

# THE MESSENGER

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## NCC REPORT

### NCC FOCUSES ON POVERTY

Robert McCluskey

"In 1999, after nearly a decade of unprecedented economic growth and well into the latest overhaul of the nation's welfare system, one in six American children - over 12 million youngsters - lived in poverty, according to the latest available figures from the Census Bureau. That's the good news, because in 1993, more than one in five children were poor. The bad news is that the nation today is roughly where it was in 1979. And compared to the rest of the industrialized world, this country remains at the bottom of the heap. Today, as the good times begin to wane and policy makers begin to evaluate what welfare reform has wrought, the question emerges: Is this the best the United States can do? Must so many children in the nation grow up poor?" *New York Times*, July 8, 2001

In its Mobilization to Overcome Poverty, the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA is out to address just this issue. This initiative was formally adopted over a year ago, and once again served as the central focus of the work of the General Assembly, held in Oakland, California, November 12-16. In this effort, poverty is seen in the historic context of slavery and civil rights: two expressions of institutional racism that were eventually overcome, largely as a result of the churches' steadfast witness and advocacy. The NCC agrees with its former president, Ambassador Andrew Young, that "the continued existence of poverty in the 21st century is the moral equivalent of slavery in the 19th century."

In seeking to overcome poverty, the NCC is keenly aware of the connections with related issues that contribute to or derive from poverty in our nation. The NCC has been active in each of these areas for many years, in some cases breaking new ground. For instance, the work of the Eco-Justice group has "connected the dots" between environmental concerns and social justice issues, revealing that the abuse of natural resources and land go hand in hand with discrimination against the poor and ethnic minorities. (The "Black Belt" of America, running through Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama, also constitutes the highest concentration of toxic dump sites in the country.)

Other related issues, all of which received attention at the

Assembly meetings include:

- **Welfare reform**, a process which, ironically, affects the poor who have little or no power over the way decisions are made. The NCC Washington Office is providing strong leadership in monitoring and advocating for improvements to TNAF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families).
- **Support of public schools**, with special attention given to the current issue of vouchers.
- **Ecumenism and interfaith relations**, as the churches are called to transcend doctrinal differences to meet critical needs, and to raise the prophetic voice of the church on justice and peace issues.
- **Environmental stewardship**, including a critique of Bush's energy plan and our withdrawal from the Kyoto protocols.
- **Racial justice**, and the disparity between rich and poor, racism and other forms of discrimination. (In August, the NCC sent a delegation to the conference on racism in South Africa, a conference boycotted by the US government.)
- **Faith-Based initiatives and charitable choice**: providing analysis, insight and critique.
- **Children's rights**, including support of "The Act to Leave No Child Behind," introduced by Sen. Chris Dodd (D-CT) and Rep. George Miller (D-CA), in May, 2001, and through its collaboration with the Children's Defense Fund.
- **Religious Liberty**, attending to the unique standing which allows the churches to be the conscience of society, and the persistent threats that religious freedom is subject to.
- **Prison reform**, and the issues of rehabilitation and recidivism.
- **Affordable housing**, including a growing partnership with Habitat for Humanity.
- **Christian stewardship**, our treatment of the poor and homeless, our response to consumerism, corporate greed, and economic injustice.
- **Refugee, immigration, and detention policies**.
- **Hunger issues**, including the countless programs to feed the hungry on the local, regional, and national level, and a new partnership with Bread for the World.
- **International affairs**, communication with other churches in the world, and the impact of our lifestyle decisions on the lifestyle choices of our larger neighbors; international justice and debt relief, the Mideast crisis and the price of oil.

All of these affect the conditions which lead to poverty and continue to be the concern of the NCC member churches. It is anticipated that the focus on poverty will strengthen rather than dilute our efforts in these areas. Rather

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February 2002

# A Valentine Cat Tale

Over the Christmas holidays, we left our house for several days to visit my youngest daughter and her friend and their four cats in Los Angeles, and then down the coast to visit a friend on the way home. We left the cat door open and the automatic feeders and water containers filled for our three cats to work it out on their own. They know the drill.

When we returned, our two senior cats greeted us, but Esperanza, the latest and youngest addition to our feline family, was not in evidence.

Before I continue this tale, it's important here to know the cast of cat characters:

**Julian**, the lone male, my cat, the oldest and largest. He doesn't want to fight, but he feels his seniority should be respected and he will defend it. He has staked out certain parts of the house that are his and he breaks into outraged hissing if he's invaded.

**Silky**, Steve's cat, a quiet, ladylike, even-tempered female of indeterminate age. However, she has decided she is queen of the master bedroom, and interlopers, even those merely attempting to cross the room, may be startled by a surprise attack that consists of a lightning charge from under the bed, usually around dawn.

**Esperanza**, the affectionate, fractious upstart who has invaded their space, eaten their food, and often flaunts her youthful vigor by leaping from the living room floor to the top of the drapes. She is fiercely determined to be part of our family, and they grudgingly tolerate her, as long as she knows her place. The problem is, of course, that she doesn't. They are likely to come across her snoozing on one of their favorite chairs or windowsills, or climbing onto a bed one of them has already staked out. Border skirmishes break out periodically, with growls and hisses and tails twitching in menacing rhythm and hysterical rushes up and down stairs. Nobody gets hurt; it's

mostly psychological warfare. An hour later two of them may be napping inches apart on the same bed, as though no altercation had ever taken place. (All this may have a strangely familiar ring to those of us who have grown up in a family, as I assume most of us have.)

So Esperanza didn't show up that night when we got home. Strange, because she always greeted us on our return, even from a short walk. Steve said half-jokingly, "Do you s'pose they 'done her in?'"

"They'd never do that," I said, "she's part of the family." She didn't appear the rest of the night or for breakfast the next morning. Something was obviously wrong. Espie had never quite mastered the cat door, but she had discovered Julian's secret passageway above the rock wall in back of the stove. If she were trapped in there, we reasoned, we'd hear her. We both began to mourn her, recalling how lively and affectionate she was, eager to be with us, running at full gallop with her tail high in the air.

By that afternoon, we were certain she wasn't going to show up. I walked glumly out to my car to make the daily trip to the post office. Julian was sitting on the hood of the car, staring at me, wearing his brooding look. "Julian," I suddenly asked him in a quiet voice, "Do you know where Espie is? Can you tell me? Show me?" It wasn't the first time the idea had occurred to me to ask him the whereabouts of lost things, and he had always come through. Why hadn't I thought to ask him in the first place?

He jumped down off the car and started down the stone steps toward the storage cottage. At the same time, I thought, Oh, no, she couldn't be in *there* all this time, how could that be? I hurried down the steps after Julian as he leaped up on the low wall opposite the cottage and sat staring intently at the door. I reached the door, pulled it open, and out jumped Esperanza, meowing her little squeaky meow, shivering, rubbing against my legs in frantic joy at being rescued. She had apparently followed me in there the night before we left for L.A., and I hadn't seen her. I remembered making that quick trip out to get an empty carton and more wrapping

paper; it was cold and I'd turned out the light and shut the door and hurried back into the house. Espie'd been locked up without food or water for four days.

Julian sat on the wall narrowing his eyes at her like a parent who's both relieved and exasperated when the lost kid is found. I told him what a wonderful cat he was. He maintained his faintly amused, Sherlock expression—Elementary, my dear, if you just ask me and listen more closely, I could tell you many things.

Despite a very hungry kitty clamoring for my attention, I stood in the winter sunshine savoring this small gift of miraculous, ordinary life, feeling connected to everything. Even with cats, family and the deep need to be connected can triumph over the territorial instinct, and they can communicate with us, if we allow ourselves to pay attention.

Oh, and one other thing: Esperanza is Spanish for Hope. A friend of ours suggested the name in a moment of whimsical prophecy.

Patte LeVan



## THE MESSENGER

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## NCC FOCUSES ON POVERTY

(Continued from cover)

than simply meeting the immediate needs of the poor, the council will also be active in addressing the larger, underlying and systemic issues which contribute to poverty in the first place.

