

# THE MESSENGER

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June 2003

*"A new dawn is breaking and a new age, the Age of Spirit, is fast coming upon us . . . a sizeable portion of humanity is steadily turning towards the light of the spirit." —Sai Baba*

## Greater Things Than These...

Eric Allison

A big part of what has made Swedenborgians unique in the Christian world is our belief that a spiritual Second Coming of Christ is happening at this very moment. That is changing. People of virtually every religion believe that the world is taking a significant step toward new ways of living and of perceiving reality itself. Ask yourself, how is your belief in a spiritual Second Coming related to what is happening in the world today? What particular events or even people do you see as signs of the increasing presence of the Lord in the world?

Swedenborg makes clear that we are spiritually evolving as a species, but I hadn't thought much about how or if human beings are changing. Are we seeing signs of that evolution right now? Presumably some of these changes would challenge our current beliefs in what people are capable of doing. Jesus said, "greater things than these will you do." I know I haven't been doing any of those "greater things," and I have always been suspicious when I heard or read of some guru or avatar who supposedly was doing the "greater things."

I'm not aware of any rule that says God must first manifest these changes in the western world, and so my inner inquiry led me to consider the living spiritual saints and sages of India. I've generally dismissed these accounts as the tales you always hear from India. I confess I never gave them much credibility.

The Indian mystic and writer, Sri Aurabindo, prophesied that on

November 23, 1926, "supra-mental consciousness" for the human race would begin. He said that on that day someone would be born who would represent the beginning of this change. On the old Hindu calendar that was the "never declining, very-full year." This day traditionally celebrated the god of great blessing, Siva. There was also at this time an unusual alignment of the stars, so everyone in the village of Puttparthi was chanting when the sun's first rays shone on the purple rocks beyond the Hitravati River. It was at that moment in Pedda Raju's house that Satyanarayana (Sai Baba) was born. Raised as a Hindu in a modest home, he was 15 years old when he told his family and community that he was an incarnation of the Muslim holy man named Sai Baba of Shirdi, who had died eight years before Sai Baba's birth. From that time on the person known now as Sai Baba has healed people and performed miracles on a daily basis.

He is the guru I selected as the focus of my search for a person who is doing "greater things." I knew of Sai Baba only because a member of my congregation, Ella Erickson, told me of her fantastic visits to the ashram. I had to see for myself if he was doing "the greater things."

I read some of the teachings of Sai Baba and found myself in agreement with virtually everything he wrote. His writings are, as we say, "very Swedenborgian" but with an Indian twist. He believes as do most Indians that we are now in the Kali Yuga. A Yuga is a five thousand year period. The Kali Yuga is

the "Great Day." ( Second Coming ) He does not just teach and work miracles on individuals. He has also built two huge "super specialty hospitals," two universities, two ashrams—one of which can house as many as ten thousand people—and he has started numerous schools. I felt compelled to take the plunge and go on a spiritual adventure to the much-maligned, much-revered and much-visited subcontinent of India. Or so I thought. At the ashram, they said, "You did not come because you wanted to, you came here because Swami wanted you to come." It took everything within me to put on hold my doubts and western views of gurus and open myself up to the experiences and convictions of the sixty million people who follow Sai Baba.

I stayed in a modest hotel (\$6.00 a day) near the ashram in White Field

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Sai Baba

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# President's Report

This has been a very busy and productive year as your president. Many exciting things have happened, to be sure. But there have also been a few sad events of note. I'll begin this report with a list of my travels, followed by several points that I want to highlight for you.

## 2002-2003 Meetings and Visits

- July 27-Aug. 4:  
Almont New Church Assembly,  
Almont Michigan
- Aug. 11:  
Church of the Good Shepherd,  
Kitchener, Ontario
- Aug. 22-25:  
Wayfarers Chapel Board meeting,  
Palos Verdes, California
- Aug. 29-Sept. 1:  
MINSU meetings, LaPorte, Indiana
- Sept. 5-13:  
British Conference ministers  
meetings, and preached at the  
Birmingham New Church
- Sept. 19-22:  
Cabinet meeting, Cincinnati, Ohio
- Sept. 24:  
Toured Hobart & Smith Colleges,  
Geneva, New York
- Sept. 29:  
Elmwood New Church,  
Elmwood, Mass.
- Oct. 3-6:  
Pacific Coast Association Meeting,  
Long Beach, California
- Oct. 11-13:  
F. Bob Tafel's retirement party and  
installation service for Sarah Buteux,  
Cambridge, Mass.
- Oct. 15-16:  
CAM meetings, Berkeley, California
- Oct. 18-20:  
EDSU, Kitchener, Ontario
- Oct. 23-27:  
General Council meeting,  
Temenos Retreat Center, Pennsylvania
- Nov. 7-10:  
SHS Board meetings,  
Berkeley, California
- Nov. 13:  
Toured St. Jerome's College,  
Waterloo, Ontario
- Nov. 16:  
Investment Committee,  
Newton, Mass.

