

THE MESSENGER

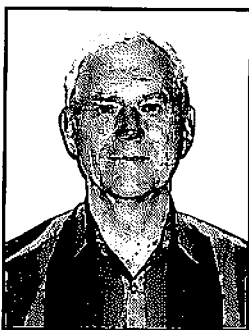
Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

March 2000

Can We Dream?

Paul Zacharias

Joan Rivers says, "Can we talk?" I'm asking, "Can we dream?" Perhaps by talking and dreaming together we can help our Church be a more effective witness for the Lord in his world in the coming century.



After the January, 2000 *Messenger* came out, President Ron Brugler asked me to put some flesh on the bones of my article, "The Church: Past, Present, Future." Be more specific, more tangible—what might the coming New Church really look like? How do I visualize the New Church at its very best? So, let's dream awhile.

Everything we do and are is based upon assumptions, underlying principles. Everything. My dream for the coming New Church is based on one major assumption, namely: What Swedenborg tells us about the spirit of the New Church reigning supreme in the world, eventually, is really true. I'm not talking organizations; I'm talking spiritual beliefs and values. This divine revelation will one day permeate and affect all human activity throughout the world. If what Swedenborg tells us is true, then this is a given. It follows automatically. And it's up to us, as receivers and witnesses of this divine legacy, to share the good word. Having been given this pearl of great price, how then shall we act, as a Church?

Before anything worthwhile can happen, I would like to suggest that the

two following requirements must be met. A basic change of mindset is required on the part of Convention members. Unless and until we change our thoughts, plans, and actions, things aren't going to change very much in the Church. We tend to think small and to expect small. To what extent do we really expect and trust the Holy Spirit to work in our lives? During convention sessions we're often exposed to new and exciting worship forms, but how often do we use them in the local churches? We say that our religious faith is really very important to us, but is it truly the number one priority in our lives? Yes, I believe that a fundamental change of mindset is required, if our Church is to flourish and grow. And how do we change? Swedenborg gives us three steps: 1) We honestly examine the situation; 2) We visualize an improved scenario; 3) We take tangible steps toward the new look.

A number of surveys tell us that what most North Americans want more than anything else is to be challenged; they want deeper meaning in their lives; they want to invest their lives in something worthwhile; they want to feel connected and whole.

And at the heart of it all is being intentional every step of the way. We consciously decide and plan that this is what we want the Church to be because this is what the Lord wants it to be.

The second requirement follows the first: if the Church is to fulfill its higher potential, it will need visionary, disciplined, enthusiastic, purposeful leadership, at both national and local levels, and both clergy and laity are included. A number of surveys tell us that what most North Americans want more than anything else is to be challenged; they want deeper meaning in their lives; they want to invest their lives for something worthwhile; they want to feel connected and whole. And shouldn't the church be addressing these deep spiritual needs? Enthusiastic leadership is essential, and by implication every church member is a leader.

(Before continuing, I'd like to suggest that you read Revelations 2 and 3 again. I just did and, reflecting on my own degree of commitment and stewardship, felt properly rebuked and chastened.) And throughout this article, please keep this basic premise in mind: Unless a majority of us agree on some course of constructive, creative action that will improve the overall quality and effectiveness of our Church, on both local and national levels, and move confidently in that direction, our 40-year gradual decline will continue. And that would be sad indeed.

So, what might a revitalized, thriving, spiritually alive New Church look like? Let's look at it from three perspectives: individual, congregational, and national. Please bear in mind that all of this grows out of my article in the January *Messenger* and is an elaboration of those themes. Also, my primary objective is

(Continued on page 35)

IN THIS ISSUE:

• Interim Ministry • Unity in Christ: NCC Report • Parish News

March 2000

Editor's Dog Day Afternoon

The first three days into January 2000 I felt, as many did, both grateful and somewhat disappointed that nothing cataclysmic had happened. Other than exchanging comments in the local bank about the irksome adjustment to writing zeros, we all seemed to be going about business as usual, much as we had in the previous century, or year, depending on your millennial persuasion.

Then on January 4, a neighbor's large retriever bit my right hand. I was walking along the road, a walk I've taken daily for six years, when the dog jumped out of an open car door, rushed over and bit me. Two fingers and the back of my hand were badly slashed. It was deep dusk, and I was holding a small yellow flashlight in the hand that was bitten. I wondered later if it was the flashlight the dog wanted. Maybe she had a yellow toy that looked like that and she thought I'd stolen it. (Dog lovers often hint that when Man's Best Friend turns on you for no apparent reason, it must be something you said/did, and you need to do some shallow soul searching—like, *Why me*)? But whatever character flaw in me prompted her mad, impetuous behavior, luckily she ran off and didn't continue the attack. I stood there in shock, mopping blood, and called out to the owner, "Your dog bit me."

The owner ran over to look at my hand. "Oh, dear, are you sure?"

"Well, yes," I replied in the testy tone reserved for minor domestic skirmishes, "I think we must come to that conclusion, since I'm not into spontaneous bleeding." She corralled the dog, then rushed off and got her husband, who emerged with hydrogen peroxide and a roll of gauze, poured the peroxide over the wounds, then bandaged my hand sufficiently to keep the blood from running down my arm.

Then I was borne off on the hour-long trip to the emergency hospital, where the intake person routinely does

irrelevant and embarrassing things like weighing me on a scale that always weighs ten pounds too heavy and pressing me to reveal the name of my primary physician, which I couldn't remember because I had never met him. That aroused suspicion; I could tell by her expression as she grilled me about my phone number, address, and social security number, that I was probably being discreetly tested for Alzheimer's. I coolly spit out all that information and then dazzled her by volunteering my driver's license number, my mother's maiden name and my Grandmother Lucy's phone number when she lived in San Gabriel in 1941. (In case you think I'm making this up, it was Atlantic 18019).

My hand had swelled to the size and color of a small eggplant when she asked me to fill out a dog bite report to send to the county animal control. "I'll do the best I can, I still have the use of my thumb and forefinger," I replied gamely. "Do you think somebody may get around to treating the problem I'm here for before they have to amputate? Ha ha," I added, to show that I was joking.

"Ha, ha," she answered, to show she had a sense of humor. "We'll have you out of here in no time."

They did, too. I was cleaned up, given a tetanus shot, glued back together (apparently they prefer not to stitch dog bites unless limbs have been severed) and sent home with antibiotics and pain killers within the hour.

So I didn't have the use of my right hand for two weeks. That, and a subsequent bad case of flu, got me a bit off schedule with *The Messenger*, which is why I am telling you all this. I am slowly trying to make up for lost time. Though the trauma has been temporary and relatively trivial, it put me dauntingly face to face with all the things I couldn't do. I became doubly grateful for all the *Messenger* contributors who sent me good-looking copy, on time, so I didn't have to expend extra effort to nag by phone or email, or re-keyboard messy text. This set me to musing on the idea of composing a list of things that make editors smile or sigh with relief:

The Messenger House Rules

1. Good-looking copy—by that I mean typed, double-spaced, wide margins, and you have looked it over before it is sent out to check for missing words, incomplete sentences, etc. It is next to impossible to edit single-spaced copy and still be able to read it. I am happy to take submissions by FAX, email, disk, and snail mail. Of course I will accept longhand copy if you have no other way to do it. Include complete information where you can be reached, and an author's bio of one or two lines.

2. Please pay attention to *Messenger* deadlines and the need for *The Messenger* to be as timely as possible in reporting the results of important meetings. If significant business took place at your Association or Support Unit meeting or your annual church meeting, I would greatly appreciate it if the chairperson, or someone else pre-assigned to the task, would send me a brief writeup of the highlights, including a list of any officers

(Continued on page 45)

THE MESSENGER

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

March 2000
Volume 221 No. 3
Whole Number 5248

Typesetting & Layout
Town & Country
Press, Plymouth, IN

Patte LeVan, Editor

Editorial Address:

The Messenger
P.O. Box 985
Julian, CA 92036

TEL: (760) 765-2915
FAX: (760) 765-0218

E-MAIL: Messenger@jinet.com

Business & Subscription Address:

Central Office
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460

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

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

Can We Dream?

