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# THE MESSENGER

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Eric Allison

The best part of my consulting work is learning about the encouraging things that are happening in our churches. Many of our recently published books instruct us in living in ways that combine the emotional with the intellectual, the rational with feeling, thinking with sharing. We have moved away from the solely intellectual approach and much more to the experiential than we have ever been.

I've been pondering how this shift in our focus may be part of the unfolding of the New Church, and feeling certain that it is the main reason our church has had some growth during the last few years. During my musings I came across the book *Fire from Heaven* by Harvard professor Harvey Cox. His book provides some powerful insights which can help us understand why Pentecostalism has eclipsed Islam to become the world's fastest-growing religion, while we have yet to register as a demographic percentage point. As I read *Fire from Heaven* I found myself comparing the Pentecostal movement to our church. They grew. We declined. Why? They focused on the experience of God. We focused on the knowledge. They focused on heart. We focused on thinking. Why did they grow while we shrank? The answer may be as simple as the fact that nothing is more powerful than the power of experience itself. They offered the experience of God. We talked about it.

The General Convention had its largest membership of about 7000 around the turn of the century. The Pentecostal church came into being in 1906 and in its various forms now has nearly five hundred million followers. Pentecostal adds 50,000 new mem-

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## A New Pentecost in the New Church

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bers each day. We catered to the reasoning and intellectual side while Pentecostals focused on the experiential and feeling side.

As a whole Swedenborgians are proud of how we honor the value of other faiths. But, I dare say there is considerable prejudice among our ranks against fundamentalists and Pentecostals. For the moment put aside prejudice and read some of the facts about the Pentecostal Church.

Pentecostals are not fundamentalists. Throughout their brief history they have often been at odds with fundamentalists. There are "Pentecostal-like" groups which have spun off from the original movement who are fundamentalist in character and theology. The Assemblies of God, for example, also began in the early part of this century. They went against the multiracial mandate the Pentecostals were on a mission to fulfill, and formed instead a "white only" fundamentalist church which included a charismatic style.

Pentecostals value the experience of God above all other things. Pentecostals say "The man with an experience is never at the mercy of the man with a doctrine." While they are the first to

admit that translating their experience of God into daily living has been a problem, it must be pointed out that they are not the only Christians who have found this difficult. To join, a person is not required to speak in tongues, but it is essential to the unique character of this movement and defines its origins. To dismiss this ecstatic experience as self-induced emotionalism or manipulation of the innocent without investigating it is unfair. The Pentecostal movement has been thought of for years as the place for the poor and the uneducated. That is no longer true.

Professor Cox explains, "*Whatever one may think of the different ways people understand it, tongue speaking is an ecstatic experience, one in which the cognitive grids and perceptual barriers that normally prevent people from opening themselves to deeper insights and exultant feelings are temporarily suspended.*"

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# What Dreams May Come

Many Swedenborgians, and others, are talking excitedly about the film that opened last month, *What Dreams May Come* starring Robin Williams and Annabella Sciorra. The movie is based on the novel of the same name by Richard Matheson, who also wrote *Bid Time Return*, on which the film *Somewhere in Time* was based.

Following are some comments from reviewers, from me and from Steve Koke, chair of COMSU, who saw the film several days after I did. (Jim Lawrence and Mona Conner also saw it and will be commenting in the December *Messenger*. Those of you who have seen it, feel free to jump into the discussion!)

Siskel & Ebert, who gave it two thumbs up, summarized the film's set-up with the assumption that we all know this much from the ads and trailers: Chris and Annie (Williams and Sciorra) have a Cute Meet when their boats collide on a Swiss lake. They marry, have two children, are happy. Then both of the children are killed in an auto accident. (We learn in later flashbacks that Annie had a breakdown and was hospitalized following that event, and Chris's strength and love for her pulled her through). Art works as therapy, and they are managing to put their lives back together when Chris is killed in an auto accident—on his way to pick up some paintings for Annie and deliver them to the gallery where she works. All of this happens in the first 20 minutes of the film. Ebert's two-page review is lavish in its praise, but he feels the ending disappoints.

The substance of the film begins when we follow Chris into the spiritual world, after he realizes he has died. In several poignant scenes he tries to inform his grieving wife that he still exists. She feels his presence but can't believe it's anything but her wishful thinking. The afterlife landscape for him is a visually lush artistic vision that is presumably created out of Chris's memories and

imagination. It is where he feels comfortable, so it is where he lands. He joyfully greets the old family dog there, and at first assumes he has goofed and landed in dog heaven. Then he sees his wife's paintings, (very reminiscent of Innes, Bosch, etc.), and adjusts his perception to assume the dog is, in fact, in *his* heaven).

He has a guide into the afterlife, Albert, whom he believes to be his former mentor and fellow physician on earth, a black man played by Cuba Gooding, Jr. Albert explains that heaven has many landscapes, depending on your perception of yourself, your thoughts, and your level of awareness. There is great emphasis throughout on the power of mind and thought. Albert leaves Chris for a while and returns with the news that Annie has committed suicide and is somewhere in hell. Hell, Chris learns, is not a punishment meted out, but is quite real, created out of hellish thoughts, in Annie's case thoughts of guilt and despair and hopelessness that have hardened around her and made her virtually unreachable. Suicides are, like many others, in the hell of their own making.

Chris is determined to attempt rescue anyway. Accompanied by Albert, and later by the "tracker," a character played by Max Von Sydow, Chris is encouraged along the way to remember important moments with his children and his wife; there are flashbacks to scenes showing his struggles toward love and understanding in their family relationships.

STEVE says: "It is one of the most memorable films I've ever seen. So beautiful, so well acted, and so profound . . . (but) they could have dispensed with the reincarnation theme—too much is lost in the ever-growing depth and maturity that we will have in the afterlife, if we should go back to the ignorance and limitations of the world. But the movie took a classic turn when Williams decided to stay with his wife

in hell. Sort of like *Les Miserables*. One unselfish act makes the evil or the enemy self-destruct. Hell can't take love so unselfish and would have to expel them. Yet the decision was courageous and had to be from the heart. No strategy would work, or that would have defeated Williams, since then it would be calculated, not an act of love. Love has to do the entire rescue, even if it means giving up on rescuing her and staying in hell."

PATTE: "Yes, and that is what turns the tide. He makes the decision to truly join her where she is. The flashbacks to her breakdown following their children's deaths shows us that he wasn't able to do that before, because he denied his own pain and refused to be in that place with her. When he finally goes to love's ultimate and chooses to join her in hell, that acceptance melts her fear and she is able to recognize him and catch his vision. When the brilliant light of love and truth casts the fear out of our minds, hell can't exist, since hell is

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## THE MESSENGER

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## A New Pentecost In the New Church

(Continued from Cover)

*Ecstasy, as my late teacher Paul Tillich wrote, is not an irrational state. It is a way of knowing that transcends everyday awareness, one in which "deep speaks to deep." At some level, if only in dreams, nearly everyone longs for such an experience."*

There is an eerie significance in the fact that the Pentecostal movement began a little more than a decade after the Parliament of World Religions. The Chicago World's Fair of 1893 and the Parliament of World Religions were called the "New Pentecost" and the "New Jerusalem." Twenty-eight million people came to see this awe-inspiring sight of "The White City." The first Fair to be illuminated with electric lights. People were certain that it officially ushered in the gleaming dawn of humanity's greatest era. The Parliament of World Religions was looked upon as the Fair's greatest achievement, and it was largely the result of the tireless efforts of our own Charles Bonney. It was an extraordinary achievement, the effects of which are still felt today, and Swedenborgians can rightly claim some credit for it. It may have been our finest hour.

