

THE MESSENGER

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September 1999

In God's Hands

Convention Sermon

Theodore Klein

All of us, this Convention, and all of creation are in God's hands. Feeling that can bring great comfort. Yet it also brings a great challenge to step up to whatever our part may be in responding to God's hands. As individuals in relationships and communities, we are called to seek an understanding of where God's hands are moving and pointing. We are called to move and work with God's hands in response to whatever is needed and make a difference for good.

Take a moment to look at your hands. Consider some of the many things you can do through your hands. You can reach, touch, hold, lift, clasp, guide, and much else. You can receive energy in and through your hands, and you can act and make a difference for others with your hands. What we can do with our hands is so much and yet can feel so tiny as we contemplate God's hands.

Consider God's hands. When have I felt God's hands lately? One time: looking out from my favorite mountain ridge early this month, I felt God's hands in a vast landscape of mountains, valleys, and green trees. Another time: wondering about being at convention when our daughter is starting a new medication, I have felt she is in God's hands and can respond very well to anything that might happen. Still another time: at a meal during this convention, I sat across from someone and could see the hands of God as this person told a most marvelous life story.

How can we best image ourselves as being in God's hands? We can picture God's hands continually holding us, but that does not account for how God leaves room and space for our freedom and choices. We can think of God's hands as very close, much like those of a loving person who remains close at hand as another explores. Scripture passages speak of God's hands supporting or upholding (Psalm 63:8), and God helping up or upholding when one falls (Psalm 37:24). We can think of God's hands as continually supporting. Yet God's hands also challenge us and guide us toward participation in creation,

redemption, rebirth, and service.

How are we to respond to God's hands? One vital part is a receptivity which turns from efforts to control and looks to God for guidance. The Luke reading in today's service speaks of moving away from anxieties and looking to God's care as seen through the birds of the sky and flowers of the field (Luke 12:23-27). We can be moved by the wonders in the lives of birds, the blossoming of flowers, the growth of trees, and much else in nature. We can trust in God's continual effort and presence that is alive and moving with us and all other beings.

God's hands also seek an active and committed response, calling each of us to make a difference. The Isaiah reading speaks of God taking by the hand and forming (Isaiah 42:6), and calling to us to join in opening the eyes of the blind, freeing captives from prison, and releasing people from darkness (Isaiah 43:7). This is a call to address conditions that harm, oppress, and imprison in this world and also spiritually. God's hands point a way for individuals, relationships, local churches

and other communities, and this whole church. God's hands challenge all to hear and respond to need and be of service.

How, in day-to-day situations, can we best respond to God's hands? Think of a person being interviewed for a job and struggling with fears about the interview. The person can recognize the fears, bring them to God in prayer, and resist being dominated by them. The person, accepting the whole situation as in God's hands and seeking to move with God's hands, can be energized

and fully present in caring. The person can concentrate on learning what is needed for the job and offer full and honest responses to questions.

I remember feeling in God's hands and seeking to respond to God's hands on the day of teaching my first Urbana University class at the Ohio Reformatory for Women. It was still dark, and it was snowing when I was ready to leave. I felt afraid both about what teaching at such a place might be like and about driving through snow to get there. Praying helped me to calm down and see my part in starting out as to drive slowly and carefully, discerning later if it was safe to continue or better to return. I remember praying often during the drive. I felt guided on a path, the physical trip being only one part of the

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The Rev. Dr. Ted Klein with the Rev. Marlene Laughlin (L) and Florence Swiger, Wayfarers Chapel board member.

Convention Jottings

I wonder if being a veteran of twelve consecutive Swedenborgian Church conventions qualifies me as an old-timer. Maybe a semi-old-timer? But no matter how many years I repeat this procedure, I seem to go through the same convention process every year. I dread getting ready, with so many details to attend to, followed by an exhausting trip. Even though I enjoy seeing many of the people year after year, I'm never ecstatic about wrenching myself out of the unfinished projects I'm involved in during my vacation time. I arrive at convention frazzled and impatient with the first 24 hours of confusion: finding my way around a new place, figuring out the key system, finding that the keys often don't work anyway, discovering at least one vital necessity I left at home (like clothes hangers, because there are never any in the rooms), and discovering every year that there isn't enough light in the room for reading, and going off once again on a single-minded search for a reading lamp. Finally I sit on the edge of the bed and have a talk with myself about getting too hung up on convenience and relapsing into my control freak mode, then I settle in and start to enjoy the gifts that have been laid before us.

I know I'm not alone in this process—one minister this year was wandering around the Pepperdine campus in circles, finally arrived back at the registration table looking crazed and stated disgustingly that he was going to make one more attempt to find his dorm room, and if his final pass wasn't successful he swore he was going back home. Someone who thought he knew how to find it helped out, and I assume the search was rewarded. When I saw the minister the next day he appeared docile and adapted, all thoughts of mutiny dissipated.

It seems that after the first chaotic 24 hours even those of us who are directionally challenged and plagued with low stress thresholds can relax and begin to appreciate that, hey, we ARE in

God's hands.

So the voluntary simplicity movement, as articulated by guest theme speaker Cecile Andrews, was exactly what I needed to hear; and judging by the enthusiastic response after her presentation and during pre-convention sessions, many others felt the same way. (It also fit right in with books I recently bought: one recommended by my younger daughter, titled *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff...and it's all small stuff* by Richard Carlson, and a book titled *The Paradigm Conspiracy, Why Our Social Systems Violate Human Potential and How We Can Change Them*, which will be reviewed in a future *Messenger*. Interesting how books and people seem to enter our lives at the very time we need them).

Cecile's message isn't new, but it was so well synthesized and *do-able*. One thing at a time, one day at a time, examining our lives in each moment of decision to see if we really need to buy something, or if the purchase is being used to assuage the emptiness that's the result of soulhunger. Are our days filled with doing things we think are expected of us, when our hearts are crying out to do something that will truly nourish us? Simplicity Circles are small community-based support groups. They are being formed all over the country, with the idea of helping each other gradually change the parts of our lives that aren't working toward enhancing our inner joy—we *do* need to help each other with this.

I walked out in the hallway during a break at the pre-convention session and was once again aware of the styrofoam cups and other disposables on the table when we were served snacks and coffee. How can we begin to put a stop to this avalanche of waste that's ruining the planet; at meetings, on planes? Some of us carry our own cloth shopping bags to the market. Some markets encourage this by selling cloth bags, and giving a small rebate when you use them. Can we form a habit of carrying our own cups to meetings? Can convention and meeting planners think about instructing food service people not to use styrofoam and paper? And how could we all cooperate to bring this about? Maybe just start small and decide, hey,

WE'RE not going to do this anymore.

I went on through the week, feeling more and more opened up and touched by generous, spiritually mature attitudes and positive outlooks manifesting in the face of so many changes taking place. I had been to Wayfarers Chapel a number of times, in the seventies and early eighties, when I lived in Redondo Beach. But I had never seen the Chapel and grounds as beautiful as they were that Saturday, with the ordination at twilight, audience and participants facing the sea, liturgical dancers moving to the hymn, "Here I Am, Lord." I wept, and felt, indeed, like the wayfarer coming home.

After convention, on the way back to Julian, I stopped in Long Beach to visit my friend Janet, a retired therapist who's been volunteering for several months at a local hospice. Although I'd visited plenty of convalescent homes, I had never been in a residential hospice, so she invited me to come with her the next day, and she would give me a tour.

I walked into a very homelike, healing atmosphere filled with peaceful energy.

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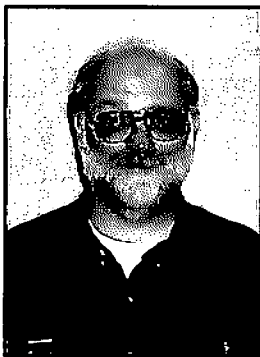
In preparing this address I spent a lot of time wrestling with the notion that my purpose here today is simply to

expand upon my words that are already printed in the advanced reports. But then I took a look at our bylaws, where I was reminded of my responsibility to address you not about my activities, but about the state of our church. Those words seemed to jump out at me, and I am glad that they did. For they give me the opportunity to share something that is much more important than mere activities.

What I want to share began about four weeks ago with an event that will forever change my life. I became a great uncle. This was not a new experience, for I am now a great uncle some fourteen times over!

Last weekend I had the wonderful opportunity of meeting my newest relative, Holden, and what an incredibly beautiful child he is. When I first held him and gazed down into those shimmering eyes, I knew that we were beginning a very significant life relationship. As I held his hands the love and acceptance they both shared and sought through their touch, was a priceless gift. In so many ways, Holden's hands confirmed for me the glorious truth that we children of God depend upon one another in so many ways, for all of us need a hand to hold onto every now and then. Our need for love and acceptance is real, and when we truly experience it, our lives are forever changed for the better.

But there is something else I must share with you. Holden's hands are not what you would picture a baby's hands to be. He was born with an extremely rare birth abnormality, something called a congenital limb aplasia. He has no forearms, and his hands are at the end of his upper arm, where there are no elbows or wrists. His hands have no thumbs, and only two or three fingers,



We Are All the Work of God's Hands

President's Report

depending upon how you count them, because two of the fingers on each hand grew together in the womb. And so last week when I held those hands, there would be some who might say that I was holding an imperfection. But they would be so wrong, so very wrong. The love and acceptance that those little hands both sought and shared, made them the most perfect hands in the world! We should all be like Holden's hands.