The General Secretary has called on NCC members to practice "repentance", to change the way we think about the poor; to resist the temptation to blame the poor or excuse the wealthy and powerful; to think clearly about the systemic, interrelated issues that lead to poverty; to be sensitive to the contingencies of life and the changing demographics of the poor (e.g., the majority of homeless people are not the mentally ill or drug addicted, but single mothers with children); to remember that we are all vulnerable and in need of each other's help. Dr. Edgar is also calling for the practice of what he calls "Ego-disarmament": to put the focus not on the identity of the server, but on the needs of those served.

The NCC is also aware of the need to reach out in collaboration and partnership with those who are already active in the fight against poverty. "Let's connect the dots and link together those who are providing different resources for the poor." In addition to its historic link with Church World Service, the NCC is forming new partnerships with The Children's Defense Fund, Habitat For Humanity, The Salvation Army, Bread for the World, and others.

The NCC has already developed a number of tools to help churches and individuals lend their support to the fight against poverty. These include:

*Charitable Choice*, an excellent essay by the Rev. Dr. Eileen Lindner in the 2001 Yearbook of Churches.

*Staying on Course*, produced by the Justice for Women Working Group, this publication provides a clear in-depth look at the changing nature of government and church partnerships.

*Best Practices Fest*, held each year at the General Assembly meetings in November—successful anti-poverty programs from around the country are lifted up, celebrated, and shared.

*Micah 6*, A packet of information designed to help churches address local needs of the poor.

As always, the NCC seeks to do its mission on two fronts; on the one hand, as an organized, ecumenical body comprising 36 communions who collaborate and share their resources and talents to provide focus and greater effectiveness in areas of common concern to the churches. The work of the staff is overseen by the Executive Board and the General Assembly, made up of representatives from the member communions. On the other hand, and equally important, the mission is accomplished through the work of the individual member communions within their own structures. Thus, the Swedenborgian Church is called upon to be pro-active in developing policy and programs that enable our congregations to contribute to the goal of overcoming poverty, even as it strengthens its support of the NCC in this effort.

## Six Steps to Overcome Poverty

- **Prioritize** people who are poor—both in our personal, family, and vocational lives and in our congregational and organizational practices—through prayer and dedication of our time and resources.
- **Decide** our financial choices in ways that promote economic opportunity and justice for those in poverty.
- **Evaluate** public policies and political candidates by how they impact people who are poor.
- **Challenge** racism, dismantle the structures of racial injustice and white privilege still present, and seek reconciliation among all groups in our society.
- **Nurture** the bonds of family and community and protect the dignity of each person.
- **Organize** across barriers of race, denomination, and social boundaries in common commitment and action to overcome poverty in our own communities, our nation, and our world.

The tragic events of September 11 were a subtext in every event and discussion. Delegates reflected on personal experiences, their communions' response, and the difficult complexities that lay before us, especially as the church is called to proclaim peace and justice. The statement "Out of the Ashes and Tragedy of Sept. 11, 2001," was adopted and is available on the NCC's website at [www.ncccusa.org](http://www.ncccusa.org). Immediately after the attacks in New York and Washington, and continuing still, the NCC has provided a strong voice for the churches. Its website has carried messages of peace and healing, including an interfaith statement, "Deny Them Their Victory." Both pastoral and prophetic in tone, the document calls the American people to a "vision of community, tolerance, compassion, justice, and the sacredness of human life that is at the heart of all our religious traditions." It has been signed by over 4,000 individuals and has reached every member of Congress. The website has also been used as a clearing house for the efforts of its member communions to address the issue. The council is reissuing an acclaimed reference book for Christians, *God is One: The Way of Islam*, by R. Marston Speight, available from Friendship Press. Church World Service is increasing its efforts to meet the humanitarian needs of the Afghan people, where it has been active for decades, even as it provides substantial relief in the US. The council's Interfaith Relations Committee, led by Dr. Jay Rock, has found its efforts to be especially timely as it facilitates dialogue and common action across religious differences.

*The Rev. Robert McCluskey is pastor of the New York New Church. He is one of the three Swedenborgian delegates to the NCC, along with the Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey and MaryAnn Fischer.*



**For as long as space endures, and for as long as living beings remain, until then may I, too, abide to dispel the misery of the world.**

—His Holiness the Dalai Lama

# The Challenge of Valentine's Day

Andy Stinson

With the start of the new year it seems as though things have been roaring along. The new year is an odd time, full of promise, yet in the middle of one of the coldest times it seems almost contradictory that the two should coincide. And now as we ease into February, the charm of the Currier and Ives winter days has begun to give way to cabin fever. And in the middle of all this, here comes Valentine's Day.

I know almost no one outside of high school who gets excited about Valentine's Day. Maybe it is the time of year, the commercial and obligatory nature of it all, or perhaps it is the imperfection. For those of us who are single, this is

written large. I have heard few of my single friends celebrate not being partnered on Valentine's Day. For them this is definitely an imperfect time. For those of us who have lost our partners it can be even more so, harkening the grief of our loss. Even for partners who are married or together for any length of time there is an inherent knowing, even if it is unexpressed, of the imperfection in the relationship and in our partners. Maybe he always leaves his socks balled up in the hall or she is never home on time; but there is always something missing compared to those heady days of love that Valentine's Day seems to conjure up.

And this is the challenge of the day. To love an imperfect being or situation. Certainly God does this, loving us in our imperfection in every moment, wanting to be closer to us no

matter what we do, and we as people of faith are called to be like God. SO open yourself to the goodness of this holiday and to our situations. If we are alone, we can be our own Valentines, take ourselves to dinner and love ourselves in all our imperfections just for a day. If we have lost our loves, celebrate all that was good and know that it will be, again. If we are partnered, love the imperfections of our mate. Make it the task to love each other in the face of all that we might see as wrong without calling for it to immediately change. Because, as we begin to learn to love an imperfect being, we begin to learn to love as God loves us.

*The Rev. Andy Stinson is pastor of the Elmwood Swedenborgian Church in Elmwood, Mass. Reprinted from the Jan-Feb. 2001 Wing and a Prayer, the Elmwood church newsletter.*

Editor's Note: The following three Valentine stories were sent in by the Rev. Eric Allison, pastor of the Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church in Redmond, Washington. The authors are unknown.

## The Legend of St. Valentine

The story of Valentine's Day begins in the third century with an oppressive Roman emperor and a humble Christian martyr. The emperor was Claudius II. The Christian was Valentinus.

Claudius had ordered all Romans to worship twelve gods, and he had made it a crime punishable by death to associate with Christians. But Valentinus was dedicated to the ideals of Christ, and not even the threat of death could keep him from practicing his beliefs. He was arrested and imprisoned.

During the last weeks of Valentinus' life a remarkable thing happened. Seeing that he was a man of learning, the jailer asked whether his daughter, Julia, might be brought to Valentinus for lessons. She had been blind since birth.

Julia was a pretty young girl with a quick mind. Valentinus read stories of Rome's history to her. He described the world of nature to her. He taught her arithmetic and told her about

God. She saw the world through his eyes, trusted his wisdom, and found comfort in his quiet strength.

"Valentinus, does God really hear our prayers?" Julia asked one day.

"Yes, my child. He hears each one," he replied.

"Do you know what I pray for every morning and every night? I pray that I might see. I want so much to see everything you've told me about!"

"God does what is best for us if we will only believe in Him," Valentinus said.

"Oh, Valentinus, I do believe," Julia said intensely, "I do."

She knelt and grasped his hand. Then they prayed together. Suddenly there was a brilliant light in the prison cell. Radiant, Julia cried, "Valentinus, I can see! I can see!"

"Praise be to God!" Valentinus exclaimed.

On the eve of his death, Valentinus wrote a last note to Julia, urging her to stay close to God, and he signed it "From your Valentine."

His sentence was carried out the next day, February 14, 270 A.D., near a gate that was later named Porta Valentiniana in his memory. He was buried at what is now the Church of Praxedes in Rome.

It is said that Julia herself planted a pink-blossomed almond tree near his grave. Today, the almond tree remains a symbol of abiding love and friendship. On each February 14, St. Valentine's Day messages of affection, love, and devotion are exchanged around the world.