Swedenborgians were on the leading edge of a new way of thinking. We were a highbrow group attracting well-known North American thinkers and writers who embraced the teachings of The New Church and who believed we could help build the real New Jerusalem. The Pentecostal Church would not form until 1906, and when it did it couldn't point to a World Congress held in a gleaming white edifice as evidence of its esteem, but to a self-educated black preacher who gathered a small group in a livery stable to experience the power of God.

In January 1894, a few months after the Fair closed, a fire reduced the "White City" to a pile of ashes, and Chicago suffered from the burden of

high unemployment. When I read this I thought it must in some way be a correspondence. Could the spiritual and economic downturn after the Fair and the Parliament have been a vastation? Could the virtues of the solely intellectual approach have reached the limits of their usefulness, for America and for our church? Wouldn't a New Pentecost be something for all races and levels of society? Wouldn't it be characterized by profound experience as well as profound insight? Wouldn't it be identified by some experience within akin to the first Pentecost?

The Parliament of World Religions and the World's Fair of 1893

were as much symbols of what was wrong with America as they were symbols of what was right. It may be that the same could be said of our church.

Frederick Douglas, a well-known black author and former slave, called the "White City" the "White Sepulcher."

African Americans were barred from participating in the planning, and only two were invited to give presentations at the Parliament.

Benjamin William Arnett of the African Methodist Episcopal Church ended his address by referring to the Parliament as "the Parliament of Shinar," where the people "plotted treason against the Divine command . . . and their tongues were confused . . . in fact this is the adjourned meeting from Shinar to Chicago."

Arnett's reference to Shinar probably went over the heads of most of the assembly. Shinar was the area where the descendants of Noah settled to build the Tower of Babel. Arnett was telling the Parliament that

it was a bunch of babbling intellectuals bent on building something based on their own intellects rather than a Divine commission. Such an enterprise would certainly fail not only because it left out the non-white faithful, but because the intellect can take faith only so far.

It is well-documented that large numbers of the poor and the middle class during this period were especially disenchanted with the main line churches. For those who wanted a church with more than lofty ideals and challenging theology there was none to be found. The myths, mysteries, and power found in the direct experience of God were not in the sanitized banality or North American Christianity.

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Sunday morning worship in most churches had the predictability of the assembly line culture it represented. Our denomination, though doctrinally different, imitated in format and style the very church that it came into existence to rebel against. Our church, like churches in general, could not admit to itself that it was more a reflection of the culture than a Pentecost

building a New Jerusalem.

It was during this time that the Swedenborgian Church began to decline and the Pentecostal Church was born. The Pentecostal Church came into being in an old stable in the city of angels - Los Angeles. William Joseph Seymour, a black preacher, firmly believed that a New Pentecost would come if believers prayed fervently enough for the Holy Spirit to descend upon them. Like many devoted ethnic Christians, he found it

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## A New Pentecost in the New Church

(Continued from page 143)

inconceivable that the churches of the day were truly the body of Christ on earth. He looked for a New Jerusalem created by people of every race and culture who gathered to receive the spirit of God as described in Acts 2. On April 9, 1906, the spirit fell on Seymour. He received the gift of tongues. Within weeks his small group was gathering large crowds who wanted to experience God, and did. Within six months the movement had spread across America like wildfire as large groups gathered to receive the spirit. Within two years the movement had spread to over thirty countries.

The Swedenborgian Church in North America faded with each passing decade. The excitement about the uniqueness of our message and the potential of our impact diminished. The faithful continued to focus on learning all the intricacies of how our teachings differed from the rest of the Christian world. The Swedenborgian Church looked to itself for solutions and repeated what had worked long ago, even though the decline continued.

When I became part of the Church and enrolled at the Swedenborg School of Religion in 1972, the doctrinal focus was fading. Being new to the church, I remember clearly my early perceptions. The church was precious to everyone, and everyone was worried. I saw a line drawn in the sand between doctrinal folks and those psychologically oriented. The psychology contingent believed real regeneration required a therapeutic framework to uncover undealt-with feelings. For them, doctrinal study was a narrow head trip which used truth like a blunt instrument to pummel genuine seekers. The doctrinal folks believed the study of the writings was the only way to gain insights to the inner workings of our relationship with God, and to learn how the Word is a guide to understanding the complexities of our daily life. They saw sharing on an emotional level as a dangerous exercise in self indulgence. Neither approach

attracted enough new people to stop our decline. Most gatherings included a discussion which ended with what was called "The Blue Funk," that is, a depressing realization that the good old days of full churches were gone and no one knew why.

Swedenborg said that the growth of the New Church would be slow at first and catch on more easily with Africans. The black churches in Africa are actually our largest. They know and love the doctrines and have inspiring worship which is emotionally very powerful. It may be that it takes two centuries for us white folks to get enough of the Old Church out of our system to begin to grow. If we want a model for what attracts people we could look to Africa. But imitating churches that grow would miss the point. White people don't need to act African. Swedenborgians don't need to become Pentecostal. We need to have both the intellectual and emotional experience of God that fits our own character. Each congregation needs to find its own style which experiences God in ways that are intellectually and emotionally fulfilling.

Our church exists because one person's experience of God was shared in written form with the world. We have concentrated on understanding the information given to us as the result of Swedenborg's experiences, and felt it was inappropriate or dangerous to have our own. We so feared losing control of our reason that we experienced too little. We talked about someone else's experience for over two hundred years until our own tower of Babble collapsed. The faithful remnant of that failure is now seeking more direct experience of God rather than just reading and talking about it. We are slowly moving toward a more balanced approach. The modest growth we have experienced during the last few years must to some degree be the result of this change in focus.

While it is most encouraging to see this shift happening, I must say something I never thought I would hear myself say. We also need to be more conversant in our doctrines. We don't need to go back to having the style of doctrinal groups we had as our

mainstay but we do need to be more knowledgeable about our own teachings than we are. Only twenty years ago it was common for a congregation to have several people who knew the doctrines better than their minister. This is no longer true. This is not because the average minister has a greater command of the doctrines but because doctrine is less of a focus for lay and clergy alike. Some of our congregations know very little about our teachings, and fewer than half our churches have regular classes on the teachings. How can I say we need more doctrine and at the same time say we need to be more experiential? That is exactly the point. Churches need a simple two-fold heart and head focus, i.e. *Love and Wisdom, learning and doing, and experience and knowledge*. More than any other single factor, the reason churches grow is because people have learned about or experienced God in a way that has changed them and they feel compelled to share it with someone else.

I think we can reclaim the excitement our church had in 1893 and add something else. That is what will be described in a subsequent article.

*The Rev. Eric Allison is the Pastoral Ministries and Church Growth Consultant. He lives in Kitchener, Ontario. ❖*



## Attention:

### Visitors to Southwest Florida

If you are planning a visit to Southwest Florida this winter, make sure you contact the New Church of Southwest Florida. This way we will be able to include you in our church program while you are here. We may be able to help you in other ways—reservations, points of interest, ticket discount, etc.

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# SWEDENBORG and NEAR DEATH EXPERIENCES

Wilma Wake

In 1975 Dr. Raymond Moody was finishing his book on near-death experiences. The publisher wanted a longer book, so Moody went to the library for additional material on death. Among the books he found were some of the writings of Swedenborg. When Moody's *Life After Life* appeared with six pages on Swedenborg, it came to the attention of Swedenborgian Leon Rhodes. Rhodes contacted Moody and told him about the existence of Byrn Athyn. Soon after that, Rhodes attended a program on NDEs with psychologist Kenneth Ring. When Dr. Ring asked audience members to identify themselves and their interest, Rhodes stood up and introduced himself as a Swedenborgian. Ring invited him up saying, "if you're a Swedenborgian...you know more about this than I do." Rhodes went on to become involved in the establishment of IANDS (International Association on Near-Death Studies). He has been writing on the subject of Swedenborg and NDEs since then, and his book, *Tunnel to Eternity: Beyond Near-Death*, was published by Chrysalis Books (Swedenborg Foundation) last year.