(Continued from cover)

to stimulate thought and evoke responses. We need to talk and dream about this very important subject. If we don't, who will?

On the Individual Level

1. As we all know, a Church is only as strong as its individual members. Swedenborg reminds us that we are all mini-churches, and coming together for worship, fellowship, and service constitutes the larger church. Are we as informed, as committed, as enthusiastic, as we might be in fostering the cause of our beloved Church? To further this end, what would happen if all of us pledged to spend at least one hour a day in meditation, reading devotional material (primarily the Bible and our Church teachings), and serious reflection on our personal spiritual journey. We need to know what we really believe, why we believe it, and how to apply our beliefs in daily conduct.

2. What would happen if we all pledged to contribute at least 5% of our total income to the New Church cause in the world? Obviously this is a compromise; the figure should be 10%. We all contribute to a number of other worthy causes, and I'm trying to be realistic. Even with a 5% base we could radically expand many of our Church programs and activities; many of our local churches would be self-supporting; more training would be available for local lay people; all sorts of exciting possibilities come to mind. My guess is that in a relatively short time, many of us would want to ratchet this figure up to 10%. Let's put our money where our dreams are.

3. What would happen if we all pledged to exercise more honesty in all of our Church affairs and relationships, locally and nationally? I don't see how very much can happen until this comes to pass. Several years ago the Council of Ministers agreed that this would be the underlying policy in all our discussions. From my vantage point, this hasn't always been the case. When we are talking one-on-one, over lunch or out for a walk, there is candor and openness, and it's so beautiful. Then we gather for

meetings, and too often the truth is shaded, or we engage in playing games. I'm not talking brutal in-your-face-it's-good-for-you honesty. I'm talking about expressing the truth with love and sensitivity, for the spiritual enrichment of all concerned. This includes all of our daily activities: with our families, local church board meetings, in small groups. This grows out of trust, doesn't it!

4. What would happen if we all made a commitment to bring one other person into our Church every year? For one thing, it would double our numbers in one year! People say, "Well, most of my

Unless a majority of us agree on some course of constructive, creative action that will improve the overall quality and effectiveness of our Church, on both local and national levels, and move confidently in that direction, our 40-year gradual decline will continue. And that would be sad indeed.

friends are presently church-goers," or, "They're just not interested," or whatever. We can come up with lots of nice rationalizations. But let's be honest about it—when is the last time we've seriously thought about this matter? If our Church really is important to us, then aren't we going to want to share it with others? If we don't spread the good word, and bring in new members, who will? This isn't for the purpose of having a big Church for the sake of bigness. It's because the Lord has called us and we have answered his call.

5. An explicit feature of being part of this New Church is: Being regularly involved in some local environmental group, such as a voluntary simplicity circle. What's the point of having a large, thriving Church if Planet Earth is collapsing all around us! I'm greatly

concerned about our grandchildren's grandchildren. Those good folks in 2150 have the right to live in a safe, healthy, beautiful world, and that's not going to happen unless present trends are reversed in the next 30 to 40 years. It's up to us. Deep in our hearts and minds we all know what needs to be done: get off the consumer merry-go-round; simplify our daily living; recycle; tread lightly upon the earth; look ahead seven generations. Some thirty years ago, while visiting Gus Ebel, he happened to mention, "We have a policy here: if it's yellow let it mellow; if it's brown, flush it down." Over these thirty years, I, one individual, have saved about 100,000 gallons of water. Even if 50% of all North Americans did this, it would solve all of our water problems. This is not our world. It belongs to God.

6. What would happen if all of us, upon waking every morning, spent about five minutes with the Lord? Just a quiet time with the Lord—giving thanks for our sleep; reflecting on the coming day's activities; re-dedicating our lives in his service; asking for guidance in making some tough decisions; seeking to follow the Lord's will in all things. And there may be several times during the day when we need to center down in similar fashion. The Lord is always close to us; it's up to us to stay close to him!

On the Congregational Level

1. Let's assume for a moment that our local Swedenborgian Church takes top priority in our lives. What might this look like? First of all it means having members who are well informed as to what the New Church is all about. I think it's kind of sad that the Council of Ministers can't seem to agree on the meaning of confirmation, and the number and content of confirmation sessions before people are admitted into membership. In some of our churches no classes are required for membership. We believe in the Swedenborgian faith and this gives us our identity, our reason for being. I'd like to see a study class at least once a month, perhaps after a Sunday service, brown bag it, and have a serious discussion, in small groups, on some facet of our Church life and

(Continued on page 36)

Can We Dream?

(Continued from page 35)

teachings. Then have a major get-together once a quarter, with a potluck meal, good fellowship, and some type of learning experience. Nothing takes the place of personal encounters, large and small. The question is: Are we willing to give the church number one priority in our lives?

2. Worship, private and corporate, will continue to be the life-giving heart of the church. Authentic, relevant, appealing worship is essential in the life of any church. In my ideal church, the minister or leader would work very closely with the laity in developing worship forms and practices that would best meet the spiritual needs of the local members. The laity must be more involved in this, and all aspects of local church life. Local needs will differ. What are the real, felt spiritual aspirations and needs of the people in your local group? How do you find out? By sitting down and talking about God things. All churches that are growing have this in common, without exception: their worship services turn people on.

3. In the ideal church, everyone would have a peer ear. By peer ear, I mean one other person in the local congregation with whom you would talk, by phone or in person, several times a week. A sort of spiritual buddy, and the conversations would be about everything that is important in your life: your church life, your family life, your inner life, whatever comes up. These intimate, trustful relationships are important. The peer ears might change every six months or so. A simple way to establish lifelines of trust.

4. One or two of our churches require annual reaffirmation of our membership in the Church, and this appeals to me. Making this a very special celebration once a year, when we rededicate ourselves to the cause of the New Church in the world. Too often we coast along year after year, taking our church membership for granted. If our faith is really important to us, shouldn't we be willing to yearly publicly declare anew our allegiance and loyalty to the Church?

On the National Level

1. If all or most of the above rings

true, it then follows that we will need a different kind of ministerial leadership in the future. Providentially, as we've all read, the Swedenborg School of Religion is presently going through a radical shift in its philosophy and curriculum. My hope and prayer is that Convention and SSR leadership will be open and receptive to the winds of change presently blowing through the Christian Church. The Holy Spirit is moving—pray that our sails are in place. The entire role and purpose of ordained clergy needs to be reexamined and looked at very carefully. A clergy colleague recently wrote me: "The robe and collar are history...Our members are thinking about a 'layperson's' church in which all of us will be assuming responsibility for its life and future. We are looking forward to having training sessions, to help our lay people function more effectively—conducting worship services, preaching, leadership skills, etc." Can we look at the role and training of clergy with completely new, fresh eyes?

2. How best can Convention serve our local churches? It has a pivotal role in the publication of a wide range of printed material; it can provide teaching materials for local training sessions; it can sponsor regional training programs for various leadership requirements; it holds excellent annual sessions for spiritual renewal, fellowship, and instruction; it is involved in the work of the National Council of Churches; it sponsors camps and retreats; it supports many local church projects; it provides us with a national identity. All of these are necessary and important. But my overall sense is that we spend far too much of our energy, time, and money in maintaining the external institutional organization. Given modern communication systems, do we really need all of these meetings and all this travel?

According to the 1999 *Journal*, we have 1532 active members in the denomination. Our current structure could well serve the needs of 50,000 members. Do we really need all of these committee meetings, at both local and national levels? This turns a lot of people off. I can't see too many committee meetings being held in heaven! Rather, why not train and empower the men, women, and youth of every local church, and then let them loose. They

will develop the religious forms that best meet their spiritual needs. God has given us time, reason, devotion, freedom, imagination and energy—let's use these gifts for his glory. People will respond to a winsome vision.