## Tell Me Whom You Love...

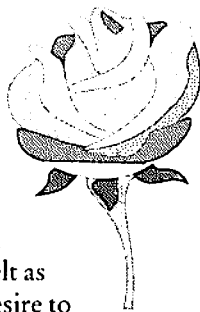
John Blanchard stood up from the bench, straightened his Navy uniform, and studied the crowd of people making their way through Grand Central Station. He looked for the girl whose heart he knew, but whose face he didn't, the girl with the rose.

His interest in her had begun thirteen months before in a Florida library. Taking a book off the shelf, he found himself intrigued, not with the words of the book, but with the notes penciled in the margin—the soft handwriting reflected a thoughtful soul and insightful mind. In the front of the book, he discovered the previous owner's name. Miss Hollis Maynell. With time and effort he located her address. She now lived in New York City. He wrote her a letter introducing himself and inviting her to correspond. The next day he was shipped overseas for service in World War II.

During the next year and one month, the two grew to know each other through the mail. Each letter was a seed falling on a fertile heart. A romance was budding. Blanchard requested a photograph, but she refused. She felt that if he really cared, it wouldn't matter what she looked like. When the day finally came for him to return from Europe, they scheduled their first meeting—7:00 PM at Grand Central Station in New York. "You'll recognize me," she wrote, "by the red rose I'll be wearing on my lapel."

So at 7:00 he was in the station looking for a girl whose heart he loved, but whose face he'd never seen. I'll let Mr. Blanchard tell you what happened:

"A young woman was coming toward me, her figure long and slim. Her blonde hair lay back in curls from her delicate ears; her eyes were blue as cornflowers. Her lips and chin had a gentle firmness, and in her pale green suit she was like spring-time come alive. I started toward her, entirely forgetting to notice that she was not wearing a rose. As I moved, a small, provocative smile curved her lips. "Going my way, sailor?" she murmured. Almost uncontrollably I made one step closer to her, and then I saw Hollis Maynell. She was standing almost directly behind the girl. A woman well past 40, she had graying hair tucked under a worn hat. She was more than plump, her thick-ankled feet thrust into low-heeled shoes. The girl in the green suit was walking quickly away. I felt as though I was split in two, so keen was my desire to follow her, and yet so deep was my longing for the woman whose spirit had truly companioned me and upheld my own. And there she stood. Her pale, plump face was gentle and sensible, her gray eyes had a warm and kindly twinkle. I did not hesitate. My fingers gripped the small worn blue leather copy of the book that was to identify me to her. This would not be love, but it would be something precious, something perhaps even better than love, a friendship for which I had been and must ever be grateful. I squared my shoulders and saluted and held out the book to the woman, even though while I spoke I



felt choked by the bitterness of my disappointment. "I'm Lieutenant John Blanchard, and you must be Miss Maynell. I am so glad you could meet me; may I take you to dinner?"

The woman's face broadened into a tolerant smile. "I don't know what this is about, son," she answered, "but the young lady in the green suit who just went by, she begged me to wear this rose on my coat. And she said if you were to ask me out to dinner, I should tell you that she is waiting for you in the big restaurant across the street. She said it was some kind of test!"

It's not difficult to understand and admire Miss Maynell's wisdom. The true nature of a heart is seen in its response to the unattractive.

## Love Has a Clothes Call...



This is an email sent from my sister Cindy about when she met her husband Val for the second time. She flew from Ohio to Kansas where he met her at the airport.

"When I first met him it was with friends, only for a few hours. Val had prepared a Chinese dinner and we three girls brought wine. His smile and sincerity melted my heart. I told Mom when I got home that I had met the man I was going to marry. Eleven months later I flew to Wichita to meet Val over Memorial Day weekend. We were going to fly from Wichita to Garden City for a job interview for me. Anyway, I could not remember what Val looked like, I could only remember his smile. As I got off the plane there was a man in desperate need of a good haircut, dressed in a tan Ultrasuede shirt and brown wool plaid pants. His cowboy boots were worn and dirty. As I looked at this young man I said to myself, "Please God, don't let that be him!" He stepped forward and smiled; I instantly realized that it didn't matter a hill of beans what he was wearing, I was smitten. The rest is history. I later found out that he had gone into the men's store in Garden City and asked them to pick out something really nice for an important date. They sold him that terrible set of clothes that had probably been on the rack for ten years."



I pray for the strength to accept that lives most often end in tragedy, that quests don't always work, that understanding is a long and lonely hunt, that I can't reason my way to love, eat gold, or live forever. And that none of this matters. I pray to understand that I am here to find my way back to God, whatever that takes, and all the rest, save love and duty, is an illusion.

—John Taylor Gatto,  
as quoted in *The Sun*, December 2001.



# WHO BETTER KNOWS?

Francesca

After my 12-year-old grandson Gabe had spent two years in religious training, I decided he could proceed down the path millions had traveled before and receive his First Holy Communion. But first he had to get through the Sacrament of Penance or the dreaded "Confession."

Religious education for the mentally impaired child meant a lot of coloring the various images of God. Not that I really expected anything else, because after all, God had made him and loved him just as he was. God didn't need him to know much more than that, and Gabe loved Him in return. So when Father James was told that I wanted Gabe to receive Holy Communion, he responded that he needed to understand about the Body and Blood of Christ.

Gabe knew God lived UP—somewhere in the clouds—and He had lots of hair, which Gabe, depending on which crayon his class gave him, colored red, green, black or brown. Blood meant nose bleeds, or body hurts.

I explained all this to Father James and he finally said, "Does he know Jesus?"

While I contemplated exactly what that meant, Father pressed on. "Can he identify a picture of Jesus?"

"Yes." I responded quickly, putting a period on my "Yes." Fortunately Father did not require me to test his mind-set with the image of Baby Jesus in a manger. He seemed satisfied and I silently sighed with relief that I didn't have to do real battle.

First Confession was scheduled for the first Saturday in April, with practice the day before. I don't know how much preparing they did with him; I suspect very little. I also was in the dark as to what was going to happen, but everyone seemed genuinely happy Gabe was there. They had a pretty ceremony planned with a procession down the center aisle. Each child, holding a votive candle, turned into the first pew and was led in order, first to last, into a room

where Father James would be waiting on Saturday.

"Can Gabe carry a votive candle?" was the first question the teachers asked.

I responded that I thought he would, even though I feared he might not. You never knew with Gabe. The things you thought he would do, he would not, and vice versa. In addition he might do something one time and everything be OK and then refuse to ever do that again. I don't think I ever knew how to expect the unexpected.

But at this moment he was holding the votive and standing in line behind the little girl with red ringlets. He looked angelic, as did everyone. And then the teacher, speaking to the pretty red-haired girl, spoke the words that froze me to the spot.

"Honey, keep your hair behind you. We don't want it to get close to the candle and catch on fire."

***Even after all these years that Gabe had been with his grandfather and me, I was still dealing with issues—I never accepted Gabe being ridiculed, and I despised the condescending looks I received from others when Gabe did something peculiar.***

I didn't know what he was going to do—drop the candle, throw the candle somewhere and run—at which point someone would have to tend the candle while I tried to stop him. Whatever the scenario, it was going to be serious.

Someone blew a "C" note whistle and the procession started. He followed everyone else. I couldn't believe it. I walked to the first pew and waited for the children to arrive.

Suddenly, Gabe's young voice announced with volume and clarity, "Smokey the Bear says don't start forest fires." And again, "Smokey the Bear

says don't start forest fires." And again . . . until he was even with my pew.

He stopped and waited for me to reassure him that he was correct, which I did, by nodding my head. He turned, followed the other children and sat when the next "C" note was blown.

No one said a word; none of the children laughed or poked fun. All the teachers acted as if nothing had happened. Everything proceeded smoothly. Had instructions been given to ignore anything that Gabe might say or do?

Even after all these years that Gabe had been with his grandfather and me, I was still dealing with issues—I never accepted Gabe being ridiculed, and I despised the condescending looks I received from others when Gabe did something peculiar.