In 1995, one of our Swedenborg School of Religion students, Lee Woofenden, (now pastor of the Bridgewater church) did a master's thesis on the subject of Swedenborg and NDEs. Utilizing these two resources and materials from IANDS, I'd like to review similarities between Swedenborg's writings and modern-day accounts of near-death experiences. IANDS says that the basic pattern is for an NDE to have one or more of these elements:

- "Feeling that the self" has left the body and is hovering overhead. The person may later be able to describe who was where and what happened, sometimes in detail.
- Moving through a dark space or tunnel.
- Experiencing intensely powerful emotions, ranging from bliss to terror.
- Encountering a light. It is usually described as golden or white, and as being magnetic and loving; occasionally it is perceived as a reflection of the fires of hell.
- Receiving some variant of the message "It is not yet your time."

- Meeting others: may be deceased loved ones, recognized from life or not; sacred beings; unidentified entities and/or "beings of light," sometimes symbols from one's own or other religious traditions.
- A life review, seeing and re-experiencing major and trivial events of one's life, sometimes from the perspective of the other people involved, and coming to some conclusion about the adequacy of that life and what changes are needed.

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the spiritual world  
before."***

- Having a sense of understanding everything, of knowing how the universe works.
- Reaching a boundary—a cliff, fence, water, some kind of barrier that may not be crossed if one is to return to life.
- In some cases, entering a city or library.
- Rarely, receiving previously unknown information about one's life—i.e., adoption or hidden parentage, deceased siblings.
- Decision to return may be voluntary or involuntary, usually associated with unfinished responsibilities.
- Returning to the body.

We Swedenborgians can immediately see many similarities with Swedenborg's account of travel in the other world. The Rev. Lee

Woofenden sees Swedenborg as having considerable sophistication with spirituality before he had the dying experience, so his "descriptions are more analytical than those of many present-day NDEers — most of whom had never experienced the spiritual world before." So our writings are more detailed than most accounts of NDEs. Even though Swedenborg's works were more sophisticated, many modern-day accounts are similar to Swedenborg's. Woofenden cites Kenneth Ring's work to note an experience that many NDEers have, of seeing a "presence" or "being of light." He reminds us that Swedenborg says two angels are with us as we die, and he quotes: "I have seen angelic faces of the third heaven whose quality was such that no artist, with all his skill, could impart enough of that kind of light to his colors to capture a thousandth part of the light and life you can see in their faces." Swedenborg wrote often of the communication he felt with higher beings during his spiritual travels.

Rhodes says in his book that Swedenborg's spiritual

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# River Dancing

Ron Brugler

Our family has made its annual trek up to MacGregor Point Provincial on the eastern shores of Lake Huron for eight consecutive years now, which means that it holds some very special memories for us as a family. This year was no exception. We enjoyed beautiful weather, fun times at the beach (especially flying kites in near-perfect lake shore breezes), and delicious meals cooked over the campfire. It was a very relaxing, enjoyable time.

But our holidays held one disappointment for me. We just didn't seem to find the time to engage in one of my favorite summer activities—fishing along the banks of the many rivers that flow through that part of Ontario. We went fishing only once, as we made our way home and stopped for an hour or so in the hamlet of Cargill. I didn't catch a thing. One tantalizing bite was all that the fish would do for me. And so, I write this having gone the entire summer fishless! Nothing crushes an angler's ego faster than enduring such a fate.

This can't be said for Toby. While I stood on the banks of the Teeswater River, Toby mustered up the courage to wade out into the waters near the base of the dam. There he cast his line downstream, slowly moving his lure upwards against the flow. Somewhat to my dismay, after only two or three casts, I heard him holler out, "I got one! I got one!" I could tell from the bend in his pole that it was a doozy. As he slowly reeled it in I saw that there, on the end of his line was a bass, if not the granddaddy of that pool, at least his younger brother. I would guess that it weighed close to five pounds, being at least 40 centimeters long. It was a catch that would make any fisherman proud!

As I looked across at that fish and at my son, I watched something happen that I'll never forget. Holding his fish with one hand, and laying his pole down with the other, Toby stood up and began to dance around as I've never seen him move before. It was as though he was taking part in a mystical ballet as he swayed back and forth and lifted one foot and then the other. While he held both the fish and his other hand high in the air, he turned and turned and turned in a movement that would have won the acclaim of the circle dancers who meet at our church. The sounds of the bubbling river seemed to provide the music that his body responded to, as he swayed to and fro with each gurgling note. Then, bringing his dance to an ideal conclusion, he bent down and gently released that fish, as if it had become an offering to the river's spirit, as though that fish could be released knowing that Toby had given it the thanks it deserved.

Watching this wonderful scene, I couldn't help but utter a few words of prayer myself. I stood there along those waters and offered to God my own expression of thanks—thanks for my son's presence in my life, thanks for the beautiful time that all of us had shared together during our holidays, and thanks that I had a son who knew the importance of

dancing in times when God brings a bit of happiness and joy into his life. I offered words of thanks for several glorious gifts that God had brought to my attention through Toby's river dance.

It was in the same spirit that Jeremiah proclaimed the following words years earlier: "The people of God will come and sing for joy on Mount Zion, for they will be delighted with my gifts—gifts of corn and wine and olive oil, gifts of sheep and cattle. They will be like a well-watered garden, they will have everything they need. Then the girls will dance and be happy, and men, young and old, will rejoice. For I will comfort them, and turn their mourning into joy, and their sorrow into gladness." (31:12-14)

When was the last time you offered God this form of thanks—singing for joy, dancing and being happy in response to the gifts God has so freely brought into your life? Have you ever allowed your heart to overflow with joy to the point that it makes you dance? I certainly hope so!

I know from this past summer's convention that some of us have, to be sure. But some of us have not, and for most of us, such times are too few. This need not be the case, if we'll but heed the prophet's urging. "Come and sing, dance, and be happy, rejoice, for I will comfort you, and turn your mourning into joy and your sorrow into gladness." This wonderful opportunity is ours for the taking, and indeed, such opportunities come our way if we'll but look for them.

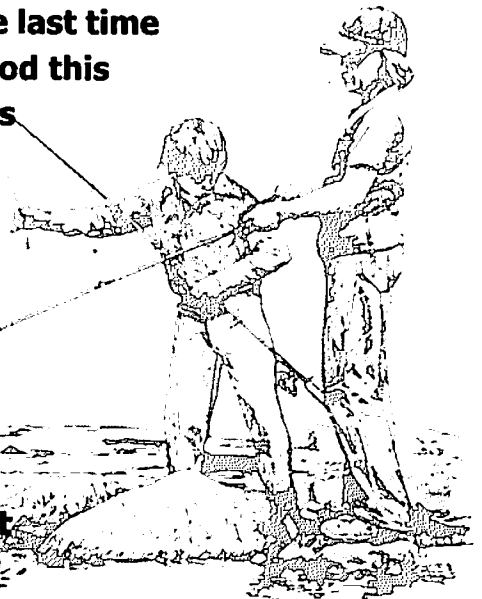
Be they in our churches, homes or workplaces, in our times of silent rest and meditation, in response to our loved ones who fill our lives with joy, or even on the banks of a river, such times do come. And when they do, may we join in the dance of thanks. Nothing pleases God more!