Some General Observations

Adopting all the above suggestions, alone, would be a very difficult and lonely prospect. But joining with a number of other people of like mind and heart, locally and nationally, would result in an incredible spirit of enthusiasm and purpose for the entire Church.

If you have a better plan of action for Convention, or can improve on the above outline, I would very much like to hear from you. As I see it, continuing the status quo is not a viable option.

And we don't need more restructuring of the external institutional organization. In the 1960s we spent hundreds of thousands of dollars on this, all to no avail. In 1980s we spent over half a million dollars on church reorganizations, which resulted in some benefits, but didn't address the heart of the problem. We need to begin from within, and base everything we do and are on bedrock spiritual principles.

Nothing in the above is terribly new. Most of it comes out of the life of the Christian Church in the first century. We're going back to basics here.

Millions of people in the world today are searching for spiritual enlightenment, genuine friendships, and a deeper spiritual meaning and direction in their lives. I'd like to think that the Lord could use our Church to satisfy this need.

Can we still remember the feelings we experienced when we first encountered the glory and the wonder of the New Church way of life? I'd like to think that we can still bring that early magic back into our worship and back into our lives.

Could we try something like this for, say, a three-year period! The beginning of a new century, January 1, 2001, would seem to be an auspicious start-up date.

As for me, I would love to be part of a Church like this.

Paul Zacharias is a retired Swedenborgian pastor living in Kitchener, Ontario. ☩

As the first big snow storm of the season hit New England, I was snug inside a huge, stone Franciscan

Monastery in Andover, Mass. I was there with about 30 other ministers and leaders from a variety of denominations learning about interim ministry.

We had begun our journey together during the sweltering days of late July when we took "Phase I" of the Interim Ministry Training together in Waltham, Mass. We had all worked on a project of some sort for six months and were now coming back together for the final phase of our basic training. (My project was one of exploring the similarities and differences between interim ministry in a parish and an interim presidency in a seminary. Most of the students are actually in interim ministry situations for their projects. I was looking at some of the seminary-in-transition issues).

I loved the opportunity to come to know leaders and ministers from many other denominations and to understand better how other denominations utilize the "interim minister." It is a concept being discussed in our own Swedenborgian circles, and I'd like to share some of what I am learning to facilitate our Swedenborgian discussions.

The Interim Ministry Network was organized in 1980 by a group of ministers who were working as interims [initially called the Interim Network]. It was an attempt to promote a new ministry that was virtually unknown in the various denominations: interim ministry. An interim minister is one who comes into a congregation for a short period of time after a regular minister has left. Initially, this role was seen primarily as one of filling the pulpit between regular ministers. Over time, however, it has become clear that the needs of the congregation "between ministers" are unique, and ministering in these times requires special skills.

The Interim Ministry Network has mushroomed in recent years, and many



INTERIM MINISTRY

Leadership for the Wilderness Journey in the Life of a Congregation

denominations are coming to see the value in having trained interims available to serve congregations on a short-term basis between long-term ministers. IMN offers training and support to those called to such a ministry. I took the training in order to make the insights available within the SSR curriculum and to the denomination at large.

A minister's leaving a congregation can be a difficult and tumultuous time for a parish. There are many situations that result in ministers leaving their ministry location. They can include rather traumatic events, such as a sudden death or serious illness, or a long-planned and expected retirement. A church and minister might agree that the minister's calling there is coming to an end; or there might be deep-seated conflicts resulting in considerable discord around the change. Whatever the reasons for a minister leaving, there is a range of feelings on the part of parishioners. They can include grieving and fear as well as excitement about new possibilities for growth that lie ahead.

**Interim Ministry
is "specifically adapted
for those wilderness
times in the life of a
congregation when
surface structures are
stripped away and
fundamental issues of
faith and discipleship are
readily discernable."**

The IMN says in its training book that it believes "the interim periods offer unique opportunities for congregations and other organizations within the body of Christ to be renewed ..." [IMN Basic Education Workbook, p. 1.3] They go on to say that they see this ministry as one that is "specifically adapted for those wilderness times in the life of a congregation when surface structures are stripped away and fundamental issues of faith and discipleship are readily discernable." [IMN, p. 1.3]. In other words, it can be an incredible opportunity for growth on the part of the congregation.

The IMN has identified eight stages that a parish passes through between ministers. They are:

- Termination
- Direction Finding
- Self-study
- Search
- Negotiation
- Call
- Installation
- Startup

In the process of attending to these stages, the interim minister needs to address five tasks:

- Coming to Terms with History
- New Identity
- Leadership Power Shifts
- Denominational Linkage
- Commitment to New Leadership and Directions

Of course, the interim will help the parish come to terms with the loss of its previous pastor and then help it begin to explore its directions for the future. An important initial task in that process is Coming to Terms with History.

"The interim time is a moment in the congregation's life when the members have a chance to look back and appreciate their history, both recent and long-term..." [Nicholson]. It's an opportunity to look at its achievements and strengths as they've been expressed throughout the many stages of the parish's life. It's a chance to remember the hard times that were overcome as well as the joyful times.

(Continued on page 38)

INTERIM MINISTRY

(Continued from page 37)

The tasks of Discovering a New Identity can be productive. It's an opportunity to look at ways the parish has been changing and discover a new way of self-understanding. This can be the time of doing a self study and coming to understand itself on a deeper level.

Leadership changes can be significant. This is a time when new sources of leadership can emerge from within the congregation. The transition is a time when people whose voices have been quiet in the past might be sought out, and others who have been vocal might decide to step back. The changes can be healthy with a systemic look at the leadership issues in the group.

Renewing Denominational Linkages involves an opportunity for a parish to explore its relationship with its denomination. It can be a good opportunity to explore partnership in a new way.

The Commitment to New Directions is important. It is a time to reflect, to face the future, and prepare the way for a new leader [Porcher]. There can be great excitement about the new possibilities that lie ahead. There can be a new sense of harmony and vitality, and a readiness to call a new minister.

Do these findings and experiences apply to us Swedenborgians? This is something we all need to explore together. I think that there is a great deal we can learn from the IMN about our own situation. However, our centers often have long periods without a minister or lay leader, and we need to consider whether that would mean some long-term interim ministries or short-term interims that may not end in a new minister coming in, but rather in a stable lay structure in place for leadership. Would we want to train our own ministers for interim work or think about hiring trained ministers from other denominations – or some of both? Would we want to train some lay people to do this work? Is there money available to pay for salaries of interims?

One of the complications of such a

(Continued on page 45)

INTERIM MINISTRY

Network's Phase III Basic Course, Andover, Mass., January 24-28, 2000.

(Due to lack of space, not all attendees are shown.) Photos by Bill Boys.



Above: (L to R) Marriott Churchill, Charlie Simonson, Louis Pinton, Tom McCabe, Wilma Wake (Don Gibson, not shown, had to leave early due to a friend's illness).



Above: Faculty (L to R) Dick Scherch, Cathy Narowitz, Sue DeSimone, Coordinator.



Right: (L to R) Gayle Whittemore, Tom Woodward, Pam Bakker, David Robinson, Helen Moore, George Bennett, Bruce Updyke.