I believe it was providential that the same week I learned of Holden's birth, Martha called from Central Office to share with me the idea for this year's schedule cover. She told me that it would include those familiar words from Isaiah's vision of the great potter at work, words that proclaim that "we are all the work of God's hands." When we finished that call, those words kept resonating in my mind. I sat in my office and cried. I cried for Holden and my niece Renee, and my sister, Mary. I cried for those tiny little hands. And I cried because God had, for some reason, let this little one down. But through all that wall of tears I was able to see something else with a clarity that astounded me. It holds a lesson for us all to carry with us.

This year our theme proclaims the fact that we want our church to be held in God's hands. If I would ask that you picture those hands for a moment in your mind, what kind of hands would you see? I would venture a guess that those hands would be perfect, with four fingers and a thumb, smooth skin, warm, and soft to the touch. They would be strong and steady, but also comforting and loving—all good qualities, because we want to hold onto a faith that assures us that God can be nothing else.

I realized that we oftentimes liken our

church to God's hands. We want this denomination to reflect the same qualities by being perfect, strong, steady, comforting, and loving. Yes, we want the hands of this church to express the same qualities as God's hands. And when it fails to attain this ideal, we grow irritated, angry, upset, and disillusioned because we have failed to be what we think God wants us to be.

But I want to ask you a question. What if the hands of God and the hands of this church were like Holden's? Would we rely upon God and the church less? Would we refuse to go to them for the love and comfort that we so often need in life? Would we look at them and turn away, as though our seeing was a sinful act? I hope not, because those hands would have much to offer us in spite of their shortcomings. And if you doubt me, I have a great nephew that I want you to meet. He has so much to teach you.

I have shared this with you today because in so many ways, as your president this has been a year of realizing and struggling with the fact that these hands that we want our church to be are not always manifested in a perfect external form. This has been a year in which the state of our church has revolved around our realization of that fact. It has been a difficult lesson for us to learn.

I know that there are some of you here who think that these hands have been calloused, rough, and anything but comforting. In response, you have raised hands of your own that reflect the same malformations. Be it in regard to tumults that have taken place in some of our churches or the issues we have confronted in regard to our seminary, or some of the judgments we have made about each other, the hands we have used have fallen far short of what we expect the hands of God to be like.

But I also know that there are others of you who have found the hands of this church to be nurturing and loving, a source of comfort and strength. And I know that whether you are in New York, St. Louis, Cleveland, Edmonton, or Pretty Prairie, these hands have reached out to you in this year gone by. And our

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We Are All the Work of God's Hands

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touching has been a supportive and healing experience, and in that touch, the hands of God have been present.

Today, I hope that all of us realize two things. First, let us acknowledge that these hands that we know as the Swedenborgian Church have not always fulfilled our idea of perfection. And let us repent and ask for God's forgiveness for that lack and dedicate ourselves to reformation where it is needed, so that regeneration might follow. But let us also realize something else, something that is even more important to us. Let us affirm and celebrate the fact that the hands of this same church have tried to reach out with love and acceptance, in the best way that was known at the time. Our efforts have been a good thing. And we know that this is all that God expects of us—to do the best we can.

I can assure you that we are doing our best. This week, our Council of Ministers has worked hard to be more honest and direct and caring in our communication with each other. Perfect? No. But our trying is leading us forward. The

SSR board and faculty are working hard to implement changes that will make our seminary a better place, where the

God has given us hands, more like Holden's hands, so that our perfection can be attained internally, through the love and acceptance we share and receive.

important truths that we have to proclaim to the world can be uplifted and spread in new and exciting ways. Perfect ideas? No, but exciting for the potential they hold. Our General Council is working hard to lead our church forward into new areas of growth and renewal. Perfect attempts? No, but good and supportive of what our church is called to be. Our support units are doing the same—not perfect, but still helping us to reach out and become all that God intends. And in our local centers, from Wayfarers to Temenos, from Fryeburg to Stonehouse,

from Washington DC to Edmonton, we are doing the best that we can. In our trying, God is helping us to do wonderful things.

As my first year as president draws to a close, I no longer picture the perfect hand as an image of what this church is, or what it can be, or even what I want it to be. And I mean it when I say that perhaps God has given us hands, more like Holden's hands, so that our perfection can be attained internally, through the love and acceptance we share and receive. These hands demand that we need each other. These hands insist that we support each other. These hands require that we care about each other in many ways. This is what being in God's hands is all about. May we seek to be those hands in the year to come. ♦

Convention Jottings

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People were living day to day with an open awareness that each day might be their last. Individual rooms were filled with articles from home, and family involvement is supported and encouraged. A counselor is on staff to help residents and family members talk about feelings and questions as they come up. I was introduced to Angelo, who welcomed me with a glowing smile and warm handshake. He is HIV positive and dying of lung cancer. He said he had recently been interviewed for a week by a Japanese film crew doing a documentary about hospice, and it was going to be broadcast on the Internet. Angelo said he needed a new computer so he could reach out to people on the Internet who were interested in hospice, and set up a way that they could communicate with each other. He was

brimming with enthusiasm as he told me this story, as well as details about his daily life and visits with his son. I chatted with Ron, the director who started the hospice nearly two years ago. It is the only residential hospice in the area.

The cumulative effect and spillover from convention had happened again, as it seems to happen in one way or another every year. I don't know that I would have taken the time to visit and become more educated about hospice if the experiences at convention hadn't sharpened my awareness of the things that really matter. Maybe sharpening our awareness of the things that really matter is the best thing convention does. We can come away feeling privileged, as I did, to be a part of this church family. ♦

Patte LeVan

SCENES AROUND CONVENTION



Steve Koke, COMSU chair, with Swedenborg Foundation Executive Director Deborah Forman & Susan Poole, COMSU member & Foundation acquisitions editor.



Lisa Cole & Linda Sebenius, Puget Sound church, who provided child care, music & a Johnny Applesseed children's play; with one of the play's stars, Jaimie LaVerde.

In God's Hands (Continued from cover)

path. The snow lessened, all around me became brighter, and the sun emerged. The sun emerging helped me to feel welcomed by God's hands and ready to go on with teaching in this situation which brought both fears and excitement to me.

Confusion and more fears came to me as I faced the chaos of a first day of classes and the culture shock of being in a prison. Students approached with anxieties, questions, and challenges. There were moments when I wondered "What am I doing here," but also moments when I felt all was in God's hands and I was called to be in that situation and respond. As the morning continued, I saw more and more of a path to follow being present and respectful for each student, bringing my knowledge into the situation, and offering contributions that might be part of rebirth and healing. Having been physically inside and having worked in prisons makes especially real for me the call to work with God's hands in freeing ourselves from many kinds of prisons and captivities.

God's hands come with a loving and freeing power. Swedenborg describes how hands image and correspond to power (See, for example, *Arcana Coelestia*, no. 878), and we can think of God's hands as meaning God's power and God's action. Swedenborg describes God's providence as God's love acting through God's wisdom (*Divine Providence*, no. 337). God's love, guided by God's wisdom, nurtures, supports, and guides while continually seeking what is best for all beings. God's constant effort with all people is to bestow on all of us the happiness of eternal life in heaven (*Divine Providence*, no. 123). This happiness can come only with our free response and choosing of a life of heaven or life of charity.

God's hands can be described as always present and supporting but never falling heavily on us. What is created and provided with God's hands leave room for our choices. With our freedom comes the possibility of doing evil and causing harm as well as contributing to good and benefiting others. There are patterns of order and consequences extending to life beyond this life which mean that doing evil eventually brings evil on self, with only love and never punishment coming directly from God. Yet among the consequences of people doing evil are undeserved harms and suffering inflicted on others. We can think of God's hands in relation to undeserved harms and sufferings as in no way intending them, but as seeking to restore, redeem, bring healing, and aid rebirth. Most immediately from God is what God directly wills, such as the happiness of



Liturgical dancers at ordination.

each person, while most remotely from God is the toleration of evil (*Arcana Coelestia*, no. 9940). God's hands, in the face of evil, continually work to bend toward good.

Revelation 3:20 speaks of God standing and knocking at the door, ready to eat together with us if we hear God and open the door. Swedenborg speaks of God at the door knocking, and our part as including opening the door and welcoming God (*Divine Providence*, no. 119). We can look to God's hands as ready to guide each of us in whatever part we have in relationships, communities, the church, and the world. We need to recognize God's hands and respond in walking on a path to which they point.

The path to which God's hands point is one of an ongoing life of charity, service, and consideration of others. Necessary for this life are looking to God, resisting what is evil and harmful, and contributing to good. Out of being on this path over time there can come a new motivating joy which delights in the good growth of others.

The path to which God's hands point, that which frees from captivity and darkness and leads into love, freedom, and light, can take a vast variety of forms. One person's life can have as a great focus faithful service in the detailed workings in both a local church and the denomination. Growth and nurturing of children can be a great focus for another. For another, God's hands and the person's response can involve a life of recovery from abuse and being able to draw on the person's learnings to assist others. A great focus for another can be on addressing some of the injustices and oppressions that subjugate and disadvantage people. For still another, love of nature and humans living in harmony with nature with the guidance of God's hands can be a great focus. Each person's vocation, relationships, and participation in communities would have a different shape and yet be in God's hands.

God is continually working to guide our rebirth and reshaping in a life of charity with others. Think of what God may be forming for you. How can you respond to God's hands with each being you encounter? Think of responding to God's hands as part of relationships, families, church and other communities, this convention, the world, and more. May you come to be more and more in God's hands. Let us pray.