**Happy Thanksgiving!**

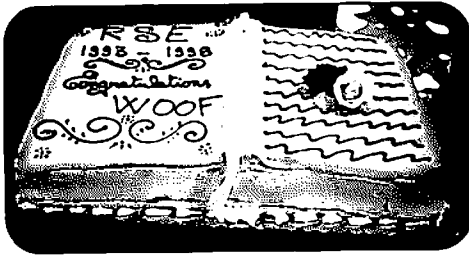
(Canada, October 12; U.S., November 26)

*The Rev. Ronald Brugler is pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario and president of the Swedish Church. ❖*

**When was the last time  
you offered God this  
form of thanks  
— singing  
for joy,  
dancing  
and being  
happy  
in response  
to the gifts  
God has so  
freely brought  
into your life?**



# Completion of Five-Year RSE Project Celebrated



Prelude to  
Father William's  
Cake:

*The following  
poem was read  
by Stuart  
Shotwell before  
the cake was*

*brought in at a celebration held at the Swedenborg Foundation September 20, 1998, in appreciation of the Rev. Dr. William R. Woofenden's completion of the Redesigned Standard Edition of the Theological Works of Emanuel Swedenborg. He was also presented with a copy of the Arcana, Volume 12, signed by all Foundation members and staff. The project was begun in 1993.*

"You are old, Father William," the young man said,  
"And your hair has become very white;  
And yet you incessantly surf on the Web—  
Do you think, at your age, it is right?"

"At first," Father William replied to his son,  
"I feared it might injure my brain;  
But after years of typesetting, I'm sure I have none,  
So I do it again and again."

"You are old," said the youth, "and are thought rather cross,  
But you've grown an egregious hacker;  
You set all of The Swede in that WordPerfect DOS,  
And no one can call you a slacker."

"It's true," said the sage, "I act one-tenth my age—  
I've kept looming dotage at bay  
By perusing AC and AR and HH  
and CL and DP and CJ."

"You are old," said the youth, "and your wrist is now shot—  
They say carpal tunnel's to blame;  
Yet you finished 'the Thirty' and missed not a jot—  
Pray, how did you manage so lame?"

"Well," said his father, "it's partly sheer will,  
And partly my wonderful wife,  
and partly the longing to hear them say, 'Bill,  
Go on up!' when I reach the next life."

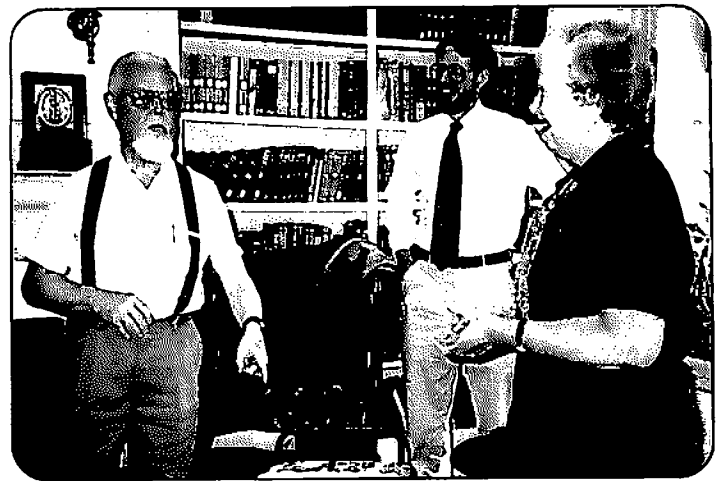
"You are old," said the youth, "I would hardly suppose  
Your eyes are still good, though you've said it;  
Is it true that you soon will be pressing your nose  
To an index that needs a good edit?"

"That's not the half," said the grizzled old Woof,  
"Why, to quit now would be my perdition  
I intend to wade through a wide ocean of proof,  
When they translate the Library Edition."

"You are old," said the youth, "with a touch of the gout,  
Though I'm sure if I asked, you'd deny it.  
I hear that your doctor has figured it out  
And ordered you onto a diet."

"Wrong once again," Father William replied,  
"I can eat at a merry old rate.  
When others are groaning and holding their sides,  
I call out, 'Bring on the cake!'"

*(With apologies to Robert Southey and Lewis Carroll from the author, who prefers to remain anonymous).*



L-R: Bill Woofenden, Stuart Shotwell, Alice Skinner

## DREAMS Topic of YOUTH RETREAT

A fall youth retreat is planned at Blairhaven Retreat and Conference Center, S. Duxbury, Massachusetts November 6-8, sponsored by the Bridgewater church. The topic is **Dreams**. The Rev. Lee Woofenden says, "We will use Swedenborg, current psychology, and the background of our own experience to explore this fascinating topic."

Tammie Wilson, new SSR student, is coming to the Bridgewater church for her two-year Field Education. She will be part of the youth retreat staff.

Construction on the new Bridgewater church steeple is well underway. At this writing the belfry section is taking shape in the parking lot, and they expect the steel structure for the cone section to arrive soon.



# Parish News & Community Outreach

## FROM SAN FRANCISCO:

### *A Story of a Church Angel*

by Karen Gatter, Chair  
Inreach/Outreach Committee

In the spring of 1998 Cliff Jepsen came up to me at church with an idea about how to solve homelessness in the city. His idea was to create a donation box the homeless panhandler would carry, of which 80% of the money donated would support a homeless shelter. This box would legalize panhandling by providing a job to help fundraise for their sponsoring shelter. The homeless person would keep 20% at the end of the day for his or her efforts and be able to stay overnight without restriction. "What a great idea," I said, while Cliff said, "It's a gift, Karen, you can take it and run with it." I started running with it, and I can't seem to stop. It's like a giant snowball now!

Cliff continued to have more ideas about how to run a full homeless recovery program within the shelter. I worked the ideas into an executive business summary and added a name (Benevolending Box) and a cashless system with an ATM debit card box feature. I then asked for feedback from Jim Lawrence, Sharon Schulte, Parker Dusseau, Linda Taylor and Evalyn Davidson, who are all on the Inreach/Outreach Committee. They all thought it an ingenious idea and continue giving superior input. I then brought the Benevolending Box program (and a couple of other products) to Mayor Willie Brown on June 6th. Mayor Brown's top homeless advisor, Terry Hill, said he loved it!

Jim Lawrence and I will attend a meeting at the mayor's office with Mr. Hill and Mission Rock Shelter administrators next week! We hope to gain a partnership with the city to do a pilot program with the Mission Rock Shelter, the city's newest 400-bed facility. With this contract in hand, we can begin the next phase, producing Benevolending Box prototypes with a sponsoring bank partner or start our own non-profit

corporation (Bank for the Poor). In the near future, we will post a Benevo-lending Box "Call for Interest" volunteer sheet on the SwedenBoard. We would greatly appreciate hearts and business and non-profit type minds to add to this budding project for the church. We hope to have this project launched by the 1998 holidays or in the first quarter of 1999. My gracious thanks to Cliff Jepsen! You are a church angel!

*Reprinted from the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church Newsletter.*

## ROYAL OAK, MICHIGAN

A fundraising benefit workshop, "Listening to Your Inner Guide: Healing Relationships Through Miracles" explored three principles of attitudinal healing October 22, 7:30-9:00 p.m. Mark Robey, founder of the Metro Detroit Center for Attitudinal Healing, highlighted

- 1) Health is inner peace. Healing is letting go of fear;
- 2) We can always perceive ourselves and others as either extending love or giving a call for help;
- 3) We are students and teachers to each other.

In the community, the church congregation participates in a shelter program for the homeless, holiday food programs and gifts for inner city families or battered women shelters, the annual Crop Walk for hunger, and donates to the Royal Oak teen shelter. The Women's Alliance has supported children through World Vision and provided remedial reading classes for inner-city children, as well as provided scholarships for Almont Summer School needy children. The Rev. Renee Billings and some members of the congregation feel that more community involvement of individual members beyond the church could make a real difference in people's lives.

