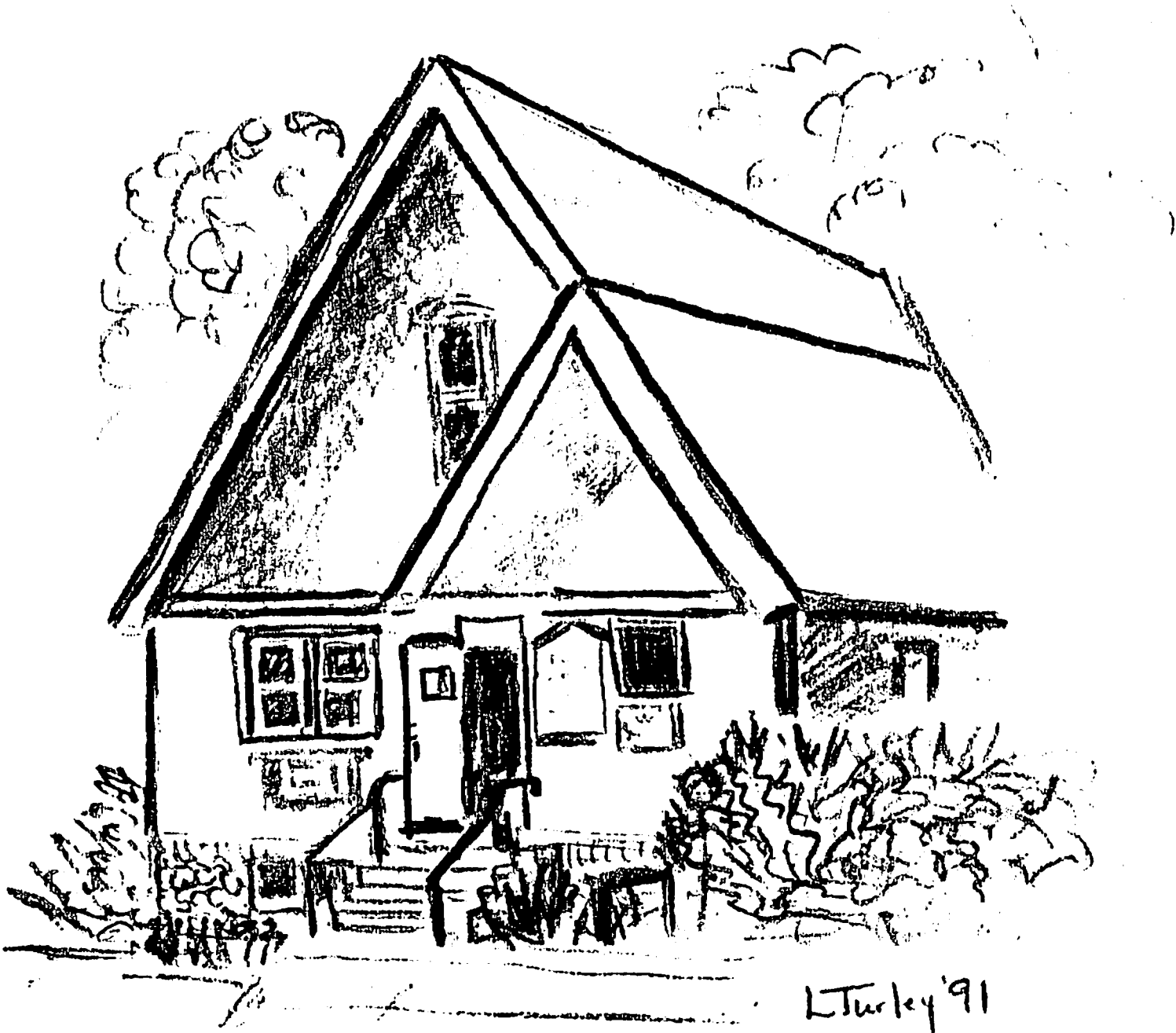


Official
Publication,
Swedenborgian Church
of
North America

The Messenger

November 1991



*The Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church
commemorates 160th anniversary*

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Cover Sketch by Laurie Turley, 1991: The Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church, designed by John Calvin Stevens, present building completed in April of 1910. (See "A History of the Portland Swedenborgian Church," p. 143)

The Messenger

Publisher: The Communications Support Unit

Published monthly, except 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 1991
Volume 211, No. 10
Whole Number 5164

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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, \$8.00 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.

Moving Toward the Light

Giving Thanks for the Freedom to Choose

Guest Editorial
by Ken Turley

One amazing attribute of human beings is that we are able to focus our attention on something and filter out everything else which is not relevant. When we hear, we sift through an amazing amount of miscellaneous background noise and are able to pick out what is important. The rest we are able to ignore, even to the point of not consciously hearing it at all. In seeing, we are able to focus on what is central and let all of the other activity around us happen without it drawing our attention. And this capacity is especially true with the sense of touch. If we concentrate, we can feel our breathing, maybe our heart beat, maybe even our digestive tract at work. If you take a moment to notice, you can feel your socks, the pressure of your belt. You might be feeling a slight breeze or be feeling chilly, or warm. We are feeling a constant array of things all the time. But most of this stimuli is simply and effectively filtered without our having to think about it. Even within our own minds we are sorting through a constant flow of thoughts and feelings and focusing on what is important to us while ignoring the rest.

Think, for a minute, what life would be like if we could not do this. All sounds would strike our attention with the same intensity. All motion and color would demand our attention equally. All the physical sensations of our skin and hair and inner organs would be equally insistent. But let us give thanks, for this is not the case. The Divine Mind has provided us with the capability of unconscious discernment, of "selective inattention," and so we need not be overwhelmed by our environment. We need not be subservient to stimulation.

In this day and age, and particularly in our society, the ability to focus attention and screen out the irrelevant is more important than ever before. We are constantly bombarded with stimuli advertising of all kinds, media, unlimited options for entertainment. We are the constant recipients of societal and cultural pressures of all kinds. We are regularly faced with situations where we choose what we notice, give attention to, and how we will respond. We are constantly confronted with these minute decisions in our jobs, in social situations, when driving, even in our own homes. Young people especially are constantly dealing with situations and people trying to influence their behavior. There is tremendous pressure from all sides, at all times, to conform and not to conform! All of us are constantly buffeted by the pushes and pulls of different interests and influences, each one wanting our attention, our energy, our resources. This is so prevalent that some people become very uncomfortable, even anxious, without
(continued on page 155)

