
THE MESSENGER

Monthly Publication, Swedenborgian Church of North America

November 1995

Some Thoughts on the Relationship Between Social Action and the Church

The church's role is unique in that its motives should spring from a concern to look beneath the surface, to address the spiritual realities that lie within each individual life, and throughout our lives together.

Robert McCluskey

For over ten years, I have served on our church's delegation to the National Council of Churches. In that time, I have encountered a wide variety of opinions on ecumenism, social action and social justice, church/state relations and related matters. As a result of this diversity of opinion, a certain amount of confusion seems to have developed in conversations about social action, and whether or not the church should be involved in such things, leading some to question whether we should be involved in the NCC, or to question the nature of our involvement. Put most briefly, we are involved in the NCC for the primary purpose of ecumenism, the unity of the church: a principle set forth clearly and forcefully in our writings. The NCC is involved in social action issues principally because the majority of its member churches are, but there are many other dimensions to the ecumenical work of the NCC, just as there are many other dimensions to the life of its member churches.

As for social action, it is vitally important to understand that religion and social justice in general are very much related to each other in a complex, living, self-reflective way. That means there can be no simple formula that tells us, clearly and unambiguously, what the nature of that relationship is. Unless we are personally involved with the issue, we cannot say just how social action and religion are related. And as we do become involved, we will find that our understanding of that relationship comes alive, is constantly changing, and grows as

we do. The following comments on the church and social action are offered to inspire us to think in new ways about how our church might impact the world.

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"Religion is of the life, and the life of religion is to do good."

(Emanuel Swedenborg, Doctrine of Life, n.1)

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Do Christians have a choice whether or not to be involved in public policy issues? This is a question I answer by telling the following story:

A pastor and a recent convert were walking along a river bank in a country where missionaries are sent. The pastor and his friend saw a body floating down the river. They reached in and pulled her out, administered first aid and sent the grateful person on her way. The pastor looked at the convert and said, "Isn't it great that our faith was sufficient to give us the strength and ability to aid that person during a time of distress?" His companion agreed.

The next day the same two were walking along the same river bank and noticed that there was another body floating down the river. Again they pulled the person out, but this person needed a little more than riverside amateur first aid, so they took him to a hospital built with money sent there by congregations in the United States. The person was treated in the emergency ward of the hospital and released. The pastor turned to the convert and again said, "Isn't it great that our faith and our dollars helped us to be here during a time of need for your country?" "Yes," the convert agreed.

The next day the pastor and his friend walked along the same river bank and found themselves in the same situation. The third person they pulled out was hurt more severely than the previous two, and required hospitalization. As they left the hospital, the pastor once again asked, "Isn't it great that our faith allowed us to be with these people in time of need?" This time the convert looked at the pastor and commented, "Maybe our faith should guide us to the source of the river so that we can stop whatever it is that is causing the bodies to float down the river."

Once the recent convert made that observation, the situation became political for the pastor. He could simply say that the responsibility of the church is to offer leadership and guidance to its congregation in and through ser-

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Moving Toward the Light

Pausing to Recognize our Soul Food

It is another irony and challenge, isn't it, that the fall season gets underway with busyness on all fronts—school starting, workshops, projects, meetings. And oh, yes, holidays coming up, more time in choir practice learning new pieces for this crowded season, and smack in the middle, the observance of Thanksgiving, prelude to Christmas, when we're given the mixed messages to do, do, do—and also to stop, slow down and appreciate, contemplate, be aware, become still and be thankful for those things which are surely going to escape our notice if we're busy and distracted.

Writing this on the day following my sixtieth birthday, I am aware of the challenge of my birth sign, Libra. Scales. Balance. Ebb and flow, of the giving of ourselves, and the filling up of ourselves. The choices we must make daily; what will fill our well, what won't. How to say no to what won't. How best to go forth and give back to life, and to be aware when we have become full enough to emerge and have something worthwhile to give back, share, participate in wholeheartedly. It becomes the detailed awareness of the one and only moments that Anne Morrow Lindberg referred to in *Gift from the Sea*. If we're aware and present for 15 minutes with someone, we can come away enriched—ah, then we must be alone with ourselves and the experience to process it, often on paper in journaling. Try to capture the essence and cherish where we've been for a moment, let it work its magic, put it in our treasure chest, and move on. The most important things go on in those underground streams of our lives from which we are nourished, that quench our soul thirst—the poignancy of what wasn't said in an encounter, the pause and look of love which will escape us if we aren't tuned in.

I am sitting in choir in the chancel of our little community church in Julian, and I look at the faces in the congregation, as I often do. The sight of the Burns family lifts my heart; I don't want to stare at them, but I find it difficult to take my eyes off them. The little brother is severely hearing-impaired, and Julie, his older sister, signs for him throughout the service. His attention wanders, and she brings him back to focus, a slight gesture of her hand on his arm, a loving look. Her hands and fingers are performing this incredible ballet, the silent music underscores our spoken words. Their mother, sitting on his other side, is also signing to him occasionally.

Their dad recently had a bad fall. Mr. Burns was walking an older woman out to her car after a meeting; it was dark as only mountain darkness can be, and the sensor lights didn't go on. He walked off the edge of a five-foot retaining wall and dislocated a shoulder and broke several other bones. He sits in a wheelchair at the end of the pew. His deaf little boy looks over at him, and mutual expressions of pain, empathy, and pleasure play over their faces. With all the problems, they are there, present with each other, in that moment. All very fleeting, you have to be looking at them, almost drinking them in, to catch it.

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I recently returned from beautiful Loma Center in Issaquah, Washington, where the annual Pacific Coast Association meeting was held this year (September 15–17). The program featured our own Dorothea Harvey, professor at SSR, teamed with David Spangler, author of *Toward a Planetary Vision* and *Emergence: the Rebirth of the Sacred*, among other books. Spangler, a former co-director of Findhorn Community in Scotland, is a spiritual leader, educator and writer who now resides in the Puget Sound area. The theme of the program was “Beyond the Books,” an experiential, heart-centered exploration of the living out of our philosophy. We also explored some of the fears that get in the way of our “getting out of our heads” and living within our vision of the sacredness of creation. Dorothea

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The Messenger

Publisher: The Communications Support Unit

Published monthly, except July and August, by the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America).

November 1995

Volume 216, No. 9

Whole Number 5204

Typesetting & Layout

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The opinions of the contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the Editor or the Communications Support Unit, or represent the position of the church. Subscription free to members of the Swedenborgian Church; non-members, \$12.00 a year; foreign \$15.00 a year; gift subscription from a member, \$5.00 a year; single copies \$1.00.

Deadline for material: Six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.



*Great occasions for
serving God come
seldom, but little ones
surround us daily.*

—St. Francis de Sales

Social Action and the Church

(Continued from front cover)

mons, prayers, and Bible classes. Or he could agree with the convert and come to understand that sermons, prayers and Bible classes should be a way of preparing Christians to take an active role in shaping the events around us. This may mean going to the source of the river to prevent whatever it is that is bringing harm to people."

("Justice in the Gate," Horizons, May/June 1990, pp. 18-19, by Rev. Eleanor Giddings Ivory, director of the Presbyterian Church [USA] Washington Office.)

When any social issue is presented to a church group, ten percent will automatically be in support of it, simply because it is a social issue, ten percent will automatically be opposed to it, simply because it is a social issue. The other 80% will be eager to discuss and explore the particular details of the issue within an understanding of how (not "if") religion can and should be involved in the outer world, with the larger neighbor. (A comment overheard at a meeting of the Prophetic Justice Unit Committee of the NCC.)