God, lead us by the hands, and help us see the way. Help us to welcome you more and be more and more sensitive to needs around us. Help us to go from here with love in our hearts and love in our actions. Amen.

The Rev. Dr. Theodore Klein is professor of theology and philosophy at the Swedenborg School of Religion and author of The Power of Service, published by J. Appleseed and Co. ♦



Drs. Mary Kay & Ted Klein.

The Examined Life



Cecile Andrews

Voluntary Simplicity—a term that calls up many meanings. To me, it has always

seemed like common sense, but to many it calls up something else—as the 20-something son of a friend of mine said, “What’s that thing your friend Cecile is involved in, that ‘self-deprivation’ movement?”

In reality, Simplicity is about people trying to live more fully so that they can live more consciously. In particular, people have discovered that our extreme consumerism is destroying both our lives and our planet. In our race for “getting and spending” we have lost sight of what is important.

To me, the simplicity movement is “the examined life”—we are looking at everything and asking about the consequences for people and the planet. We are trying to learn to live in more harmony and balance with ourselves, each other, and nature.

I know very little about Swedenborg, although I have long been curious about him since my particular area of study focuses on the Transcendentalists, a group of people influenced by Swedenborg just as the modern Simplicity movement is influenced by the Transcendentalists. So when I was asked to speak, I welcomed the chance to learn more about Swedenborgianism. However, when I began preparing my remarks I felt somewhat inadequate—what could you want to hear from an outsider? So I tried to learn more about Swedenborg—a monumental task! What I did see, though, is that he was essentially a seeker, always looking for truth, and would never turn away from learning from the outsider. So I felt a little better.

But still, I hesitated. As a Unitarian I rarely use traditional theological

language, and I wasn’t sure about how to address the theme of “In God’s Hands.” So I just asked myself—“What does this phrase mean to me?” What immediately came to mind was a sense of peace and security, of being valued and cared for.

“Well,” I thought, “This is just what people are looking for in the Simplicity movement, so that’s easy for me to address.” People in the Simplicity movement have realized that being cared for and valued is a rare experience in our consumerist, greed-driven society, a society that puts profits above people and the planet.

And so we feel empty and alone, and to relieve our anxiety, we escape into the shopping malls and into the television, trying to fill the emptiness, but never able to do it. We are looking for peace of mind in all the wrong places, pursuing the false promise of consumerism.

There have always been those who have advocated simplicity, people who knew that when we turn to “things” we have less time for the inner life. The difference today is the environment. Not only does an obsession with things undermine our inner lives, it is destroying the planet. We know the facts.

Since 1940, Americans have used up as large a share of the earth’s mineral resources as all previous humans put together. We’ve lost 50% of our wetlands, 85% of our old growth forests, 99% of the tall grass prairie and more than 520 species of native plants and animals with another 6,000 at risk.

We consume 40% of the world’s gas and more paper, steel, aluminum, energy, water, and meat per capita than any other society on the planet. We would need four additional planets if the rest of the world consumed as we do. We are polluting the air, destroying the soil, eliminating species, changing the climate through greenhouse gases and global warming. Cancer is increasing.

And we do this so we can drink pop,

and drive our cars to the malls, and eat fast-food in one hand while talking on our cell phones with the other.

We’re working longer hours than 20 years ago and savings are lower than they have ever been since the Depression.

We spend twice as much on children’s athletic shoes as we do on children’s books. We watch 15 hours of TV a week.

Of the industrialized countries, we are:

- Number one in billionaires and number one in children and elderly living in poverty.
- Number one in wealth and number one in the gap between the rich and the poor.
- Number one in big homes and number one in homelessness.
- Number one in private consumption and last in savings.
- Number one in executive salaries and number one in inequality of pay.

We’re violent and bored. Kids are

shooting kids and we give prozac to children at age three.

We do not look like the noble creatures that we are.

For me, Simplicity is best defined by

Thoreau in those words we all recognize:

*I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately; to front only the essential facts of life
And see if I could learn what it had to teach
And not, when I came to die
Discover that I had not lived.*

Let’s take a look at each section, because I think each one throws light on what voluntary simplicity is:

I went to the woods: it was not an escape from civilization; it gave him breathing room, a chance to reflect. We all need this chance to reflect; as busy as we are, we are extremely vulnerable to manipulation and exploitation.

Also, it was about making connection with nature. You know how he talked

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There also exists a sleeping sickness of the soul. Its most dangerous aspect is that one is unaware of its coming . . .

The Examined Life

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about the pond, how the pond was a window to truths. It was more than a pond, it was a symbol of life. We have been separated from nature and thus don't care about it. If we don't care, we won't save it. As Alice Walker said, "Everything we love can be saved."

I wished to live deliberately: That is, to live consciously. To not live by rote, to not just go along. To choose how to live.

To front only the essential facts of life: In our own lives do we spend time on essential things? How much time do we spend grooming, how much time shopping? We have more shopping malls than schools, more prisons than schools.

And not, When I came to die, discover that I had not lived: This is it! This is the core of simplicity. To feel fully alive. We are not fully alive. Albert Schweitzer puts it well:

You know of the disease in Central Africa called sleeping sickness . . . There also exists a sleeping sickness of the soul. Its most dangerous aspect is that one is unaware of its coming . . . As soon as you notice the slightest sign of indifference, the moment you become aware of the loss of a certain seriousness, of longing, of enthusiasm and zest, take it as a warning. You should realize that your soul suffers if you live superficially.

That is the issue. How do we wake up from this sleeping sickness of the soul?

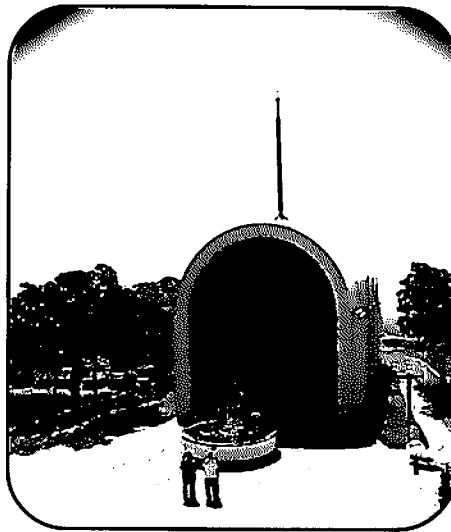
Thoreau went on to say, *I did not wish to live what was not life, living is so dear . . .* How much in our lives is not life? For instance, how often do we interact with anything? Just look at our own kitchens: We use a machine to take away the joy of cutting vegetables, use a machine instead of hanging our clothes to dry; use a machine to wash our dishes instead of standing there singing. Not too many people sing while they load the dishwasher.

So we are trying to return to the natural, to live in harmony with nature, to realize that we are a part of nature.

As Abraham Heschel said, "Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the

universe becomes a marketplace for you."

We want to build a society of celebration instead of consumerism.



Pepperdine Chapel

Cecile Andrews, guest theme speaker and Pre-convention workshop leader, is the author of *The Circle of Simplicity: Return to the Good Life* (HarperCollins 1997). She is a former community college administrator and now the director of the Simplicity Circles Project with Seeds of Simplicity, a program of the Center for Religion, Ethics, & Social Policy at Cornell University.

She writes a column called "Simplicity" for the *Seattle Times* and leads workshops on Simplicity and Finding Your Passion. She has her doctorate in education from Stanford University. ♦

We Join Spokes Together in a Wheel

We join spokes together in a wheel, but it is the center hole that makes the wagon move.

We shape clay into a pot, but it is the emptiness inside that holds whatever we want.

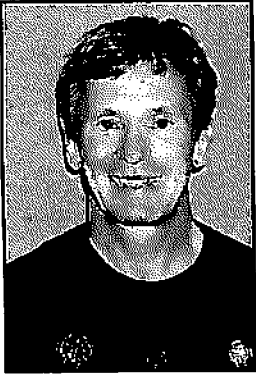
We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable.

We work with being but non-being is what we use.

Lao-tzu, 604-511 B.C.



Participants of pre-convention workshop, led by Cecile Andrews & Lorraine Sando, with EdSU staff B.J. Neuenfeldt & Marjie Leas. From left back row: Cecile Andrews, Lorraine Sando, Manon Washburn, Susan Poole, Marjie Leas, Carl Blenkin. Middle row: Juliet Hadden (seated), B.J. Neuenfeldt, Mary Ann Thorballsson, Phyllis Bosley, Jean Treash, Patte LeVan. Front Row: Jane Siebert, Marge Calby, Diane Rienstra.



First, to you the students, I congratulate you. You made it! I know that you have been through a lot to get to this moment, and it shows your determination

to serve God. We need you. We need people who are tough, tenacious, intelligent and willing. It is no small thing to be ordained as Swedenborgian ministers. Statistically you would have had a better chance of becoming astronauts. But, you have answered a higher call to lead those who want to explore another dimension, the dimension of heart and mind and soul.

I must point out that in order to get here all of you have had to be on a little bit of an ego trip. I've been on this trip for quite some time now and I also know that this is not a bad thing. You have to believe that you have something to say, something to offer, that you can do something that will make a difference. You have to be convinced that there are things you can do that no one else can do just the way you do. I'm glad you believe that God has called you to the ministry. In this good company let's call your ego trip a healthy proprium. While you need to have a healthy proprium it is also what can and will get you into trouble from time to time. As Christopher Hasler, (then president of the British Conference) once said to me while I was in the midst of shooting my mouth off by criticizing someone who didn't deserve it, "Watch your proprium." So I charge you to remember, every good that will be done in your entire ministry is not from you but from the Lord working through you.