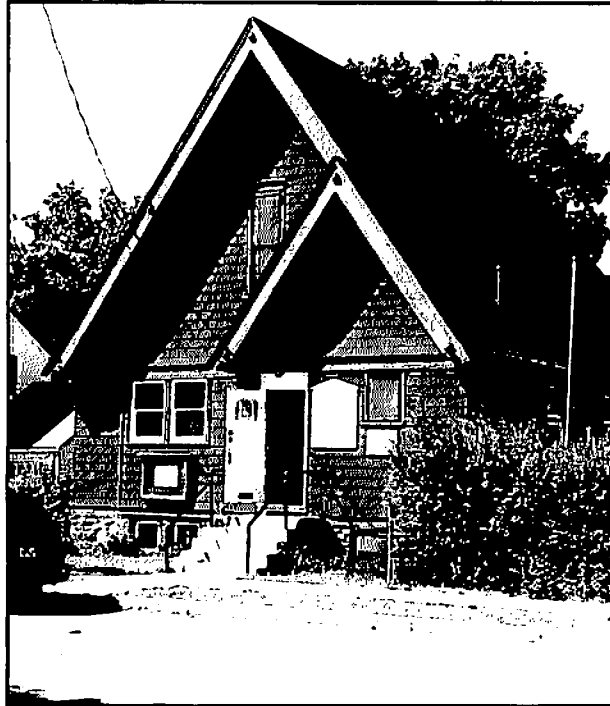
A History of the Portland Swedenborgian Church

Jay Jordan

I am writing this in commemoration of the 160th anniversary of the Swedenborgian Church of Portland, Maine. Despite many setbacks and disappointments, the historic development of this community has proven to be a continuous labor of love for several hundred people, spanning over five generations. We owe past church members an enormous debt of gratitude for their labors and for providing this lovely house of worship. It is sad that at present we have no oldtimers to share their stories with us newcomers. I myself have only been associated with this church a few years.

Portland in the 1820s was a bustling seaport town of 25,000 people crowded into a one-square-mile area around the waterfront. Diversity of religion or even interest in religion back then was limited, with only the Congregational, Unitarian, Methodist and Quaker churches from which to choose. More and more people were opting out completely—"coming out" was the term back then for free-thinking.

One of these free-thinkers was Dr. Timothy Little. Dr. Little was born in 1776 in Newburyport, Massachusetts. He was preparing for the Unitarian ministry but dropped out and entered medicine as a profession, setting up practice in New Gloucester and then moving to Portland in 1825. In the winter of that year he met a young lawyer named John Meguire who gave the doctor a curious book entitled *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem* by Emanuel Swedenborg. The book enabled Little to reconcile all the misgivings he had held about Christian teachings



Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church

and he quickly became convinced of the truth of Swedenborg's revelation. He soon shared his new-found passion for Swedenborg with other acquaintances and they formed a small group, gathering at each other's homes to read and discuss these "Heavenly Doctrines."

By 1829 the group had grown in number and many felt that some form of public worship was desirable. They began to meet monthly for worship in the vestry of the Methodist church with Dr. Little as the lay leader. Then on August 21, 1831, as they continued to grow in spirit and in numbers, the Church of the New Jerusalem was officially constituted—the event we commemorate today. There were at that time thirteen charter members: Dr. and Mrs. Timothy Little, Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Coleman, Dr. Albus Rea, Ebenezer Mason, William Hunnewell, Mrs. Sarah Rea, Mary G. Walker, Lydia Sawyer and Martha Freeman.

Over the next several years their numbers continued to grow and they soon came to seek a church building of their own. In 1835 a Charter of Incorporation was obtained and in 1837 a church building on Congress Street was completed. The first minister, Rev. Henry Worcester, was engaged in that year and served until his untimely death in 1841. Because of the small congregation and their lack of resources, the church was usually without a permanent minister for its first two decades, Dr. Little serving as lay leader most of the time.

A major problem for the early Swedenborgian Church was the lack of a model for worship, church government and other organizational questions. Swedenborg never considered starting a church and so the founders drew eclectically from existing church liturgies and structures, especially from Episcopalian forms of worship and Congregational forms of church polity. As the years went on, their worship forms became more and more elaborate. These came to be disagreements among members and outside hostility from mainstream churches, often condemning Swedenborgianism as a dangerous heresy. Fortunately, no one was ever burned at the stake as in earlier colonial times.

In this pioneer period, the church grew slowly. But things changed in the 1850s. The death of Dr. Little ended this early phase. With the engagement of Rev. William B. Hayden, a twenty-five year pastorate began that constituted the "heyday"

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History of Portland Church (Continued from page 143)

of Swedenborgianism in Portland. He was born in New York City, became a book publisher and then entered the Swedenborgian ministry. He became the first editor of the *Messenger*, the official publication of the national Swedenborgian church. He was a brilliant speaker and apologist of church doctrine and was very progressive, bringing concerns for ecumenism and social service to his Portland ministry. He was a charismatic leader and was much loved by his parishioners. Consequently, during his tenure, the church grew to a peak of 183 members.

Many prominent and influential people joined the church during this period. Among them were James Phinney Baxter, a business and political leader and a civic reformer and scholar who created our public library and park system. The now famous Baxter State Park is part of his legacy. Another prominent member was the pharmacist H.H. Hay, after whom the Hay building is named.

The negative side of this period was that along with the numbers of important and prominent people there developed a kind of gentrified quality to the congregation. This was reinforced in 1867 when a new church building was constructed on High Street. The first church building had been destroyed in the great fire of July, 1866, and this New

Jerusalem Temple, as it was called, was extremely costly to build, was far bigger than was needed and quickly came to be a major financial burden.

Rev. Hayden retired in 1876 and for the next twenty years the church steadily continued to lose vigor. Older members passed on, fewer new members joined and the church's debts grew steadily. Indeed, by 1900 there were now only 45 active members and attendance at worship averaged about thirty. Meantime, many of the remaining members became hostile toward the minister and were staying away. In 1903, the Christian Science Church, which had been renting the "temple" for its services, found other quarters and this was a major financial blow. The final straw came when a coal strike ensued early that winter, which left the church without heat. The remaining members decided to meet in the Sunday school room to stay warm. However, this move of seeming defeat led to an interesting discovery, something that hadn't occurred in the church for decades: a feeling of real intimacy. This rediscovery of their sense of community led them to sell the burdensome edifice and so, on the day after the final service in December of 1903, the "New Jerusalem Temple" was torn down.