"Congress shall make no law regarding an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." (First Amendment, Bill of Rights)

"The practice of pluralistic, liberal democracy involves a threefold reality: religion, government and a mediating civil society. . . . Political differences are vulnerable to a wider range of public criticism than are religious proclamations. . . . It is therefore appropriate to expect that politics be conducted according to 'public reason' within the context of a 'reasonable pluralism.'

Keeping religion out of government does not mean that we are forced to keep it to ourselves. In civil society, religious people are free to influence the political process in any way consistent with the freedom and safety of others. In a pluralistic society, democracy itself requires that between government and the other two spheres of life we erect an implicit *cordon sanitaire*, a rule of secular political civility that will bracket or filter out the untranslated oracles of the religious. . . . Religious people must learn the secular language of politics. . . . In such a society as ours, civility requires that political discourse be guided by reference to forms of reasoning and arguments available to citizens generally." ("Translating God-talk: Church, State and the Practice of Civility," by Winston Davis, Christian Century, April 20, 1994, pp. 417-18.)

The church's involvement in social issues must not spring from external, merely practical motives; it must not become involved in order to correct or restore *appearances*. Unlike other

Keeping religion out of government does not mean that we are forced to keep it to ourselves.

impulses and efforts to address social injustice, the church's role is unique in that its motives should spring from a concern to look beneath the surface, to address the spiritual realities that lie within each individual life, and throughout our lives together. When the Gospel is so apprehended that it speaks forcefully to the immediate life of an individual or group, and indicates, not just an idea or a feeling, but an actual path along which we can and should move, a new way to live with each other, then we talk about the church becoming involved in social issues and social action.

At a recent meeting of the National Consultation of NCCC-Related Churches and Jewish Organizations in the U.S., the following questions were asked: "What sources of tradition or theology do we use in determining and describing what is good? What imperatives in our traditions lead us to think about engagement in the world?" Philemon Sevas-tiades, of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, gave this response:

"[For the Christian,] there is a connection between salvation and work in the world. One fundamental Christian response to living in the world when the promised end does not arrive, is to live as much as possible in the image and likeness of God. Christ became more like us, so that we might become more like Him. Jesus as the unique incarnation of God is central for Christians: acting in Christ's image in the world is part of the Christian calling and of salvation. There is no social action for Christians without Jesus as God and man."

It is very common to hear people say that because Christ helped people, we should too; social action is an imitation of Christ. But we also know that non-Christians, as well as agnostics and atheists, feel called to engage in social action for a variety of reasons, few of them rooted in the example or teachings of Christ.

Social action is by no means limited to the church, nor should the church pretend that it can solve the problems of the world. The impulse to social action, to confront injustice and oppression, is universal: as humans, as social beings, we all acknowledge and deal with the different levels of the outer dimensions of our lives. The difference that the church makes is not in getting us involved with social issues, or devising a theology that is complex and other-worldly enough to keep us out. Rather, Christians are called to enter the social arena in a new way, with a radically new understanding of what is important, what should be attended to, and what is worth fighting for. As Jesus redefined what it means to be human, so his ministry among us calls us to redefine, not *if*, but *how* we should be engaged in the needs of our brothers and sisters.

The political problem is not a political problem,

it is an economic problem.

The economic problem is not an economic problem,

it is an ethical problem.

The ethical problem is not an ethical problem,

it is a spiritual problem.

(Anonymous)

All people, both the regenerate and the unregenerate, are involved in the moral and civil dimensions of life. To pursue the spiritual path is not to be relieved of our personal and political responsibilities. Rather, matters of civil law and moral values are seen in the new light of God's truth, subordinated and responsive to spiritual impulses. The regenerate person enters into his/her outer relationships with greater awareness, compassion, and commitment; the sense of responsibility (*responsibility*) becomes greater; in fact, it becomes commensurate with the Divine power made available to us in the Word, and from the Lord.

The Rev. Robert McCluskey is pastor to the New York Swedenborgian Church. The foregoing article is a followup to his presentation at the 1995 Convention in San Francisco and his subsequent mini-course. (See September 1995 Messenger.)

We Left Our Hearts in Seoul

Linda Tafel

When we were making plans early this year to travel to South Korea in June, our main intent was to have a good visit with three of our grandchildren, whose father is stationed there with the U.S. Army. As it happened, we got that, and a great deal more.

We learned by chance last spring that the Rev. En Bo Chung, who was ordained by our church in 1958 and serves in South Korea, had been in recent communication with President Edwin Capon. We told Edwin about our tentative plans, and offered to meet with Mr. Chung if it seemed appropriate. Thus began what would result in the "bonus" of our trip—a most delightful visit with Swedenborgians in South Korea.

Dick's daughter Gretchen, with five-year-old Ashley, met us at the airport in Seoul, and after an overnight just south of Seoul we drove to Taegu, some 150 miles away, where Gretchen and Phil and the children were living. There followed one-and-one-half wonderful weeks with them in Taegu, getting reacquainted with Ashley, and the two two-year-old twins, Lauren and Garrett, who did not remember us from their stay with us more than a year earlier.

Gretchen had set aside nearly the whole time for us, and we visited the local markets, parks and scenic locations; ate the local fare; and generally got involved in their life in Korea. One day we took the train to Pusan, where Gretchen and Phil were soon to be transferred, and spent an enjoyable day sightseeing in that seaport city. Thanks to the hospitality of one of Gretchen's Korean friends, Dr. Ha (pronounced HUH) we were treated to an excursion to Kwang-ju, seat of government for 1000 years under the Shilla dynasty and site of royal tombs, ancient palaces, and temples.

While in Taegu, we were able to contact En Bo Chung, who had known we were coming, but not exactly when we might be able to meet. It was clear on the phone that

the sooner we could visit them, the more pleased he would be. We also were eager to visit him, but reluctant to leave the grandchildren any sooner than necessary. We arranged to fly to Seoul on Thursday, prior to our scheduled flight back to the States on Saturday.

The welcoming committee at Kimpo airport in Seoul consisted of Mr. Chung; Mr. Duck-Pyo Lee, a

Garden" once used as a retreat by royalty), both in central Seoul. At Kyong-bok we also visited the National Folklore Museum, where English-language tapes were provided to interpret the displays for us. The Revs. Chung and Pyo and Mr. Lee were most gracious hosts and able guides throughout.

Amidst all this activity, En Bo Chung and Dick somehow found

time to talk one-on-one. Mr. Chung fondly remembered Dick's father from when Rev. Chung had been in Boston studying at the theological school. He recalled only two previous visitors to Korea from the U.S. church: Margit (Mrs.

Othmar) Tobisch on one occasion, and a member of the Board of Missions on another.

Friday's finale and perhaps the highlight of our visit was an evening at Mr. Lee's home and a delicious home-cooked Korean meal. Several members of the congregations from Kwang-ju and Taejon had flown to Seoul for the occasion. From Kwang-ju were Dr. An, a professor of horticulture at the university there; Dr. Yang, a surgeon; and Mr. Son, who had just taken over as circulation manager at a newspaper after a stint as editor. From Taejon had come Mr. Chung, an agricultural inspector for the Korean government. From the Seoul group were Mrs. Chun-Hae Lee and Mrs. Woon-Hae Lee, in addition to Mr. Lee, his wife, and his two young adult children. Altogether there were fourteen of us.



Dinner gathering at Mr. Lee's home. (Left to right) Back: Mrs. Chun-Hae Lee, Rev. En Bo Chung, Rev. Dick Tafel. Middle: Mr. Choong-Hyun Lee, Miss Hye-Young Lee, Mrs. Byung-Qee Kim (son, daughter, and wife respectively, of Mr. Lee), Mr. Lee, Mr. Chung (from Taejon). Front: Mrs. Woon-Hae Lee, Rev. Myung-Hee Pyo, Dr. An, Mr. Won, Dr. Yang.

member of his congregation who is a vice-president of Korea's second largest steel company; and the Rev. Myung-Hee Pyo, a young woman whom Chung ordained several years ago. After collecting our rather considerable luggage, they whisked us to Mr. Lee's waiting car for the trip to the apartment where we would be staying.