You are graduating at a time I believe we are becoming more New Church than we have ever been because we are allowing ourselves to be excited about what we believe. Keep your hearts open to the Lord and never be afraid to share how precious your faith is—that is what inspires and transforms others.

The Future of Ministry

Eric Allison

I am here this evening because I received an email from Mary Kay a few weeks ago inviting me to speak to you about the future of ministry. The email said I had between seven and nine minutes to cover the topic, and Bob Kirven would also have the same time allotted to cover the same subject. Unfortunately, one more trip was a bit more than Bob's physical body would allow. However, Bob and I have corresponded by email and telephone, and my words tonight are B.K. approved. Email is just one example of how things are changing. When I graduated twenty-two years ago email did not exist. I typed my graduation speech on a portable Royal Sprite typewriter which I bought for \$49 and still have in a drawer at the cottage. When Y2K hits on January 1st I plan to sell it for \$10,000 or for the highest bid, which I hope comes from Bill Gates.

The initial request by Mary Kay to keep the talk under ten minutes was absolutely correct because research has shown that your attention will begin to wander after about seven and a half minutes. It's true most North Americans have been conditioned to expect a commercial every seven and a half minutes. If I don't do something to change the pace at that point your minds will begin to wander, and you'll begin looking around for the refrigerator. You don't think you've been conditioned? Does the name Pavlov ring a bell? My point is that we live in a world that changes so rapidly no one is really sure what will happen, or how quickly, or what the long term consequences will be. What is certain is that

all God's children are caught in this whirlpool of changes with you and they are looking to you for spiritual leadership. Your job, our job, is to tell others about the New Church and to demonstrate it by how we live.

Everyone is gathered here this evening because a little over two hundred years ago a group of people in England believed Swedenborg's writings were a genuine revelation from God. They had the courage to go against the thinking of the day and tell the world that a deeper level of Divine Love and Wisdom had just begun to change the world and that this movement of the Divine in the hearts and minds of people would not stop until the world had become a heaven on earth. It was an astonishingly radical idea for Christians to have in the eighteenth century. The question for you and for all of us to ask ourselves is—how does what we are doing and what we are planning to do fit into the New Church? This is the measuring stick we must use on everything we do. Is it New Church?

What we are as spiritual beings is changing, and to keep thinking of us as we were fifty or ten or five years ago, or last week, is a mistake and a denial of the transformational power of God.

It's like the great theologian Paul Martin said, "The New Church must be at least as different from the Old Church as the first Christian Church was from the Israelitish church." It hasn't been. To you graduates I apologize. We don't seem so very different. You see, we just haven't come up with anything else yet.

I suppose this isn't the best time to tell you this, but Swedenborg never endorsed ordained ministry, nor is ordained ministry even mentioned in the New Testament. In the early Christian church ordination came into being as a secondary position in a congregation. The ruling elders were the spiritual leaders. Ordination was a distinction

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The Future of Ministry

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first given to young men who were called to ministry but weren't mature enough to be elders. Ordination as we have it today is a mechanism put in place by the Roman emperor Constantine. I don't say this to invalidate your desire to be ordained or to talk myself out of a job. I say this because I believe that ministry in the New Church is shared by everyone who ministers regardless of their schooling or title.

The New Church is the both/and, not either/or. We honor what is good about the old as we try to create something new. We try to be more inclusive than exclusive, to look for what draws people together rather than what keeps them apart. It doesn't matter if a church is traditional or ultra modern. What matters is whether people can feel safe to open their hearts and minds to the Lord and each other and together share in real spiritual transformation. Your graduation marks a milestone in your training to serve this denomination, but even more important, it marks your commitment to, and our blessing upon, your calling to serve the Lord as the New Church unfolds.

I'm supposed to speak on the future of ministry. I don't really know anything about the future of ministry. But, I have an opinion on everything. In my opinion ministry needs to be much different because the world is different and ministry needs to be very much the same because the basic spiritual needs of people have not changed since the church began.

You want to know about the future of ministry? Remember, it has only been a few centuries since freedom of religion became a guaranteed right in a backwater British colony which is now a great nation. Slavery didn't come to an end until the last century, women got the right to vote in this country in this century. The Lord is leading us on a slow progression to "make all things new." It is important to realize that the pace appears to be picking up. The sum total of human knowledge now doubles every three years. The changes that are happening in the world today in some

way reflect the spiritual evolution of the human soul, and the Lord is in charge of the plan. What we are as spiritual beings is changing, and to keep thinking of us as we were fifty or ten or five years ago, or last week, is a mistake and a denial of the transformational power of God.

I believe that the future of your ministry rests on your recognizing and overcoming three main temptations. One is taking yourselves too seriously. Embrace a lighter approach. Move away from the Constantinian, minister-centered, authoritarian model. Ministry is not something you do to people, it is something you do for them and with them and you do it with the Lord and for the Lord. What is called the minister-centered model is a leftover from the last millennium, and its time to go has arrived. While this is true, it is also a fact that today the single most important factor in getting churches to grow is having a very good sermon. It is still why most people come to church. But following the minister-centered model most ministers write out their sermon or notes and get no feedback on its content before they deliver it. Very few ministers have any systematic way of getting input that will help improve their preaching. Most never take any further training in preaching for the rest of their ministry. Don't follow that model. The minister-centered model, like Constantine himself, is afraid of criticism. Instead, seek criticism. You won't melt. It will help you. People come to hear you preach. Many come to church knowing that they will have to sit through a liturgy as dry as dust and struggle through three unsingable songs just to hear your message. Make it good. And ask for their help in making it better.

Taking yourself too seriously also means that you try to do too much. Every time you lead is an opportu-

nity to get someone else to help you and to teach them how to do what you do. Ministry is not to be hoarded, it is to be shared. Every church you serve will have people who can perform acts of ministry which will expand the uses of your church and empower the people.

The second temptation is to not take ourselves, as Swedenborgians, seriously enough. What we have is more than just unique. After two hundred years many people still find our beliefs refreshing and exciting, and we have something to offer which can help people to see the world in a whole new light and live new lives. So many people today are all cranked up about the millennium. I just don't get it. I have to believe that the Lord sending the disciples throughout the spiritual world to declare the second coming is more important than three zeros behind a two. For us the millennium started two hundred twenty-nine years ago. We are the only people in the world who believe that the real millennium is a Divine process of God leading the world to greater love and wisdom and freedom and justice and equality than ever before. The way our culture has chosen to measure time is completely arbitrary. The only spiritual significance to the millennium is that people are asking hard questions about how the world ought to be. You can show them an internal sense to the Word and to life.

When you plan programs remember that the spiritual needs of people during the time of Jesus really are not that

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The Rev. Eric Alison & John Titus, not taking themselves seriously.

Wayfarers Chapel History

Editor's Note: At the consecration of the new visitors center site and ground-breaking ceremony, the Rev. Edwin Capon read, as the basis of his address, the following Chapel history, written by Betsy Young as part of the first draft of a Chapel five-year plan.

"Then are they glad because
they had quiet and He brought them to their desired haven."

This quotation from Psalm 107 was, and remains, the biblical core of the Chapel dream. It was Elizabeth Sewall Schellenberg, daughter of Swedenborgian minister Dr. Frank Sewall, who first dreamed the dream and was instrumental in guiding it to eventual reality. She envisioned a small chapel of exquisite beauty which would be built on the Palos Verdes Peninsula to the glory of God and to share the insights of Emanuel Swedenborg, eighteenth century scientist and theologian.

There were other stalwart dreamers, too, on the west coast. The benefactions of the Vanderlip family were well known. They had already offered large areas of land for schools and colleges from the 16,000 acres they owned. It was Lucy Mercer Billingsley, a member of the Los Angeles Swedenborgian Church, who first approached her friend, Narcissa Cox Vanderlip, with the proposal that she donate three-and-a-half acres of peninsula land if the national denomination would raise the funds to build a church.

A California committee approached the national organization with this description: "The property lies on a scenic highway along the Pacific Ocean and attracts thousands of motorists on Sundays. We believe that the maintenance of such a Chapel would be supplied by offerings collected at the year-round vesper services on Sunday afternoons and by weddings and other special services. We think that the gardens can be made so charming that they will attract interest throughout Southern California."

The present Chapel is so closely associated with Lloyd Wright that few people realize he was not the first to make architectural plans for the committee. Several prominent west coast architects were approached to solicit preliminary drawings. Ralph Jester, a neighbor of the Vanderlips, was among those asked to submit a drawing. Just prior to World War II, he wrote of his plans.

"The vitality of church groups today may be directly affected by the fact that each church has a structure already finished or to be completed for them within a matter of months. This is a static state of affairs as far as active member participation is concerned. The great religious edifices of the Middle Ages attained their glory by what I have to call divine attrition through the years. It was accomplished by the continuous effort of church workers who knew that no man could live long enough to finish the work of God."

"Your Chapel in Palos Verdes will, in my opinion, be a more dynamic force in the lives of its builders and supporters if it is never completed . . . this process of growing," he said, "... being active rather than passive, becomes more beautiful and rewarding throughout the years."