Important Church Calendar Dates

Feb. 24-27	MINSU Ft. Myers Beach, FL	May 17-19	COMSU Temenos
Mar. 6	SSR Site Selection Committee Andover-Newton: Newton, MA	Jun. 25-Jul. 2	Convention 2000 Urbana U. Ohio
Mar. 28-30	CAM Newton	Aug 24-27	MINSU TBA
Apr. 6-9	EDSU Temenos	Sep 20-21	FPRSU Almont
Apr. 28-May 1	General Council/ SSR/CAM Joint Meeting Temenos	Sep 22-24	Cabinet Almont
May 5-6	Wayfarers Chapel Board Palos Verdes, CA	Sep. 26-28	SSR Board Newton
		Oct 13-14	Wayfarers Chapel Board Palos Verdes, CA
		Oct 19-22	General Council Temenos

UNITY IN CHRIST: *Gift and Calling*

National Council of Churches Report 1999

Robert McCluskey



Members and friends of the NCC gathered in Cleveland Ohio, November 8–12, 1999, to convene its annual General Assembly, and also to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of the Council. The Council continued to work on issues of relevance to Americans of faith, even as it looked back over 50 years of human struggle and divine victory, of battles won and new battles

entered into. The celebration of civil rights, and the challenge of speaking out against the war in Vietnam; the end of apartheid, and the extension of Christian relief efforts throughout the world and here at home; the rebuilding of burned churches since 1996, and the liturgy of reconciliation of the survivors and attackers at No Gun Ri in Korea. Fifty years of quality publications, resources for worship and Bible study, rigorous inquiry into issues of faith and order, advocacy, and support of those who are marginalized and oppressed. Truly the record is impressive. But problems remain. Some of them are as old as human nature: fear and uncertainty in the face of change, and the reluctance to enter into new forms of relationships. Some of the problems are new, the result of our success: a growing bureaucracy, dwindling finances, turf wars; the challenge to adopt new models sufficient for our time, but not yet agreed upon or fully in focus.

In one sense, the NCC has done its job so well that it is no longer needed in its present form. In 1950, it was a truly remarkable and ambitious undertaking; and not without its detractors, whose perspectives were rooted in centuries of suspicion of, and division between, what was different. And now we see ecumenism more and more becoming the norm as churches—and synagogues and mosques—respond to the call to unity, for all people to be one. Ecumenism is now local, and the national bodies are being called to new tasks. And so the job is not finished: as one stage is completed, others emerge. Among them: widening the field to include Catholics and Evangelicals. Here we find culture and politics (rather than theology and doctrine) dividing us. Suddenly the challenge seems both greater and more urgent.

Guide for Future

The Executive Board was extremely busy with transition matters, including a review of the final report of the Pappas Consulting Group, staff and budget cuts, revisioning the work of the NCC in light of societal changes, and restructuring it accordingly. Speaking for the transition team at the

Executive Board meeting, the Rev. Wesley Granberg-Michaelson, head of the Reformed Church in America, noted that the outer dimensions of the Council (finance and administration) must be seen as feeding and empowering the inner dimensions (mission, program, witness), and vice versa. He also described the following “marks” which will guide the vision of the NCC in the future:

- Creation is an organism, not a machine
- Hierarchies need to be reduced (taking the focus away from “offices” and putting it on “functions and use”)
- Authority is based on trust
- Effective leadership is visionary
- Life and work are spiritually rooted
- Structures are smaller, and networks larger
- Innovation is rewarded

Two policy statements from the National Ministries Unit were approved by vote, after their second reading before the General Assembly. *The Churches and the Public Schools at the Close of the Twentieth Century* notes that “...the public schools are the primary route for most children...into full participation in our economic, political and community life.” While affirming that “parents have the right to select home schooling or private or parochial schools for their children, [it also notes that] with that personal right comes the public obligation to support public schools for all children.” The policy statement on *Interfaith Relations and the Churches* was also adopted, with one change, explicitly making interfaith relations a priority of the Council through its Executive Board. Two resolutions from the NMU were also adopted: *For Renewed Faith Community Universal Health Care Campaign* and *A Call to Christian Commitment and Action to Combat Racism*.

A policy statement from Church World Service and Witness was adopted. *Pillars of Peace for the 21st century: A New Policy Statement on the United Nations*, notes that the U.N., however limited, represents the best efforts made so far by governments and peoples of the world toward a vision of peace “rooted in justice, a vision of a world bound together in intentional community dedicated to the well-being of all people and all creation.” Two resolutions developed by CSWS also received approval: *United Nations Funding Crisis* and *The Use of Children As Soldiers*.

Campbell Ends 10 Years of Service

Several changes in leadership are also worth noting. The Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell retired from the position of General Secretary at the end of 1999, ending 10 years of service to the NCC in that role. Joan was a vibrant force in the Council, providing leadership that was inspiring, supportive, and challenging. She was never failing in her efforts to articulate the mission of the NCC for its members, interpreting that mission to the larger society, and representing the Council to those it seeks to serve. In this regard, we recall her leadership of the NCC delegation that obtained the release of three U.S. servicemen from Kosovo last year, as well as in the current

(Continued on page 40)

UNITY IN CHRIST: *Gift and Calling*

(Continued from page 39)

controversy over Elian Gonzalez of Cuba. Joan also made a consistent effort to include all members of the Council in its life. The Swedenborgian delegation, the smallest in the Council, is truly grateful for the ways in which Joan reached to make sure we were on board.

Young Focuses on Poverty

Ambassador Andrew Young was installed as the president of the NCC (2000-2002). Addressing the Assembly, he noted that his primary focus will be on the eradication of poverty. "Dr. King always said that America cannot continue to exist with so many people isolated on lonely islands of poverty in the midst of this ocean of material wealth. Most of the problems that we're facing in America, whether crime or education problems or hate groups, are derived from those islands of poverty, and we tend to treat the symptoms but not wipe out the poverty." He spoke of the importance of directing the focus of attention to "the forgotten Black and Hispanic underclass as well as the poor whites in our small towns and rural communities."

Former Congressman Edgar New General Secretary

The Rev. Dr. Robert W. Edgar, former congressman and president of Clairmont Theological School, was elected to serve as the new General Secretary. In his remarks to the Assembly, he spoke of maintaining the mission of the Council, of doing the same work, but in new ways. "At the local level, the ecumenical movement is alive and well. People break a common bread and share a common cup, they exchange among traditions, they are interested in a spirituality that doesn't necessarily have a label. As an optimist, I see a great opportunity to connect to that local passion from a national level and find ways to really make a difference."

He asked the delegates to consider what it would "take for us to light the fire of the NCC?" He then listed five items: 1) Praying daily for the ecumenical movement; 2) talking hopefully about the NCC; 3) standing together courageously; 4) celebrating each other's diversity; and 5) finding ways to make it possible to break bread and share a common cup. Finally, he called on each of us to "recognize our unity and diversity, our commonality on planet earth, and keep a word of hospitality on our lips."

Highlights Include Dialog Between Mainline, Evangelicals, Catholics

Other events and personal highlights included the following:


- On Tuesday evening, the Cleveland Symphony Orchestra performed several pieces which explored the nature of inspiration and the spirituality of secular music;

- On Wednesday evening, delegates and visitors attended the "Great Conversation"; an evening of dialog between mainline churches, Evangelicals and Catholics;
- A "pretty good" conversation with Conrad Raiser, head of the World Council of Churches, about Friedemann Horn's death and vision for an alliance of New Church organizations. Dr. Raiser remembered well his conversation with Friedemann on this topic, and was glad to hear that efforts in that direction will continue;
- On Thursday evening, during the service of installation for Ambassador Young, each member communion was asked to light one of 35 candles, a symbol of our unity and diversity. (How many heads of communions does it take to light 35 candles? Thirty-five, but it takes a lot longer than expected!)
- Later on Thursday evening, at a banquet celebrating Ambassador Young's installation, Mary Ann Fischer and I shared a table with representatives from the Presbyterian Church, the Korean Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church.
- Late night church chat with statewide ecumenical leaders from Kentucky and Minnesota, and a press representative from Berkeley, California, who had positive words about our San Francisco church and the Wayfarers Chapel. We spent the rest of the night talking about Swedenborg and continuing revelation.

Video on Council's First 50 Years Available

"Unity in Christ: Gift and Calling," is a high quality video tape that chronicles the Council's first 50 years. Highlighting both the ups and the downs of this strange and wonderful experiment in national ecumenism, "Unity in Christ" is an excellent resource for churches to learn more about the Council and to envision what it might become with our help. For copies, or other information about NCC activities, please contact the communications office at 1-212-870-2049. If you'd like to track the work of the Council on the Internet, try www.nccusa.org, or World Faith News at www.wfn.org.