While I pondered if I should ask any questions, the teachers dismissed the group, telling everyone to be back tomorrow. I guess it was just as well, I probably wasn't going to like what I heard anyway.

Tomorrow arrived long before I was ready. I still had that knot in my stomach, but I told myself that probably the worst had happened and the little "Smokey" thing wasn't so bad; and if he did it again, I would just smile to all those condescending looks and be gracious. After all, I was in church.

I decided I would prepare Gabe for the actual Confession on the way to the church. That way, he wouldn't have a lot of time to either forget or decide he didn't want to do it.

"Gabe, you're going to see Father James today and have your First Confession. Papa and I are so excited for you." He didn't respond, so I continued, "You remember you are going to Confession today."

"Yes," he said, a little flat, but positive.

I thought I would start the remedial 101 by giving him something he might think about when Father asked him about his sins.

"You go into the confession room and tell Father James about any bad things you have done."

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A painter will tell you that his painting is never completed. He “sees” his work; it has life, and it grows and changes in his eyes and perception as long as he is near it. Years after selling a work, the artist may see his painting again and still feel connected to it, but regard it as a child that never grew up because the years have led him to other perceptions. In his growth, he has moved away from the feelings or perceptions that inspired that past work, and it has stayed in the moment of its development, when it was sold, to be “looked” at by admiring eyes.

When we go to a museum, we want to see the history of an artist—a selection of works that represents the changing perspective and growth of an artist we admire. We “look” at each work and try to feel what was behind the brush in the time of its creation. We see the evolution of the energy and the artist only by “looking” at works created over a lifetime of inspiration, a lifetime of development and change; a lifetime of evolving perceptions. But we could never say that we knew the artist. We may have an interpretation or a connection we perceive with the work, but we are only looking at his work, once removed from the “present,” the here and now of the time of its creation. We see only the moment the work stopped. We don’t see how it got to that moment, and we don’t see any of the ways it would have changed after that moment.

I have spent a great deal of time “in the moment” throughout my life, and consider myself somewhat of an expert on the dichotomy inherent in this subtle misnomer. Having been diagnosed with AADHD (Adult Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) at the age of 33, I spent most of my life in the moment, unwittingly distracted by a constant stream of “data” coming in from all directions. It was very hard to be in the “here and now” when each moment was crowded with many threads of thought. Through time and experience I developed ways of altering my behavior to force myself

## The Present the Moment (Seeing & Looking)

to be *seeing*, and not just *looking*, at the people and events in my life.

Of course it was a long process, and I was not always conscious of my efforts. I was only conscious that something in me was isolating me from others, including family, friends, girlfriends, et al. Since I had inherited the intuitive abilities that often come with ADHD, I was able to feel this isolation without anybody really noticing. I was not a “hyperactive” child; my hyperactivity was internal and manifested itself in my inability to concentrate on long-term anything. This included conversations and most other interactions with people. I glanced by love and joy, and moved quickly past pain and loss “in the moment.” I didn’t feel a sense of belonging. I created a self-fulfilling prophecy, replaying situations that led to pain and loss, and never experiencing the full splendor of joy, happiness, and love.

I tell this story only to draw a line between the ADHD experience and living life in the elusive “moment.” It is on this line that I walked in my past. Thankfully, I woke up.

Inherent in “life in the moment” is a lot of mental and emotional travel, arriving, and of course, leaving as quickly as you arrive. Think of all the built-in

surface-level experience in this life model. Think of the faulty opinions and perceptions that are formed when we read only half of a mystery, watch half of a movie, or hear part of a story. Imagine how our picture of the “here and now” is diminished when the next moment takes us away from seeing deeply, what is close and right there before us in the here and now. We rob ourselves of life’s most transforming experiences as they become transient instead of life-changing. We can talk about them as events, but did we really learn and grow if we had not fully integrated them into the here and now of our lives?

Some of us live physically in the “here and now” with perceptions formed in the “there and when,” filtering each experience through past experiences, never really *seeing* the truth of what “now” is. This affects our perceptions of new people in our lives, and people in our past. The desire to keep seeing deeply what is right in front of us in the “here and now” is required in order to be aware of who we are and how we have grown. More importantly, it takes this desire, and the intent, to discern new people and experiences in the here and now from patterns and people in our past.

It is thought virtuous to be capable of living in the moment and making each moment a life unto itself. What happens most often, however, to a person who believes they are living in the moment, is that they can soon become a person who is never quite present in the here and now for they are always ready to drop what is here and now for the next moment or a past moment. There is a big difference between *here and now* and *the moment*. The paradox is that living in the moment will keep us firmly rooted in the *there and when*, causing us to stop our spiritual and emotional growth—which only comes through seeing deeply into our experiences and learning from them. Living here and now means paying attention to the present, living with intent, not living in the moment. The only intent in the moment is the isolation

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*I was not a “hyperactive” child; my hyperactivity was internal and manifested itself in my inability to concentrate on long-term anything. This included conversations and most other interactions with people. I glanced by love and joy and moved quickly past pain and loss “in the moment.” I didn’t feel a sense of belonging.*





A Toltec Wisdom Book  
by Don Miguel Ruiz  
Amber-Allen Publishing, 1997  
San Rafael, California

Reviewed by Kelly Mahan-Jaramillo

The dedication reads:

To the circle of fire;  
Those who have gone before,  
Those who are present,  
And those who have yet to come

I think the first question one might ask when picking up this small, 138-page book would be, What is Toltec Wisdom?

The book opens with a short chapter titled "The Toltec" which succinctly explains who and what the Toltec are. To give an overview of this fascinating group of people is essential to understanding how simple the basic agreements and teachings are, yet how esoteric.

Thousands of years ago, the Toltec were known throughout southern Mexico as "women and men of knowledge." Anthropologists have spoken of the Toltec as a nation or race, but, in fact, the Toltec were scientists and artists who formed a society to explore and conserve the spiritual knowledge and practices of the ancient ones. They came together as masters (naguals) and students at Teotihuacan, the ancient city of pyramids outside Mexico City known as the place where "Man Becomes God."

As with many esoteric teachings over the millennia, the masters were forced

## THE FOUR AGREEMENTS

### *A Practical Guide to Personal Freedom*

to conceal the teachings and maintain their existence in obscurity. As always, between European conquest and the often rampant misuse of personal power by a few of the apprentices, it became necessary to shield the knowledge.

Ironically, having a history similar to Wicca, the spiritual practices forced to go underground managed to survive by being passed on through generations by different lineages of naguals. Though they remained veiled in secrecy for hundreds of years, ancient prophecies foretold the coming of an age when it would be necessary to return the wisdom to the people.

Don Miguel Ruiz, a nagual from the Eagle Knight lineage, has been guided to share the ancient wisdom of the Toltec. Ruiz was born into a family of healers, raised in rural Mexico by a mother who was a curandera (healer) and a grandfather who was a nagual (shaman/master.) The family assumed that young Miguel would embrace their centuries-old legacy of healing and teaching, carrying the Toltec tradition forward. Instead, Miguel chose to attend Western medical school and become a surgeon. In the early 1970s a near-death experience changed the course of his life.

Miguel had fallen asleep at the wheel of his car, causing the car to careen into a wall of concrete. He remembers that he was not in his physical body as he pulled his two friends to safety. The experience left him stunned, and the roots of his ancestry called him back home where he began to study in earnest with his mother, then completed his apprenticeship with a powerful shaman in the Mexican desert. His grandfather, who had since passed on, continues to teach him in his dreams.

In the tradition of the Toltec, a nagual guides an individual to personal freedom. This is Don Miguel Ruiz, a nagual from the Eagle Knight lineage, and he is here to share the teachings.

Toltec knowledge arises from the

same essential unity of truth as all the sacred esoteric traditions around the world. Although it is not a religion, it honors all the spiritual masters who have taught on earth. While it does embrace spirit, it is most accurately described as a way of life, distinguished by the ready accessibility of happiness and love.

Now, I would imagine, the second question might be, What are the Four Agreements?