## THE NEW CHURCH OF SOUTHWEST FLORIDA

The new congregation got started less than two years ago under the leadership of the Rev. Dick Tafel. The church is a participating member of the Lee County Juvenile Justice Council and its planning committee. Beginning last March, Dick conducts a weekly discussion group at the Fort Myers Beach Marine Institute, a non-resident school/detention center for youth in trouble. Talks deal with values, responsibility, ethics, and alternative models of behavior. Dick is the chaplain for the Fort Myers Beach Fire Control District, is on call for pastoral concerns for those with no church home, and is a member of the Fort Myers Beach ministers' group. He is also a trained member of the Lee County Disaster Team which is activated in major disasters such as hurricanes, tornados or plane crashes.

Recently the New Church of Southwest Florida began three outreach ministries especially designed for those with no church home: a wedding ministry, a memorial service ministry, and pastoral counseling. These ministries address the needs of people who want a religious setting for important milestones in their lives but have no church home or minister. The church is also inaugurating a "Kids' Intervention" program to reach and help youngsters who need an ear, a mentor, someone to help them sort out their choices, options, and resulting consequences.

## LAPORTE NEW CHURCH, LAPORTE, INDIANA

The Rev. Eric Hoffman, pastor of the LaPorte New Church for six years, has left parish ministry as of this past August for an indefinite period to pursue other career alternatives in the art field. He intends, however, to remain active in Swedenborgian youth activities.





## What Dreams May Come

(Continued from page 148)

largely a construct of our fears. Also, as Chris becomes more enlightened in the spiritual world, the people around him are able to show themselves to be who they really are.

I agree about the reincarnation aspect—if they were going to dabble in that, I wish it could have been presented with as much depth as the other ideas were . . . my understanding is that this is the toughest schoolroom, and some souls may choose to come back and grapple with the tough challenges here to work on something that can't quite be done any other way. If we think of the world as simply a place of limitation and ignorance, then what is its purpose? We're told that we've been given the power to create heaven on earth, but we have to make the choice to envision it and keep faith with the vision."

**STEVE:** "Good point. But it seems to me that the movie reflects a conventional theology in that only heaven and hell are known. What actually happens, with the questioning and the uncertainties that Williams has to struggle with, suggests Swedenborg's world of spirits in between. There is a lot of struggle there, even to just understand how the spiritual world works and to uncover the surprising fact that one has died. The hell that he finds his wife in is more like the "lower earth" that is the bottom part of the world of spirits, than hell. States in the world of spirits are mixed, while in heaven or hell they are settled on what one has thoroughly become. It would have been impossible to be in hell and to respond to Williams. Because she did respond, her inner state was not hellish, only confused with still-remaining inner conflicts . . . Williams' character uncovered that and played on it hopefully. The hellishness therefore could only be reflected in the decrepit character of the environment, which still had remnants of home. The upside-down cathedral was also a religious symbol, intolerable in a real

hell but useful for self-analysis, because it showed how religion was being upset in her. It was still pretty intact, but in the wrong position . . .

"In the world of spirits, the journey is extended, and it's possible to think of reincarnating from there. But in reincarnating, a painful reversion to non-spiritual states and the state of untutored childhood has always seemed to be contradictory to further growth along the lines one has chosen and somewhat developed in the previous life. You start from scratch again instead of continuing on the journey you had going. Adult souls would have to be in kids, and they aren't. Kids remain original creations and they have to learn everything that the adult inside would already know. So for me the ending was poetic and certainly cute, but implied a loss of the consciousness that would have helped immensely if they had stayed in the other world and continued to work with what they had accomplished."

Richard Matheson's book, on which the film was based, was published in 1978 by Putnam, was out of print for a number of years, and has been republished in paperback by TOR. Reading the Afterword, written by the film's producer and Matheson's old friend Stephen Simon (formerly Stephen Deutsch), I learned that they wanted to make the film 20 years ago and couldn't—it was too far ahead of its time. Matheson's five-page bibliography includes Wilson Van Dusen's *Presence of Other Worlds*, and of course Raymond Moody's *Life After Life*, and Swedenborg is quoted on p. 133. There are also eight pages of readers' comments on the Internet (Amazon Books) indicating that the book opened a view of the afterlife that changed the readers' lives. In perusing the book, however, I have to conclude that, contrary to what often happens in Hollywood—the film is better. Don't miss it!

Patte LeVan



## SWEDENBORGIAN CHURCH MEETING DATES

### 1998

- Oct. 7-9 Committee on Admission into the Ministry, Newton, Massachusetts
- Oct. 16-18 SSR Board Newton, Massachusetts
- Oct. 29-Nov. 1 General Council Temenos, Pennsylvania
- Nov. 7 Investment Committee Temenos, Pennsylvania
- Nov. 13-14 Wayfarers Chapel Board Wayfarers Chapel, California
- Nov. 14-15 Retirement Committee Newton, Massachusetts

### 1999

- Feb. 8-14 Council of Ministers EdFest Tucson, Arizona
- Feb. 19-20 Urbana Trustees Urbana, Ohio
- Apr. 17-18 Wayfarers Chapel Board Wayfarers Chapel, California
- June 20-27 Pre-Convention and Convention 1999 Pepperdine College Malibu, California



## Change of Address

Karen and Stan Conger—  
7203 Alverstone Avenue  
Los Angeles, CA 90045  
(310) 670-4685 (home)  
(310) 458-8448 (work)

NOTE: Although the Congers still have their home in Bishop, California, the above address is the operative one for the next two years. Their L.A. address is in the new Journal.



# PCA Votes to Fund Property for Stonehouse Spiritual Growth Center & Puget Sound Church

Hosted by the Puget Sound Society, the Pacific Coast Association held its eighty-seventh annual meeting September 25-27, 1998, at Dumas Bay Centre in Federal Way, Washington.

The theme of Spiritual Global Warming was explored throughout the weekend and in a panel discussion on Saturday, headed by the Rev. Drs. George Dole and Bill Woofenden, and the Rev. Paul Martin.

The main item of business discussed was the imminent need to secure property to house Stonehouse Bookstore & Growth Center and the Puget Sound Society, in view of the precarious position they are in due to rapidly escalating rents and real estate values in the area. The Rev. Paul Martin's ministry has been generating revenues of \$350,000 a year, with over \$100,000 coming in from workshops. However, they've been paying \$50,000 per year in rent, and their lease was up at the end of this past September. The cost of leases in the area have been doubling and tripling.

A special task force begun by PCA president Jim Lawrence, and MINSU liaison to the Swedenborg Growth

Center of Puget Sound, Alan Thomsen, included ultimately several others to study the prospect of assisting both of our ministries to share a property that would be owned by the PCA somewhere on the east side of Seattle. A process of meetings and discussions with the two local boards (Stonehouse and Puget Sound) led to the task force returning to the full PCA board with a specific recommendation. After some very searching discussion, the PCA board was able to unanimously recommend the following motion to the full membership at the annual meeting on September 26th:

The Board of Directors unanimously recommends the following motion to the voting membership of the 1998 annual meeting of the Pacific Coast Association of the New Jerusalem:

"The PCA membership authorizes the PCA Board of Directors to invest up to \$250,000 to be used for a down payment and related expenses for the acquisition of a building and/or property in the Puget Sound area. The PCA Board of Directors also is authorized to negotiate to lease the building to the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound and/or the Swedenborg Spiritual Growth Center.

The Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound and the Swedenborg Spiritual Growth



*Dumas Bay on Puget Sound (sketch by Manon Washburn).*

Center will search for a suitable building and/or property for sale. When the two boards both vote in favor of a particular building or property the officers of the PCA will look at it and, upon approval of the full PCA Board of Directors, the PCA will purchase it and lease it to the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound and/or the Swedenborg Spiritual Growth Center. The first lease is to be for five years, with the expectation that the lease payments will be at least equal to the mortgage payments. The PCA will hold the Title, protecting its investment. At the end of the first five-year lease a full evaluation of the PCA interest in the building will be conducted by the PCA Board of Directors."