- Nov. 17:  
New York Church sanctuary  
rededication, New York City
- Nov. 22-25:  
Church of the Holy City cross tower  
dedication, Edmonton, Alberta
- Dec. 22-24:  
Church of the Good Shepherd  
worship and Christmas Eve services
- Jan. 8-12:  
Wayfarers Chapel Board meeting,  
Palos Verdes, California
- Jan. 13-15:  
Lay Leadership Program meeting,  
Berkeley, California
- Jan. 17-19:  
New York Church Board and  
congregational meeting, New York City
- Jan. 25-26:  
Cleveland Swedenborgian Church
- Jan. 31-Feb. 3:  
New Church of Southwest Florida,  
Ft. Myers, Florida
- Feb. 7-9:  
Central Office and Boston church
- Feb. 13-17:  
COM Executive Committee,  
Pacific Palisades, California
- Mar. 7-10:  
Meeting with the Boston congregation,  
General Council conference call, and  
Wilma Wake installation.  
Boston and Portland, Maine
- Mar. 12-16:  
MINSU, Palos Verdes, California
- Mar. 17-20:  
CAM, Berkeley, California
- Mar. 28-30:  
Meeting with New York Church Board  
and congregation, and met with  
several members of the Church of the  
Little Grain, Brooklyn, New York
- Apr. 3-6:  
SHS Board meeting,  
Berkeley, California
- Apr. 12-14:  
Eric Hoffman installation,  
St. Paul, Minnesota
- Apr. 17-21:  
Pretty Prairie Maundy Thursday service,  
Pawnee Rock Good Friday, Easter  
sunrise, and Easter Sunday worship  
services, Kansas
- Apr. 25-27:  
Transitions retreat and Kristofer Lange  
baptism, Almont, Michigan
- May 3:  
Investment Committee,  
Newton, Mass.
- May 11:  
Church of the Good Shepherd,  
Kitchener, Ontario
- May 15-18:  
Wayfarers Chapel Board meeting,  
Palos Verdes, California

- June 14-15:  
Urbana Church and meeting with  
Dr. Robert Head, Urbana, Ohio

## Items of Note

- Our church in LaPorte, Indiana has been able to purchase the former Red Cross building, which is right behind the church. This provides them with a minister's apartment, church office, bookroom, and additional meeting space and parking that will help in expanding their ministry to this community.
- It was wonderful to welcome Eric Hoffman back into our active ministry during his installation service at our church in St. Paul, Minnesota, and to meet the 10-12 new members of the congregation!
- A special weekend of celebration took place in Cambridge in October when the congregation hosted F. Bob Tafel's retirement party and installed Sarah Buteux as their new pastor. I was honored to speak at both events. The congregation continues to work on fundraising for the purchase of the chapel.

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## THE MESSENGER

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## Greater Things Than These...

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outside of Bangalore. For the first week I thought perhaps I had finally lost it. I was in India trying to get a handle on why six to twelve thousand people gathered every day just to watch this old Indian man walk through the crowd for about twenty minutes. The reason they all got up at four or five in the morning to stand or sit in line for two to three hours was the hope that he would pick them for a private interview. The conviction held by all was that Sai Baba (or Swami, as he is affectionately called), would heal them. If it was cancer, he would cure it. If it was emotional distress, he would heal it. Many of them believe that he is actually God in the flesh and that there is nothing he cannot do. Yes, I did say God with a capitol G. They believe he is God much in the same way that Christians believe that Jesus is God.

As the days passed by, I became absorbed by the spiritual power of being with so many people who love God. I began to feel at home there, and changes happened within me that are hard to describe. I had never spent four hours every day in prayer before. I had never chanted with thousands of people as a regular discipline. I had never been in an atmosphere where men and women were not seeking a partner. The focus was on Spirit, not the flesh. It was the dirtiest and smelliest holy place I had ever been in. But that did not matter and no one complained, for that was external and the people were there for something more internal than they had ever had before.

