don't know, but he looks so strange! I think we should stay away from him. He may have some unusual disease."

"Oh," Zardo said to himself. "That's it! They are looking at my beautiful purple color and they feel uneasy near me, because it is different from what they are used to."

Zardo was troubled. He sat down in the grass and opened his lunch box. As he ate he thought and thought. "What will I do? How can I make the people see who I am? I am not my purple body! I am my soul and my spirit—surely this is a strange land if they do not know that!"

Zardo felt very sad. So he started to sing to cheer himself up. His notes started out soft—little trills of tones which sounded like a waterfall, soothing his troubled spirit. Gradually his song grew louder and stronger, and the beautiful sparkling notes rang out through the land for all to hear.

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(Continued from page 11)

"I am Zardo—just a boy  
I've come here filled with joy  
To see your land and learn of you—  
Who you are and what you do.

Come and listen to my song  
You'll see I mean no wrong  
When you know me you will find  
That I am really good and kind.

But it's my color that you see  
Now—this color is not me!  
When you know me deep inside  
You will not want to run or hide!"

As Zardo's clear, sweet voice floated through the air, the people of the Land of Colors stopped to listen. A yellow mother said to her children, "Listen, listen to the beautiful singing! It sounds like a lark. Let's go and see who is making such sweet music."

A group of blue children heard the song and ran to find its source. "Such beautiful singing!" they said. Many others heard the lovely sweet tones, and they, too, came to discover who it might be who could sing in such a manner.

Zardo was very pleased to see the people coming, so he continued with more of his favorite trills. He thought, "Now I will have a chance to show them who I am. I will try to see how I can show them that I want to be a friend."

He noticed a few brown boys trying to fly a kite, but they couldn't get it to catch the breeze. He went to them and said, "Please let me help you. Do not be afraid of my color—it is a special mixture of red and blue. I think it is very pretty, don't you?" And he helped them until the kite was soaring high in the sky. He heard one of them say, "I'm going to ask my mother if I can be purple, too!"

Then Zardo saw a little green girl who was trying to ride her new three-wheel bicycle. He came to her and said, "I am Zardo, and I'd like to help you." At first she was shy, but as he sang to her she smiled. Then he held the bicycle and ran along with her, all the time singing so sweetly.

The rest of the day Zardo played with the children. He sang to them and helped them in any way he could. They were all curious about his appearance, so he explained how he liked to be different and had chosen his color—purple. "In my land," he explained, "we all like to be different and special."

When it was time for Zardo to return to his own land, the people of the Land of Colors were very sorry to see him go. "Please come and see us again," they said.

Zardo replied, "Yes, I will. Perhaps next time I visit I will be orange—or aqua."

"Orange? Aqua? Well, that will be interesting," they replied.

Zardo returned to the Spacemobile Station, and soon he was on his way home. As the sun was setting, Zardo's clear sweet voice could be heard throughout his universe.

"We're all so very different  
Each one in his own way  
How we look—how we dress  
In all we do and say.

We have our own ideas  
Our tastes are varied, too  
Things that seem just right for me  
May be all wrong for you.

If we were just the same  
How boring it would be!  
So let's enjoy the differences  
In others whom we see.

For we are children of one God—  
One Father of us all.  
He loves each of us equally  
Young, old, big or small.

He gave us each our talents  
Which we are meant to share  
With love and understanding hearts  
With people everywhere."

(Zardo's last song may be sung to the tune of "The Last Time I Saw Paris.")

*Pearl McCallum is a retired elementary school teacher and second generation Swedenborgian who grew up in the Detroit Swedenborgian Church. Mrs. McCallum taught Sunday school for many years, and later became associated with the Los Angeles church through her husband. They have resided in LaJolla, California for 15 years. "Zardo and the Land of Colors" is her first published work.*

"How  
can I  
make  
the  
people  
see  
who I  
am?"