The membership voted 36-1 in favor of the motion.

## Elections

Nancy Freestone of the San Francisco church was elected to a new and first term on the board of directors, and John Calhoun of the El Cerrito church was elected to fulfill the remainder of the Rev. Dr. Horand Gutfeldt's unexpired term (the

*(Continued on page 151)*



*Above: PCA Women's Alliance (L-R) Phyllis Bosley; Nancy Freestone, new president; Jean Treash, secretary.*



*Right: Spiritual Global Warming panelists Paul Martin, Bill Woofenden, George Dole.*

## PCA Votes to Fund Property for Stonehouse Spiritual Growth Center & Puget Sound Church

(Continued from page 150)

president dedicated the business meeting to Horand, who entered the spiritual world September 26, exactly one year previously).

The officers of the board remained the same, with the Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, president; Ron Siddell, vice-president, Margaret Culver, secretary, and Stan Conger, treasurer.

The PCA Women's Alliance elected the following new officers:

Nancy Freestone, president  
Karen Fliescher, vice-president  
Jean Treash, secretary  
Merle Lundberg, treasurer

The collection taken at the Alliance meeting is being sent to the Rev. Kei Torita to aid her ministry in Tokyo.



Above: (PCA Meeting) L-R: Margaret Culver, secretary; Jim Lawrence, president; Stan Conger, treasurer; Ron Siddell, vice-president.

Below: Paul Martin and Alan Thomsen, MINSU liaison, in happy hug.



## SSR to Put Emphasis on People and Programs

For the past decade, the Swedenborg School of Religion has been following a path toward long-term educational and financial viability. The ordination program has been upgraded, particularly in the areas of field education and practical ministry: the school has received degree granting status for an M.A. in Swedenborgian Studies; and new lay leader and certificate programs have been initiated. Enrollment has increased significantly. Many members of General Convention and its constituent bodies have helped SSR reach its fund-raising goals in each of the last five years, and have contributed over a million dollars to support SSR since the beginning of the fund drive. Cost-cutting measures have resulted in significant savings. An ad in *The Messenger* and an appeal to the Council of Ministers elicited nine responses from qualified individuals who are interested in future faculty positions.

The fund drive and cost-cutting measures alone will not be enough to ensure long-term financial viability for a Swedenborgian learning community of faculty, students, and administration. The Board has made the decision to try to convert SSR's current real estate into funds for people and programs, while at the same time looking for less expensive quarters that would be more helpful for our current configuration of students.

After almost a decade of discussion with the Cambridge Society, the School has reluctantly decided to sell the School's Chapel in Cambridge. The School cannot continue to subsidize an individual congregation when SSR's purpose is to serve the entire Church, particularly when the Chapel is no longer being used for SSR educational purposes. It is SSR's hope

that some arrangement can be made to allow the Cambridge congregation to continue to worship in the Chapel. SSR is also working on selling the Newton property, though we cannot move until new quarters have been located.

Within the next year, we hope to complete the reconfiguration of our assets to put more emphasis on people and programs, and to move forward in terms of recruiting and preparing future faculty members.

Mary Kay Klein, president, Swedenborg School of Religion. ❖



Tammie Lea Wilson (R) with fourth-year student Andy Stinson.

## New Student at SSR

Tammie Lea Wilson comes to SSR from Flagstaff, Arizona. Her family participated in the General Church Congregation in Tucson while she was growing up, though during her high school years services were monthly rather than weekly. She received her B.A. in Secondary Education and Fine Arts from Northern Arizona University and her M.A. in Counseling and Guidance from the University of Arizona (in Tucson), and since 1985 has worked both in private practice and as a social worker. It was also in 1985 that she realized her real love was for ministry, and it was only last year that she discovered Swedenborgian ministry was a possibility. Characteristically, she has not wasted any time; and she is now enrolled at SSR full time.

❖

## OPINION

### Library Edition Discussed Further

Dear Editor:

As a member of the committee overseeing the creation of the Swedenborg Foundation's new Library Edition translation, I read with interest Neville Jarvis's letter in *The Messenger*. In it he suggests that Swedenborgian groups work together to further this project, specifically by contributing to several translations that have recently been completed.

Readers of *The Messenger* should be reassured that it was the intention of the Foundation from the very beginning of the Library Edition project to work in cooperation with other publishers. Most, if not all, translators of Swedenborg in the United States, and several from Europe, have been kept informed about the progress of the project from its inception. Sample translation guidelines were circulated in 1994, and many scholars contributed ideas to their development.

As part of our initial consideration of how the project might best be completed, we analyzed the translations Mr. Jarvis mentions, along with many others, with a view towards possibly incorporating them into the Library Edition. Unfortunately, despite their excellence, each of these translations was found not to meet the criteria set out in the translators' guidelines adopted by the editorial committee.

One among the difficulties we encountered was the absence of inclusive language. It is our belief that only such language accurately reflects the inclusive nature of Swedenborg's own writing. Though some translations have made concessions to the need for inclusive language, none of the translations we examined exhibits a fully developed inclusive diction.

We further considered the possibility that these other translations could be revised to conform to the Library Edition criteria. After much delibera-

## TO THE EDITOR

tion, we concluded that altering an existing translation to meet the criteria would be more difficult than making a fresh translation with the standards in mind. As one of my colleagues on the committee observed, a translation is a whole fabric that must be woven at once, not a length of thread that can be easily knotted and mended. Patching new language into an old translation is hard work that yields unsatisfactory results—as can be seen in the current Standard Edition, a patchwork that is often stiff and artificial.

Considering the magnitude of the task we face, the Foundation would be pleased to work with any translator who shares our goals, as set out in the criteria established by the editorial committee. In general these criteria hold that the translation:

- will use language readily intelligible even to those who are not familiar with Swedenborgian thought.
- will conform to the standards set out in two documents of the committee: the Translators' Guidelines and the Style Guide for the Library Edition (based on the *Chicago Manual of Style*).
- will be printed in a format and design to be determined by the Swedenborg Foundation.
- will include annotations and a substantial preface for the work, written by the translator in accordance with the Translators' Guidelines.
- will include a preface and annotations by another scholar (who may be a non-Swedenborgian), which will place the work in its historical and cultural setting.

The Library Edition project is remarkable in my experience for

fostering true collegiality among those associated with it. We are constantly aware that this collegiality is not of our making, but flows from something greater than ourselves. Therefore it is our hope that the Library Edition will be *inclusive* in the broadest sense of the word, a shared effort of and benefit for all who love Swedenborg.

Stuart Shotwell  
Project Manager, Library Edition  
Lubec, Maine ❖

## OPINION

### Promise of the Rainbow

Dear Patte:

Thank you for the excellent Convention issue of *The Messenger*, and the very interesting articles on the Promise of the Rainbow. I was fascinated by Jim Lawrence's sermon. I especially enjoyed the way that he pilloried the unrealistic expectations of early Swedenborgians. (What would Mr. Spock from the twenty-sixth century think of our late twentieth century conception of the future?)

Many of us do believe that we are onto something that will be recognized by the rest of the world someday. The question, as Jim rightly points out, is what form that recognition will take.

The idea that the Swedenborgian denomination will steadily grow until it takes over Christianity is contradicted by Swedenborg himself. Swedenborg many times makes the statement that the New Church will not be "established among those within the (Christian) Church but among those outside of it, that is, among the gentiles" (*Arcana Coelestia* 4747.2; see also 409, 2986, 9256, 9407.7). He makes it clear that other cultures, not our own, will realize the predictions of the New Age. This point by itself negates the expectations of "conquest" by any of the Western-based ecclesiastical organizations calling themselves New Church.