The Four Agreements are:

- 1) Be Impeccable With Your Word
- 2) Don't Take Anything Personally
- 3) Don't Make Assumptions
- 4) Always Do Your Best

Before Don Miguel even helps the reader with the first agreement, there is a short introductory chapter called "The Smokey Mirror." It is four pages, but once the reader has absorbed those four pages, there is no turning back. It takes intense concentration to read and grasp, and there is no way to review it, no review here to give. There is a brief explanation that this reviewer can try to pass along, and that is the moment of realization that "Everything is made of light, and the space in-between is not empty." Everything that exists is one living being, and light is the messenger of life, because it is alive and contains all information.

When one (the one in this case being an ancient one who had a vision) comes to the realization that Everything is God, he or she comes to the conclusion that human perception is merely light perceiving light, that matter is a mirror and the smoke in-between is what keeps us from knowing what we are.

Smokey Mirror said, "I am looking at myself in all of you, but we don't recognize each other because of the smoke in-between us. That smoke is the Dream, and the mirror is you, the dreamer."

Don Miguel Ruiz does an impressive job of taking a concept that may be as

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## THE FOUR AGREEMENTS

(Continued from page 24)

hard to see as the face of God him/her self, and paring it down in relatively simple language. He goes back to the dreaming issue that Smokey Mirror first understood: What we are seeing and hearing right now is nothing but a dream. We are dreaming in this moment. We are dreaming with the brain awake.

Ruiz carries us gracefully through that thought to the concept of choice. As children, the language we spoke was not our choice, nor were our religious or moral values—these were already there before we were born. We never had the opportunity to choose what to believe or not to believe. These are agreements, and we never chose even the smallest of these. We never even chose our own name.

Children believe everything adults tell them. They did not choose the beliefs, and may at some point even have rebelled against them, but the rebellion is not strong enough to combat the belief system we were born into, and by our very birth, agreed to. Don Miguel calls this agreement, and consequent surrender, the domestication of humans. And it is through this very domestication that we learn how to live, and learn how to dream. It is important to give an overview of chapter one so that we understand that the Four Agreements are so much more than some kind of verbal handshake with God and Self. It is an understanding of our programming, and until we can understand our programming, it is virtually impossible to go about undoing it and begin a life based upon beliefs and agreements that YOU choose.

So—back to the agreements. In this review, I am only going into depth with the first one. If the reader is captured by the concept, it is my duty to stop here.

### The First Agreement: Be Impeccable With Your Word.

As Don Miguel explains, right out of the gate, this is the most important agreement and also the most difficult to honor. It is so important that with just

this first agreement one will be able to transcend to the level of existence he calls heaven on earth.

*Be Impeccable With Your Word.* Why your word? Your word is the power you have to create. Your word is the gift that comes directly from God. "In the beginning there was the word, and the word was with God, and the word is God."

Through the word you express your creative power. It is through the word that you manifest everything, regardless of what language you speak. The word is not just a sound or a written symbol. The word is a force.

Don Miguel goes on to point out that we are the only creatures on the planet with the use of words, the ability to

*He remembers he was not in his physical body as he pulled his two friends to safety. The experience left him stunned, and the roots of his ancestry called him back home where he began to study in earnest with his mother, then completed his apprenticeship with a powerful shaman in the Mexican desert.*

speak. He says that the word is the most powerful tool we have; the word is a tool of magic. And therein lies the double-edged sword. With the word, you can create, you can destroy. Depending on how it is used, the word can set you free or destroy you more than you know. All of the magic you possess is based on your word. Your word is pure magic, and misuse of your word is black magic.

I will have to stop here, because as

Don Miguel reveals history and the use and misuse of the word, the reader has to stop and take a breath, tallying up how many times he or she has used the word as pure white magic, or misused it as black magic, activating people's fears.

He speaks of the mind as a fertile ground where seeds are planted. Plant a seed, a thought, and it grows. So often our human minds are fertile for the seeds of fear.

This is only the dissection of the word *word* (and a very condensed version). What of the word *impeccable*?

*Impeccable* means "without sin." It comes from the Latin *peccatus*, which means "sin." Religions talk about sin and sinners, but what does it really mean to sin? Is it possible that a sin is anything you do which goes against yourself?

These questions and so many more are answered in *The Four Agreements*. As a reader, I am still stunned. As a reviewer, I feel inadequate, but that does not matter. As a reviewer, I cannot recommend this book highly enough. It is gentle but tough, easy but rock hard, small but larger in scope than many tomes dispensing spiritual guidance. It is warm, wise, and accessible. I guard my copy fiercely, and the day I understand it fully, I will give it to the first stranger on the street that I encounter. For 'thou art God.'

It is only the smoke which gets in the way.

I want to thank Terry Dalrymple and Tomas Hart for bringing this book to my attention.

*Kelly Mahan-Jaramillo has worked in the film industry as an assistant music editor for a number of years; her most recent work includes Saving Private Ryan, A.I. (Artificial Intelligence) and Harry Potter. She lives in Venice, California, with a friend and four cats, and writes in her spare time.*

Editor's Note: There is a workbook that accompanies *The Four Agreements* and a number of study groups have been formed as the book has steadily gained recognition.



## TO THE EDITOR

### Newly Isolated Member Suggests "Why Not Media Ministry?"

It was Sunday morning, and once again I was going to miss church—how I have truly missed the joy of being in our church. What was I thinking of, to be in a place without our church? And how could I remedy the situation?

I said to myself, I'll get a group and read with them, share my collection of sermons that were used in Royal Oak, maybe gather enough people to have someone come here, or go "there" where church is—a long expensive trip from Nevada to Michigan. These solutions weren't very practical.

Then the thought hit me. We need a media ministry—radio, TV, or both. In years past this has been a concern for me and even more so now that I'm truly an isolated member. I have been very concerned over the years about isolated members and those who have churches but no ministers. There are people who are ill or handicapped and shut-in who could benefit from a media church. Think about the numbers of new listeners who would learn about our ministry and use its doctrine and messages to improve their lives.

Have we considered that one of our great hopes is the potential for us if we share our church with the world population? There are seekers who long for and need spiritual support and do not know where to go. We all need to be strengthened and comforted now more than ever.

Several days ago as I was pondering this idea, and the happenings on September 11, I received the special October copy of *Our Daily Bread*. It was amazing how the contributors each had their individual approaches and responses, and yet taken all together there was something for everyone.

I am more convinced than ever that it is our call that we answer by getting out there with our messages and sharing our religion as it relates to life. We have talent and resources unavailable to others. With our ministers, publishing facilities, Swedenborg House of Studies, support units, and more, there is no reason we should not succeed.

I have many ideas, and I am sure others do—what do you think?

Thank you for listening.

Mary Crenshaw

Henderson, Nevada



## Convention 2002 IS the Maine Event

Yes—or Ay-uh—Convention is going to be in Maine! This is your Maine chance if you have been longing to visit our beautiful state. Convention will be held at the University of Southern Maine in Gorham. The campus is 20 or so minutes from the Portland Jetport and close to an exit on the Maine Turnpike. Now that Amtrak comes to Portland you could even come by train!

The week's format has been changed to allow for schools that get out late in June. Pre-convention and ministers' meetings will begin **Wednesday, June 26**. Delegates come **Saturday June 29**. The outing will be **Tuesday, July 2**, and departure **Wednesday, July 3**. We will be staying in a double dorm with meeting accommodations nearby. There are elevators in all buildings. The cafeteria is beautiful and huge with plentiful choices, vegetarian always being available. For recreation there are public hours at their skating rink, some local beaches, and outings for youth being planned, as well as evening activities and free time. Gorham Center is within walking distance and has all the amenities of a campus center.

The Tuesday outing will be a lobster bake somewhere that swimming will also be available, so bring your suit.

Convention theme is "Living For Peace." The keynote speaker will address this timely and vital subject.

We hope you can spend some extra time in Maine, either before or after Convention. Portland itself has a multitude of attractions. If you like shopping there is the Old Port with its 19th-century buildings, specialty shops, restaurants, and pubs. There is also The Maine Mall for those with more modern tastes. The Art Museum and Children's Museum are downtown, and the Portland Observatory is nearby with spectacular views of Portland and Casco Bay. There is a narrow-gauge railroad skirting the bay, and Super Duck Tours that go in it. We will have information available on the many other activities in Portland. Speaking of shopping, Freeport is about half an hour north on Route One (25 minutes from my house in Bath). Brunswick, with Bowdoin College, is another 15 minutes north.