**Opinion** (continued from page 2)  
tioned developing Temenos, five people favored selling Temenos. Fifty-three other programs were listed as most important by at least one person. I think it fair to say that answers to this part of the survey were inconclusive, if not insignificant.

*Edwin G. Capon, President*

To the Editor:

I agree with Rev. Capon's interpretation that our results regarding "the most important action or program for 1995" were inconclusive. The small table in the section was included to demonstrate **how very few** mentions the "most-mentioned" programs received. The report states that we received a total of 57 different priorities, a different one for every 3.3 person responding (i.e., we had 188 responses [69%] to this open-ended question out of 271 replies). It would be erroneous to conclude that any program mentioned had significant consensus as a priority.

*Karen Feil*

*Survey Committee, Chicago, Illinois*

To the Editor:

The recent survey results were interesting. The thing that stood out was the age bias in our membership. I cannot say it was a surprise, but seeing it in print definitely brought the message home: we need more young people in our churches, lots of them. I cannot think of anything more urgent than to accelerate our efforts to provide family and youth-oriented programming.

I am not sure how the survey was created, nor how the information is intended to be utilized. I read, however, of confidence levels and guess that there is a clear intent to formulate national, denominational policy from these results. While I think that it is important to find out what the membership wants, I am (and was at the time I filled out my survey) concerned about using a sur-

vey to formulate policy. I have three reasons for expressing caution:

- The age data shows that a majority of members nationwide is over 50. To me, this indicates that we need to be especially cautious about our wants and needs as revealed in the survey. A church with a bias toward older folk may not be a comfortable or attractive place for younger people.
- Some of the information in the survey is confusing; e.g.: the willingness to pay for *The Messenger*. One question suggests that 75-76% of those who receive *The Messenger* are willing to pay up to \$15/yr to continue to receive it. Yet another question indicates that less than half of those who answered the survey actually donate money to the national

- And third, I am puzzled by the confidence level. I realize that when the survey was drafted, there must have been an effort to neutralize the possible skew of opinions of those who are active in the national church (both lay people and ministerial/administrative/pastoral persons with a remunerative relationship to General Convention), who would have the strongest reasons for participation in the survey. Unfortunately, I fear the reverse has occurred. While we know the sex, age, membership status and length of association of the respondents, we cannot discern the percentage of respondents who have a pre-existing relationship to the national congregation which might introduce bias in their answers. To me, the margin of error assumes

more than the method can support. The issue of self-selection of participants was mentioned, but this is impossible to neutralize. I would rather there be no assertions of confidence level and that the survey results

be used only for reference.

It is vital that we move forward as a national denomination. I am encouraged at the start this survey represents. I am troubled that more people did not take the time to fill out and return their surveys, but that is water under the bridge. We still have some thinking to do, and I hope that the national leadership can generate another survey to address issues raised by this one.

I think that we need to discuss among ourselves, as a national group, some very basic issues. My first concern is that we insure a future. The demographics are a concern. We fifty-year-olds need to work at it to attract 20-somethings to our midst. We need to keep this in mind as we go forward. Another thing that should be kept in mind is money. We need to pass along a church that has a reasonable prospect

(Continued on page 15)

## Readers respond to the Survey Results in November issue . . .

denomination. Since less than half of those answering the survey actually are in the habit of sending money to the church, how do we account for the presumed jump in those willing to actually part with money? Is "contribution history" a better indicator of increased financial support than a simple assent to a concept of future contributing? I have no idea, but my guess is not optimistic. Pledge drives run into this phenomenon all the time. The survey assumes an equal relationship between thinking something and doing something, and I'm not so sure this is true. While this may seem trivial, the difference between 75-76% of the readership paying \$15 for a subscription versus less than half doing so, works out to \$6,000/year. This is a large margin of error for budgeting purposes in our organization.



## Opinion

(Continued from page 15)

of paying the bills; especially those bills associated with having ministers.