Warmer hospitality I have not experienced. From our arrival at the apartment to our final farewell on Saturday at the airport, we were provided for generously. Mr. Lee had arranged time away from his work to help escort us. Thursday afternoon was a shopping expedition in Seoul, followed by dinner at an elegant high-rise restaurant overlooking the city. Friday morning and afternoon we were treated to tours of the historic Kyong-bok palace and the grounds of the Piwon ("Secret

We spent a very enjoyable evening learning about our respective congregations and sharing thoughts and common concerns about the church. The Revs. En Bo Chung and Myung-Hee Pyo together serve the congregations in Seoul and Kwang-ju, commuting on alternate Sundays—Chung from his home in Kwang-ju and Pyo from Seoul. The Kwang-ju group meets in their own building; the group in Seoul currently rent space and are looking for a location on which to build. In Taejon there are about three or four people, so regular services are not held.

We discovered from our conversation that evening that many of our concerns are similar, including the challenge of how to grow—or, as one member put it, “We get visitors who seem to like what we have to offer, but they don’t stay for long. How do we get them to stay?”

That evening we also discovered a small way to begin to repay, through the church network, some of the hospitality we had received. Socializing before dinner, we spent some time talking with Mr. Lee’s daughter, Hye-Young, and son, Choong-Hyun, and learned that Hye-Young would be attending graduate school at the University of Maryland in College Park this fall. We told her that was not too far from our church in Washington, D.C., and offered to put her in touch with people there. Since her arrival in College Park in August, she has found a local family to live with through church contacts, and

has attended church in D.C. We speak with her by phone frequently, and hope she will be able to visit us in Florida before she finishes her studies and returns home.

Saturday we were due at the airport in the afternoon. But there was time in the morning for the short drive to Panmunjom, at the edge of the demilitarized zone between South and North Korea. The drive there made only too clear the immediacy of North Korea’s still-hostile presence. The Han River, which parallels the highway, flows to the border dividing the two Koreas, so military guardposts, bunkers, and other fortifications are very much in evidence along the entire route. Even in the heart of Seoul, guards are posted at bridges across the river, which could offer an easy opportunity for infiltration or attack from the north. Looking across toward the north from the observation deck at Panmunjom, and viewing the exhibits in the park and visitor center there, were solemn reminders that the Cold War has not ended everywhere.

From Panmunjom, it was time to head once again to the airport, with a stop for lunch at a roadside eatery along the way. It was not easy to leave this country and the friends we had made so recently. We would like to return sometime, and *not* just because the grandchildren may be there for another couple of years. We found Korea to be a lovely country, and the people we met to be gracious and hospitable. It seems to us to be an overlooked travel destination.

The memories we have brought back of a beautiful country, welcoming people, and new Swedenborgian friends, will not soon be forgotten.

Linda Tafel serves on the Pastoral Ministries Support Unit (PMSU) and is the wife of the Rev. Richard H. Tafel, Jr. She resides in Fort Myers Beach, Florida.



On the grounds of Kyongbuk Palace—Left to Right: Myung-Hee Pyo, Dick Tafel, En Bo Chung, Duck-Pyo Lee

World Community Day, 1995

World Community Day, observed the first Friday in November, began in 1943, with the Chicago Council of Church Women. The themes focus on responsible corporate action for justice and peace. That year, Armistice Day, November 11, was set aside as a special “Peace Day” to be called “World Community Day,” focusing on the theme, “The Price of an Enduring Peace.” Over 100,000 ballots were cast, giving opinions on the peace questions asked in 85,000 leaflets distributed. The interest generated resulted in this becoming an annual observance for church women. It was envisioned as another day to be observed internationally, on the order of World Day of Prayer, to bring church women together in a more common search for an enduring peace.

The second observance in 1944 was climaxed by the signing of the following personal pledge by participants:

“I do solemnly promise, in the presence of God, to work and pray for the establishment of a just and durable peace. I do this for the sake of the future peace and prosperity of the United States of America and for justice and liberty for the people of all nations. Unto this task I commit my will and my prayers.”

WCD continued to emphasize peace, but has been broadened to include a vital partner of peace, justice.

The theme for 1995 is, “Preserving the Fruits of God’s Labor.” The theme lifts up children around the globe as one of God’s greatest fruits, which we are to *nourish* for the benefit of each child and our community. The theme material, written by Dr. Anne Haynes Price, of Laguna Beach, California, states, “We know that children, God’s ultimate fruit, can be blessed in a home atmosphere, within the structure of a loving family, through the nurturing of a parent or parents who find support in the wider community. This celebration *must* embrace the broadest definitions of family, which include *any adult and child in a significant relationship*. Interrelated responsibilities of being child nurturers in various capacities are at the core of this worshipful growing experience.”

The meditation is a “Children’s Plea to All Parenting People,” making several requests, such as “Give me more than food to nourish me. Give me the warmth and security of your love;” “Help me to use words when I am angry. Don’t make me so afraid of showing anger that I lose my capacity to feel strongly about anything;” “Reach out to me when I seem to be lonely or when I need someone to care.”

You Can't Take

Eric Allison

We are all familiar with this trite and nagging axiom that we can't take our material wealth with us into the other life. This is true. It is also true that we take with us all the spiritual qualities which make us who we are. If we are greedy we take our greed along. If we find it difficult to share what we have here, it will also be difficult to share in the spiritual world. If we hold onto our money when it could be of greater use to others, we will hold back what we have to offer in the other life. This life offers us countless opportunities for spiritual growth.

Swedenborg's writings are packed with insights about how to improve ourselves. He calls this reformation. We can literally choose behaviors and attitudes which we know we need to change, and with God's help, we can change. Does our attitude about stewardship need changing?

The level of denominational giving has definitely increased. We still need to be concerned about our giving being spiritually-based and we also must do a better job of informing our people about what the needs are. We must be willing to give of ourselves if we want to grow spiritually. There is no way around it. It is a fact. The amount or percentage of funds we spend on cars, clothes, or accessories reveals where our priorities really are. If the amount we give to the church and other charities comes at the very bottom of our list of expenses, how can we reconcile this action or lack of action with our commitment to living a spiritual life? We can't.

One of the primary reasons we give money is because we believe what we are giving to is worthwhile. We feel that we are a part of something which needs help. We believe that our gift makes a difference. If you believe an organiza-

tion such as the church is worthwhile, and that you can make a difference, and you don't give, what does that say about you? To press the point a little, let's just say that the amount you give to something in which you "really believe" is so little that you don't even miss the money. The question then becomes: do you "really" believe in it?

Consider the following facts as a measure of our willingness to support our Swedenborgian Church. They give some indication of the level of our financial commitment.

In 1994 the average annual contribution per Swedenborgian in congregations that received help from the Augmentation Fund was \$304. That's a \$304 average given by each active member. Per month that is \$25.33 per person or just \$5.84 per person per week. Does \$5.84 per week sound like much money to you? To some people it is all they can give. However, most of us could give much more and would not think that \$5.84 per week represented a spiritual commitment to something which we "really" believe in. That is less than what you would pay to see a movie. Many people spend \$30.00 per month just for cable TV. Some pay even more. We have improved our giving but let's not stop here. Doesn't our church deserve as much financial commitment as the TV?