Swedenborgian delegation to the NCCCUSA General Assembly: The Rev. Drs. Dorothea Harvey and Jonathan Mitchell, Mary Ann Fischer (Cincinnati), and the Rev. Robert McCluskey, chair (also serving on the Executive Board).

The Rev. Robert McCluskey is pastor of the New York New Church. 



"... I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It's a sort of splendid torch which I've got to hold up for the moment. And I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations."

— George Bernard Shaw

Editor's Note: The following piece was recently written as a letter by the Rev. Lee Woofenden to a non-Swedenborgian who had written to him after receiving an outreach copy of *Our Daily Bread*. We thought it would be of interest to *Messenger* readers.

Lee Woofenden

The Swedenborgian Church is an evolving entity, just like any other human organization. And we have quite a variety of opinion in the church—including on some of our core beliefs. So please understand that the answer I give may not be the same as the answer you would get if you asked another Swedenborgian.

Our view of God's Word is more complex than the usual Christian view. We see the Bible as the Word of God not because it was literally dictated by God and every word in it is literally true, as is believed by fundamentalist Christians, but because we see the Bible as having a continuous, connected inner meaning which tells the story of our "regeneration," or spiritual rebirth and growth process. We believe that God worked through the early oral traditions, the original authors and transcribers, and the various copyists and editors over the many centuries in which the Bible was produced to form a stable, written Word that reflects the inner, spiritual process of human beings, and of the human race as a whole. To use Swedenborgian terminology, the Bible is written in "correspondences," a living language of relationship between the material and the spiritual.

This means that when we consider whether a particular book is "the Word of God," we do not simply look at whether it has divine inspiration behind it, but at whether it has that continuous spiritual storyline that tells our own spiritual story. So, for example, while we believe that the writers of the Epistles in the New Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit (which is God reaching out to us) in much of what they preached and wrote, we do not consider the Acts and the Epistles to be a part of the

Swedenborgian Views on the Word of God

When we consider whether a particular book is "the Word of God," we do not simply look at whether it has divine inspiration behind it, but at whether it has that continuous spiritual storyline that tells our own spiritual story.

specific Word of God—much to the consternation of our traditional Christian brothers and sisters. Rather, we view them as historical and doctrinal works whose intention was to instruct, build up, and chronicle the early Christian Church.

The important point here is that just because we do not consider a particular book to be the Word of God, that does not mean we reject it or consider it to have no value, or even deny that there is a measure of divine inspiration in it.

With that as background, we can look at your question as to whether Swedenborgians consider the Koran, the Torah, the Bhagavad-Gita, and other sacred scriptures of religions around the world are also the inspired Word of God.

Of course, the Torah, which is the most sacred book of the Jews, is also a part of Christian Scriptures, along with the Jewish Prophets and Writings. We consider all of the Torah, all of the Prophets, and three books from the Writings—the Psalms, Lamentations, Daniel—to be a part of the specific Word of God, with a continuous, connected spiritual meaning which contin-

ues into the four Gospels and the Book of Revelation in the New Testament.

Our view of sacred Scriptures outside the Judeo-Christian tradition is not as well-developed, partly because most of them were not even available to Western readers at the time our major theologian, Emanuel Swedenborg, wrote his religious works. As far as I know, Swedenborg was not aware of such books as the Bhagavad-Gita, the Upanishads, the Tao Te Ching, and so on. However, we can extrapolate what his views toward them might have been by his references to the Koran, with which he was familiar.

Though Swedenborg shared some of the prejudices of his day against non-Christian religious figures, he also taught that all the world's religions were given by God to reach out to the particular culture in which they existed, and that all of them, in their Scriptures, possessed the basic beliefs necessary for people to be "saved" and find their way to heaven—namely, a belief in God, and a set of commandments or rules for life which, if people obeyed them from faith to the best of their abilities, would make them into loving, thoughtful, and kind people, and therefore into angels.

So to answer your question specifically: about such books as the Bhagavad-Gita, while Swedenborg probably would not consider them to be the Word of God, since he would likely not see them as having a continuous, connected spiritual meaning, he would consider them to be sacred books given by God through various prophetic figures in order to reach out to people of various cultures and give them spiritual enlightenment.

As a result of this, many Swedenborgians today consider the sacred literature of other religions to have the same function and effect in their culture as the Bible has had to Western culture. Though we add something extra to the Bible beyond what traditional Christians see in it, in effect we believe that the sacred literature of other cultures has just as much weight as the Word of God for the people of those

(Continued on page 47)

On 2000 VS 2001

To the Editor:

Trevor Woofenden takes me to task (February, p. 28) for criticising the early celebration of the Millennium this last New Year's. According to him, the year 2000 is the "common sensibility" time to celebrate that big turning point. But "common sensibility" can be a slippery concept, since it would violate our system of counting to the base 10, where 10 or its multiples is the last of a sequence, not the first. To base such a turning point on aesthetics and feeling doesn't make it "obvious" at all. This one unfounded idea, that the *drama* of the number 2000 is more *truthful*, drives Trevor's argument.

Things don't always work out so neatly, so we have had to look at other things, too. The official timekeepers of the world, England's Greenwich Observatory, and our US Naval Observatory, maintain on their websites that the correct beginning of the new century and millennium, by our calendar, is January 1, 2001. Quite a few other websites have called for corrections of the very different story we were getting from the media. Here, the plot thickens. We have had two concepts on the table, and the media, including prestigious news organizations and their writers and anchors, did not try to educate us about either and leave the choice to us. They acted as if a white paper had been handed down from the offices upstairs, for reasons never made clear, and it told them, as employees, what they had to say. The situation unfortunately resembles our picture of "managed news."

To change our calendar so that the year 2000 would be the first year of the new millennium would require an international conference, and that would create a flood of technical problems in our computerized world rivaling the disasters we were anticipating from the Y2K problem. What happened instead was contradictory: (a) the old calendar was kept in place by everyone, and (b) the celebrations went forward anyway in spite of the implication that the new century and millennium, by our still operational calendar, *could not* actually

TO THE EDITOR

arrive this year. Why we should do this, and why we would hold onto the belief that it could and did arrive, became an interesting question and deserved comment. It becomes a possible insight into forces that drive our culture, and it is very tempting to entertain the conclusion that those forces are primarily economic.

About the calendar we now have, which begins with the year 1, and then cannot but end a millennium with its year 1000, or a number with three zeroes—it's an attempt to mark the years of our Lord (Anno Domini), those years in which the presence and influence of the Lord directly affect history. The first year would be the year in which he was born, regardless of when he was born during that year. The years leading up to this first year of his presence with us, such as 1 BC, were renumbered accordingly. And we do not really know how inaccurate the year 1 is. Several possibilities are still on the table and will probably remain there.

Unless I misunderstand Trevor, this arrangement does not lead to mathematical problems. The year 1.5 BC (mentioned in his argument) is still a correct three years from 1.5 AD, for 1.5 BC is a moment in the second year before Christ. And to put in a zeroth year would make no sense in this system.

We don't count items of any kind from zero. We have to count from 1, and our system undoubtedly originated from counting our ten fingers. They had to be counted from 1, since a zeroth finger would make no sense.

Swedenborg's theory of numbers, based on higher meanings, makes 10 or its multiples stand for all things in a complex, a kind of summing up, not a new series.

Stephen Koke
Santa Ysabel, California

For Want of a Computer

Dear Messenger Readers:

At the close of our Pacific Coast Association meeting in San Diego last fall, and after hearing that Nan Paget was stepping down as editor of *P.C.A. News and Views*, I made the comment that I would be interested in taking on *P.C.A. News and Views* "if I had a computer," but I do not own one.

At that time, Ron Siddel, (P.C.A. board member) suggested that the P.C.A. board might purchase a computer, to remain with the editor, for the purpose of publishing the *P.C.A. News & Views*. Then the meeting drew to a close and the matter was tabled. It wasn't until later that I learned from Ron that the P.C.A. board decided not to spend the money for a computer and I dropped the matter. I decided that without a computer the job of editing *P.C.A. News & Views* was beyond my capabilities—even with a computer my capabilities were in doubt.