Most evenings, many people in the building where I was staying would gather on the rooftop to enjoy the sunset, eat dinner, bask in the warm evening air and share their spiritual journeys. There was lots of laughter, lots of tears and a great willingness to share. Discussions were not intellectually challenging. They were from the heart and there was absolutely no pressure to believe or be converted. People just shared how God was real for them, and that was mostly through the person of Sai Baba. These

were gooseflesh-producing stories all about the "greater things." Here are just a few of the stories I heard:

Two years ago, Katherine had come from Germany seeking God through Sai Baba. After a stay of several months she had to go back to Germany. She wanted very much to believe from first-hand experience that Sai Baba was the avatar of the age, the incarnation of Siva and Ram But Katherine had not had the coveted "private interview" with Sai Baba, and she longed to have the secure faith of those who had witnessed his miraculous powers. Before departing for her home, she prayed to Baba saying "shower me with your love, then I will know that you are real. Just shower me with your love." In her own words she said "I took the train to Bombay and went to the Sai Center there. After the morning Darshan ended, I was left with more than twelve hours of waiting before my flight was to take off. There were some temples I wanted to go to in the city, but I only had two hundred rupees left. A cab driver at the center offered to take me around even though I told him I had only a little money and it wouldn't be worth it for him. He said he would take me wherever I wanted to go and he took me all over the city. He even sat with me on the steps of a temple for two hours waiting for it to open. After a long day of touring which went well into the night, he dropped me off at the airport. I thanked him and gave him the little money I had. I looked at him, somewhat bewildered as to why he would do so much for me and I asked him, 'why would you do this for me when all I can give you is two hundred rupees?' The driver looked at me and said 'I just wanted to shower you with my love.' I knew then that Baba had heard my prayer and that he loved me."

**"What does it matter how God is manifested? If you believe in your heart that God is alive in the world then you will see him everywhere. If you don't, you won't see him no matter what he does. You will not see the greater things."**

Katherine's story is typical of those who say that Sai Baba has answered their prayers through another person, but stories have a very wide variety of categories. For example many people have seen Sai Baba "materialize" things. That is, he reportedly makes things appear from thin air. With my own eyes I saw "Vibouhti" come out of his palm. It is a Hindu sacred ash. Often people in private interviews are given a ring. He simply reaches into the air and pulls out a diamond ring which always fits perfectly. I heard of one man who went to a jeweler to have his watch repaired but the jeweler was only interested in the ring the man had been given by Swami. The jeweler told him that he had never seen a stone set like that. No glue was used and he could not find anything that was holding the stone in place. He added that rings had not been made that way for over a thousand years.

There is another account of a man who agreed to sell his ring to a jeweler. As he was in the act of handing over the ring, it disappeared.

There are the thousands of people who say that Swami has appeared to them in their own country while Sai Baba was actually in India. Even more amazing is lining up the dates and times of visitations to discover simultaneous appearances in more than one location. A woman in Colorado saw Swami jump behind the wheel of her car while she flew into the back seat. He drove her car through a monster storm saving her from an accident. At the very same moment people in other locations around the world saw Swami intervening for them. One man was drowning himself in the ocean off Sri Lanka when he saw the bushy-headed figure clad in an orange robe walk across the water to pluck him from the sea and carry him to the shore.

Perhaps the most extraordinary case was the man from Australia who was having an interview with Swami when word came that his wife was gravely ill back home. Swami asked him what he wanted. He said that he wanted to be with his wife. At that moment Swami created a wall and asked the man to

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## Greater Things Than These...

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step through it. The man stepped through the wall into his wife's hospital room in Australia. So it goes. Just when I thought I had heard the wildest story of them all someone would tell me another. Skeptic and cynic though I am, I knew that these stories were not invented. Not surprisingly, there are even two well-documented accounts of Sai Baba raising the dead. I protested to someone, "I don't care what story you tell me, I will never believe that Sai Baba is God. I simply can't. How can God be in one five foot tall Indian man?" I taped the response: "The issues you have about believing in him are the same issues you have about believing in Jesus, really believing. If you really believed, *with God all things are possible*, then you would believe this. What does it matter how God is manifested? If you believe in your heart that God is alive in the world then you will see him everywhere. If you don't, you won't see him no matter what he does. You will not see the greater things."

I mulled over the comment. I thought about how much of this may just be my own cultural bias. In India people have no trouble believing in miracles. They just accept it as reality. We believe in angels. We believe that God is everywhere all the time. We believe that God intervenes by using angels to help us. Could there be living angels who help us? Maybe Sai Baba is a new kind of person. He is just one of the first ones for us to see and that's why it is so hard to believe.