Money is a topic we tend to shun. People are often more willing to talk about sex than money. It seems that we would rather avoid seeing the very clear connection between contributing to the church and our own spiritual pilgrimage. We eschew phrases like "Put your money where your mouth is." Some even see discussions of fund raising as being

It With You. Or Can You?

vulgar. We cannot ignore the fact that Jesus mentions money more often than he does prayer. Praying can be much easier than giving. It may be that Jesus talked about money so often because He knew what a tough issue this is. There are not many opportunities in life for having a tangible measurement of our commitment. If our motives are good, the amount of money we give is at least some measure of our spiritual growth.

Of course, there are those persons on fixed incomes, or with young families, who are barely squeaking by each month. There are those who simply can't give more. People should never be pressured or feel pressured to give when giving is a struggle. Hardship is not part of the stewardship fleet.

Volunteers are also essential. The time offered by volunteers can be even **more** valuable than the funds which are donated. Our church in Georgetown, Guyana uses the dedication, "Bless those who give, Bless those who cannot give, and keep us mindful that the best gift is our lives lived in service to your will."

The point is that almost all of us could offer much more and hardly even notice it. Shouldn't we contribute at least enough to feel as though we miss what was given? Is it

really good stewardship when what we give doesn't affect or change our lifestyle? The Word is clear and Swedenborg backs up the practice of tithing. My personal belief is that giving ten percent of my income to the church and other charities is an obligation. After that what I give is really giving.

Virtually all of our congregations have increased the amount they give. Good work! The majority of us would not miss another \$5 per week. There are probably quite a few of us who wouldn't miss another \$10 or even \$20 per week.

A couple without children making \$40,000 a year in combined income after taxes would give \$4,000 per year if they gave 10%; an amount any of our churches would welcome. Just to make it easy, let's say that the average income of the average church member in our denomination is \$20,000 per year after taxes. If each person gave only 5% of their annual income, the average gift would rise to \$1,000. That's \$19.23 per week. For some, this increase of \$13.39 per week might be a bit hefty; for others it would be very manageable.

Just for fun, let's assume that all 539 churchgoers in congregations receiving augmentation gave \$19.23 per week in 1995. This would move the average annual total from \$163,856 to \$373,527. Wow!

Over half of our congregations receive help from the Augmentation Fund. The total amount the Aug-

Our church in Guyana uses the dedication,
"Bless those who give, bless those who
cannot give, and keep us mindful that
the best gift is our lives lived in
service to your will."

mentation Fund was able to offer without going into deficit spending in 1995 was \$144,000. This amount was divided up among the churches based upon their requests for assistance. Just think of the new projects we could create if the Augmentation Fund did not have to be used, because each local church was paying its own way.

You might say "Eric, you're dreaming. It will never happen!" Perhaps it is the impossible dream. But I do like to think big, that is, if you call 5% big.

Well then, let's lower our sights. Let's ask everyone to give 2.5% of their income, based on the hypothetical average income of \$20,000. That's only \$9.61 per week. An increase of \$3.76 per week. Could you afford that? This would increase annual congregational giving from \$163,000 to \$269,000 just in congregations receiving augmentation. Nearly everyone could increase their giving by \$3.76 per week. This would give the Augmentation Fund \$100,000 more to work with. That's a big difference. If every person in

our denomination gave an additional \$3.76 per week to their local church, SSR, the church Annual Appeal, or other denominational causes, we would reap amazing benefits. Our membership has approximately 1600 people. If 1000 of us each gave an additional \$3.76 per week, we would raise \$195,000. Over a five-year period this would add up to \$975,000. Wow!

In 1995, the denomination's projected deficit is \$30,000. That's a lot of money. But if 1000 of us reached into our pockets and gave \$30, we'd be in the black. That is, in round figures, only 60¢ per week per person. Is 60¢ each week too much to ask?

We can't take our material possessions with us into the next life. But we can take along the satisfaction that we made a big difference by giving a little extra, and we will leave behind a legacy which will inspire others. Let's do it!

The Rev. Eric Allison is church growth consultant with the Pastoral Ministries Support Unit (PMSU). He resides in Kitchener, Ontario.

Important Church Calendar Dates

November 2-4	Wayfarers Chapel Board
November 3-5	PMSU—Grand Bend, Ontario
November 4	Investment Com.—Wilmington/ Philadelphia area
November 11-14	C.A.M.—Newton, Mass.
December 2-3	General Council/Cabinet/National Church Trustees—Washington, D.C.
January 12-14	FPRSU/AFC—Ft. Myers Beach, Florida
February 16-20	Com ExCom—Newton
March 17-19	CAM—Newton
March 22-24	GOSU/PMSU/EdSU—Almont, Michigan
June 26-30	Convention 1996—Urbana, Ohio

Messenger Indexes Available

Messenger indexes for the five years from 1990-1994 were completed last spring. Lee Woofenden and the Information Support Unit included this task, at the request of the Communications Support Unit, in their project of computer-indexing 150 years of *The Messengers*. The hard copy indexes are being taped or bound into each year's *Messenger* volumes at the Swedenborg School of Religion. Librarian Jean Hilliard is willing to send photostat copies of individual indexes to anyone who wants them for \$1.00 each to cover postage and copying costs. Write to: SSR Library, Attn: Jean Hilliard, 48 Sargent St., Newton, MA 02158.

Our Swedenborgian Heritage

Twentieth in a series

Ritual in Worship

by Paul Dresser

Louise Woofenden

Surprise! More than seventy-five years ago people were already rebelling against traditional forms of worship. The following is abridged from an article in the March 7, 1934 Messenger.

The time: a quarter of a century ago. The place: A Pullman sleeper, en route from a Midwestern city in which the annual convention of our church had just been held. The persons: two white-haired gentlemen, pillars of the time-honored Boston Society; and, quite as a listener-in, a young theological student, callow, but not too impressionable. The background: at the recent convention, much ritual, even a surfeit thereof; and at the church back east, a fair amount of the same, but so different in conception and form as not to be easily recognizable as ritual by those most accustomed to it. Conversation: not verbatim.

First Gentleman: What is the idea of the form and ceremony? To my way of thinking, any of it at all is too much! It only gets in the way of worship. There's no warrant for it. The doctrines state explicitly that all representatives of religion were abrogated at the end of the pre-Christian dispensation. All these rituals were invented by the now vastated "faith alone" church.

Second Gentleman: True enough! And why masquerade in the shroud of the dead? The New Church started and enjoyed the heyday of its infancy in its rightful simplicity. A rigorous and thorough-going simplicity! That is what we have at home, and we have prospered under it. And we have not let anything vitiate or obscure the Word or the

doctrine.

First Gentleman: No, and we must stand by our guns! The sphere of worship emanates from the Divine Word itself. The more simply and directly we are brought by means of true doctrine into the sphere of the Word, the greater and more fruitful the results.

Musing student [Dresser, of course]: These gentlemen are not far from the kingdom. The sphere of worship emanates from the Word as opened by the God-given teaching. But these gentlemen do not quite see the human end of it. The sphere of worship calls for things appropriate in the general atmosphere of the place, and on the part of the worshipper. Worship requires its medium and its tools. We would not be satisfied merely to read the Word and the doctrine soberly, intellectually, in a drab room. We would not be satisfied not to bow our heads in prayer, and again to rise to our feet and sing. Why? Because we are human and have got to be limbered up; because the Word of God will not penetrate, or find lodgment until we put ourselves through the motions, and put ourselves in the attitude which invites the Word. We must provide a few, at least, of the outward and visible correspondences of the inward and spiritual graces of worship.

What these dear old gentlemen think of as the absolute simplicity of the worship in their home church is, in reality, sufficiently enriched with ritual, only they are so accustomed to it that they mistake it for the very life.