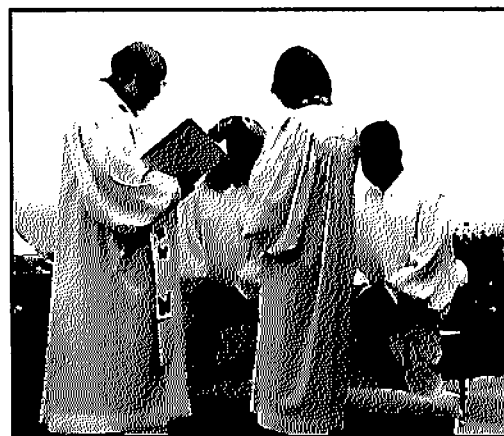
With the onset of World War II, access to the coast was closed to the public, and it was not until 1945 that the Chapel dream would be rekindled.

By that time building on the California coast was again possible. Jester had become disenchanted with his design, however, and suggested that the committee approach his friend Lloyd Wright for new drawings.

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Groundbreaking ceremony for the new visitor's center (from left:) The Revs. Ron Brugler, Edwin Capon, Harvey Tafel. (They weren't actually breaking through the ground at this point!)



Ordination: The Revs. Ron Brugler & Rachel Rivers, ordinands Susannah Currie & Andy Stinson.



The "old timers" who attended the original dedication in 1949, from the left back: The Revs. Jerry Poole, Harvey Tafel, Dick Tafel, Paul Zacharias. Left front: Mareta Tafel, Annella Smith, Merle Lundberg, Fran McIntosh, John Vanderlip, son of Narcissa & Frank Vanderlip (seated), and Susan Vanderlip.

Wayfarers Chapel History

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The ensuing contact came at an ideal time in Wright's life. Like so many people of that period, he had become disenchanted by the waste of war and was in need of some challenge to lift his spirits. A recent drive up the California coast through the beautiful redwood groves near Monterey had nourished his creative spirits. He had stopped at a restaurant surrounded by redwood trees and roofed with glass. He felt a spiritual energy as he gazed through the towering trees to the sky beyond. Ralph Jester had already suggested to him that he submit a design for the proposed Chapel on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. Suddenly he knew how wonderful it would be if he could incorporate this feeling of oneness with nature into a design for the church. The results of that inspiration became the Wayfarers Chapel on the Palos Verdes Peninsula. ♦



From left: Carol Fusco, Eli Dale, Wilma Wake, Mary Kay & Ted Klein, Annella & Carol Smith enjoy Saturday night Chapel festivities.



Fifteen Million Visitors in Fifty Years

The worship service, which marked the beginning of the 50th anniversary celebration of the Wayfarers Chapel, was based on the original service celebrated on July 16, 1949. The following dedication song, "The Wayfarers Chapel," embodying the original vision of Elizabeth Schellenberg, was a popular hit song produced in the 1950s on 45 rpm records.

*The Wayfarers Chapel out to the sea,
looks down from a mountain and beckons to me.
I climb up the mountain and suddenly find,
in Wayfarers Chapel a new peace of mind.
The seagulls out by the breakers, gliding over the foam,
seem to cry in the twilight, stranger welcome home.
And then like a sailor a long time away,
in Wayfarers Chapel I kneel down and pray.*

The song was performed by musicians Wendy Waring, Chapel music director, Jeffery Waring, and Chapel singers Susan Dietz, Leberta Clark, and Mareta Tafel, who also offered the prelude and postlude.

An estimated fifteen million visitors have made a pilgrimage to the Chapel in the fifty years since the cornerstone was laid in 1949, making it the most active public outreach program of our faith.

The box which was sealed in the cornerstone at the dedication ceremony contains a copy of *True Christian Religion*, in remembrance of Emanuel Swedenborg; a scroll recording the original gift of the grounds to the General Convention by Mrs. Narcissa Cox Vanderlip, and including the names of the members of the Palos Verdes Chapel and Building Committees; a copy of the *Convention Journal* for 1948; a copy of *The New Church Messenger*; and a copy of the booklet issued for the dedication service.

In anticipation of the celebration of its 50th anniversary, the Chapel embarked on an ambitious restoration project. Since its opening in 1951, the Chapel had never had a comprehensive restoration, and the need had become increasingly apparent. Plans for the project were started in the summer of 1998, with the Chapel scheduled to be closed for the dates between January 18 through January 29, 1999. Under the general guidance of Chapel administrator the Rev. Harvey Tafel and local architect Dean Andrews, and with architectural input from Eric Lloyd Wright, plans were drawn up and contractors hired. The twelve-day storm of work began and ended on schedule, resulting in the resplendent Chapel that Convention attendees saw on Saturday, June 28. The details of the restoration were written by the Rev. Harvey Tafel in an article which will be published in a future issue of *The Messenger*.

The Messenger will keep readers updated on the progress of the new visitors center being built at the Chapel. For details and background on the center, see the February 1999 *Messenger*, "The Wayfarers Chapel," by the Rev. Harvey Tafel, p.25.



THE GRADUATES SPEAK

Susannah Currie

It's been seven years since I put my son Benjamin on the bus to kindergarten and started commuting from Maine to Newton to take classes. During that time, my family has grown with me on this journey to ministry. My son, who is now going into seventh grade, has challenged me with many questions that have taught me to apply theology to life. My daughter Sage has become a wonderful adult and has taught me the balance of holding on and letting go, with her honest and open feedback. My daughter Grace has grown from a child into a lovely young woman who is a source of unconditional love and fashion sense. And my husband Deane has been the most supportive and loving partner I could want. I have received so much love and strength from all my family and all the many wonderful friends at home in Maine, within the Council of Ministers and in Convention at large. I thank you all so much for your support and encouragement.

I first became aware of the Swedenborgian Church about a dozen years ago. The discovery of Swedenborg's writings was, for me, the discovery of a new way to look at the world, life, and God. Swedenborgian theology has helped deepen my relationship with the Bible and with the Lord. I've always liked the way my husband Deane explained Swedenborg's writings to newcomers at the Portland Church. He would describe Swedenborg's theology as a tool belt. When you read Swedenborg you are being given a tool belt to build new religious understanding. The raw material, the rough wood, is your honest and sincere search for God in your life, what Swedenborg would call acknowledging the Lord.

Now I'm someone who likes to do home repair, so I can relate to the tool belt analogy. I like to identify certain theological concepts as individual tools in the tool belt. But, being given a tool doesn't mean you know how to use it. And some tools are more difficult to master than others. We need to look to experienced carpenters for guidance. So I want to thank a few people for teaching me how to use specific tools in my tool belt. First, I thank the Rev. Robert McCluskey for showing me that I could have a tool belt of my own. I have the Rev. Ken Turley to thank for showing me how to use the screwdriver called Love, Wisdom, and Use. With this tool and its spiral motion, I am able to build an understanding of God and human beings that attaches them tightly together. I have Rev. George Dole to thank for showing me how to use the drill called Correspondence. With this tool, I am able to dig deeply into the Bible and into life in the natural world to form an opening into the spiritual meanings within. And, finally, I have Wilson VanDusen to thank for his booklet, *Uses* which is the hammer in my tool belt. When I use my hammer I am doing, acting, and making an impact by living my life fearlessly, guided by the Lord.

I am not an expert at using any of these tools. Sometimes my drill goes awry and sometimes I hammer my thumb. But the final product of spiritual carpentry will not be mistaken for anyone else's. It is uniquely my own, and as I keep building my religious understanding, I offer myself—my love, my compassion and my actions to the Lord. And like any parent, the Lord loves homemade gifts, flaws and all. The Lord is the Master Carpenter, to whom I pray for strength, inspiration and guidance to use my tools more and more skillfully. So I'll be packing my tool belt and heading to Temenos to put my tools to use, to continue the building of that ministry, as minister and director and carpenter's apprentice. ♦



Susannah Currie (right) gets congrats from the Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake.

Andrew Stinson

I'm from Maine, and up in Maine there was this young Swedenborgian minister, and he went out and took a call to his first parish. It just so happened that the first Sunday of this young pastor's new career would be the fourth of July. So he got all fired up and wrote a sermon about the correspondences of Red, White, and Blue, and the significance of red and white in the spiritual world and what this had to do with Tibetan Buddhism and the search for the lost Word . . .

Well as you can imagine this was a pretty long sermon. But what this young pastor forgot was that this fine piece of preaching of the Word of God was set up directly against the Fourth of July parade . . .

So Sunday came and the young minister came out into the chancel and there was one . . . only one parishioner, an old farmer who'd been suspicious of the parade ever since Maine had outlawed fireworks, said he wasn't going to any parade that didn't have fireworks . . . so there they were.

Now the young pastor didn't really know what to do . . . So he figured he just better go ask the old farmer. So he gets down from the chancel, sits down next to the old farmer and says, "Well, do you want a service or would you just rather go to the parade?"

"Well," replied the old farmer, "every morning I hook up the wagon, fill it with hay, and go down to the back forty to feed the cows. If only one cow shows up, I feed it."

The young minister's heart pumped and he raced back up to the chancel . . . He tore through the liturgy and got to the sermon, and preached with the passion of a man squarely in the stream of Divine providence. He praised God and told about the significance of Red and White and all kinds of things . . . he preached and preached and preached . . .

When it was over he raced to the back of the church. Unable to control himself,

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THE GRADUATES SPEAK

Andrew Stinson

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the young minister said, "What'd you think?"

"Well," said the old farmer, "like I said, every morning I hook up the wagon, fill it with hay, and go down to the back forty to feed the cows. If only one cow shows up, I feed it, but I don't feed it the whole darn wagon!"