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## OPINION

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Where I part company with Jim is in his comments about "liberation from a glamorous but exhausting and unattainable view of our obligation to the promise."

My own expectation is that over a long period of time conditions in this world will improve. To me this means some form of increase in love to God and love to the neighbor, and therefore a reduction in the social ills that lead many people to be isolated, depressed, and angry. If this expectation is an "ironic inability to shift one's perception onto the spiritual plane," then I wonder what is meant by the word "spiritual." To be spiritual is to be loving, and therefore to have spiritual peace.

The real question is how the New Age comes about. I cannot envision it happening apart from the explicit knowledge about God, heaven, marriage, etc. which was published by Swedenborg. Perhaps the world will gradually come into these ideas and beliefs through a "natural" dissemination of information, and will come to understand and accept the true nature of the Advent, marriage, heaven, and revelation without ever being aware that it was written down by Swedenborg. As unlikely as this is, it is even more unlikely that there can be a New Age that is not based on a love for the visible God, the Lord God Jesus Christ, and the intelligent keeping of His commandments.

In other words, I believe that the promise of a New Church will be fulfilled, and that it must include an awareness of Swedenborg's published material and the treasures they contain. But the essence of a New Age, as Jim pointed out, is not in the growth of a denomination, but in the way that people as a whole think and act. No Swedenborgian ecclesiastical organization that I am aware of thinks that it really is "The New Church." All are imperfect human organizations that could very well fade away. The New Church itself is contained in the

Advent angels' prediction of "Peace on earth, good will towards all."

*Rev. Jeremy F. Simmons  
Assistant Pastor, Bryn Athyn Church  
Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania*

Editor's Note:

The Rev. Jeremy Simons shared, by way of background, that he served in the Peace Corps in Togo, West Africa, and has served churches in Kempton, Pennsylvania and Glenview, Illinois. He is married to Allyn Edmonds and they have teenage twins. His brother married Julie Rankin from Fryeburg. He comments, "they often went to the Fryeburg Camp, which they love. I wanted to go also but I never made it although I have been to Fryeburg many times."

## TO THE EDITOR

### Greetings from Germany

Dear Messenger:

Thank you very much for coming into my house by courtesy.

I like to read what there is going on in the dear New Church in America—remembrance of the years 1957-1960, when my husband, Rev. Werner Schmidt, and the family lived in Cambridge.

Our New Church in West Germany is still alive, since 1975 without a minister. We just founded an association. Gemeinde der Neuen Kirche nach, Emanuel Swedenborg (33 members). We are scattered all over West Germany from the north to the Lake of Konstanz.

When we meet 3 or 4 times a year, Dr. Friedemann Horn or Thomas Noack (?) from Zurich are serving us. In between the connection of the members is important for us.

Many greetings to all the old friends, the Doles, the Kirvens, the

Woofendens, the Tafels and so on and to Alan Thomsen.

Sincerely,

*Barbara Schmidt*

Rosbaumweg 20  
79110 Freiburg  
Germany

### From the Editor:

Dear Barbara Schmidt,

Thanks so much for your friendly letter. It's good to hear from you. My apologies for the question mark and a few things left out, as I couldn't make out all the words. We're happy to hear you're enjoying *The Messenger* and that you've formed an association. Please do write again. I've included your address so that some of your old friends can write back.

Blessings,  
*Patte LeVan*



### Bridgewater Sermon Service

The Rev. Lee Woofenden's sermons, preached at the New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts are available both by postal mail and by e-mail. There is no charge for the e-mail sermon service. Simply send a message to [leewoof@tiac.net](mailto:leewoof@tiac.net) requesting the sermons.

For delivery by postal mail, the cost (to cover postage) is \$25 to receive the sermons weekly for one church year, or \$15 to receive two sermons every other week. Sermons can be mailed to Canada biweekly for \$25 in US funds. Please send your check to:

New Jerusalem Church  
Central Square  
Bridgewater, MA 02324

## Chrysalis: Seeing Through Symbols

(Continued from back page)

through myths and symbols offers the one sure antidote to the plague of neo-fundamentalism and single vision that seems to be drumming insistently at our cultural doors. (Feeling cognitive and spiritual vertigo midst the boundless universe opened by science, many people have rushed backwards into the arms of what they feel are simple, trusted values and ideas—thereby ignoring the excitement and creative possibilities offered by the call to change). But scientist and Jungian scholar John Hitchcock's excellent offerings also teach us to avoid "scientific fundamentalism," a type no less destructive than the religious kind. Here the "seeing through" attitude shows how a fine appreciation of physical science does not limit us to its single lens, but may also deepen our spiritual seeing, as it did for Swedenborg.

This new volume of the Chrysalis Reader can help us to keep our spiritual vision transparent, deep, and discerning; open to the challenging times that await us; and yet grounded in enduring human and spiritual values. It does not seem too much to say that this book represents an important "latest installment" on the Perennial Philosophy.

*Stephen Larsen, Ph.D. is Professor Emeritus of Psychology (SUNY) and currently director of Stone Mountain Counseling Center near New Paltz, New York. With his wife Robin he co-directs the Center for Symbolic Studies, a non-profit education and personal growth center. He is the author of The Shaman's Doorway, the Mythic Imagination and with his wife Robin A Fire in the Mind, the Life of Joseph Campbell. He contributed to Emanuel Swedenborg: A Continuing Vision, edited by Robin, and served on the Swedenborg Foundation Board for fourteen years.*

*Seeing Through Symbols: Insights into Spirit*, fifth in the series of Chrysalis Readers, is available in late October. To order, call the Swedenborg Foundation at 1-800-355-3222 ❖

# give a gift of inspiration

As Thanksgiving approaches, followed soon afterwards by Advent, that age-old question arises once again: "What will I give *this* year?" How about giving a gift of inspiration, enlightenment, and comfort to those you love?

*Our Daily Bread* is a monthly magazine of sermons, readings, and devotions published by the Swedenborgian Church since 1949, and now edited by the Rev. Lee Woofenden. Each month it brings you a variety of viewpoints: classic and contemporary, doctrinal and experiential. Recent topics include "Parables," "Heaven and Hell," and "Spiritual Parenting." The January outreach issue on "The Swedenborgian Church" is not to be missed!

*Our Daily Bread* is especially appreciated by people who have no regular contact with the church: elderly shut-ins who can no longer attend; individuals and families who live far away from a Swedenborgian church; students who have gone off to college. It is also a very readable ongoing introduction to the church for newcomers to Swedenborgian ideas,

with fresh, modern translations of passages from Swedenborg for every day of the year.



The subscription price for *Our Daily Bread* is kept low so that anyone can afford it. In the U.S. and Canada, subscriptions are U.S. \$12.00 or Canadian \$18.00. For addresses in all other countries, subscriptions are U.S. \$15.00 per year. Please make your check out to *Our Daily Bread* and mail your subscription to:

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<http://www.tiac.net/users/leewoof/index.html>



## SWEDENBORG and NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES

(Continued from page 145)

travels were not exactly near-death experiences, but that there are many parallels in what he encountered. Near-death experiences have been recorded in many cultures throughout history, and they are a common topic of discussion in the present day. We Swedenborgians have a great deal to contribute to this discussion!

Leon Rhodes, *Tunnel to Eternity: Beyond Near-Death* Chrysalis Books, Swedenborg Foundation, 1997, pages 1-3. West

Chester, Penn.

"What is a Near-Death Experience (NDE)?" from the IANDS web site [<http://www.iands.org/nde.html>].

Lee Woofenden, *Death and Rebirth*, MA Thesis Project, Swedenborg School of Religion, 1995, p. 6.