The question is not whether or not we shall have ritual in our services of

worship; for there is no worship without ritual. The Quaker, probably, is highly unconscious of his ritual. And the so-called non-ritualistic Protestant churches are certainly unconscious of theirs; but "simplicity," "spontaneity," and "naturalness" are not entities in themselves, and the personalism which, in worship, they tend to practice, is to many of us painful ritual. We seek to worship to meet with the Lord, and it is as disturbing, perhaps more so, to have the minister obtrude his personality, as it is to have the service overladen with ritualistic lumber.

Ritual, in proper form and measure, should subordinate all finite personalities to the fact of the presence, or invocation of the Lord. Ritual, in its place, should serve to introduce various forms of beauty, and the spirit needs beauty as much as it needs anything, as witness the manifold works of God which are at an infinite remove from the merely utilitarian. If one is a worshipper of the Creator at the shrine of nature, one cannot consistently, at the same time be an advocate of drabness in church worship. "The glory of Lebanon shall come unto thee, the fir tree, the pine tree and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary; and I will make the place of my feet glorious." [Isaiah 60:13]

The Rev. Paul Dresser, ordained in 1909, served our societies in Abington, Massachusetts, New York City, Brooklyn, Bath, Maine, and San Diego.

Louise Woofenden is a writer and former archivist at the Swedenborg School of Religion. She resides in Sharon, Massachusetts.

Field Education Experiences in HIV Ministry

Jonathan Mitchell

Having offered to write for *The Messenger* about my field education experiences with HIV ministry, I felt myself floundering somewhat. How to convey the complex mix of joy and pain, of reward and loss? Where to find the forthrightness to name my own personal engagement with it?

In the course of my training at the Swedenborg School of Religion over the last year, I have served the HIV community in two settings. For my community component, I volunteered one afternoon a week at the Boston Living Center, a drop-in center for HIV-positive persons which offers a number of free services as well as a place for social support. I also did a Swedenborgian Center Experience (SCE) at Living Waters HIV ministry in San Francisco. As perhaps most *Messenger* readers already know, Living Waters was founded in 1992 by the Rev. Susan Turley-Moore, with support from the Los Angeles Society and the Growth and Outreach Support Unit (GOSU) of the Swedenborgian Church. Living Waters' mission is to serve the spiritual needs of all those affected by the AIDS epidemic. These two experiences have allowed me to spend time with those in all stages of the cycle, from recent diagnosis, to failing health, to preparation for the end of life.

HIV ministry is, first and foremost, about finding the courage to listen. When someone seemingly young and vital and alive tells me that he feels sick all the time, that he cannot eat, that he has no energy, that he is tired of fighting—I cannot hear this without a knot of anxiety forming in my own gut. Or again, when someone looks me in the eyes and says that he is afraid, that he is not ready, that he doesn't want to go, it is hard not to look away. I am often struck speechless at that moment. I have no advice, no way to make things better. And yet when I am able to stay with it, when I am able to listen and to feel, sometimes something happens. When they feel heard and supported, people find their own answers. The life-affirming impulse is reborn.

But perhaps this paints too scary a picture of HIV ministry. Moments of this intensity are more the exception than the rule. It can also be the sharing of stories, jokes, gossip. It can be as simple as saying, "Hi, good to see you again," as simple as taking someone out for a cigarette or holding a hand. People living with HIV and AIDS

occasionally have moments of wanting to confront the losses and to voice the sorrow. But they also, understandably, have long stretches of wanting to get on with their normal, everyday lives. HIV ministry, then, is also about openness and flexibility. It teaches the humility of letting yourself be, at a given moment, what another needs you to be.

At a much more personal level, the Boston Living Center and Living Waters have been contexts in which I have come to a much stronger sense of my own gay identity. It is with some trepidation that I speak to this side of my spiritual journey. I know of its potential to reopen more general questions around sexuality. And also, some to whom I have shown this article have raised a concern that by addressing gay-related themes, I might reinforce the still-common perception of AIDS as "the gay plague." So perhaps it is worth emphasizing that the HIV infection

is not limited to gay men, that one does not have to be gay to work or volunteer in this field, that I myself have not been working exclusively with gay men, and that when I do, the focus may or may not be on the gay experience.

Having said that, it also needs to be said that the AIDS epidemic has hit the gay community with particular severity, and continues to do so. And for my part, to sidestep the gay-related issues would be precisely *not* to convey the true flavor of *my* experience.

It was not until midlife that I was ready or willing to come out as a gay man. It

has been a bittersweet experience. It has been a great joy to develop (at long last!) a circle of gay friends and acquaintances. Some part of my loneliness and alienation heals every time I hear the life story of another gay man, however much it resembles or differs from my own. Yet the joy is accompanied by an equally keen sense of loss. Part of this is personal regret, a sense of lost time. Then come the repeated reminders of how much of my generation of gay men has already disappeared. I am often haunted by the thought of those whom I will never get to meet. I often have the eerie feeling of walking into the empty spaces that they have left behind.

Again and again, I hear stories of loss and rejection. I have talked to a number of men in their twenties, thirties and forties, who have cared for a dying lover, lost an entire circle of friends, whose own health is failing, who take for granted that they have a few years left at most. I am in awe of them; they are my heroes and teachers. I see all the ways they continue to live, to make new
(Continued on page 146)

*Our relationships
to our fellow travelers
in life
make a rich tapestry
of samenesses and differences.
But to get to the shared core
of our humanity,
we need first to be freed to
voice the uniqueness and integrity
of our own
individual experiences.*

What's New at SSR?

Mission Statement

The mission of the Swedenborg School of Religion is threefold:

1. To prepare qualified men and women for Swedenborgian ministries;
2. To serve as a center for spiritual growth and Swedenborgian scholarship;
3. To make its resources available to our Church and community.

*Approved by the Board of Trustees,
May 1995.*

Vision Statement

A new spirit fills the Swedenborg School of Religion as it fosters pastors and prophets for the present and future needs of the denomination, its parishes, special ministries, and people. A prophetic vision revealed in Emanuel Swedenborg's call sparks personal transformation (regeneration) toward greater usefulness. As pastors, students are educated to be sensitive to a wide range of spiritual needs and empowered toward effective outreach. To thus find ourselves and God will lead to deeper dimensions of mutual understanding and cooperation, and open channels for higher energies to help transform human society for the next millennium.

*Approved by the Board of Trustees,
October, 1994.*

New Students

Three new ordination track students are attending the Swedenborg School of Religion this fall: Min-Heui Cheon, Adam Seward, and Andy Stinson.

Min-Heui Cheon received her S.T.M. in Old Testament from Union Theological School last year. She also has a B.A. and an M.Div. from Hanshin Theological Graduate Seminary. She is an ordained vice minister in the Presbyterian Church in Korea. She belongs to a small Swedenborgian group of about 22 people in Bayside, Long Island. Min-



— New Students —

From left: Min-Heui Cheon, Andy Stinson (standing), Adam Seward.

Heui was greatly influenced by the preaching of Jae Hyung Bae, and by the love of the members of the group for each other. Her plan is to go back to Bayside after ordination. She has been accepted for a Ph.D. at the Jewish Theological Seminary, which she may attend at a later time. Two other members of the Bayside group hope to come to SSR eventually.

Adam Seward is an American Indian whose tribal affiliation is Cherokee and Choctaw. He has been active in traditional circles and has been on the advisory board of Anawim, a spiritual center for Native Americans in Chicago. He sees points of significant connection between American Indian and Swedenborgian beliefs. He hopes for a parish ministry in the Swedenborgian Church, and also hopes to introduce American Indians and Swedenborgians to each other with the hope that a friendship comes about. Adam received a B.A. from Louisiana College, an M.A. from Pittsburg (Kansas) State University, and attended Meadville Lombard Theological School. Adam's wife, Lynn Higgins,

who is working on her doctoral dissertation in sociology from Loyola University in Chicago, accompanied Adam to Newton.