In Bath you could visit the church, many antique shops, the Maritime Museum, and perhaps take a boat trip on the Kennebec River. Restaurants are excellent. Popham Beach is nearby for walks and swimming for the very hardy. It is 85 miles from Portland to Rockport/Camden with spectacular scenery and Windjammers, and 160 miles to Bar Harbor.

I hope this whets your appetite for what will be a great Convention in a place you have always wanted to visit.

Lois Dole

Registration Co-chair



### Important Church Calendar Dates

Feb. 1-3 .....	COMSU—Wayfarers Chapel, Palos Verdes, Calif.
Feb. 28-Mar. 3 .....	Joint General Council/Cabinet— Del Rey Beach, Florida
April 26-29 .....	Retirement Committee—Newton, Mass.
May 4 .....	Investment Committee—Newton
May 2-5 .....	MINSU—New York City
June 26-29 .....	Council of Ministers—Gorham, Maine
June/29-July 3 .....	Convention 2002—Gorham, Maine

## Ghoulies and Ghosties In Cleveland

In an endeavor to make ourselves better known around the neighborhood, we held a Halloween Stop at the Cleveland Swedenborg Chapel. Although this was our first attempt and we were not sure how many people might stop by, we decided to think enthusiastically, buy a lot of dry ice, and pray for a good turnout. We were delighted with the results! Rev. Junchol Lee, Leo and Nela Serrano, and Cynthia Holden decorated the church the night before, and the effect was quite

## Parish News

spooky, we were told. In fact, a few of our youngest visitors were reluctant to come in. Junchol and Leo had distributed approximately 200 flyers to houses on neighboring streets, which resulted in about 60 kids with their parents coming by.

In Cleveland the allotted "Trick or Treat" time is from 6 to 8 p.m., and when the flow had seemed to stop around 7:50 we decided to turn on the lights and begin taking the decorations down. As we were doing that a few groups of "trick or treaters" trickled in looking for candy and cider. For us, the highlight of the evening was when one of their parents came in (with her camera), expressing



disappointment that we had started taking everything down because she had heard, "You have to visit the Swedenborg Chapel—it looks really spooky." Our planning group is already meeting to discuss the past year's event and what we can do to improve for this year—2002 *trick or treaters*—**BEWARE!**



## The Present and the Moment

(Continued from page 23)

of the moment itself from the present. **T**he *present* remembers the past and moves on, lets it go. Since the present was present in the past, it learned by seeing deeply in the *now*; that is now the past, and it moved on staying present in the ever-evolving here and now. The moment was only "looking" in the past, just as it is now. Therefore, the moment formed judgments instead of understanding. It got stuck, or it raced ahead, only getting half the picture: half the picture of love and joy, and half the picture of pain and loss. All of which become misperceived in the moment. The moment doesn't deal with loss or pain; it tries to diminish them with the next moment, or a past moment. Where is the healing? Where are the resolution, the learning, and the growth? We will live those moments of pain and loss over and over again until we intend to understand

them, seeing their roots in our experiences, and healing, in the here and now.

**T**he *present* regards love and pain as two sides of the same coin, learning equally from both in understanding them both, by seeing deeply into the meaning of both. Dealing with loss and pain, and celebrating fully, our joy and love is what keeps us here and now. Our connections with people are rich and full and our love is truth, in the present. There may not be as many connections however, as we are living within the limits of our mortality. But those that are lived in the here and now are the stuff and pith of life. It is quality, not quantity that expands the vision and understanding of our lives. It is *seeing* not *looking* that brings growth and happiness to our relationships and our lives in the here and now. Of course there is a lot to be said for living in the moment once in a while, but a good analogy would be the saying that goes something like, "It's good to take a walk down memory lane, but I wouldn't want to buy a house there."

I have not been referring to moments of pure joy, bliss, and revelation, for these are moments in the here and now, as are moments of profound sorrow, pain, and loss. In experiencing these moments in the here and now, they are honored and fully realized, adding lasting impressions to our lives to enrich our souls and our time on this earth.

**I**would urge everyone reading this to close your eyes for just one full minute. For that minute, repeat this mantra:

*Attention, Attention to the here and now.*

When you open your eyes, don't forget to stop looking, and use them to see.

*John Rogers is a musician, poet, and member of the Portland, Maine Swedenborgian Church.*

Reprinted from June 2001 *The Appleseed*, the Portland church's newsletter.



# Social Concerns Education Committee Update

Ted Klein

This is to update you on the work of the Social Concerns Education Committee. The committee is available to assist you in social concerns education, service, and action efforts. We offer, and welcome your responses to, our recently approved mission statement:

The Social Concerns Education Committee of the Swedenborgian Church acts to encourage, nurture, and inspire social action and education within and beyond the denomination. The committee offers assistance and guidance with responses to social needs and issues through such efforts as mailings to centers, presenting workshops and displays at Convention, and maintaining a presence on the internet.

Included in this update are some ideas and information relating to ways of being of service in the world as changed by the tragic events of September 11. Let us remember well Alicia Titus and the many others killed in the

terrorist attacks. In going on in the world so changed, perhaps we can reach new understandings of the interdependence of humans with one another.

Part of this update shares information and asks for your input about the website our committee is developing. Please respond to this important new direction in our work.

We welcome ideas from any of you about how our committee can be of service in the future.

## Responding to the World as Changed by the Tragic Events of September 11: What Individuals or Churches Can Do

1. Join with local efforts in your communities: some churches are part of an effort to develop avenues of interfaith understanding. Groups in many communities are organizing ways of offering support to those who lost loved ones in the attack. Some community groups are organizing ways to work for safety for all citizens. Many different activities may be going on; you can join some of them, and perhaps you will think of something needed and not yet being done.

2. Learn about and see how you can use some of the resources being developed in the denomination. The October issue of *Our Daily Bread* includes much that can aid worship, prayer, and reflection.

You may have also seen the variety of materials in the latest *Messenger*. *God in the Midst of the City*, an important collection of such materials as poems, prayers, quotations, and reflections is being compiled by the Communications Support Unit. I will be offering a course next Spring Semester through the Swedenborgian House of Studies dealing with Swedenborgian perspectives on violence and non-violence.

3. Seek out and learn from helpful resources from outside the denomination. Important resources in response to the terrorist attacks and our changed world are being developed by the National Council of Churches, such as prayers and other worship resources, affirmations of diversity, materials for use with children, and more. I believe some of the resources will eventually be available to be mailed to our churches. You can check on-line at [www.nccusa.org](http://www.nccusa.org) and search under "Faith Responses to Terrorism."

## The New Social Concerns Education Committee Website

Please give some thought to what could be part of our website and make suggestions.

Among features being considered are: Booklist; Societies' Activities; Action & Service; Education; Web Connections; Care of the Earth; Committee Information.

Please consider and respond to the following questions:

- What would you like to see on the website?
- How can the website and our committee be helpful to you?
- What would you like to know about—from the website and our committee?
- Do you have stories to offer to others about something you or your church has done?

Please send ideas by e-mail to our Web Designer, Sarah Swart ([sarswart@iVillage.com](mailto:sarswart@iVillage.com)) or by regular mail to me:

Rev. Dr. Ted Klein, SCEC Chair,  
273 Perham Street,  
West Roxbury, MA 02132.

## Women's Alliance—Getting "New Business" Organized

Hey, Ladies!

I would like to thank everyone who has given me a constant show of support as your president of the Women's Alliance. I didn't realize what an awesome task I accepted. In preparation for the next luncheon at our convention in Portland, Maine, I have a request. Please send me any business items that you would like to discuss at the luncheon which would be considered "New Business." These items should arrive *before* May 1, 2002. The executive committee will then add it to our luncheon agenda as "New Business"

when we have our committee meetings at convention. Please understand that I would like the luncheon meeting to run as smoothly as possible, because we are always on a tight schedule. I believe that collecting business items ahead of time will help in this process. Any unannounced "New Business" that comes up during the meeting will be tabled for the next luncheon meeting. Thank you for your understanding and loving support.