My journey through seminary has been something like the experience of the cow trying to eat the whole wagon of hay. No matter how hard we try there is always so much more. But as the Lord has brought me to this point, I am thankful. I am thankful for the good and the bad, for the sweet and the bitter, for the opportunity to work toward something greater than myself and how frighteningly ominous that is. But mostly I am thankful for all of you, for the presence of each and every person here and your companionship, comfort, and challenging on this long road. Each of you, by your participation here today and in the days to come, shares with me my journey, as Swedenborg tells us, is the living Word, and I can imagine no greater gift. Thank you.

The Rev. Andrew Stinson has been called to the Elmwood church.



Andy Stinson gets a grin from the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell, Washington D.C. church.

Jun-Chol Lee

This is the first time in my life to have such a speech as graduate address. So I was having a very difficult time to figure out what to share with you in this place and at this very significant and meaningful moment.

I would like to begin by giving thanks to my Lord, Jesus Christ, for guiding and helping me to be here tonight with you. And I would like to thank Rev. Dr. George Dole and Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey. It was Rev. Dr. Dole who revised and transformed my ugly English into fine and readable one. I also give a special thanks to Rev. Dr. Harvey for being my advisor for the last two years and helping me to accomplish such a job. With her wise and careful advice, I was able to maintain my track in the right and proper way through all the struggles and confusions in my journey.

I chose the issue of *evil* to be the subject of my thesis for a master's degree. In fact, the issue of *evil* has been one of the most essential drives that energize and stimulate my academic passion for a long time. My goal for choosing such a subject was not only to know what evil and its origin are, but also to understand what I am and what the essence of human nature is. Further, my interest covers how/what is the present predicament of our human relationship with God. It was Emanuel Swedenborg who enriched and enlightened my quest. Therefore there is no denial that Swedenborg's teaching was one of the major influences in choosing *evil* to be the subject of my thesis.

But the subject was too broad to be covered in a master's thesis, thus I decided to narrow it down. My final title for the thesis was "A Swedenborgian Search of the Origin of Evil: Jung & Swedenborg." It was not my original intention for this to be a comparative study between Jung and Swedenborg concerning their methodology to understand the issue of evil. But somehow it became a comparative study, and I am quite satisfied with what I have learned through my research between them. At

this point, please do not assume that I would have some answer for the issue of evil and its origin. I do not have any answer. I just have more questions and fields to have a deeper research than before. My master's thesis was just my first step in my lifelong quest for studying humanity and its predicament. But if you need some information concerning the issue of evil, I would be glad to share, or if you have something to tell me, I would like to listen.



Jun-Chol Lee (center) with the Rev. Young Min Kim (R) & Philip Bae.

Tonight I have two things I want to share with you. The first one is my personal experience of divine guidance for my regeneration that, though I began with confronting the issue of evil, the Lord led me to see what good is. At the beginning, my mind was full of confusion and pain because of my acknowledgment of evil residing in my inward nature. But what the Lord granted me to experience through my research was not to see how evil I am, but how good I can be. It was, indeed, an academic work writing a master's thesis, but the journey that my mind has gone through was very special and spiritual, different from previous times. I have no answer for why I feel it in this way, I just experienced it. Another one that I would like to share with you is a passage from Scripture. It is Psalm 138, verses 7 to 8, which, I believe, well describes the journey that I have gone through and my personal prayer for my future journey:

Though I walk in the midst of trouble, thou wilt revive me; thou shalt stretch forth

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THE GRADUATES SPEAK



**John
Maine**

I was wondering what I'd say tonight when I recalled something I saw just a

few days ago. I was on the bus from Kitchener - where I live - and heading into Toronto to catch the flight that would bring me here to Malibu. The bus was just coming into the outskirts of Toronto when we passed a new subdivision under construction. Now that in itself is nothing remarkable, but what caught my eye was this billboard that stood in front of the half-finished houses. It didn't promote the quality of the houses, or their price, or the wonderful life-styles they could afford the prospective buyer. No, that billboard had another message. It promised that what this housing development offered was the experience of a "real community." And that one word "community" was printed in huge block letters that covered most of the space on that sign.

To me that billboard is very much a "sign of the times." So many of us today hunger for the experience of "real community," where we belong, where we are known and nurtured and valued, where we can love and be loved. And the depth of this hunger is such that

we know it to be a yearning of the spirit. For it is only through a life lived in authentic, loving relationship with others that we may encounter the God we long for and become the kind person each of us is called to be. This is what the first Christian communities knew, that the Gospel message had set them free, free in Christ to be as real and as loving with one another as they could be. I believe this is what our church

and our teachings can offer a spiritually lonely and hungry world: a path toward rediscovering and rebuilding communities of the Spirit, communities of love.

It is my desire, with this commission I am receiving from you tonight, to dedicate myself, with God's help, to help others build and enter the New Jerusalem. In embarking on this work I feel deeply blessed and grateful for the love and support given me by my wife Catherine and son Joshua, and by everyone in the Kitchener church and in the Canada Association. I am also very thankful for the support of other Swedenborgians in Canada and especially those in the British Columbia New Church Society. Finally, and not least, I feel blessed by all of you here at Convention, both those I've met and those I have yet to meet, and I know your love and prayers will guide and support me in the years ahead.

Thank you.

John is a member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, Canada. He has been a member of the church board, the men's group, and various committees. He is preparing for ordained ministry through enrollment in the Masters in Theological Studies (MTS) program at Waterloo Lutheran Seminary and by taking courses via the Internet from the Swedenborg School of Religion. John has previously worked in education and in community social services. He lives in Kitchener with his wife Catherine and their son Joshua. ♦



Morning worship and communion service at fountain, led by Rev. Jerry Poole with Rev. Renee Billings assisting.

Editor's Note: I asked John to share with *Messenger* readers what brought him to the Swedenborgian Church. He e-mailed the following account:

Seven years ago my wife Catherine and I were looking for a church which, in terms of its beliefs and its sense of community, could be a spiritual home for us and our three year old son Joshua. We had moved to Kitchener from Toronto a few years before and were still feeling rather isolated in our new location. There were a few "mainstream denomination" churches in our neighborhood, but we weren't comfortable with them. Somehow they just felt "wrong." We knew nothing about Swedenborg (I don't think we'd ever heard of him) but Catherine remembered someone telling her that the Swedenborgian church in town understood Christian faith in a new way and was very open and respectful of each person's spiritual journey. So in January of 1992, with some trepidation, we attended our first service at the Church of the Good Shepherd.

I have never forgotten that service on that winter's day nearly seven years ago. We sat right in the back, too shy to talk to anyone, hoping in fact that no one would notice us. We were unsure if this would turn out to be the church home we were looking for. And I don't remember much of the details of the service or what the sermon was about. However, I will always remember the sense of peace I felt and the sense that something deep inside of me was saying "yes" to the kind of feeling or presence around me. I don't know how to describe that feeling or presence, only that it was both beautiful and felt profoundly "right." I knew I was where I needed to be and that Catherine, Joshua, and I had found our church home. ♦



Chuck & Verda Winter receive Lay Leader Award.



Rev. Dr. George Dole, who "retired" to Bath, Maine. He will minister to the church there & be a commuting part time professor at SSR. (He also demonstrated his wish to be remembered as a parliamentarian par excellence).

THE GRADUATES SPEAK

Jun-Chol Lee (Continued from page 113)

thyne hand against the wrath of mine enemies, and thy right hand shall save me. The Lord will perfect that which concerneth me: thy mercy, O Lord endureth forever: forsake not the works of thine own hands.

Amen.

Thank you.

Jun-Chol Lee, who received his master's degree in Swedenborgian Studies from SSR this year, came to the U.S. from Kwang-ju, Korea, December 1993, and is currently a member of the Bayside Swedenborgian Church in Bayside, New York. He received a bachelor's degree in religion from Bryn Athyn College in June 1996. He has one more year to go for ordination at SSR and will also be enrolled in the master's degree program at the Boston Graduate School of Psychoanalysis this fall. Jun-Chol is currently doing Clinical Pastoral Education at Rhode Island Hospital and is a candidate to become a future SSR faculty member. ♦

Appreciation for Years of Service



The Rev. Erni Martin (center) for 47 years of ministry, with the "kids"—Revs. Paul Martin & Rachel Rivers.



The Rev. Erwin & Lisa Reddekopp, with friend Nancy Freestone, 50th anniversary of the Edmonton church; Erwin was the founding minister.



Eldon & Annella Smith, San Diego church, Eldon Smith was the first lay leader graduated from SSR.

ALSO RECOGNIZED FOR DEDICATED SERVICE:

Rev. Edwin Capon, 50 years in ministry

Rev. Ted Foster, 35 years in ministry

Rev. F. Bob Tafel, 35 years in ministry

Sharon Reddekopp, leaving General Council

Rev. Ken Turley, leaving MINSU

Fred Hille, leaving IMSU

B.J. Neuenfeldt, leaving EDSU

Other Milestones Celebrated

Wayfarers Chapel, 50th Anniversary

Swedenborg Foundation, 150th Anniversary

Swedenborgian CHURCH MEETING DATES

Sept. 3-6	FPRSU Newton
Sept. 17-18	Wayfarers Chapel Board Palos Verdes, CA
Sept. 23-26	Cabinet Almont
Oct. 21	Investment Committee Temenos
Oct. 22-24	General Council Temenos
Oct. 29-31	SSR Board Meeting Newton Centre
Oct. 29-30	Urbana U. Trustees

Thanks to the Convention '99 Planning Committee

Co-Chairs Merle Lundberg,
Manon Washburn

Committee Phyllis Bosley
Nancy Freestone
Karen & Stan Conger
Pat Lundberg
Cass Ball
Lorraine Sando
Jessie, Al & Don Rado
Cindy Gutfeldt
Rev. Marlene Laugblin
Mary Sabol, Chapel Public Relations
Director

Central Office Martha Bauer,
Larry Conant

GENERAL COUNCIL REPORT

General Council met at its pre-convention session on June 23, 1999, at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California.