Another issue to address: how can interest in church programming be translated into insuring that the church survives into the future? Outreach generates love and respect for the church and it is a right thing to do, but unfortunately, there is no indication that it actually generates membership or money. Doing good is at the heart of Swedenborgian theology, but how do we balance the costs of outreach with the costs of expanding church membership? Programs/meetings/workshops are fun to go to and quite enriching, but how many people would attend if they were asked to cover not only their own expenses, but those of the actual program provider and the overhead/burden expenses as well? Since the national church picks up these expenses, I am skeptical that the current survey accurately measures support for programming. Heck, we all like subsidized benefits and freebies. Our willingness to take them does not indicate our depth of support to continue them if the expenses were shifted to our pockets.

Members' interest in programming has a relationship to growth of membership and finances, but the relationship has never been explored to the point where we can generate any guidelines with statistical levels of confidence for others to follow. We need to find out if we can do this. Eric Allison plugs away, but the local churches seem indifferent to his efforts at times. I am sure that the age bias is part of the problem, but I suspect that there is also the problem that we really do not have a clue as to the efficacy of one activity over another. And we do not have enough people to try them all.

I hope that I am not being altogether negative. This survey is a very good first step. But it remains a first step. We all must join in to create our future. The reason I exhort others who, like me, have kept away from national convention activity is simple. Those to whom the duty falls will

## Passages

### Confirmation

**Harley**—Sue and Duane Harley were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church October 16, 1994, at the LaPorte New Church, LaPorte, Indiana, the Rev. Eric Hoffman officiating.

### Marriages

**Cutting and Lord**—Sara J. Cutting and Dale E. Lord were united in marriage November 12, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church, Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Vittum and Atwell**—Donor Vittum and Donald Atwell were united in marriage October 29, 1994, at the Fryeburg New Church, Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Wasson and Seybold**—Dorothy Wasson and Russell Seybold were united in marriage October 15, 1994, at the First Congregational Church in North Conway, New Hampshire, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry of Fryeburg, Maine, officiating.

### Deaths

**Boivin**—Raymond P. Boivin entered the spiritual world October 3, 1994, in Fryeburg, Maine. A graveside service was conducted October 6, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Eastman**—Carl Eastman entered the spiritual world October 15, 1994, in Fryeburg, Maine. A graveside service was conducted October 22, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Eastman**—George P. Eastman entered the spiritual world October 6, 1994, in Fryeburg, Maine. A graveside service was conducted October 10, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

**Frederick**—the Rev. Ernest L. Frederick, 88, entered the spiritual world November 8, 1994. He died peacefully at his home in Vero Beach, Florida, after a short illness. Ernest was ordained June 20, 1954, and served Swedenborgian churches in Brockton, Miami, and DeLand. He retired in 1988. He is survived by his wife Hazel, daughter Vivian, and granddaughters Dawn and Sharon. A memorial service was conducted November 14, 1994, at Swedenborg House Chapel and Growth Center, DeLand, Florida, the Rev. Skuli Thorhallsson officiating.

**Mathias**—Mariada Mathias, 89, educator and lifelong member of the Church of the Open Word, entered the spiritual world October 23, 1994, in St. Louis, Missouri. A memorial service was conducted October 30, 1994, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

**Thomas**—Milton L. Thomas entered the spiritual world October 24, 1994 in Fryeburg, Maine. A graveside service was conducted October 28, 1994, the Rev. Dr. Gardiner Perry officiating.

### Church Family News

Larry Young of the Boston church is very ill and on the critical list at Brockton Hospital in Brockton, Massachusetts. Our prayers are requested and much appreciated. Cards and letters may be sent to Dorothy and Larry's home at 88 Turnpike St., S. Easton, MA 02375-1124.

build programs that include their own bias in whatever action they plan. The survey makes it quite clear that we are becoming demographically isolated. The Reverend Jim Lawrence's article in the October *Messenger* also makes it clear that our leadership is quite possibly even more isolated from the population at large than the general membership. This is not a good situation. People who find themselves running this church have, in many ways, a thankless task. We give them little guidance, and less than half of us provide support to the national church. It stands to reason that they will work in a path dictated by their "loves." This is proper, but it is not clever for a small church with a liberal theology in a conservative religious society. To assume that people will come to us simply because we have the right programs, or act in the right fashion just is not borne

out by the facts. Our membership is declining. We attract mostly people like us, and "us" is getting old and out of touch with the mainstream—which needs our theology.