*Yours in sisterhood,*  
Jenn Tafel



## WHO BETTER KNOWS?

(Continued from page 22)

"I am a good boy!"

"Yes, of course. But sometimes, you get angry."

"I am a good boy!"

"I know. But sometimes you are mean to Blacky."

"I am a good boy! I am a good boy!"

Instantly, he was loud and agitated. I had gone too far.

"Of course you are. Nana and Papa know that."

Time to drop the subject. What was I doing anyway? Trying to make this a perfect experience? Maybe Father wouldn't even ask him about sins.

I was silent for the rest of the drive, mentally exercising with my own psychobabble, even though Gabe occasionally would tell the back of my head that he was a good boy. "Sparring for a fight," as my mother would say.

When we got out of the car at the church, he shot me one more wary look, daring me to say anything to him. His grandpa turned him around by telling him what a big boy he was getting to be. I felt pretty foul myself, but I was determined to look warm and loving, just in case Gabe eyeballed my face to check my attitude.

I let his grandpa stand with him in line, and I went to the parent's pew. I was hoping to be out-of-sight, out-of-mind, because Gabe could be angry for hours. Right now, I just wanted to get this over, as painlessly as possible.

The procession went off without a hitch. No more reference to hair and "Smokey."

One of the teachers came over and whispered, "When Gabe goes into the confession room, can we shut the door?"

"No, I don't think so. He might be afraid," I told her. He would never let us close his bedroom door, or the bathroom door. I couldn't imagine him being closed in with someone less familiar.

Now all of a sudden, I had something new to fear. Gabe going into the room—being all alone—with a stranger. How many times had I warned him to stay away from strangers? Of course he knew Father, but if he were

alone in the room, would he think Father was a stranger? Don't know why that hadn't occurred to me before.

Standing, I decided to stop Gabe before he went in, but it was too late. It was his turn and he was headed for the door. So I sat down, telling myself whatever happens, happens!

The teacher waited for Gabe to go into the room before she pulled the door about halfway to her. Then for some reason she reached in and closed it completely.

I instantly felt sick to my stomach, as I waited for Gabe to jerk at the door, screaming to be let out. I held my breath so long that I had to gasp for air when Gabe, himself, opened the door and returned to his seat. He looked OK—a serious, but calm expression.

Actually I couldn't have asked for a more perfect expression. Some of the little girls were giggling. Then there was Gabe, who didn't even know what this was about, appearing full of grace. Well... maybe he was.

Shortly after the last child returned to his seat, Father James came out. He told the children this was a wonderful day, the first time of many times they would visit with our Lord, Jesus. I didn't hear the rest of the sermon, because I was trying to find a tissue to catch my tears before my mascara ran.

Father James and the "C" whistle programmed the children to leave the church procession style. The teachers were beaming as if they had pulled off

something quite magnificent.

We loaded Gabe into the car, and he, too, was caught up in the golden moment, quite pleased with everything.

"I did good, huh, Nana," Gabe asked and announced.

I opened my mouth to say, yes, but he started in again.

"I did good, huh, Papa."

"You sure did, Gabe," we both exclaimed at once.

Then Grandpa, braver than I, said, "Gabe, did you talk to Father James?"

"I said I was a good boy."

We laughed all the way home, thinking of the various statements Father James could have made, and getting Gabe's, "I am a good boy" response. I even speculated that Father might have helped him along and wondered how many, "good boy" times it took before Gabe sounded angry.

But then I knew the answer.

Whatever the question—or the statement, or the blessing—that evoked the 'I am a good boy,' it was all Father would need to hear. After all, who would know better than Gabe and God?

*Patricia Francese Watson began writing in the late 50s, winning numerous regional contests, including two state awards. She has been published in the Congressional Record and a handbook for high school studies. She lives in Bent, New Mexico. This is her first appearance in The Messenger.*



## Wayfarers Chapel Winter/Spring 2002 Calendar of Events

**February 26, 2002** - Return engagement - The Treblemakers- The women performed in February 2001 and the house was sold out one week before the concert date. This local group of women has been performing together for the past 28 years. 7 - 9 p.m. Donation \$5.00 with reception following.

**March 12, Artista Marchioni, RN-**  
Lecture - *Natural Healing Pathways*-  
7 - 9 p.m. - Donation \$5.00 -  
Reception following.

**April 23, 2002** -Return engagement - God's Women of Treasure- This trio performed in February 2001 to a sold out house with requests for their return. They sing primarily gospel music but will add classics and show tunes to their repertoire. 7 - 9 p.m. Donation \$5.00 with reception following.

**April 28, 2002** - Fourth Annual Art Show - "Thursday Morning Painters" featuring Sheila McKee and her one of a kind sterling silver jewelry. This art show has become a favorite in the community. Free and open to the wayfaring public.



## FIND SWEDENBORG BOOKS VIA THE WORLDWIDE WEB

Are you looking for Swedenborgian books, literature, art, and music? Here are some great sources on the Web:

### SWEDENBORGIAN PUBLISHERS:

J. Appleseed & Co.

The Swedenborgian Church's publisher of books and pamphlets

<http://acorn.he.net/~japple>

The Swedenborg Foundation  
Premier publisher of books by and about Emanuel Swedenborg

<http://www.swedenborg.com>

Fountain Publishing

Art, Music, and Literature of a New Christianity

<http://www.fountainpublishing.com>

The Swedenborg Scientific Association

Publisher of the scientific and philosophical works of Swedenborg

<http://www.thenewphilosophyonline.org/>

The Swedenborg Society

British publisher of Swedenborg's works and related literature

<http://www.swedenborg.org.uk/>

### SOURCES OF NEW AND USED, OLD AND RARE SWEDENBORG-RELATED BOOKS:

Amazon.com

Lists many new and used Swedenborg-related titles at or below retail price.

Search by author, title, keyword.

<http://www.amazon.com/>

Half.com

Buy used books from individuals and

book dealers at discounted prices.

Search by author, title, keyword.

<http://www.half.com/>

EBay.com

The leading online auction site. Search

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One or another of these sites is likely to have the title you are looking for.

Happy reading!

Lee Woofenden



## Reaching Out

Esther Nicastro-Capon

At our last Convention in St. Paul, I was approached by the Rev. Pavel Heger from the Czech Republic. He was very concerned because pornography is widely displayed throughout his country, in all kinds of establishments, even places that children frequent.

He is acquainted with a person in the country's legislature whom he has asked to draft a bill or ordinance that would limit locations where pornography would be available. Unfortunately this person is a new and inexperienced member of the country's legislature and there isn't any precedent to which to refer. Pavel asked if I could help in any way. I told him I would do my best to find some kind of document that could be used as a model.

I spent many hours researching until I was able to locate "A Model Ordinance Regulating Sexually Oriented Businesses." It contained the instructions that it is a model only and must be tailored to fit the requirements of state law and the needs of the local community.

I photocopied the twenty-nine page document and mailed it to Pavel. I recently received a postcard from Pavel which in part said, "Thank you so much for sending me those important materials! We will see what we can achieve here with that."

I am delighted that he was able to receive them and hope and pray that this will help to restrict the availability of pornography in his country and more specifically in his locale.

Over the years I have done much pro bono consulting not only for the Wayfarers Chapel but for our denomination and our members when I was called upon for help. I must admit that to be able to help Pavel is the most satisfying accomplishment.

*Esther Nicastro-Capon is an attorney. She and her husband, the Rev. Edwin Capon, a former president of the denomination, live in Concord, California.*

## Swedenborg Collaterals Wanted!

Do you or your organization have Swedenborg collaterals that you no longer want or need? Do you have two copies of something that you would love to see go to a good home? Well, look no further! The Elmwood New Church is in the process of creating and consolidating its Swedenborg Library and would love to have those copies of Swedenborg collaterals that you no longer need or want. We are not looking for copies of Swedenborg's works (those we have) but are looking for collateral material that might be in need of a home. We will pay the shipping, and we will make sure that donations are well cared for and fed. If you have some titles please contact [elmwoodnewchurch@hotmail.com](mailto:elmwoodnewchurch@hotmail.com) or call the church directly (508) 378-2981.