The president's, vice-president's, secretary's, and treasurer's reports were accepted. General Council met with members of the SSR board, faculty, CAM, and liaison committee to share some concerns and ideas, especially in the area of improving communication. The school spoke of new curriculum plans and other ideas, such as the house of studies model, that are being explored. The liaison committee reported on some recommendations to improve working relationships.

It was voted to increase Ron Brugler's

job to 3/4 time, effective July 1.

We heard the Interim Ministry report and approved a request to support the placement committee's continued work to develop policies and procedures for administering an interim ministry program within our denomination.

A committee was approved to explore the denomination's relationship, needs, and responsibilities in connection with NCC.

GC also met with members of the Cambridge society as they shared some concerns.

At the post-convention meeting on June 26, General Council made committee appointments, considered various budget requests, and approved proceeding with the work necessary to support the Pacific Coast Association's loan to Stone House for purchasing their building.

Scenes Around Convention



Mary Crenshaw & her daughter Terri Koskela, son-in-law Jukka, & grandson Nelson, who was a year old July 20, aboard the Voyager, spotting dolphins & seals



At Wayfarers Chapel festivities Stan & Karen Conger (Rev. Ted LeVan, far left).



Executive Committee in a moment of levity: Chris Laitner, Ron Brugler, Gloria Toot, Polly Baxter.

Election Results:

Vice-President: Chris Laitner
Secretary: Gloria Toot
Treasurer: Polly Baxter
General Council: ... Lawrence Conant
..... Nancy Freestone
..... Rev. Ken Turley
COMSU: Mona Diane Conner
EDSU: Joy Fleming
FPRSU: Frances McIntosh

MINSU: Barb Halle
..... Rev. Dr. Donna Keane
..... Karen Conger (2 year term)
IMSU: Philip Bae
Nominatng Committee: . Linda Kraus
Committee on Admission to the
Ministry: Rev. Marlene Laughlin
..... Pat Tukos
Board of Trustees, Swedenborg School
of Religion: John Titus
..... Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell



At Alliance luncheon, the Rev. Kit Billings, Sunday School Association president, receives a check from Mite Box chair Barbara Tourangeau for \$1726.74, donated to the Sunday School Association in memory of the late Rev. Gertrude Tremblay. (Alliance President Mary Crenshaw at left).



Women's Alliance Officers, 1999-2000: (from left) Phyllis Bosley, Margaret Krause, Mary Crenshaw, Jennifer Tafel, Sandra Schofield.

Women's Alliance Officers 1999-2000

President Mary Crenshaw
1st Vice President Jennifer Tafel
2nd Vice President . Sandra Schofield
Secretary Phyllis Bosley
Treasurer Margaret Kraus
Mite Box Chair Manon Washburn
Religious Chair Rev. Renee Billings
Publication Chair Sue Burns
Round Robin Chair ... Merrilee Phinney
Nominating Committee Chair
..... Susan Poole (1999)
..... Jeanette Hille (2000)
..... Nan Paget (2001)
..... Martha Richardson (2002)
..... Pam Selensky (2003)
..... Sharon Reddekopp (2004)

Council of Ministers Report

The Council of Ministers met on June 20 through June 22 with 30 members and 12 guests participating. The meeting began with our sharing from personal lives and ministries on Sunday afternoon, and included seven business sessions running from Sunday evening through Tuesday evening.

The Council of Ministers devoted much attention to ways the Swedenborg School of Religion and the denomination can address difficulties and go forward in cooperation, recognizing their relationship as a partnership. There were lively discussions of changes being made at the Swedenborg School of Religion as it enters a three-year period of transition. Of much interest was the idea of close cooperation with another seminary as a possible future direction for SSR.

The Rev. Kent Garlinghouse, an experienced interim minister, led a detailed and insightful presentation and discussion on interim ministry. This led to considering what steps can be taken to make such ministry available in our denomination. The Council of Ministers endorsed continuing the work on interim ministry.

We considered denominational participation in the National Council of Churches. We reaffirmed last year's motion recommending that General Council form a committee to consider goals and responsibilities relating to denominational participation in the National Council of Churches. Also approved was a motion that the denomination's National Council of Churches delegation and the Council of Ministers Executive Committee develop a strategy to enable Convention to reflect on and come to nonbinding votes on social and ecumenical policy issues.

The Council of Ministers approved a revised version of the Authorized Candidacy Path to Ordination for this next year, recognizing that much needs to be done to work out provisions for the path.

The Retirement Committee reported on important changes in the retirement plan for ministers. The Council of

Ministers agreed to begin planning for another EdFest, to be held in the winter of 2001. Gudmund Boolsen has requested removal from our Roll of Ministers. It was voted that this be done and his name be transferred to the Roll of Former Ministers. The Council of Ministers approved our proposed budget for the year 2000.

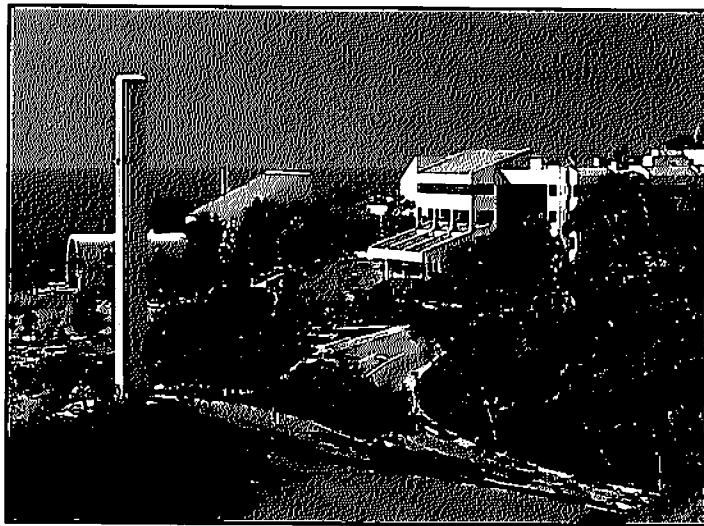
Election results were as follows: the Rev. Marlene Laughlin, Executive Committee member; the Rev. Deborah Winter, Committee on Admission into the Ministry representative; the Rev. Erni Martin, Nominating Committee member; and the Rev. Renee Billings, Convention Preacher 2001.

The Council of Ministers presented four recommendations to Convention.

1. That John Maine be approved to be consecrated as a lay leader for service in the Kitchener Church and the Canada Association.

2. At her own request, supported by the approval of her plan of ministry by the Council of Ministers, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommended that Susannah Currie, whose ordination was requested by the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos and the Temenos Board of Managers, and who completed a full course of study at the Swedenborg School of Religion, be ordained.

3. At his own request, supported by the approval of his plan of ministry by the Council of Ministers, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommended that Andy Stinson, whose ordination was requested by the Elmwood Society, and who completed a full course of study at the Swedenborg School of Religion, be ordained.



Pepperdine University, Malibu, California

4. That Convention participate in forming an Alliance of Independent New Church Organizations based on the following "Principles of Alliance."

"We are allied as organizations devoted to the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ, whom we recognize as the visible God in whom dwells the fullness of the godhead incarnate.

We recognize the Bible as a divinely inspired means of communicating to us the Lord's will for our lives, striving to understand and follow it according to the spirit that gives life, and cautious concerning the letter that can kill.

We believe that true worship centers in lives of mutual service, lives of thoughtful care for the physical and spiritual well-being of all people of all nations, tongues, and religions. We further believe that the same divine love and wisdom incarnate in Jesus Christ is present in different forms in all religions, offering means of salvation to everyone who seeks to live in justice and compassion.

We understand the message of Scripture in the light of the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, whom we believe to have been called by the Lord to be an agent for the renewal of the Christian Church."

*Rev. Dr. Theodore Klein
Secretary, Council of Ministers*



The Future of Ministry

(Continued from page 109)

different from the needs of people today. As Samuel Johnson said, "The greatest challenge in life is not in creating new things to do but to act upon what we already know to be true." Bible study is still the most sought after and successful program today in virtually every denomination. People still want to learn about the Bible. Teach them and teach them how to teach others and share the internal sense not just from their head but from their heart. Every time you lead is also an opportunity to teach others to lead.

The third temptation is to believe that you can't make a difference.

Swedenborg said, "the consequences of every action are felt to eternity." So many of us believe that we can't make a difference when the truth is that we have no choice. You graduates of 1999 will minister in the next millennium, and you are going to make a difference in one way or another. It is up to you to decide what kind of difference that will be. Jesus said "with God, all things are possible." I ask you, what does that leave out? Nothing, there is virtually no limit to what you can do as long as it is done with God. There is nothing wrong with having a program that effectively facilitates the spiritual transformation of hundreds of people in one congregation, and if you believe that it is just as good to minister to many as it is to minister to a few, you can throw off our unconscious conviction to remain small and your congregation will grow in number as well as in spirit.