Now I read in *The Messenger* (December 1999, p. 154) that I am the new editor of *P.C.A. News and Views*, and that is in error.

I am the chairperson of the communications committee and the publication of the *P.C.A. News and Views* is a responsibility of that committee, but until someone who has a computer steps forward to the challenge, the matter remains unsettled.

I would be glad to hear from anyone of our P.C.A. members who would feel like rising to the occasion.

Respectfully,
Charles E. Bush
Seattle, Washington



Give Us a Sign

Seen in the vestry of a New England church:

"Will the last person to leave please see that the perpetual light is extinguished."

Bridgewater, Mass.

Audio Tapes on Swedenborg

An introductory class on the Swedenborgian Church, led by the Rev. Lee Woofenden, is available on audio tape from the Bridgewater church. Topics covered include the Lord, the Bible, Salvation, Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedenborgian Church, Rites and Sacraments, Heaven and Hell, and the Second Coming. Order the six tape set by sending U.S. \$15 to:

New Jerusalem Church
88 Central Square
Bridgewater, MA 02346

Boston

A new book, *Religions in Boston*, is being published by Harvard University in conjunction with their Pluralism Project headed by Grove Harris. The Boston Swedenborgian church will be included in the book with the following information:

History—The historical roots of the church can be traced to the Green Dragon Tavern in Boston in 1784. Admirers of the philosophy of Swedenborg gathered in a theosophical group that eventually organized in the city of Boston in 1818. The church was chartered in 1823 in Boston, meeting in several locations before finally settling in its present location atop Beacon Hill, in the heart of the city in 1845. A beautiful Gothic structure served the membership until the mid sixties when it was replaced with an eighteen story high rise apartment, the street level accessing Bowdoin Street serving as the main sanctuary, with facilities on the second floor. The church, being the first Swedenborgian Church in Massachusetts, was thought of as the Mother Church by other forming Swedenborgian congregations in the area. Among its members the church includes the noted Timothy Harrington Carter, founder of the Old Corner Book Store; Sampson Reed, mentor of Ralph Waldo Emerson; Lydia Maria Child, abolitionist; Clarence Barron, financier/editor of the Wall Street Journal; James George Webb, hymnologist; and The Honorable Mayor M. Nichols of Boston.

PARISH *News*

from East to West

*The church is open to peoples of all faiths and sponsors at an interreligious level, the monthly gatherings of the Boston Clergy and Religious Leaders Group for Interfaith Dialogue. It serves as a place of worship and gathering for the Muslim community in Boston and other faith-based communities. Monthly senior luncheons, operas, theatricals, musicals concerts and coffee-house are also offered. The use of its facility is also extended to several human service and outreach organizations.**

The Interfaith Clergy Breakfast hosted by the Boston church was included in an article in *The Boston Globe* on Sunday, December 19, 1999, written by M.E. Malone, entitled, "In Boston, faith has many faces." It begins, *There was a time when the monthly meeting of spiritual leaders at the Church of the New Jerusalem in Boston was small and mostly mainstream Christian. Today the meeting can attract up to 100 leaders of every faith—from Baha'i to Zoroastrianism—and reflects the wide religious diversity that is Boston today.*

"We've had every faith under the sun here," said the Rev. G. Steven Ellis of the Boston Clergy and Religious Leaders Group for Interfaith Dialogue, who hosts the gatherings. Fewer than 25 years ago, "every faith" in the Boston area included Protestant denominations, Roman Catholicism, Judaism, and Orthodox Christianity. Little else was visible.

"Today, it is no longer unusual to see a minister from the Church of the Sacred Earth, a pagan faith, alongside a representative from the Archdiocese of Boston and the Vedanta (Hindu) Society," said Ellis...

Elmwood, Massachusetts

On January 23, the Elmwood church held a "Blessing of the Animals" service. There were over 20 creatures of God brought to the altar to be anointed.

The Rev. Andy Stinson says, "It was great fun and a great celebration of the animals in our lives!"

Portland, Maine

The Maine Association, consisting of the Portland and Fryeburg congregations plus the Network Center in Concord, New Hampshire, has issued the invitation to the denomination to hold Convention 2002 in Maine. They say it will be the first Downeast conclave since 1880!

(Editor's Note: Yay! At last I will get to see the Fryeburg and Portland churches, and the famous Fryeburg Assembly—sans lectures, but at least I'll get to see the campground.)

San Francisco

The Board of Trustees of the Swedenborg School of Religion met in the Bay Area February 5-6 to hold their regularly scheduled winter meeting and to explore the possibilities for relocating the seminary to Berkeley. Two of the thirteen trustees are from the San Francisco congregation—the church's co-pastor, the Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers, and Alan Thomsen. The trustees attended church February 6 and stayed for coffee hour in order to meet more members of the San Francisco parish.

A full report of the SSR meeting will be published in the April *Messenger*.

The Rev. Ronald Brugler, president of the Swedenborgian church and pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, delivered the sermon at the church February 6. Ron was in San Francisco as part of the SSR Board and welcomed the opportunity to visit the S.F. congregation for the first time.

Puget Sound

The Rev. Eric Allison is living in Seattle and is full-time pastor for the Puget Sound church at least until June. MINSU has "targeted" the church for growth, and Eric reports that attendance went from 12 to 35 in the first three weeks.

What Are You Doing This Summer?

The Ohio Association and the staff and faculty of Urbana University would like for you to come to Urbana and help to do two things: Help "Build the City of God" at Convention 2000 and help Urbana University and the community celebrate the sesquicentennial of the founding of Urbana University by the Swedenborgian Church. The university was founded in 1850, and Dr. Hazard, the board of trustees and the faculty and staff are very proud of their heritage and the support of the church.

Bill Coffman from the Urbana church is the convention chairperson, and has the support and assistance of the Cincinnati and Cleveland churches. The plans are well on their way to being put in place. We think that all of you who were with us here in Urbana in 1996 will be surprised at the changes that have taken place on the campus. There is a new dormitory being built adjacent to the Commons, and the Commons is being expanded. Part of this construction will be complete by convention time, but the new dorm will not be ready until the beginning of the school year. There have been many other improvements, and there are more in the planning stages.

Further details can be found in the mailings to all our churches and the registration forms in the *April Messenger*. For everyone arriving by air, our plan is to have you fly into Dayton International (DAY) this time. The reason for that is the city of Columbus and Ohio Department of Transportation are going to have the majority of roads under reconstruction between Port Columbus and Urbana. Remember, Dayton will be your destination for Convention 2000.

There are a lot of activities being planned and we hope to encourage families to attend. One nice thing about convention in Urbana is that it is within easy driving distance of the majority of our churches, which makes for a nice vacation. We are waiting to welcome you all to CONVENTION 2000!

—Dick Sommer ☩

SCYL Winter Retreat 1999

The Swedenborgian Church Youth League's Winter Retreat was held December 27-30, 1999, at the Almont Retreat Center, in Almont, Michigan. The SCYL's Winter Retreat is sponsored by the Survivors, the youth of Almont Summer Camp. Approximately 30 people were in attendance, including leaguers from all over the country.

This year's theme was "Science and Religion," which inspired many excellent discussions. Leaguers participated in two or three sessions every day on a variety of topics related to the theme. This year, the Revs. Wilma Wake and Eric Hoffman presented, as did Mindy Jester, Bill Baxter, and Michelle Huffman. Session topics included "The Mystical Experience," "What is Science?" and others.

Winter Retreat gives leaguers a chance to learn and discuss about a topic that they choose themselves. It also gives leaguers a chance to play games, be social, and attend a dance and pizza party on the last night. This year, we also had the opportunity to play on the ice of Brandau Bay, including makeshift ice-skating, hockey, and curling. Winter Retreat is a time to make new friends and to spend time with friends from far away.

The SCYL (ages 13 through college age) is always looking for people interested in attending or staffing retreats, especially ministers.