The remaining core of the congregation decided to reorganize as an urban missionary society and they began holding services at the YMCA. But the results were disheartening and in 1907 plans were made to construct a new church building in the suburbs. It was decided to locate in the Deering section of town where most of the membership had moved over recent years. A lot was acquired on Stevens Avenue, designs supplied by the famous architect, John Calvin Stevens, and our present building was completed in April of 1910. This building was intended as the parish hall, and the people had hopes that their little congregation might grow until they had the resources to build a proper church on the adjacent vacant lot. This first phase cost \$3,300 in all! Ministers were supplied and paid through grants from the national denomination as a mission church. However, church growth efforts were sporadic

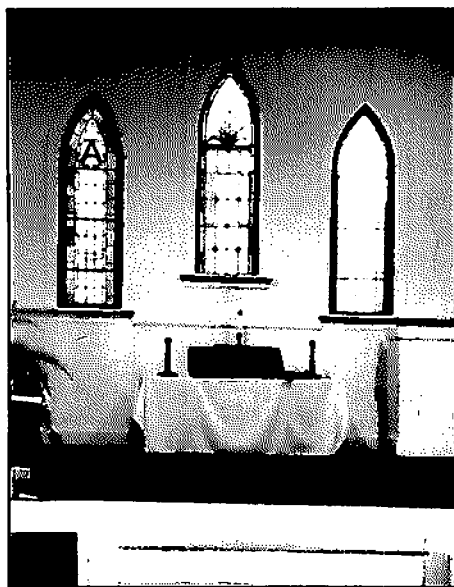
and membership never rose above 45.

Robert Gass joined the church in 1927; he is at present our oldest living member. Until limited by old age, he was steadfastly loyal to the church and very active. He was a Mason and his connections brought in new members. In 1945, he conceived the idea of renovating the building to make it look more "churchy." They removed what was the ceiling and floor of the second story, creating the present high-ceilinged sanctuary and chancel area as well as a new organ loft. He also promoted the idea of becoming a non-sectarian community church. But by the early 1950s they could no longer afford a minister and the church dwindled in numbers. By the late seventies, during cold weather, they held meetings in each other's homes once a month, keeping the church closed because of the high cost of heating.

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defeat led to an
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decades.**

During this time, Michael Salvetti came to serve as lay leader for the group. He did a great deal to keep the church going including building maintenance, public relations, leading the services and generally keeping people together. He was well loved by the members, who numbered between six and ten.

It was under Michael Salvetti's leadership that the congregation decided to put out a call for a minister. In September of 1981 new hope arrived in the coming of the Rev. Susan Turley-Moore to serve as pastor, along with funding from the national denomination. Salvetti smoothed the transition in leadership and supported Sue in her first



Chancel

months. She started weekly services in the church again, built a pastor's office, began renovations in the basement and efforts to establish a day care center in the church. She also established a counseling ministry for families and individuals and brought the church into the local ecumenical scene by serving on the Maine Council of Churches and the Portland Interfaith Council. She was on the volunteer staff at the Portland Women's Crisis Center and a member of the New England Women's Clergy Association. During her time there, the older members remained and were ministered to while the preparation and groundwork for new growth was being made. The church developed a reputation in the community as a caring, compassionate church involved with neighborhood issues. Then in the spring of 1984 she answered a call to serve at the Wayfarers Chapel on the west coast.

Despite disappointment in her leaving, reform and renewal continued when in September of 1984 the Rev. Turley Moore was succeeded by the Rev. Robert

McCluskey. He continued weekly services, began evening discussion groups and classes, stepped up publicity and made gains in attendance. He also did weekly volunteer work at the Maine Youth Center. It was during this time that the Children's Co-op Day Care began using the space which had been prepared in the church basement. Then in May of 1988, Rev. McCluskey answered a call to serve the Swedenborgian Church in New York City.

It was then that a few loyal members, led by Pat Cushman, Mary Ann Healey, Jay Jordan, Cheryl Boykin, Wanda Pettersen and Pat Vigue gathered together to decide what to

do. Committed to continuing as a church, they contacted the national body for financial help, put out the call for a minister and began interviewing candidates, while continuing to meet together under their own leadership and that of invited guest ministers.

In September of 1989, the Rev. Ken Turley began serving the church as its first full-time, full-salaried minister in almost 90 years. This was a big step to take for a church with so few members, but the "leap of faith" has proven to be well worthwhile. The fruits of Ken's first two years here have been steadily growing. We now have a growing, active membership, a lively Sunday school, user-friendly forms of worship with original musical offerings, creative advertising attracting new visitors,

and a continuing array of workshops and events on a wide variety of topics. These innovations and successes wouldn't be possible without Ken's help and without our commitment to learning to work together to create the kind of church we have been hoping for. And now we are looking forward to October, when Ken will be installed formally as our pastor by Convention president, the Rev. Dick Tafel.

We still have many challenges ahead. In the next few years we're compelled to become fully independent financially. This, of course, is contingent upon new membership and the growing stewardship of our spiritual community. We can only continue the mission and service of the church through the generous donations of our time, talents and

money. We must also face and resolve the many questions and problems that arise when a small church of six or eight grows into a "large" church, as yet of unknown proportions. But these are problems we anticipate with eagerness.

Looking back over the years, one theme emerges clearly.

A church is not a building, it is not a static thing at all. It is a living, changing, growing thing: a group of souls playing and working together in a helping, caring, compassionate spirit of community. It is a unified body of diverse elements living a life of charity and useful service to God and to our neighbors. This is a theme that has run constant throughout the previous 160 years of the Portland church and it continues here still today.

Jay Jordan is secretary of the Portland Swedenborgian Church.



Above photo shows some present-day members, with Rev. Ken Turley and wife Laurie (Front, center).

Who's Doing What Around Here?

George Dole

*When we are at
the point of
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force helping us to
do this.*

Does my salvation depend on God or on me? One of the major themes in the history of Christian doctrines centers in attention between law and grace. The law theologians would say that it's up to me. The sacred scriptures reveal the laws of life and I must follow them if I am to be admitted to heaven. This view reached one of its extremes in the Catholic system of catalog sins, confession, penance, merits, demerits, and the great big score card.

Grace theologians insist that we cannot save ourselves, that only God has the power to deliver us from evil. Probably the extreme of this was Calvin's doctrine of predestination which maintains that we have nothing to do with our salvation, that God decides who is and who is not to be saved.

Swedenborg maintains that there is truth to both of these positions. Yes, we have no power to save ourselves, yes, we have no bananas; and yes, we must do the work of repentance and reformation of life if regeneration is to happen: we are to shun evils *as if of ourselves* and at the same time to acknowledge that it is actually the Lord who is doing the work.

Our understanding of this familiar statement ought to change and to deepen in the course of our lives. We might look at that understanding as a kind of index to our general current spiritual state.

There are times when it is quite appropriate that we feel that everything is up to us, that it's time to haul up our own socks and fight our

own fights. There are other times when with equal appropriateness we feel powerless and can only hope for the Lord's deliverance. And when we are at the point of balance, we find ourselves doing our best without a sense of pride or ego, with a consciousness that there is a major force helping us to do this.

To me, one of the most persuasive arguments in favor of maintaining this tension between law and grace is to be found in the 12-Step programs, with Alcoholics Anonymous as the first and the best-known example. In one adaptation of these 12 Steps, the first one reads, "We admitted that we were powerless over our addiction and that our lives had become unmanageable." The third Step, "We made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of the Higher Power as we understood it." And Step 6 reads, "We were entirely ready to have the Higher Power remove these defects of character." These Steps, in particular, focus on grace, on the recognition that we cannot change ourselves.