*The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is associate professor of practical theology at the Swedenborg School of Religion. Her book on Swedenborgians and the New Age will be released by J. Appleseed in 1999.*



Easter Sunday afternoon, April 12



## Marriages

**Bowlby & Merritt**—Eden E. Bowlby and Richard E. Merritt were united in marriage September 5, 1998, in Sebago, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating.

**Dolley & Fekete**—Shelly L. Dolley and Kurt L. Fekete were united in marriage September 4, 1998, at the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Renee Billings officiating.

## Death

**Bischof**—Lillian Bischof entered the spiritual world September 4, 1998. Lillian taught for 40 years in New York City schools and she and her husband Gus were faithful members of the New York New Church for many years before retiring to Pennsylvania. Over the years, they continued their generous support of the church. Lillian is survived by her three daughters, Beth Schofield, Carol B. Wilson, Lynne McClure, and her brother William F. Ehret.

**Farnham**—Dorothy B. Farnham, 82, entered the spiritual world July 26, 1998. She was a life-long member of the Swedenborgian Church. A former resident of Brockton, Massachusetts, she retired to DeLand, Florida in 1975. She served as secretary for the church for many years in both New England and Florida, and was secretary for the Sunday School Association for many years. Memorial services were held in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, August 30, 1998, the Rev. Lee Woofenden officiating and in DeLand, Florida, September 20, the Rev. Skuli Thorhallsson officiating. Dorothy is survived by a son, David B. Farnham of West Bridgewater, Massachusetts; a daughter, Jeanne E. Kemp of Abington, Massachusetts; three grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

**Wheaton**—Louis Wheaton entered the spiritual world May 14, 1998, in Phoenix, Arizona. A memorial service was conducted May 21 at the Fryeburg New Church, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating. Louis is survived by his widow, Ola-Mae, and their three children, Jess, Andrea and Susan.

Susan wrote this letter (opposite) to her father, which was read at his service, a month before he died.

## Adam Seward Hospitalized

We just received word from Central Office that the Rev. Adam Seward, the newly installed minister of our church in Pretty Prairie, was admitted to St. Francis Hospital on the evening of October 13 with virus-induced heart failure, a very serious condition. Please join us in prayer for him and his wife Lynn.

Cards may be sent to the Seward's home address: P.O. Box 1, Pretty Prairie, KS 67570.

Hi, Dad -

I tried to call earlier and spoke with Jess. You were asleep, and Mom & Andrea were out for a walk. I didn't want to disturb you, so decided that I would write this letter.

I had such a strong dream last night. I was sitting on the washing machine in the laundry room off the kitchen in the Kezar Falls house. You had your arms folded comfortably, and you were leaning against the wall, listening to me explain whatever it was that I needed to talk with you about. Your eyes were always so kind, so knowing, with just the right little glimmer of humor. You never let us take ourselves too seriously. I don't remember anything more about the dream, only that talking with you made me feel better.

I feel so blessed that we've had all of these years after that awful night in January in Kezar Falls when the Rescue Squad wheeled you out of the house and took you to Portland. That was over 27 years ago. So many years to share as a family, so many times that I've turned to you for advice and support, never to be disappointed. Years during which you could enjoy and know your grandchildren, and know that you've left your imprint on them, too. Years that you and Mom could share with your friends and with each other.

Tragedies happen every day and leave survivors wishing that they had had the opportunity to express themselves. I'm grateful that, because of those years when your health was so precarious, I've realized how fragile this thing called Life is . . . how at any time, all that we hold dear can be torn from us. I'd like to think that I haven't taken you for granted—even if I have been too busy too often to spend quality time with you and Mom—and I hope that you know, Daddy, how much I love you. And how very proud I've been to be a Wheaton all of my life.

We laugh and joke about how you're going to outlive us all, and, for so long, I've almost believed that. Certainly I did before I got my asthma under control. There were a couple of nights when I really thought that I was going to die. I could not breathe, I was suffocating, I was terrified. No one, not even Chris, knew how very frightened I was. I think that maybe you do.

We've laughed and joked over the years that you'll always pull through. You always have before. But Andrea told me that, this time, you're less certain, things feel different, that you're not sure you'll bounce back. And I worry that you're afraid. We've never talked about your feelings about the hereafter. I guess that I've always sensed in you a quiet religious belief in life after death, but we've never really had this discussion. There have been too many times that I've felt the loving, comforting presence of Grammy or Grandpa in Chatham, or heard Uncle Elwyn's laugh on our back lot, or felt a connection on some (spiritual?) level with love past, that I can't deny that there's something beyond this life on earth. When I die, I fully expect a welcoming committee of all the dear ones who have shared my life . . . with you and Mom at the head of the parade!

Oh, Daddy, I have no idea how long any of us has on this earth, and I hope with all of my heart that you've got a lot of years left in you yet. But, if you don't, I want you to know that you've been the best father in the world and that I'm so very grateful to have been your daughter.

Please come home if you can. If you can't, know that I love you—and I'll see you again. I know that. I hope you do, too.

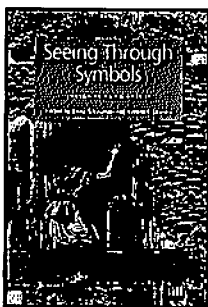
Love,  
Susan



*Submitted by the Rev. Edwin Capon. Reprinted with permission from Ola-Mae Wheaton and Susan.*



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.



## Chrysalis: Seeing Through Symbols

Review by Stephen Larsen

The symbol for which this journal was named at its founding fifteen years ago is one of nature's more transparent and exquisite versions of "correspondence." I have

allowed synchronistic impulses to guide me through the pages of this forthcoming *Symbols* issue of the Chrysalis Reader. As I did so I found an interesting correspondence between my own inner state and the particular article, poem or story I encountered. I often felt a kinship with the many excellent authors, appreciation of the varied, rich, and textured offerings, and sensed a beautiful maturation of this journal's central message: Chrysalis has "come of age." (The translucent wings unfold from sticky newness to an iridescent transparency. The unfolded butterfly breathes a "divinely superfluous beauty" in James Joyce's felicitous term).

While there is a clear inspiration from Swedenborg's informing ideas, there is a fresh contemporary feeling to much of the writing, and I am delighted to see how cross-cultural are many of the symbolic instances and examples from the essays. In addition to articles that stay with American or European themes, we find the Tantric Kundalini system compared to Teresa of Avila's "Mansions" of the spiritual journey; Malaysian wedding customs with their wise symbolic instructions to

prepare the young couple for what is to come with the new change in their lives; an article on the use of ancient Chinese war strategies to supplement Swedenborg's advice on encountering inimical forces within the self. Nor are the arts neglected, from fine examples of contemporary poetry throughout the volume, to reflections on George Inness's deep, painterly symbolism by his grandson, also an artist.

The true test of the authenticity of Swedenborg's ideas will never be found simply

in how well the faithful can repeat them, but in how well they inform an openly creative and self-enriching approach to living in the eternal now. And here in this melting-pot culture of contemporary America, I appreciate any spiritual approach which looks, respectfully, to *all* its sister traditions of the Earth to help interpret this (multifaceted, multicultural) reality in which we dwell. "We are," said Joseph Campbell, "in a free-fall into globalism." And Campbell encouraged us to develop the richness of our vocabulary of symbols to prepare us for the

beauty and opportunity provided by symbolic diversity, rather than being threatened by it. This seems the greatest strength in a new spirituality informed by Swedenborg's groundbreaking insights.

The symbolic attitude, the ability to see

***The true test of the authenticity of Swedenborg's ideas will never be found simply in how well the faithful can repeat them, but in how well they inform an openly creative and self-enriching approach to living in the eternal now.***

(Continued on page 154)

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