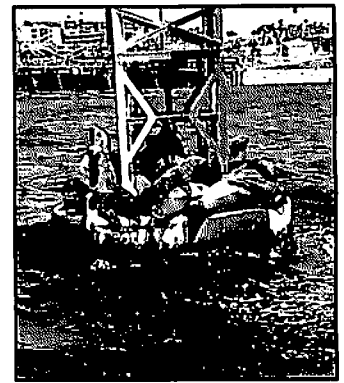
My final piece of advice to you is to remember that we are all here this evening because of one man's experience of God. Don't be afraid to have your own. To be a spiritual leader you must have a rich spiritual life. If you are not spiritually prepared to lead, people will always know it on some level. If you come to God with your heart and mind open the Lord will always be there to help you in the building of the New Church. God bless you.

The Rev. Eric Allison is the pastoral ministries/church growth consultant. He lives in Kitchener, Ontario. ♦

Scenes Around Convention, Continued:



Happy Ocean Racer folks returned to port. (Virginia Branston looks as if she might mutiny!)



Seals on the buoy. Redondo Beach Harbor.

Letter from the Editor:

The Communications Support Unit and *The Messenger* want to take this opportunity to thank all those who responded to last year's *Messenger* Fund Appeal.

Donations and subscriptions for the last quarter of 1998 and 1999 thus far total over \$3,000, with approximately one third added into the endowment fund. *The Messenger* Endowment Fund now has a current worth of \$120,708. As we build up *The Messenger's* endowment, our church's publication can eventually become financially independent.

Traditionally, *The Messenger* has been given at no charge to all members of the Swedenborgian Church—ten free informative newsletters that offer timely lay and ministerial views on our church issues, plus inspirational Swedenborgian insights to help each of us on our spiritual journey.

There is no plan to charge readers for their ten issues, but the cost to the church is approximately \$30 for each yearly subscription. If you feel that *The Messenger* is worth \$30 a year to you, perhaps you would volunteer to defray some of the publication's costs. Your support and love for your church's *Messenger* are sincerely appreciated, and again, many thanks to those of you who made contributions to *The Messenger* in the past.

Blessings, Patte LeVan



Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$ _____. I want my enclosed contribution to be used for:

☐ One-year subscription to *The Messenger* ☐ *The Messenger* endowment fund

Your Name _____

Your Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

Please make your check payable to *The Messenger* and mail it in the enclosed pre-addressed envelope included in this issue, to: Swedenborgian Church, Central Office, 11 Highland Avenue, Newtonville, Massachusetts 02460.

Baptisms

Barbu—Dailin Thomas Barbu, infant son of Jeannie and Tom Barbu, was baptized into the Christian church April 18, 1999, at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, the Rev. Ronald Brugler officiating.

Resnik—Sheryl and Jacob Paul Resnick (son of Sheryl and Bryan Resnick) were baptized into the Christian church June 20, 1999, at the Church of the Open Word, St. Louis, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating.

Confirmations

Adams, Gregory, Priest—Connie and David Adams, Carol and Scott Gregory, and Cindy and Charles Priest were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church May 9, 1999, at the Church of the New Jerusalem, Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating.

Andrews—Philip G. Andrews was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church June 11, 1999, at the Church of the New Jerusalem, Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating.

Hansen—Roy Hansen was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church March 14, 1999, at the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church in St. Paul, the Rev. Kit Billings officiating.

Phinney, Williams—Beki and Ben Phinney, and Kristen Williams were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church May 23, 1999, at the New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Mass., the Rev. Lee Woofenden officiating. (All three of these young people grew up in the Bridgewater Church Sunday School).

Pineda—Therese Pineda was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church November 15, 1998, and welcomed into membership March 28, 1999, at the New York New Church, the Rev. Robert McCluskey officiating.

Pringle—Breanna Pringle was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church June 6, 1999, at the Swedenborgian Church in Cincinnati, the Rev. John Billings officiating.

Marriages

Klein and Kelly—John Klein of Boston, son of the Rev. Dr. Ted and Dr. Mary Kay Klein, and Myriah Kelly of Bridgewater, Vermont, were united in marriage August 13, 1998, at North Hero, Vermont, on an island in Lake Champlain, the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey officiating.

Leach and Walsh—Cynthia L. Leach and Thomas M. Walsh were united in marriage May 22, 1999, at Maplewood Center in Portland, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating.

Resnick—Bryan and Sheryl Resnick were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church, at the Church of the Open Word, St. Louis, the Rev. David Rienstra officiating. (Bryan and Sheryl were married in the chapel May 19, 1996, and have been attending services since).

Deaths

Eldridge—Anita L. Eldridge, age 76, member of the Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, entered the spiritual world June 30 at the Fryeburg Health Care Center. A memorial service was conducted July 3, 1999, at Neal and York Funeral

Home in Kezar Falls, Maine, the Rev. Robert Irish officiating.

Fekete—Sherry Fekete, age 44, daughter of John and Joyce Fekete of Naples, Florida, entered the spiritual world May 24, 1999, near her home in Florida. Sherry unexpectedly passed away of a brain hemorrhage. A memorial service was conducted July 24, 1999, at the Almont New Church Assembly, the Rev. Renee Billings officiating. Sherry taught children's classes at Almont summer camp.

Frank—Adrienne Frank, 85, lifelong Swedenborgian, past president and treasurer of the Connecticut Association and generous benefactor of the church and the Swedenborg Foundation, entered the spiritual world August 4, 1999, at Norwalk County Hospital, where she had been admitted on July 29 with a massive brain aneurysm. A memorial service will be conducted in September, the date as yet unknown.

Sando—Jack Robert Sando, 72, longtime member of the Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church, entered the spiritual world July 3, 1999, succumbing to a heart attack at his home in Seattle. A memorial service was conducted July 8, 1999, the Rev. Paul Martin officiating. Jack is survived by his wife of 47 years, Lorraine; their three sons, David, Donald, Richard and their respective wives, Barbara, Linda and Sarah; and four grandchildren, Kayla, Devin, Zachary, and Lauren. Jack was best known for putting others' needs ahead of his own, and for his sense of humor and his ability to look on the light side of life.



Church Family News

The Central Office received word on July 30 that the Rev. Dr. Friedemann Horn has been diagnosed with cancer of the liver. The diagnosis indicates that his condition cannot benefit from either chemotherapy or surgery. He is currently on a homeopathic regimen. His address for cards and letters is:

Rev. Dr. Friedemann Horn
Buchholzstrasse 141
CH-8035, Zurich, Switzerland

(A one-ounce letter costs \$1.00 in postage). ♦

FOR SALE

Minister's gown (robe),
white, size large/tall.
\$40.00 plus shipping
Please contact Muriel Bennett

Phone:
(250) 545-1994

email:
mewbennett@home.com

REMINDER!

Central Office has a New Address

Swedenborgian Church
11 Highland Avenue
Newtonville, MA 02460
Phone and FAX are the same:
Phone: 617-969-4240
FAX: 617-964-3258

(The June *Messenger* noted in error that it was 19 Highland Ave., due to some post office confusion. We apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused.) ♦

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.

ROOTED IN SPIRIT A Harvest of Women's Wisdom

Alice B. Skinner, Editor

What does Emanuel Swedenborg, an eighteenth-century mystic, offer that is relevant to understand women's spirituality today? Twenty-five contributors to *Rooted in Spirit* explore the impact of Swedenborg's insights on their lives. This anthology of original essays, poetry, journal writing, and short stories introduces women whose lives are "rooted in spirit." Some of the writers were raised in Swedenborgian churches; others have chosen in their adulthood the philosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg as the ethical basis for their lives. These women of diverse ages, backgrounds, races, and occupations, writing from the heart of their experiences, find inspiration in Swedenborgian understanding of the life process.

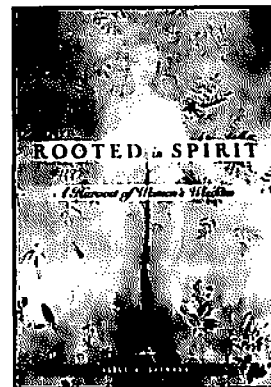
"I write from the perspective of a Swedenborgian, which means that I see the spiritual element as the very core of being, a basic reality in all human lives, providing a constant connection with God, the source of being, ever-involved and ever-present with humanity."

—Alice B. Skinner, "Women's Spirituality"

"Women live and move and have their being in cycles, like the orbit of the earth around the sun, the seasons, the cycles of the moon, the rhythms of water, the ebb and flow of days. In the genera-

tive mystery of birth and death and rebirth, our bodies and our spirits are connected to the whole cycle of the universe, to progressive order, to organic beauty, to the functioning of continual creativity."

—Vera Glenn,
"Feminine Spirituality:
Three Biblical Women"



"When I was a student at the Episcopal Divinity School, I was a closet mystic, devouring the spiritual writings of mystics of all traditions, particularly the Christians. I had encountered the works of Emanuel Swedenborg and considered him a 'mystic's mystic, one who not only experienced the Divine but could explain the theory behind those experiences....I realized that in the writings of Swedenborg was the theological integration I had been seeking: a true combination of inner contemplation with outer activity in the world."

—Wilma Wake, "Mary and Martha Unite: The Socially Useful Mystic"

Alice B. Skinner, Ph.D., Harvard University, is a research psychologist who studies women's lives. She also serves as the first woman president of the Swedenborg Foundation and as art editor for the Chrysalis Reader series.

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