But Step 4 reads, "We made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves." Step 9, "We made direct amends to people we had harmed whenever possible, except when this would injure them or others." Step 11, "We sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with the Higher Power as we understood it." Step 12, "Having had a spiritual awakening as a result of these Steps, we tried to carry this message

to others and to practice these principles in all our affairs." And these Steps assume there is something we not only can do but must do.

The persuasiveness of this for me doesn't lie in its theoretical coherence or in its accord with our doctrines. It lies in the fact that it works, that of all the approaches to addiction that have been designed and tried, this is the most effective. Because of it, literally millions of alcoholics have lived in sobriety. AA has endured as an organization without losing sight of its essential purpose and without losing its integrity. It hasn't followed the apparently inevitable pattern of organizations starting with a wonderful idea and idealistic missionary zeal and by the third generation, becoming an institution concerned primarily with its own survival. And churches in general, including our own, cannot make that claim.

But AA has one major advantage over the church. That is, alcohol is an identifiable substance, and alcoholism is a disease that has readily observable effects. And you can trace the effects to their causes. There's a clear, definable behavioral problem to deal with. The enemy is out in the open.

But you can't say the same about sin or evil in general. And it is noticeable that members of AA often have real difficulty with the last clause of the 12th Step, "...to practice these principles in all our affairs." It is not so easy to say, "I am powerless to heal this relationship," as to say, "I am powerless to control my drinking." The relationship is complex. There are many factors in it. It isn't always easy to identify exactly what is wrong. Many facets of my own being are involved in every relationship. To take it one step further, it would not be easy to design a 12-Step program for egotists anonymous because egotism can take so many different forms.

I suspect that churches fall into institutionalism so readily because the central task is very difficult and elusive. If the enemy is evil, then we know in advance that we surmount one form only to have it surface in another form. We overcome a troublesome habit by self-discipline and

find ourselves prey to self-righteousness. We find self-satisfaction in moments of humility. This is the inherent weakness in too exclusive a focus on the law, on *our part* of the process. It centers on our consciousness of what we must conceive to be our own strength. So the simplest thing to do is to support the church and abide its behavioral principles.

I haven't run across a great deal in our literature that deals directly with the 'as if of self' issue. And this disappoints me. It seems almost as though our church has really taken the side of the law, traditionally, with a kind of intellectual bow to grace. We are satisfied if we make a



*There is
much more to us
than we can be
at any one time.*



genuine effort to lead good and constructive lives and know and acknowledge from doctrine, intellectually, that our strength to do so is a gift from the Lord. We don't talk a great deal about how that doctrine gets shifted from our heads to our hearts.

What shifts it is the experience of powerlessness, the experience of doing our best and discovering that it is ineffective. There is no substitute for doing our very best and discovering that it's useless. Steps 2 through 11 of the 12-Step program are pointless without Step 1, "We admitted that we were powerless." And I can't emphasize strongly enough that we must give it our best shot first. There's a part of us that wants to believe that we really could overcome if we put forth our very best effort. That part often prevents us from putting forth our very best effort because part of us really is

scared to find out that nothing except the failure of our best effort will convince us, and anything else would be a cop-out. We'd be saying in effect, "Lord, I could handle this. I don't really need you. I know I could do it but it says that you'll help me and it would be much quicker and easier if you would take care of this for me." Which is tantamount to asking the Lord to help us maintain the illusion that we ourselves have power over our evils. It is telling the Lord that we don't want to know the truth about ourselves and evading the central question of our existence.

The Lord's providence guards above all our essential freedom and will not force us into admissions that we are unwilling to make. This means it may be helpful to take a wider view of our own natures and confront some of the illusions that make it hard for us to face the fact of our own powerlessness.

For me, much practical and relevant information about this is gathered together in Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*, where Swedenborg gets down to the very basics that are critical in all situations and in all ages. This is where he talks about direct and indirect influx, and that leads in surprising directions. The basic picture is simple. Everything that exists is maintained in its existence by two forces, one acting from the inside, one acting from the outside. At this moment, the pressure inside our bodies nicely matches the air pressure from the outside so we're comfortable.

Swedenborg tells us this is equally true of us as spiritual beings, that we are maintained in our humanity by the intersection of two flows. One is the inflow of life directly from the Lord into what Swedenborg calls the inmost; the other is the flow of spiritual forces, also from the Lord, that comes through both our spiritual and our natural surroundings. There's a story in *Heaven and Hell* about a spirit who believed he was independent of other spirits. Communication with other spirits was cut off and he became infantile, incapable of coherent thought, speech, or action.

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Who's Doing What?

(Continued from page 147)

This isn't obvious to us in this life but there are some clues. Think of anything that you might normally regard as one of your own ideas or opinions and try to trace it to its source. We soon find ourselves turning to a whole world of parents, teachers, friends, books we've read, places we've been, experiences we've had. Or if we look only inward, we find that it occurred to us. And we have no idea where it occurred to us from. The more closely we look, the more impossible it is to say just what part of any thought, any concept, any opinion is really ours in any exclusive sense. And what part we have received from sources known and unknown. I'm not the same person I would have been had I continued in parish ministry in 1973 instead of going into teaching. I'm not the same person I would have been if I had associated with different people along the way, if I had married someone else, had shared in the raising of different children with different gifts and different problems. This doesn't mean I would be totally different because that would be to deny the reality and the distinctness of the flow of life from within. But what it does mean is that I can't tell where I leave off and the rest of the world begins. Especially in the realm of my thoughts and feelings, I cannot sort out what is really mine and what is others in me.

There are depths of our being of which we are quite unconscious, and if we reflect on what happens as we move through a particular day or a particular week, we find that our consciousness of ourselves changes. One of our most familiar and useful characteristics is our ability to stand back mentally and observe what we are thinking or doing as though the person we were observing were someone else. And if there is anyone who hasn't talked to himself or herself in some way, I'd be surprised. We seem to be able to contract our boundaries so that part of us is outside for awhile. Then there are the times when we become so absorbed in what we are doing or thinking, or so absorbed in concern for another

person that we are totally unselfconscious, as though there were no boundaries at all.

The image that this suggests to me may sound a bit bizarre at first but there is more than I originally suspected in our theology to support it. It is that we do not really essentially *change at all* from the beginning of our lives to eternity. Rather, we become acquainted with different facets and different levels of our unchangeable, God-given natures and decide for ourselves what part of that we want to live in for eternity. There is much more to us than we can be at any one time. And what we call *ourselves* is not what we actually are in anywhere near a total sense, for what we call *ourselves* is what we *seem* to ourselves to be, which is ultimately determined by what we *want* ourselves to be. In the concise vocabulary of our traditional Swedenborgianism, "we" are appearances.