—Michelle J. Huffman ☩



Photo Left: (L to R) Chess players are Dustin Wright and Craig Carson.

Photo Right: (L to R) Jason Woofenden, Freda Robrer, and Joy Fox.



Editor's Dog Day Afternoon

(Continued from page 34)

elected, as soon as possible after the meeting is over: Photos are always welcome. I read the church newsletters that are sent to me and regularly mark items in them that might be of interest to *Messenger* readers. If your church doesn't put out a newsletter, I would appreciate receiving brief regular updates on significant happenings. Ideally, there should be someone on every church's board, a "press person" who assumes responsibility for getting timely copy to *The Messenger*, and I would like to be in regular touch with that person. Ministers or secretaries, PLEASE send me notifications of confirmations, baptisms, marriages & deaths of members as soon as possible after the event. There are forms for this provided by Central Office.

3. Above all, CONTRIBUTE! If you have something you think you might like to write about, don't be shy, don't put it off, don't worry about being perfect. You have a right and—much as I dislike the word, an obligation—to participate in the publication that serves you, so please exercise it!

Patte LeVan 

Want to Travel? Meet New People? Don't Forget, Camp 2000 in England This Summer!

This coming summer, the British New Church Federation is sponsoring "Camp 2000," an invitation to Swedenborgian young people worldwide to a week of millennium celebration. (See February *Messenger*.)

Convention will sponsor two young adult representatives between the ages of 18-20, expenses paid, to this gathering. Interested Swedenborgian youths may apply for these two positions by submitting two pieces of information to Central Office:

- (1) A letter from a minister or lay person attesting to your ability to represent the Church and be a valuable, contributing member to this gathering.
- (2) A short essay in which candidates will describe the contribution they can make to this international camp, the Swedenborgian background they have, and the things that they feel will be gained from this opportunity.


The minister's recommendations and the essays will be read by a committee of three (two lay persons and one Swedenborgian minister) who will receive these from the Central Office with all names removed and numerical designations assigned. Ratings from the

readers on the committee will be returned to Central Office, and the results will be forwarded to Chris Laitner, vice-president of Convention. Based on the ratings assigned, two young adults will be selected to be sent as fully sponsored representatives of Convention to the "Camp 2000" held at Purley Chase, England, from July 29–August 5, 2000.

The British New Church Federation, sponsors and organizers of this event, have many exciting activities planned which include thoughtful interaction, travel and sightseeing, social occasions and many other rewarding experiences.

The Swedenborgian Church wants to sponsor you, so submit the winning combination of recommendation and essay, and two of you will find your way paid to this marvelous summer experience.

The deadline for submission is March 29, 2000. Your written pieces must be postmarked no later than midnight of that date, so HURRY! Address your submissions to:

Central Office
11 Highland Avenue
Newtonville, MA 02460 

INTERIM MINISTRY

(Continued from page 38)

ministry, of course, is the question of location. Some interims travel long distances to take on a ministry, and others will only work in parishes close to their home. In our denomination, of course, our centers are greatly spread out, which would complicate the circumstances for us.

I think it's important for us to know that interim ministry is a priority in many denominations, and that a body of knowledge is growing up around this specialized ministry. We may not want to have interim ministry in exactly the same way it functions in other denominations, but perhaps there are ways we can utilize some of this information within a Swedenborgian context.

I feel incredibly grateful to have learned so much about parish systemic dynamics and congregational issues when a minister leaves. I'm especially grateful that I had the opportunity to come to know so many committed, talented church leaders from many denominations who are doing the hard work of this specialized ministry.

SOURCES

"Interim Ministry Network," training program in July, 1999, in Waltham, Mass., and Jan, 2000, in Andover, Mass., as well as notebook and materials distributed.

Temporary Shepherds: A congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry by Roger

S. Nicholson, ed. Alban Institute, 1998. In particular, these articles:

Bonnie Bardot, "Coming to Terms with History"

Linda Lea Snyder, "Discovering a New Identity"

Philip G. Porcher, "Commitment to New Directions in Ministry"

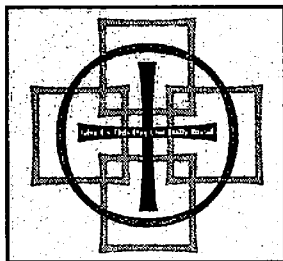
Roger S. Nicholson, "The Challenge of the Interim Time"

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is a professor at SSR and author of Wings and Roots: The New Age and Emanuel Swedenborg in Dialog, published by J. Appleseed, 1999. Reviewed in February Messenger.



The Swedenborgian Cross

At the very heart of our worship and life are the relationships bonding the Lord to his church as it grows in the lives of his people. Life moves from him in a continuously creative flow to touch, to redeem, to make whole. Our response to him is open and free, nurturing the Church in ourselves and in the larger community of all those who love the Lord and their neighbor.



This emblem of General Convention brings together those symbols drawn from the Word and our doctrine which signify this unity in relationships.

"By means of the passions of the cross, the Lord fully glorified his human." (*Doctrine of the Lord* no. 13)

"A square signifies what is just because it has four sides, and the four sides look toward the four quarters, and to look equally toward the four quarters is to respect all things from justice." (*Apocalypse Revealed* no. 905)

"The radiant circle is the Divine going forth from the Lord, which flows not only into Heaven, but also into the universe, and disposes and rules these." (*Arcana* no. 4658)

Thus, for us, the cross symbolizes the glorified Lord, and stands for his Church; the unending circle represents the Divine and its universal power; the square signifies a just union of what is good and what is true; in four squares joined by a cross under a circle, we can see righteous lives, ruled by the inflowing love of God, united by the Lord into his Church.


Swedenborgian Student Fellowship at ANTS

Swedenborgian faith students and the Swedenborgian Church have had a long and continuing relationship with Andover-Newton Theological School in Newton, Mass. We announce the formation of a student fellowship at ANTS for Swedenborgian students, friends, and those interested in Swedenborgianism.

Students of the Swedenborgian faith at Andover-Newton Theological School have organized the "Swedenborgian Student Fellowship at ANTS." Students are planning their program to include pastoral care, social gatherings, lectures, distributing educational materials, and engaging in social service projects. They welcome all those interested in learning about Swedenborg and the Swedenborgian Church to their fellowship meetings.

Contact:

Rev. Andrew Stinson
(617-378-2005)
StinsonAD@Aol.com

For info.: Swedenborgian church: WWW.Swedenborg.org 

Editor's Note: The following article is reprinted from the Autumn 1999 *FCR Witness*, the Fellowship of Reconciliation newsletter.

Gaming With God?

That's what he called it.

We received a check for \$284.90 from a donor in Maryland. An unusual amount. But the reason for it is more unusual.

"It all started," this donor wrote us, "when I found a ten dollar bill while jogging on the Cathedral grounds. I figured it was bonus money. It was not mine, yet it was in my possession. In a special way it seemed to belong to God."

This began a practice that he thought of as 'Gaming with God.' He said it meant "having fun with my partnership with God." Over and above regular giving, every stroke of good fortune—every serendipitous saving that might not have been but was—would go to one of the causes he considers God's work.

Small or large, saved or found money goes into 'playing the game.'

A parking meter had an hour's time left on it. Seventy-five cents then went into what he calls 'the Lord's Kitty.'

Soon afterward, he was driving one of two cars that were going at speeds identical to each other. But not, alas, identical to the posted limit. Suddenly a police car appeared. Red lights flashed—and the other car was pulled over. That meant \$75 for the Kitty.

A cousin drove this donor to the airport. The \$10 cab fare that wasn't went in. As does the \$9 barber fee that isn't whenever his wife cuts his hair. And even the \$235 plane fare saved when a change of plans enabled a car ride with others.

A bookstore gives him a clergy discount that he really doesn't need. He has good plans for the savings.

When going out to lunch with a friend, this Maryland donor says that he genuinely tries to pick up the check, but if his friend is stronger or more stubborn than he is, the price of lunch goes to another cause.