Andy Stinson grew up in Woolwich, Maine and attended Morse High School. He has been an active U.S. Army Reserve member since 1986, and holds a commission in a unit in Maine. He attended the University of Southern Maine, and graduated with degrees in geography/anthropology and history. He is currently a fisherman living in Portland, Maine. Andy spends his summers tuna fishing and his winters diving for sea urchins. Presently, he is interested in starting a new parish ministry.

Other Students

Four ordination track students—Susannah Lorraine Currie, Jonathan Mitchell, Ellen Shaw-Smith, and Lee Woofenden—also attended the fall retreat. Nadine Cotton was not in Newton due to a death in the family. The Rev. Dick Marine is studying for ordination through correspondence courses; he currently lives in Montana. Dick spent one year at SSR several years ago.

Two ministers—the Rev. Kinichi Kuniyeda and the Rev. Ken Turley—are working on M.A. theses.

Margaret Ris will complete her Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies this year. In addition, six students—Sharon Billings, Linda Blosser (on leave this year), Betsy Coffman, Juliet Hadden, Nancy Plorkowski, and Sharon Reddekopp—are studying in the lay leader program; Sherry Rutledge and Dick Sommer are studying to be worship leaders; and several others are taking correspondence courses.

Fund Drive Progress

Thanks to the generosity of many individuals and groups, SSR has surpassed one million dollars in gifts! As of September 15, the total was \$1,005,497.

The 1995 SSR Challenge is attempting to match \$20,000 received from several sources—\$4,000 from the board of trustees, \$7,000 from an anonymous donor, and \$9,000 from the Iungerich Fund—by December 31. Please send your contributions and pledges to the Swedenborg School of Religion as soon as possible!

SSR Board Elections

At the July 8 meeting of the Corporation of the New Church Theological School, the Corporation elected the following members to the Board of Trustees for three year terms:

Representative Class—

Karen Feil—Currently vice-chair of the board, Karen has a strong background in management and marketing. She has been president and is currently treasurer of the Chicago Society and is active in the Illinois Association. Last year Karen handled the church-wide survey for the denomination, the results of which were presented at Convention '94.

Dr. Thomas Peebles—Tom is a physician who has both practiced medicine and taught throughout his career. He has been a professor at Harvard Medical School, as well as a lifelong member of the Boston church, which he currently serves as chair of the board of trustees and president of the Bostonview Corporation.

At-Large Class—

Dr. Richard Hatheway—Dick, whose Swedenborgian roots go back four generations, grew up in the Boston church and served as president of the National League. He is professor of geology and chair of the department of geological sciences at the State University of New York at Geneseo, and is mayor of the town of Geneseo.

Dr. Robert Reber—Bob has been dean of Auburn Seminary in New York for the past ten years. He has been familiar with the Swedenborgian Church for 25 years; he taught at SSR in the early 70s, and has served on the Temenos board. He is deeply concerned about theological education and ways in which seminaries can serve as resources for the church.

There was a vacancy in the at-large class because of a resignation. The Rev. Eric Allison was elected to fill the two-year vacancy. Eric is the church growth consultant for the Pastoral Ministries Support Unit. He has also served several churches, and is a graduate of SSR. He has done continuing education in the area of church growth and has attended a number of Alban Institute workshops.

Tom, Bob, and Eric are new to the Board. Karen and Dick have each served part of a term; both were elected to fill unexpired terms. This is the first full term for each.

—Mary Kay Klein, President SSR



SSR Fall Retreat

Front Row: Min-Heui Cheon, George Dole, Lee Woofenden holding Christopher, Patty Woofenden. Back Row: Adam Seward, Carl Blenkin, Jonathan Mitchell, Wilma Wake, Ted Klein, Rob Smith, Mary Kay Klein, Ellen Shaw-Smith, Susannah Lorraine Currie, Andy Stinson.

Personal Mastery

Eli Dale

I have found it a lot easier to face the truth
by being curious about myself,
as though I am a fascinating psychological specimen.

Personal Mastery is a different term for Regeneration, and it's one of a few techniques I've come across lately that is revolutionizing the way I relate to myself and to others. Why am I so excited about this stuff? Because it contains a clear path to freeing the way we think and the way we see the world so that we can create the future we desire.

Which means we create ourselves.

Personal Mastery is about approaching one's life as a creative process. These are the components:

- ☑ have a Vision,
- ☑ make a commitment (a choice to change),
- ☑ tell the truth about yourself,
- ☑ focus your energies and attention,
- ☑ be patient, and
- ☑ take appropriate action.

Your Vision is a picture of the future you want to create. When you ponder your vision, clarify it by asking "If I actually had this, what would it get me?" Keep asking until you have found the essence. Then commit to it. Commit to doing or changing whatever is necessary to bring it to life.

Once you commit to your personal Vision and then you tell the truth about yourself, you may notice something: tension. I want to operate from faith, but the truth is I usually operate from fear. I want deeply loving relationships, but the truth is I think I will be rejected. I want God in my life, but the truth is I want God to follow my instructions. These differences generate tension, but it can be a creative tension.

Tension has a natural tendency to seek resolution. There are three likely responses to tension: (1) freak out because of the emotional strain and compromise or drop your Vision (a poor choice); (2) listen to the old tapes that say you are unworthy of your Vision or powerless to create it and never resolve the tension (also a poor choice); (3) use the energy from the difference between where you are and where you want to be to propel you into your desired state of being (the right choice).

But how does one deal with the palpable reality of emotional strain and the old tapes that tell us "you can't have that"? By telling the truth. Didn't that create the tension in the first place? Yes. But keep telling the truth. When I suffer from, *I'll get hurt if I do that*, I can say, "That's fear talking." When I suffer from, *These people don't really like me*, I can say, "That's my old tape about unworthiness." When I suffer from, *God doesn't love me, because I didn't get what I wanted*, I can say "Those are my control issues talking."

But, of course, the other part of telling the truth is naming what's going right. When I say, "I'll try this new thing," I am overcoming my fear of the unknown. When I say, "I love you," I am overcoming my fear of rejection. When I say, "Thy will be done," I am making room for miracles in my life. And I can tell the truth about these, too.

Personally, I have found it a lot easier to face the truth by being curious about myself, as though I am a fascinating psychological specimen. (I am). Curiosity helps keep me from being judgmental. When I tell the truth about being stuck in my old behaviors/beliefs, my judge says, "You'll never get it right." But the experimenter, the curious one, says, "Look. There's that behavior again. I wonder why. I wonder what I could do differently to shift away from this." Likewise, when I tell the truth about changes, the judge says, "You did it differently, but not perfectly." The experimenter says, "Oh look! Transformation! Process! Change! I wonder what comes next."

In addition to practicing different behavior, focus your attention by meditating on the Vision. It helps carve out new neural pathways, new mental grooves in place of the old ruts. This exercise in meditation is dependent on one's commitment to truth. Telling the truth gives the subconscious accurate information about where we are relative to our vision. We develop habits and reflexes in thinking and believing, the same way we develop the habit of putting the car keys on the same hook every day. You plan where you want to find your car keys, you think about having to put them on that hook every time you put them there, and eventually your hands puts them there without your thinking about it. Your subconscious becomes trained to serve your need to find your car keys. Your subconscious can become trained to serve your need to find a place in the grand scheme of things just the same way. For me, the hardest part of this practice is being patient. It takes time to get from Point A to Point B. And if I do not have some idea of where I'm going, if I do not tell the truth, and I do not meditate on my Vision, it takes a hell of a lot longer.