*I can't stop
the existence of
the inner angel.*



Three things from our theology point clearly in this direction:

- Proprium, what we claim is ours, what we think and feel is ours, is an appearance and only an appearance.
- For even the highest of angels, their evils are not destroyed, are not changed; they are removed to the circumference, taken outside of consciousness.
- For even the worst of devils, the angelic levels of being are not destroyed, changed, or corrupted, but only closed off.

If I am an appearance, my freedom needs to be only as real as I am. Which may not be very real at all. I can't change what the Lord created. I can't stop the existence of the inner angel. I can't abolish what

I have received indirectly from ancestors, from training. I can't abolish the evils which are such a prominent feature of my natural. I still am the person who was born in 1931 and always forever will be. What I *can* do rests in the fact that there is immensely more to this person than I can ever identify with. I experience that total person a little bit at a time. And tend to claim and cling to the aspects that I like best.

There's another image from our theology that may help. Swedenborg fairly frequently compares the human individual to a house with several stories. And all the stories must be there at birth. So what we call "I" doesn't build the house. It just lives in it. There's a delightful little parable somewhere in the writings about the pious hypocrite who sits in his parlor talking with his friends about noble and lofty religious sentiments and every once in awhile dashes down to the cellar to have sex with his mistress. Since we can't live in the whole house all at once, we find ourselves spending more and more time in the part where we are most comfortable. But we can't subtract or add stories or rooms.

Experientially, when we reflect on past events, and especially on past choices, we often become oddly aware of a kind of inevitability about it all. At the time we felt ourselves to be free agents in control of our destiny. Looking back, we realize how strongly we were influenced by forces of which we were then unaware. We wind up wondering whether we really could have chosen other than we did. There was a time, for example, when I felt totally out of place and very lonely in Convention's ministry. I was granted the grace to express this feeling, and the response from other ministers was unexpectedly understanding and supportive. I chose to hang in there and things got better. But, in retrospect, I can't help wondering whether I was really capable of leaving the ministry, or of leaving Convention. I've no idea where I would have turned, what I would have done for a living. It seems as though the critical choice that I made was to voice my distress, which at the time didn't seem like a very free choice at all. It just came

out, almost against my will. It was pivotal because it was authentic, because it elicited an authentic response. And it wasn't so much a *change* in me as it was the expression of an aspect of myself that I had kept concealed, to some extent even from myself.

To put this all in a kind of ratio, I seem to be independent, but I'm not. And to the very same extent, I seem to be free. But I'm not. Since I am, for the time being, confined to this level of unreality and appearance, everything balances out. My freedom is just as real as I am. That's all I need. It could be no more real than that.

In paragraph 14 of *Soul Body Interaction*, Swedenborg expresses the ultimate reality concisely by saying, "God alone acts. We only react, and seen more deeply, even this is from God." Mystics would agree without question as the process of regeneration proceeds, our theology tells us, deeper levels of being are opened. We have times when we can accomplish something only so long as we don't succumb to the illusion that *we* are the ones who are doing it. We learn from experience that as soon as we see ourselves as the initiators, we feel a power loss.

Taoism sees this in a way that has a particular appeal for me. There's a Taoist story about a butcher who was renowned for his skill. His knives always seemed to be as sharp as razors to cut without any effort. When he was asked how he did this, he replied that he didn't ever cut the meat itself, he just slipped the knife into the spaces that were already there. He felt the places where there was no resistance. He didn't see himself as *making* anything happen, but as cooperating with the essential nature of the reality he was dealing with. The Taoist martial art, Aikido, focuses not on lethal blows but on using the momentum of the opponent constructively.

Another story that illustrates this is the young man who was with his Aikido master on a trolley when a drunken laborer climbed aboard, very belligerent, shoved people out of the way and started to batter one person who resisted. As the young man watched to see how his master

would use his incredible physical skills, the master went up to the drunk and said, "Something terribly painful must have happened to you today." Then the drunk collapsed in tears.

The Taoist swimmer would study ways to cooperate with the current and would feel like an idiot if he tried to compete against it or to master it. The whole effort is to discern the underlying pattern of things and become a constructive part of it. A profoundly ecological perspective.

From a theological point of view, this helps refocus my attention, especially in times of difficulty. We often refer to such times as demanding, but the grace aspect of our theology is telling us that the Lord is at work in this situation. It's not up to us to fix it, it is up to us to discern the Lord's intent and cooperate with it, and this brings us into the current of the Lord's power, into the stream of His providence. A little

◆

My freedom is just as real as I am

◆

like sailing—we don't make the boat go, we align it with the forces that make it go. We can blow on the sail all we want. It will not get us anywhere.

According to many descriptions, the deepest mystical experiences go beyond this, they go to a consciousness of utter oneness, engulfing oneness. Maybe not infinite, but so great that there is nothing of one's personal being left outside it. And it is not so much a *loss* of identity, in a nirvana kind of sense, as it is a sense of identification with everything that is. A sense that comes with effortless conviction, not argued, but experienced. In one sense, the mystic in this state feels totally free because there are no limitations, and, at the same time, the whole being is given

into the hands of God. I would see this in Swedenborgian terms as an approach of consciousness to the inmost, to that center of our being where the Lord flows in. Perhaps the strongest argument for the image that we never change is that this inmost is totally beyond any of our powers to alter in any fashion whatever.

But, be that as it may, I hope what I have said leaves you with a sense of the exquisite relationship between those times when we are gifted with grace and those times when everything is up to us. I hope it helps prevent us from imposing our solutions on others, inclines us rather to try to understand where they are in their process, what their present spiritual needs are. I hope it helps us not avoid or postpone facing our powerlessness. If there's one simple maxim to sum it all up it would be that on the average we are our best selves when we perceive what the Lord is doing both in and around us, see that this is all one, and give ourselves to that work.

The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole is a professor at the Swedenborg School of Religion and a member of the board of directors of the Swedenborg Foundation. "Who's Doing What Around here?" is one of the summer 1991 Fryeburg New Church Assembly Lecture Series (abridged) and is available on audio tape as part of a ten-tape series, covering the two weeks of the Assembly. See September 1990 Messenger for ordering details and titles, or send a check for \$24 for the series to: Church of the New Jerusalem, 4 Oxford Street, Fryeburg, ME 04037. You may also purchase only one week of the series for \$12. Watch for notice and titles of 1991 series in the upcoming December Messenger.

The Swedenborgian Chaplaincy at Harvard-Radcliffe University

The Swedenborgian influence at Harvard has been an historical fact going back to Samson Reed's influence on Ralph Waldo Emerson in the 1800s. But the outreach of Swedenborgian ideas has been, until recently, informal.