## Baptism

Locke—Jenna Ryan Locke was baptized into the Christian faith November 11, 2001, at the Elmwood Swedenborgian Church in Elmwood, Mass., the Rev. Andy Stinson officiating.

## Deaths

Hall—Harriet (Hattie) K. Hall, 87, longtime member of the Elmwood church, entered the spiritual world September 22, 2001. The Rev. Andy Stinson officiated at the memorial service held September 27.

Mikelos—Grace K. Mikelos, 90, longtime member of the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan, entered the spiritual world December 17, 2001, following complications with surgery at St. John's Hospital in Warren, Michigan. Grace's life was celebrated December 21st in a service officiated by the Rev. Renee Billings-Machiniak. She is survived by her only remaining sibling, Ruth Brandau, many nieces, nephews, cousins and great nieces and nephews.

## Church Family News

The Rev. Dr. Ted Klein slipped on the ice after a bad storm in mid-December and fractured his hip. He underwent hip replacement surgery in December and at this writing is recovering at home. Cards can be sent to: Ted Klein, 273 Perham St., W. Roxbury, MA 02132. It may be awhile before Ted is using his email again but greetings can also be sent c/o Mary Kay at:

The Rev. Marlene Laughlin is recovering well from her bout with cancer and radiation treatment and is back working fulltime at the Wayfarers Chapel. She is looking forward to an exciting 2002 and again wishes to thank all those who have expressed their love and concern.

Vice-president Chris Laitner says: "I'm back on my feet! Many thanks to all of you who called, sent cards and emails, and who offered prayers for healing. After eleven weeks of living with a non-weight-bearing right ankle, I began the transition to using two feet. After one week, I moved from

walker to cane, and now, sixteen weeks after my close encounter with a stairway, I'm up on two feet walking (carefully) with very little cane help. My recovery time was certainly enhanced by the thoughtfulness and care of so many people. Thanks!

The Rev. Eric Zacharias discovered late last summer that he had a leaky heart valve and underwent surgery in early November to repair it. He was in the hospital for over a week, but has been recovering well and is grateful for all the love and attention he received from family and friends, and for each day of improving health. "This gift of life from our creator is pretty fragile," he says. "It behooves us to make the most of it from day to day. Good health cannot be taken for granted. We do not know what tomorrow may bring. Live fully; affirm relationships that make life precious with those you love, with friends. Greet each sunrise with a prayer of thanksgiving."



## FARE THEE WELL . . . DEADSU Remembers

Robert McCluskey

On the morning of September 11, Vincent Kane, a New York firefighter with Engine Co. #22, had just returned home after a 24-hour shift. As soon as he heard the news, he headed downtown and hooked up with his co-workers, grabbed a fire suit (one of just several available) and headed for the North Tower, the first one to be hit. He was inside when the South Tower was hit by United flight #175. It seems that Vinnie helped quite a few out of the tower, but kept going back in. That's where he was when the South Tower fell. Later, someone told Vinnie's sister, "Thank God for Vinnie Kane, I'm home with my wife and daughter because of him." Vinnie's body was recovered on Thanksgiving day and buried two days later. He had asked that "Spirit in the Sky" by Norman Greenbaum be played. Prior to this, an informal memorial service was held with a number of his friends. I was honored to be there.

I met Vinnie a few years ago through a friend of mine, Tom Leighton. Our most significant bond grew out of our love for music. Vinnie played bass and guitar, and we spent many evenings testing our capacity for harmonic convergence and decibel augmentation. We also had time to talk

about other things. You see, Vinnie had been a New York police officer before we met. However, he experienced increasing disappointment and frustration with the routines of writing summonses and harassing street people, and transferred to the Fire Department so he could "actually help people." He was also very active in promoting a more progressive political agenda, working tirelessly for the Marijuana Reform Party, helping to place several candidates on the ballot in 1998 and 2000. Through it all, Vinnie Kane stood out for his dedication and devotion, his steadfast determination to work for the legalization of marijuana, citing the present war on drugs as ill-conceived and devastating in its effects. (It is worth noting that last August the Church of England issued the same call to the British government.) A whole lot of us already miss Vinnie for a whole lot of reasons. Central to all of them was his unflinching good will and concern for others; plus he liked to play Dead tunes!

On November 10, 2001, we lost another hero when Ken Kesey (*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*) passed away. You can read all about it on his website, [www.intrepidtrips.com](http://www.intrepidtrips.com). Ken Babbs, a good friend of many years, had this to say:

"Kesey's belly was hurting and the docs did a scan and found a black spot on

his liver. It was cancerous but encapsulated which meant there was no cancer anywhere else. They decided to cut it out and the surgery went okay. He had sixty percent of his liver left to carry the load but in one of those dirty tricks the body can play on you everything else went to hell and this morning at 3:45 a.m. his heart stopped beating. A great good friend and a great husband and father and granddad, he will be sorely missed—but if there is one thing he would want us to do it would be to carry on his life's work. Namely to treat others with kindness, and if anyone does you dirt forgive that person right away. This goes beyond the art, the writing, the performances, even the bus. Right down to the bone."

They say Kesey's dead.  
Don't ever trust a Prankster,  
Even underground.  
Wavy Gravy

Vinnie and Ken are both featured in the year-end issue of the *Rolling Stone* (12/27/01-01/01/02). Vinnie is on page 55, and Ken is hard to miss!

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





# WRITER'S SCHOLARSHIP OFFERED BY COMSU

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.

The Communications Support Unit is continuing to sponsor a unique, twice-yearly scholarship opportunity for a writer 18 years or older who is interested in writing for the Swedenborgian Church to attend "WRITING FROM WITHIN," a three-day workshop at Temenos Retreat Center. Travel expenses to West Chester, Pennsylvania, will be included. This year the workshop takes place April 12-14, 2002.

If you are interested in writing for our denomination in any capacity—*Messenger* articles, pamphlets, books, sermons, we encourage you to apply for this three-day weekend intensive to learn the Metcalf-Simon Method of Proprioceptive Writing with expert Mary Bok, in the peaceful setting that Temenos provides.

Simply write to  
COMSU,  
c/o Patte LeVan, Editor, THE MESSENGER  
P.O. Box 985  
Julian, CA 92036.

Or send email to Patte LeVan at  
[Messenger@jinet.com](mailto:Messenger@jinet.com).

In several brief paragraphs tell us:

- A. why you want to take the workshop
- B. what you are interested in writing for our denomination
- C. what specific subjects, if any, you feel you may have useful expertise or background in (psychology, health, creativity, experiential subjects, mystical subjects, etc.) that you can relate to Swedenborgian spirituality
- D. what topics or themes you would most like to see J. Appleseed and *The Messenger* address in future publications.
- E. Feel free to send us a sample of your writing,

but this is not a requisite.

The deadline for our receipt of your entry is March 10, 2002.

We thank you in advance for your interest in writing, and we invite your input and suggestions about publication in our Church.

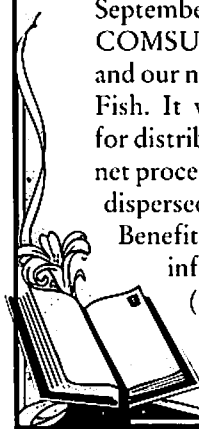
The winner of our winter competition was Bette McDonnell, a member of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church. Her report on her experience will be published in the March 2002 *Messenger*.



## God in the Midst of the City

*God in the Midst of the City*, a beautiful 62-page booklet of healing and inspirational readings published in the wake of

September 11, is compiled by COMSU chair Mona Diane Conner and our new J. Appleseed editor, Ross Fish. It will be off the press and ready for distribution in late February. The net proceeds of the publication will be dispersed through a special Squad 1 Benefit Fund. For advance order information, call J. Appleseed at (707) 938-5885 or email Ross Fish at [designross@aol.com](mailto:designross@aol.com)



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