Our leaders need our input, and our help. If we do not help, they will resent our input—if they don't ignore it altogether. While I do not wish to get into arguments, I think that Temenos is a good example of people trying to do the best they can in the absence of denomination-wide opinion. Now that the hard choices about money need to be made, Temenos is a source of conflict—we have a situation in which cathexis clashes with fiduciary requirements. I do not know what the solutions to our problems are, but I do know that this survey, and denomination-wide discussion and support, represents the best way to find out.  
*Leonard Harding*  
*Milford, Ohio*

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.

## Why is a Child of the Great Depression Co-chairing the Temenos Campaign?

I do volunteer work for a number of organizations. Most of my co-workers have no problem in envisioning the big projects that will help the organization attain its mission. But, when the time comes to vote on spending money to make the big project happen, if we learn there is not enough money to do it, many of us, including myself, automatically vote *no*. For me, in fact, the threat of lack of money is paralyzing. I am filled with old childhood *terror*. I know the fear is based on a child's absorption of the parents' anxiety, our 1930s' fears of homelessness, hunger, loss, and not enough of anything. In fact, an organization's mission and vision are instantaneously obliterated from my brain by the fearful phrase, *Not Enough Money*.

So, why in the world am I co-chairing the *Temenos Challenge*, a campaign to raise outside money for a project that General Convention *does not have enough money* to fund further? Where is my lack-of-money paralysis?

The answer is an overpowering statement made several times in recent years by former treasurer Gus Ebel: "*We are going to run out of people before we run out of money.*" To think that our church may run out of people is, to me, the ultimate fear. For that reason, I turn to the kind of outreach being done on the West Coast as our best chance of getting more people to join our ranks. The seekers being ministered to at the Wayfarers Chapel and the Stone House are looking for spiritual meaning. If we answer the needs of those many, many people, a small percentage of them will eventually join our organization. The more spiritual seekers we can help, the greater the number who will be moved to join us.

On the East Coast, Temenos programs are serving the same type of spiritual seekers. Temenos turns down groups and people every week because of lack of space, but will double or triple the number served if we can build the proposed new

retreat house pictured above.

A second Temenos campaign stimulus for me—besides not wanting to lose more Swedenborgian numbers—is to bear in mind the brave little group of octogenarians, the Philadelphia Society—supplemented by a few members of the younger generation who returned to church when the group moved to Temenos. When faced with the reality of their own small number and the mounting costs of Philadelphia's huge downtown church building, these wonderful visionaries turned to the idea of a contemporary East Coast program to serve the thousands of people now looking for spiritual meaning. The Philadelphia Society sold its beloved church building and voted unanimously to move to Temenos and invest its assets in the development of the Temenos dream.

What an example to all of us!

I believe in the vision. I believe with my whole heart that the diminishment of our denomination's membership over my lifetime, which began in the Great Depression, can *only* be turned around by major visions like the Stone House, the Wayfarers Chapel, and the Temenos Retreat Center. I respect and admire the members of the Philadelphia Society, who seem to understand that the best use of their money is for a truly significant and contemporary outreach program. As a church, the Philadelphians have not only sponsored Temenos, but their members have given generously as individuals. Please everybody, let's make their vision come true! Let's give Temenos the space it needs to allow more people to attend its programs. By doing so, we will be helping the thousands of people seeking spiritual growth, renewal, and transformation. We will be putting to good use Swedenborg's concept of regeneration.

By helping the world fearlessly, as church organizations and as individuals, we will indeed help ourselves.

*Carol S. Lawson, Co-chair, Temenos Challenge*



Architect's Drawing,  
Proposed Retreat House

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