During the past several years, our denomination has worked with the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge to develop a chaplaincy which would be recognized as an official member of the united Ministry at Harvard-Radcliffe. This endeavor involved sponsorship of lectures by Eugene Taylor (through the Growth and Outreach Support Unit) and appointment of the pastor of Swedenborg Chapel as Convention's chaplain to Harvard-Radcliffe.

One specific result has been the establishment of the Swedenborg Society of Harvard, with Eugene Taylor as faculty advisor. Mr. Taylor also is faculty advisor of the William James Society of Harvard.

We are happy to report (as we announced at the convention session in Kitchener) that the goal has been achieved! Rev. F. Robert Tafel was appointed as chaplain, and the chaplaincy was voted into membership at the May 1991 United Ministry meeting. So long as the chaplaincy continues to meet the requirements for membership, the Swedenborgian Church will be able to have one of its representatives at Harvard continuously.

Funding is necessary for such efforts. One major annual event will be the "Wilfred G. Rice Memorial Lecture on Psychology and Religion." Some funding is available locally from the Cambridge Society and the Massachusetts New Church Union. Also, the Wesley N. Gray Fund is able to offer limited assistance. Yet, it is necessary and

desirable that this Swedenborgian Church chaplaincy to college students be a denomination-wide effort. To this end, charter memberships in the chaplaincy are offered to all members, churches, associations and affiliated bodies who make a financial contribution of one hundred dollars or more. Charter membership also provides individuals and organizations with updated information on the effort.

Additionally, in exchange for substantive financial support, local churches may wish to participate directly with us through cooperative associated ministries. In this program, Swedenborgian ministers from

the surrounding community are invited to join us in having direct contact with students and in creating new outreach programs for Swedenborgian ideas in an academic setting. We hope you will be as excited as we are with this new venture, and join in accordingly.

*F. Robert Tafel, Minister
Cambridge Swedenborgian Church,
Massachusetts*

Ethics Study Guide Now Available

- Swedenborg says every single action an individual takes has eternal consequences (A.C. 3854). Is this true for environmental issues?
- If Christian Americans could go back in time and do it all over again and you were in charge of developing a new America, how would you do it and not negatively affect the American Indians?
- What is the essential problem with the Doctor-Patient relationship as it exists today?
- What does "follow your bliss" mean to you?
- What is your definition of evil?
- These are just a few of the questions for thought and discussion included in the study guide prepared by Grant Schnar after reading the latest issue of *Chrysalis*, on the topic of ethics. Send for yours today.

For a copy of the *Ethics Study Guide*, send \$1 (to cover postage and handling) to the Swedenborg Foundation, 139 East 23rd Street, New York, New York 10010.

OOPS!

In the September (Convention 1991) *Messenger* election results, under Communications Support Unit, p. 118, it should read:

Rev. Dr. W. R. Woofenden, (N) 1 year term, Massachusetts Association, 112 votes, and the Rev. Paul Grumman, (write-in), 1 vote. The Rev. Dr. William R. Woofenden was elected to fill out the unexpired term of Paul Maring on the Communications Support Unit. We apologize for the strange typographical error that resulted in the names being combined to form a whole other entity by the name of W. R. Crummin. Bill, with his delightful sense of humor, says he has been called many things, but this is a new one.

Our apologies also to photographer Nancy Hawley of Hingham, Massachusetts, who took about two-thirds of the photos appearing in the September *Messenger*. We neglected to credit Ms. Hawley for her fine work. Editor Patte LeVan and Joe Rogan of Kitchener, Ontario, also contributed to the photo layout in that issue.

Yes, Lauren

Steven Lewis

As I looked around the synagogue I felt humbled; not much had changed since I was thirteen. My childhood friend Jon, whose own bar mitzvah occurred thirty years before, was the picture of the proud papa, beaming at his beautiful daughter, Lauren, entering womanhood. On either side of me were Jim and Richard, looking for a moment like they had in 1958 when we first met in seventh grade. It seemed a miracle to be together again under one roof.

As the rabbi began his sermon about the parting of the Red Sea, I felt myself receding into the comfort of a story that has been my companion since my father was younger than I am now. From a distance of some light years, though, I heard the soothing voice say that the Red Sea did not actually part. *Did not part?* I asked myself, suddenly back in the present.

No, he said it did not part. He was talking about archaeological evidence of a "reed bridge" that the Jews were able to walk over and which sank under the weight of the heavily armored and charioted Egyptians.

I have no doubt that the rabbi meant well, but at the time I was rendered slack-jawed by the information. I would have been fascinated if we were sitting in Archaeology 101 or watching a National Geographic special, but within the confines of the synagogue, I felt robbed of something vital to my otherwise logical and ordered life.

At 43, the father of seven, I have come to believe, like Job, that we live mostly in the midst of an incomprehensible universe, a few flickers from a fire lighting up the cold cave. I also understand that there are many good souls who disagree with that view, who feel they must attempt to make sense of all phenomena that seem to defy reason. They perceive myths or miracles as challenges, as puzzles to be broken down and codified until the rules of logic apply and the mystery is solved. To do so, I believe, is a noble, if futile, effort

at escaping the human darkness. And it is not done without a price.

Those "myth-busters" remind me of the way too many educators deal with poetry. A good poem, like a myth, is often elusive and enigmatic, requiring immersion and acceptance if one is to fully realize the poetic experience. In an attempt to overcome the enigma, i.e., to gain a small measure of control over something beyond rational thought, some teachers take a poem apart to such a degree, metre by metre, that it loses its lyrical spirit.

And that is what I believe the rabbi did when he attempted to explain the miracle in the synagogue the other day. He took from us the spirit of the experience. If the role of the scientist is to try to demystify the universe—and I believe it is—then the role of the spiritual leader is to embrace the mystery. Neither can ever replace the other. While logic is a cool light that helps us gain our bearings in the cold darkness of the cave, myths and miracles warm us from within. They keep us humble and hopeful. They enable us to know how little we know, how little we control, how much we need each other. In the day-to-day world of reason, where relativity and ambivalence guide and temper our actions, myths and miracles give us moral certitude. They are the rules of life, written miraculously in stone. They are the poetic visions of the prophets and saints uttered without regard for proof, without fear that they would be shackled as lunatics.

Ultimately, a miracle urges glory and exacts shame upon all of us. It tells us we are beatific. It warns us of our insignificance. It lightens the way. Indeed, it seems to me that the very survival of our planet is dependent upon our ability to seek what is truly glorious while acknowledging the shame of overreaching our human bounds.

So, shame on you, rabbi, from one who in writing this is reminded of his own shame. And yes, Lauren, the Red Sea did part.

Steven Lewis is a freelance writer and a member of the faculties at SUNY-Empire State College and Dutchess BOCES (AP Programs). He lives in New Paltz, New York, with his wife and seven children.

A Tale of Love and Thanksgiving

from the Jewish Tradition



Once there were two brothers who lived side by side on farms. One of the brothers was married and had children, while the other brother never married and lived alone. They cared for each other deeply.