This information has helped me tremendously with my Regeneration. I hope it's helpful to you. Please try it. How do you want the future to be? Can you commit to that? Where are you now? Meditate. Be patient. Do what makes sense. Voila. A new starting place. Then do it again. Next issue we'll look at "suspending assumptions."

Eli Dale is president of the Portland, Maine Swedenborgian Church. Reprinted from their July/August 1995 Swedenborgian Church Newsletter.

Update on Temenos



At the July 1995 Convention held in San Francisco, ministers and delegates voted that the denomination and the Philadelphia church enter into an agreement for the future development of Temenos. The wording of the agreement was printed on page 112 of the September *Messenger*.

The first paragraph of the eight-part agreement reads: "The Swedenborgian Church at Temenos shall assume all funding for building and operational expenses from the date (date agreement is signed), forward, using its own funds and financial resources from the sale of its church property in Philadelphia, and will request no further financial support from the denomination for operational or capital expenses for the Temenos project. This commitment, together with other pledges and bequests, will enable the Temenos project to approach major foundations for capital grants to complete the Temenos Challenge campaign."

The vote by General Convention was to authorize General Council to negotiate wording of a final agree-

ment based on the draft approved by General Convention. General Council voted to delegate this task to the executive committee.

The Philadelphia church (The Swedenborgian Church at Temenos) is most appreciative of the denomination's decision. The church has been holding a series of meetings so that all of the members may explore the ramifications of such an agreement. Budget projections are being drawn up to show estimated income and expenses for the next three years. Up-to-date figures are being sought for the cost of building the eight-bedroom retreat house and the site development costs. Members of the church are asking for clarification as to the relationship between the Philadelphia church and Temenos. When the final agreement is signed, members of the church want to do so with their eyes wide open.

While the church members continue their study, the Temenos board is working with its engineer to resolve the legal and bureaucratic entanglements. The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation had

granted a permit for an entrance from the state highway onto the Temenos property. Two years passed since the permit was applied for, and so now we must reapply. This process is not automatic, and may take several months.

A more serious obstacle is obtaining a permit from the Department of Environmental Resources. Since our overall plan was drawn up in 1987, the Broad Run stream that goes through the Temenos property has been upgraded by the state and requirements for septic systems and storm water management have been upgraded significantly. The Department of Environmental Resources is insisting on a series of tests to determine what they will require before building and site development can continue.

With the onset of fall weather and the coming of winter, we will not be permitted to "disturb" the earth until next spring.

Stand by patiently for further developments.

Ernest O. Martin, Director

An interesting note: The vacation Bible school held at Temenos by the Philadelphia church for children of neighboring communities was extremely successful, with 32 children attending the four-day program. It focused on the Bible, nature, and environment, using Swedenborg's doctrine of correspondences. Sacred spaces were created by all attending the program. "Sacred space" is the meaning of Temenos.

Temenos Program Calendar

Fall-Winter 1995-96

Women's Group

Each Wednesday in October
November 1, 8, 15, 29
December 6, 13

Yearning For God

A Time of Quiet Reflection
October 11, 18, 25 and
November 1

Understanding the Feminine in the Divine: *The Swedenborgian Perspective*
October 27

Experiencing the Feminine Side of God
October 28

Workshop Experience on Healing
October 29

Sharing the Dream World
November 3 to 5

Couples Workshop:
Valuing our Differences and Enriching our Communication
November 12

Adventure with the Celestine Insights:
Putting the Celestine Prophecy's Nine Insights to Work in our Lives
November 18

Intuition: Divining our Deep Selves
November 19

Women's Work of Coming to Wholeness: *The Handless Maiden (Women Who Run with the Wolves, continued)*
December 2

Dances of Universal Peace
December 3

Boxing with Light and Shadow
January 27

For further information, call 610/696-8145

Temenos Conference & Retreat Center, 685 Broad Run Road, West Chester, PA 19382

HIV Ministry

(Continued from page 141)

friends, to find meaning and purpose in what they are still able to do. Many have come to a hard-won spirituality, a reliance on the divine, however that is defined for them. Some have a lively sense of closeness to the spiritual world. As a Swedenborgian and as someone with a call to ministry, I am grateful whenever someone trusts me enough to share these experiences. It may or may not make a difference in particular cases that I am a gay man. But when that connection is helpful, it brings with it a profound sense of affirmation. I have been granted some understanding of what it is to minister as a gay man to other gay men.

While my ongoing learning in HIV ministry, given where I am in my own journey, has found a particular focus in the gay experience, it is in no way limited to that. While at Living Waters, I attended sessions for caregivers at Kairos House. It was especially moving to see how the challenge of caregiving brought very different people together. I heard the experiences of gay men caring for friends and lovers, a mother caring for a gay son, a young straight couple caring for a gay brother, a lesbian couple caring for parents, a straight woman caring for an ailing mother. Different people with different stories, different experiences. And yet, people who shared many of the same concerns, people who could and did hear each other, learn from each other, and support each other.

AIDS is in many ways a disaster in slow motion. In our denomination we have already been touched by it. And while I hope and pray I am wrong, there is the likelihood that all of us will be touched in some way before the epidemic is over. I find it impossible to believe that God wanted the epidemic to happen. But in our responses to it, providence has given opportunities to learn spiritual lessons. Our relationships to our fellow travelers in life make a rich tapestry of samenesses and differences. But to get to the shared core of our humanity, we need first to be freed to voice the uniqueness and integrity of our own individual experiences. Then we can offer light to each other's paths both with our commonality and with our diversities. The ultimate lesson of HIV Ministry for me is that the most precious gift we have to give is the truth of our own experience.

Dr. Jonathan Mitchell is a third-year student at the Swedenborg School of Religion, archivist at the school library, and recently received his M.A. in Swedenborgian Studies.

Moving Toward the Light

(Continued from page 134)

and David had never met each other before they conducted these workshops, nor had they gone over what each was going to do, yet they meshed with each other perfectly, displaying an openness and joy of being that nourished the spirit.

Then there were the musical programs: Friday night, twin sisters Lisa and Linda performed with perfectly harmonizing voices, flute, and piano their own hauntingly beautiful compositions. They often play on Sunday mornings for the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound, and did perform again for our service on Sunday morning. Saturday night, Karen Bruner, Celtic harpist, singer and storyteller, "opened the gates to the Celtic Twilight." We were able to purchase on-site tapes of these performers. Now I can listen to them and relive the whole magical experience, and continue to marvel at the rich treasure of local talent that exists, people we would never hear of or experience, if it weren't for these gifts of the spirit offered by our host churches.