Monthly or quarterly, 'gaming proceeds' are sent to a good cause.

Thousands of dollars have been won, in a sense, and donated. Most donors feel good about what they put into a cause that matters to them. But this man particularly enjoys sending the checks. For he thinks of them as redeeming his 'winnings.'

Anyone else care to try it?



PASSAGES

Birth

Young—Gabriel Anasha Young, Jr., born January 18, 2000, to Gidget and Gabriel A. Young, Sr., in Glendale, Arizona. Grandmother is Dorothy Y. Marple, Northbrook, Illinois; great-grandmother is Dorothy deB. Young, members of the Boston Church of the New Jerusalem.

Confirmation

Send—Marilyn Send was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church January 30, 2000, at the Church of the Holy City (Royal Oak, Michigan) the Rev. Renee Billings officiating. Marilyn has been attending the Women's Alliance meetings and plans to contribute to the Sunday school by offering her sewing skills to help create costumes for church plays and liturgical dancing on special worship occasions.

Marriage

Neuenfeldt and Little—Amy Neuenfeldt and Peter Little were united in marriage at Almont New Church Assembly August 21, 1999, the Rev. Renee Billings officiating. Amy is the daughter of Tom and B.J. Neuenfeldt, Ithaca, Michigan, members of the Church of the Holy City, Royal Oak, Michigan and Almont New Church Assembly. Peter is the son of George and Debbie Little, E. Bridgewater, Mass. (Elmwood New Church). Amy and Pete met at a winter teen retreat at Almont in 1989. Prior weddings at Almont include Amy's parents, 1972, and Amy's grandparents in 1948. It was also a celebration of 100 years of family ties with Almont New Church Assembly.

Correction:

The Rev. Adam Seward, whose mini-sermon, "It May Be Easier Than You Think" was printed in the February *Messenger*, wishes the following corrections be made: He served the Pretty Prairie church in Kansas, not the Pawnee Rock church. Adam states, "I served Pretty Prairie full-time before my illness forced me to a part-time position. I moved to Chicago to get quality health care for my condition, not 'to start up a Native American ministry in that area.' Any Native

Deaths

Fasnacht—Doris L. Fasnacht entered the spiritual world January 22, 2000, at the Manor Care Nursing Home in Cleveland. Doris was a longtime faithful member, first of the Lakewood, Ohio church and again of the Swedenborgian Church of Greater Cleveland, where she relocated in 1964.

Taylor—The Rev. Harold Taylor, 90, entered the spiritual world November 16, 1999. Mr. Taylor was a minister in Vancouver for a number of years following the ministry of the Rev. John Zacharias. He is survived by his wife Beatrice and six children. A private memorial service was held, date undisclosed.

Trott—June A. (Mrs. Philip) Trott entered the spiritual world January 3, 2000, in Hudson, Florida. A resurrection service was conducted January 7, 2000, in Fryeburg, Maine, the Rev. Kenneth Turley officiating. ✠



Change of Address

The Rev. Eric Allison is living in Seattle, at least until June. He can be reached through the Stonehouse Bookstore, 12602 N.E. 85th St., Kirkland, WA 98033. His phone number is (425) 889-4716. Email: theborg@speakeasy.org (See Parish News) ✠

ministry that might come from my presence in Chicago would be a happy coincidence. Also, the Greek word which was used in my sermon is *philia*, not *philla*."

We apologize for the errors and for any inconvenience they may have caused.

The Rev. Adam Seward's new address:
Rev. Adam Seward
100 Forest Place
Unit G-12
Oak Park, IL 60301
Email: thepostman@postmark.net

Helen Keller Audio Book Released

The audio book of Helen Keller, *Light In My Darkness*, revised by Ray Silverman and read by Sasha Silverman in full text, is now available. This three-cassette audio book is nicely packaged and would make a lovely gift. Approximate running time 4 1/2 hours and costs \$11.95 plus \$2.00 postage.

To borrow or buy a tape or to order a catalog, call or write to:

General Church Sound Recording Library

Box 743

Bryn Athyn, PA 19009-0743

(215) 914-4980

Fax (215) 914-4935

E-mail: srlibrary@newchurch.edu ✠

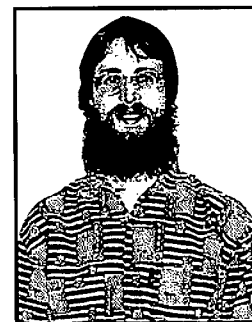
Swedenborgian Views on the Word of God

(Continued from page 41)

cultures as the Bible has for ours.

Being a largely Western church, however, we have not particularly embraced those non-Western scriptures as part of our Word of God. A few Swedenborgians believe that some of the Eastern scriptures come from what Swedenborg called the "Ancient Word," which was a "Bible" that existed before our current Bible. And I have my own suspicions that some Eastern scriptures—ones that are not simply doctrinal or explanatory books—do indeed, have a spiritual meaning, and are every bit as much the Word of God as the Bible.

The Rev. Lee Woofenden is pastor of the Bridgewater New Church in Bridgewater, Mass. ✠



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

Swedenborg Foundation
Alice B. Skinner, Editor

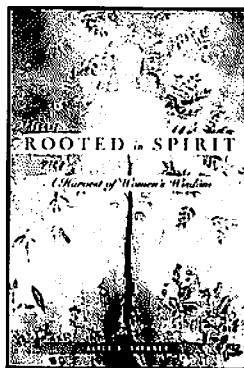
Reviewed by Janet Ashton Vernon

As I completed my reading of *Rooted in Spirit, A Harvest of Women's Wisdom*, I felt as though I had been on a spiritual retreat with the twenty-five interesting women that contributed so generously to the book's creation. Their original essays, poetry, journal writing, and short stories indeed reflect lives that are "rooted in spirit." Their diverse backgrounds, ages, races, and occupations enhance the "harvest of their wisdom" as they explore the impact of Swedenborg's insights on their lives.

The editor's search for a way to organize the writings evolved ultimately to the beautifully succinct:

*Roots deepen
Shoots spring up
Fruits ripen*

As stated in the introduction, "the book is divided into three parts: The first section concerns the wellsprings or roots that nurture spirituality. Like the roots of trees, these invisible forces—images of the feminine of the divine, ancient spiritual traditions, and biblical images—play a part in the ways we become aware of and experience the Divine. Likewise, the communities and families in which we grow up shape our sensitivity to the realm of the spirit, which, in time, we pass on to future generations. Parts two and three interpret the experience of spirituality in terms of two indicators



of its actualization in our lives: the leaves representing a search for meaning, for an expanding understanding of the Divine and ourselves; and the fruit, love expressed in useful actions both in the family and in the community."

I would recommend reading "About the Contributors" at the end of *Rooted in Spirit*, as well as the extensive bibliography, before starting the book. They provide a window to the life experience and vast resources con-

nected to the spiritual growth—the roots, shoots, and fruits you will be encountering.

Rooted in Spirit began with the idea that Swedenborgian concepts should be made more readily available to the evolving dialogue about women's spirituality. It does this very well, and more. Both men and women of all ages will find something to enhance and/or mirror their own spiritual growth.

On my bookshelves are several anthologies of spiritual writings by women of various spiritual and/or religious backgrounds. Reading this book has impelled me to re-read some of them and appreciate further the vast expressions of women's spirituality. I am grateful to the twenty-five Swedenborgian women who have created *Rooted in Spirit, A Harvest of Women's Wisdom*, sharing with us their evolving spiritual awareness and the importance—the joy—of a continuing search for the Divine Feminine.

Janet Ashton Vernon is a retired psychotherapist, reader of Swedenborg, and member of the Swedenborg Foundation. She lives in Long Beach, California and does volunteer work at a local hospice.

To order, please call 1-800-355-3222. ☒

The Swedenborgian Church
of North America
The Messenger
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460

Forwarding Address
Correction Requested

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Plymouth, IN
Permit No. 105