One day the brother who lived by himself began to worry about his brother who had a family. He said to himself, "My brother has many mouths to feed and all the concerns that go with a family, and all I have to care for is myself. I certainly have more than enough for one, but I do not know if my brother would ever come to me for help."

So the solitary brother hit upon a plan to assist his brother without his knowing it. Every night he would carry a basketload of grain from his own barn to that belonging to his brother. His brother would never notice one basket of grain more or less. In this way he could give to his brother without his ever knowing and feeling obligated to thank or repay him.

At about the same time the married brother had the thought, "Look how fortunate I am, with such a fine family to care for me now and in my old age. Yet my brother has no one but me. I have more than enough for me and my family. But I do not know if my brother would ever come to me for help."

So the married brother decided upon a way to help his brother with his knowing it. Every night he would carry one basketload of grain from his barn to the barn of his brother. He was sure his brother would never

notice one basketload of grain more or less. In this way he could help his brother without his ever knowing and feeling obligated to thank or repay him.

After each brother had carried out his plan for several months, they both noticed that they never seemed to have fewer baskets of grain, though they carried one away each night. This just went to prove, each thought, that a basketload of grain more or less would never be noticed.

One night when the moon was full, each brother set out from his barn at exactly the same hour to make his nightly journey to the barn of the other brother. As they approached the boundary between their farms, each saw someone coming toward him in the distance. They met right on the boundary between their farms. When each recognized the other and they confessed to each other what they had been up to, they put down their baskets and laughed and embraced.

Such love is rare, the rabbis used to say, even among brothers. This is the reason that, in honor of the love the brothers showed for each other, Solomon built his temple in the spot where they met.

*Reprinted from the Royal Oak
Swedenborgian Church Newsletter,
November 1990.*

The Case for Growth Groups

Ken Turley

One of the attractive things about a small church is the intimacy and closeness of the small group experience. People are able to get to know one another and develop a sense of familiarity and trust. The ongoing nature of the relationship allows for the development of a sense of history and the growth of the group and the individuals involved. This kind of experience, I believe, is essential to the growth and well-being of the human spirit, and to the sense of belonging and community which is so strong a need in today's society.

The irony is that as more and more people come to find that sense of intimacy and belonging within the group, the group gradually becomes not small! A core ingredient that made the group so attractive is lost. Now the question arises: "Where do we find the small group involvement and ongoing intimacy that is so important to our inner growth?"

I have returned from our 1991 convention with what might possible serve as a workable model and would like to present here the general idea.

The main focus of the church would become twofold, centered in Sunday worship, as it is now, and then also in the activity of what are called Growth Groups. These would be groups of three to not more than ten people meeting on a regular, ongoing basis for discussion, sharing and support, prayer and personal spiritual growth. Each group, meeting at the church or in people's homes, would have its own specific focus and be facilitated by a leader, a co-leader and a host. It would be expected that these groups would grow as people invited friends to join. As a group reaches the maximum number, a new leader, co-leader and host would be chosen and the group would divide into two smaller groups which would continue to meet. We would become a network of "Growth Groups", each in essence its own growing "small church community" and sharing in worship on Sundays just as we do now. In this way we have the gathering of the large community and all that brings, and we have the ongoing intimacy and personal growth that comes with small group interaction.

(Continued on page 155)

TEMENOS

UPDATE



The future of the Temenos project is looking brighter. With the modest programming retreats now in operation, income has exceeded expectations, and interest in Temenos workshops and other events continues to increase both locally and in the church. On the facility development front, a new plan is being worked on to allow construction to begin with little impact on other denominational programs.

The current direction, being studied in detail by a joint committee of Temenos Board of Managers, the Philadelphia church, and General Council representatives, would begin construction with overnight accommodation. Medium-sized meeting space would be included that, in addition to serving as a working center for the Philadelphia church and a Temenos program meeting area, could also accommodate weddings of

75-100 guests. The Center building site would be reserved for building in the future. Program expansion would provide the income to service mortgages on the land and facilities. Also being studied is the potential sale of some land parcels for building lots where there would be minimal impact on future programs. In general the intent is to get some of our investments out of the ground, and use the income, plus the investment by the Philadelphia church, to avoid using unrestricted denomination funds to continue the project.

Fund-raising outside the church would be targeted for helping build the Center building, and could begin once a serious construction start is evident. Work on obtaining program grants has already begun.

A schedule has been established to obtain the data needed by General

Council at its mid-winter meeting to make an informed decision on proceeding with road and site preparation. In June it is hoped that building construction could be given a go-ahead.

Anyone wishing more information or desiring to help should contact Randy Laakko, chairman of the Temenos Board of Managers.

Peter Toot, newly-appointed Temenos board member and member of General Council.

Opinion

Social Action a Stepchild

Dear Editor:

As long as I have been a member of Convention, Social Action Committees have held the place of the unwanted stepchild in our church. We know we are responsible to provide a place for her, to clothe and feed her, but it has been done with the least amount of support possible and, it seems, out of a sense of "ought to", rather than love.

Several years ago there was an effort to include one specific need in our budget by making a motion and voting on it directly at convention. This was effectively stopped by making funds available only through a confirmation by General Council.

Why our church has avoided joining other religious people around the world to face and respond to the many crying needs continues to be a mystery to me. I do believe that many have left our church because of this very issue.

This past year Convention provided almost \$5,000 for a new roof, and turned down funds to support a part-time ministry for families and victims of AIDS. I believe both are needed.

Recently in *Our Daily Bread*, I read the following regarding symbolism of trees:

The man who is being reborn begins like a tree from seed; and therefore truth which is from good is signified by "seed" in the Word. Like a tree, also, he produces leaves, then blossoms, and finally fruit; for he produces such things as are of *intelligence*, which in the Word are signified by "leaves"; then such things as are of *wisdom*, which are signified by "blossoms"; and finally such things as are of *life*, that is, the good of love and charity in act, which in the Word are signified by "fruits."

Arcana #5115

If we would use it to help define our church, I think we would agree

JUST FOR FUN



Taking License with Swedenborg?

Linda Baker, San Francisco church, says the SWDNBRG plate on her van attracts a lot of attention—and starts a lot of conversations!

we have the seeds, leaves, some blossoms, but have not brought forth fruit.

We need to prayerfully review our process, how we expend our funds, what our values truly are and then take the necessary steps to support efforts to meet the different social issues facing us today.

I agree with George Dole that we have little power to influence the greater international community, but perhaps we can comfort a needy child or sick adult living in our own neighborhoods. I believe we are a caring people. Why not show it?