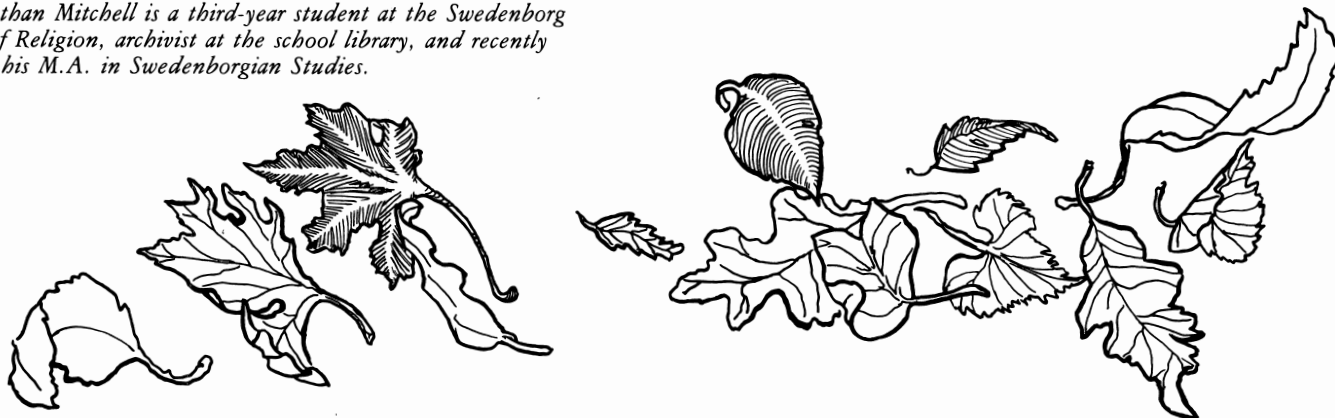
I had the privilege of visiting the Stonehouse Bookstore for the first time, after years of hearing about it. Every area of that place invites one to look, touch, sniff, feel, and browse. Comfortable chairs and a table with herb tea fixings in a sunny bay window call us to sit, read, chat, take our time.

Outgoing PCA President Harvey Tafel was lauded for instigating and implementing a policy of keeping the business meetings short and to the point so that we might spend more time nourishing our spiritual selves. A wise decision, indeed.

Regarding the issue of stewardship, it seems we are usually moved to give back to that which truly nourishes our souls. It is a spiritual law of increase and manifestation that giving with a truly thankful heart to that which nourishes us makes all of us prosperous far beyond our finite vision of prosperity.

And so, wishing a very happy and aware Thanksgiving to all, I invite you through this season to think about the things that truly nourish you and how and to what extent you want to feed them, encourage them, perhaps even prune for new growth to emerge.

—Patte LeVan



Passages

Baptisms

Glass—Kelsey Anne Glass, daughter of Gretchen Trott and David Glass, was baptized into the Christian faith August 20, 1995, at the Freyburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. George Dole officiating.

Young—Cameron James and Rebecca Rose Holbrook Young, son and daughter of Douglas James and Katharine Trott Young, were baptized into the Christian faith August 20, 1995, at the Freyburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Dr. George Dole officiating.

Confirmation

Ericson—Mark Ericson was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church August 20, 1995, at the Church of the Open Word (Swedenborgian) in St. Louis, Missouri, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

Deaths

Base—Everett Base, lifelong member of the Pawnee Rock Swedenborgian Church in Pawnee Rock, Kansas, entered the spiritual world July 10, 1995. A memorial service was conducted by the Rev. Galen Unruh.

McCollum—Roberta Mack McCollum, 86, sister of the late Elizabeth Munger, entered the spiritual world July 14, 1995, in Carlsbad, New Mexico. She was an active member of the Carlsbad First Baptist Church where she taught the Swedenborgian Church views in Sunday school. She was very active in service to church and community. A memorial service was conducted July 31, 1995, the Rev. Eric Allison and Pastor Bob Bacon of the Carlsbad First Baptist Church officiating.

Meggs—Dennis Meggs, 54, member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world July 29, 1995. Dennis was an inventor and musician as well as active church member. A memorial service was conducted August 2, 1995, the Rev. Eric Allison officiating.

Utz—Rena Crosby Utz, 92, longtime member of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, entered the spiritual world August 6, 1995. A memorial service was conducted at the church August 24, 1995, the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence officiating.

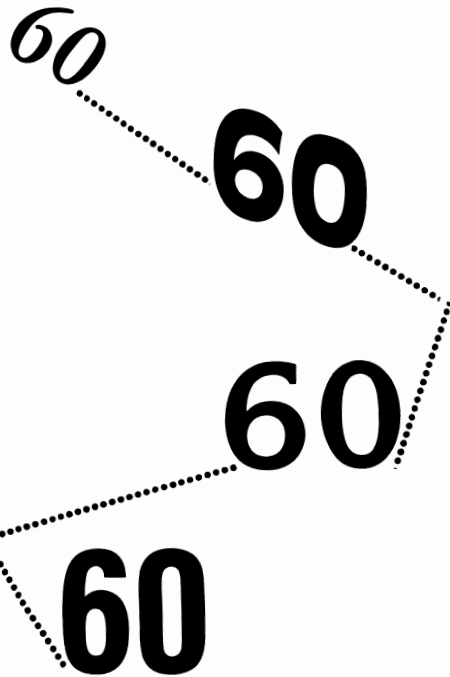
Church Family News

The Hegers, Pavel, Alice and their five children, are safely back in the Czech Republic. Pavel has written that he would love to hear any information about church matters and would like letters from the U.S. Their address is:

Rev. & Mrs. Pavel Heger
Rooseveltova 9
77900 Olomoue
Czech Republic



Detroit Sunday School Group



Is This a Record for a Sunday School Bunch?

Sixty years and still counting. The six members of the 1930s Detroit Sunday School pictured at right are Robert Woofenden, Betty Hill, Philip Guest, Maynard Zimmerman, Lucille Vanderberg and Stanley Korff. All belonged to the American New Church League, were confirmed at Forest Avenue church* and attended camp at Almont.

With their families, they were active in the life of the Curtis Avenue church* during the 50s and 60s. Two couples are still in the Metro area.

Every summer, these ex-Sunday schoolers with wives and husbands meet to strengthen old friendships, explore northern Michigan, and to enjoy their happy reunion.

**Swedenborgian Churches in, respectively, downtown Detroit and the suburbs, which were subsequently sold. The congregation is currently in Royal Oak, Michigan.*

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.

Thoughts on Thanksgiving

"... To make of it [Thanksgiving] a special observance, it seems to me, lessens its significance. This is life itself—not one day of the year. Psalm 119:164 reads: "Seven times a day do I praise thee because of thy righteous judgments." Beautiful! Once on rising in the morning—again at coffee break time—at noon ... seven times every day. The number seven, our church teachings tells us, represents all that is holy.

As we grow into an ever fuller spiritual maturity, an appreciation of the Lord's presence within—a life of thanksgiving, now seventy times seven—brings with it a joy and peace that lets in the light and warmth of heaven itself.

For most of us our families are scattered across the landscape. It is this observance of Thanksgiving that draws us together in our living rooms and around the dinner table. Here these family ties can be renewed and strengthened ... in a society where circumstances tend to weaken the bonds that hold us together ... so to all our readers, a blessed Thanksgiving Day."

Rev. Eric Zacharias, reprinted from the Plains Banner, Pretty Prairie, Kansas, November 1994.

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"When we can find a center of thankfulness from which to meet the difficulties and struggles, we are empowered and able to trust regardless of life's ups and downs.

For me I find mornings the first step in setting the tone for my day. If I start with my worries and problems, the rest of the day seems to have a tone of anxiety and stress. When I am able to stop those pressing thoughts and begin my day with thankfulness, I find a reservoir of inner peace with me in each situation ...

Some time ago I watched a PBS special documenting a major interfaith conference on the East Coast. Participants from various traditions were interviewed. I was impressed with a woman, representing a Native American tradition, who when asked to describe the essence of their spirituality, said simply, "Thankfulness." That for her people, generation after generation, thankfulness was at the center of their being—for the buffalo giving its life that they might eat and be clothed, for each and every gift of earth and spirit. I can't help but note that as we look at the life of Christ, we see a presence empowered through just such a spirit ... May our times together in November (and throughout our lives) be centered in a spirit of thankfulness."

"Today is a gift," the little girl notes in the Family Circus cartoon, "That's why we call it the present."

Rev. Steve Pults, reprinted from the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound Connections, November 1994.

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of North America
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48 Sargent Street
Newton, MA 02158**

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