Marilyn Turley
Bridgton, Maine

The Lord's Church is Universal

Dear Editor,

One of Swedenborg's distinctive insights is that "the church of the Lord is universal," encompassing the diversity of the religious searching of peoples all over the globe. Today the world is awakening to the oneness of

humanity on this planet, to our common needs, to our interdependence. Awareness of other peoples and religions is a strong new emphasis in theological as well as in other areas of education. We recognize that our common survival and our spiritual growth depend on interactive concern and intelligence from all humanity. We in North America need what other people have to offer: fresh perspectives, new insights, different approaches to communicating.

Now our theological school this year, for the first time, can offer a recognized academic degree in Swedenborgian Studies. Available nowhere else in the world, it will attract foreign students, to the benefit of North Americans. We believe it is time for Convention to affirm Swedenborg's original vision of one church of the Lord in which we share. In constructive interaction with people of other nations we gain enhanced awareness and energy for spiritual growth and life.

Alice Skinner, St. George, Maine
Dorothea Harvey, Gloucester, Mass.

Editorial

(Continued from page 142)

some kind of distraction to fill up and occupy their attention.

But there is cause for thanks. We are not left to the mercy of our environment. We need not consider all influences equally. We can focus our attention on what is essential and screen out what is simply distraction. We are able to choose what brings us closer to God and heavenly life, and what does not. This may seem like a small thing, but I see it as the foundation of personal freedom. It is the fundamental freedom to choose. *We* decide what we give our attention. *We* decide what we will affirm in our hearts and *we* decide what we will confirm in our actions. And it is these decisions, minute and yet constant, that make us who we are. To me, the ability to screen out what is irrelevant, what is distraction, what is misleading is absolutely essential to freedom as a human being. The exercise of this freedom is basic to who we are becoming. In our society, in this, the media age, I give thanks for this gift from God. In fact, I think I'll shut off the computer, the T.V. and the radio and go for a walk in the woods.

Rev. Ken Turley is minister of the Portland, Maine Swedenborgian Church.

Growth Groups

(Continued from page 152)

Some points to consider:

- Groups would begin spontaneously in response to an expressed need or interest, and as an outgrowth of workshops, lectures, and other presentations given on specific topics.
- Leaders, co-leaders and hosts would be chosen and trained by existing leaders and the minister out of group participants and would receive ongoing guidance and supervision.
- While the usefulness of these groups is based on creating a safe space for meaningful experience and personal sharing and growth, they are not intended to be encounter groups or attempt intense therapy. While the group can provide a supportively nurturing and/or challenging environment, participants

Commencements

Baptism

Francis—Clinton Frederick Francis was baptized into the Christian faith August 16, 1991, at the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian) in Edmonton, Alberta, the Rev. Henry Korsten officiating.

Whyte—Jordan James Whyte was baptized into the Christian faith June 16, 1991, at the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian) in Edmonton, Alberta, the Rev. Henry Korsten officiating.

Marriage

Rideout and Gilman—Karen L. Rideout and Charles H. Gilman were united in marriage September 8, 1991, at the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Teel and Olthuis—Linda Teel and Joel Olthuis were united in marriage August 3, 1991, at the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian) in Edmonton, Alberta, the Rev. Henry Korsten officiating.

Death

Barton—Katherine E. Barton, age 77, of Fryeburg, Maine, entered the spiritual world August 31, 1991, in Portland, Maine. Resurrection services were conducted at the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) in Fryeburg, the Rev. Gardiner Perry officiating.

Siebert—Susie V. Siebert, lifelong member of the Pawnee Rock, Kansas Swedenborgian Church, entered the spiritual world August 7, 1991, in Salina, Kansas, at age 95. Interment was at Roselawn Cemetery, the Rev. Eric Zacharias officiating. She is survived by her husband, Ooze Siebert. They were married for 72 years.

and leaders will need to recognize what kinds of issues need to be taken into therapy or counseling.

- Groups would have a defined length of time (i.e. 26 weeks) at which point the group would re-evaluate and either continue with the same the same or a new focus, divide into two or more new groups, or simply discontinue.

- The specific focus of individual groups is important. While we will want to be responding to the expressed needs of our growing community and reaching beyond our already established group as well, we also need to maintain some level of internal consistency.

That is the proposed idea for a church community that can incorporate virtually unlimited growth and still maintain a vital and growing life at the small group level. We

can continue to celebrate our common identity as a specific church within the larger community and continue to engage the issues of our personal spiritual growth in the context of small groups of familiar and intimate friends. It is a model found in the Bible in Jethro's advice to Moses to set up leaders over groups of thousands and hundreds and tens. It is also a model that has precedent in the family groups and tribal structures of Native North Americans. It is a model which is presently working in churches all across North America and Europe. It has great promise as an answer to the questions which are arising as we, as a church community, and as a denomination, grow beyond the self-defined limits of a "small group."

Reprinted with permission from the Portland Swedenborgian Church Newsletter, August 1991.

The President Reports

The committee reviewing and making recommendations for adjustments to our structure is hard at work. The purpose of this review, provided by the *ad hoc* committee in its work a few years ago, is to continually update our apparatus to most efficiently administer our programs and finances in light of the church's goals and priorities. Specific changes will be presented to General Council for its review at the mid-winter meeting.

Some of the areas under review: combining the Cabinet and General Council, making the Physical and Financial Resources Unit a committee of the General Council, and combining one or more of the support units. Suggestions are most welcome. Please send them to me at my home ASAP.

A joint committee comprised of representatives from the General Council, the Temenos board and the Philadelphia church, met at Temenos September 14. A revised approach for construction at Temenos was approved and will be presented to the various bodies for their approvals. Essentially, it calls for building one

to two small residential buildings and a small chapel-conference building. Philadelphia would financially support this program with its pledge of \$750,000. The Swedenborgian Church would pay a lesser amount by obtaining a mortgage on the property. This means that no new capital funds will be spent for construction. A vigorous funds drive from outside sources will also be pursued.

I want to close with an update report on the Stone House and Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church. They will be moving to larger quarters in November. Their new facility was formerly used by the Redmond Food Bank, and is only one block from their present location. There will be two separate areas for the bookroom operations and church worship. Space is ample for groups and meetings, with a separate area for children's programs and for child care. More information will be forthcoming.

The cup is still half full.

Richard H. Tafel, Jr.
President

A Poem of Thanksgiving

*Help me, Lord, to shape a prayer.
I do not know for what "would-that's"
I might wish
What praises sing
What glories extol
What thanks and gratitudes express.
Perhaps?*

- Would that I might have wisdom,
courage, and serenity;*
- Would that whatever more should be
will be.*
- Thanks that I have lived and that
others' lives have blessed mine.*
- That though I've suffered pains
I have also known much joy*
- Praise for Beauty and the light
and for births and growth,
and for wonders which abound.*
- Glory to the Power which grants
these gifts to me.*

Alex Georgiadis
Hillside Community Church
(Swedenborgian)
El Cerrito, California

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