One final story. I met Frederick from Austria who had been at the ashram for five years. He grew up in Austria as a Christian. I asked him how this all fits in with his Christian faith.

"I'm still a Christian," he said. I asked, "do you still pray to Jesus?"

"Not normally. God has any number of forms and names. To reach God you have to choose for yourself one name. I pray to Baba. Baba says it is like being in the desert. If you are going to find water, you have to focus on one spot and dig down deep."

I asked, "Do you think Baba can hear the prayers of everyone who is praying to him all at one time?"

"Yes, he can hear everyone's prayers at once. I know this is true. He comes to people in dreams and gives them the answer and he does this to many people with answers to different questions all at the same time."

I protested "But he is only one person."

"He is not just a person. He has taken on a body but he is not the body. He says that the body is like putting on a dress. It is very temporary. When you are done using it, you take it off."

I asked, "Do you think that he is the reincarnation of Jesus?"

"I know that many people come here believing in Jesus, and when they see Baba for the first time they see Jesus. He looks like Jesus to them and then they believe that he is Jesus. Baba says to all western people that they need to believe in Jesus. I know one man who was told by Baba that he would see Jesus. The man asked Baba if he could take Baba's picture and Baba said it was okay. When the man developed the film there was no picture of Baba but every photo in the entire roll were all pictures of Jesus."

There are many books which will tell you these and many other stories. I believe that most of the stories are probably true. Do I believe that Sai Baba is God? No, but he is certainly not a regular human being. I do think that he is doing some of the "Greater Things." I must add that while the miracles draw the crowds he works tirelessly to help people on the most basic level by founding free hospitals and schools. No one seems to know just how many schools he has started. Even more impressive than the number is the high quality of education the children receive. But, don't take my word for it. Go to India and see for yourself. With some luck you can get a plane fare around \$1,000. Once you are there everything is cheap. You can eat a great meal in the best dirt floor restaurant in town for under two dollars. I never got sick once the whole time I was there.

If you go, go as a seeker or a pilgrim and gird up your spiritual loins for a

third-world experience that will likely challenge you. Stay for at least two weeks.

What is it like?

The street in front of the ashram is the embodiment of the term, *bus-tling*. Each day, all day, is the unabated din caused from the procession of vehicles of every size and shape. They dance an amazing dance which is thrilling to take part in and fascinating to behold. Large trucks blast their horns, auto rickshaws buzz, motorcycles purr, cars honk, bicycles ring their bells, cow carts clatter, and tractors putt while pulling wagons of sugar cane. Your first glance at this mosh pit would predict 100% fatalities by day's end. But, it seems to work. Together they weave an undulating river of people, metal, wood, fruit, products, and smoke. On both sides of the street pedestrians jostle elbow to elbow with carts, pawing beggars, auto rickshaw drivers. Vendors hawking their wares. Police make a pretense of order by blowing their whistles and pretending to direct traffic. Anyone ambling the street quickly learns to step over trash, excrement, sleeping dogs and dozing beggars. One day there was even a dead man lying on the sidewalk. Like each person, like each place and like life itself, heaven and hell are side by side and easy to get to for anyone willing to make the journey.

Add to these sights and sounds the scents of India. The sweet fragrance of flowers, spices, fresh fruit, deep fried food and incense, mix with the smells of dust, garbage, burning rubbish, burning plastic, burning cane and open sewers. Odors and fragrances all mingle with clouds of spent diesel fuel to serve up a toxic cocktail Indians call air. I usually wore a dust mask or bandana on the street and sometimes even in my room. From the time you land in India until your plane leaves the runway, you will often find yourself inhaling with considerable reluctance.

What is an ashram? It is a kind of retreat center. Behind the walls are a large complex of dormitories, a school, a large library, and two canteens. I often ate hearty meals in either the Indian or

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# Our Wedding Ministry: Dynamic, Creative, Useful

Kit Billings

As you may know, we have a very active wedding ministry at our church in St. Louis, which got off to a good start this year. It's fascinating to see what kinds of conversations and issues emerge over the phone and in person with people who come to us expressing interest in our wedding ministry. It's sometimes shocking to encounter the differences between other Christian churches and our own regarding which couples are deemed worthy of support and blessing. As a New Church Christian minister I feel good about supporting and blessing the vast majority of the couples who contact us while many other ministers and churches in Christendom will not. (I am happy to report, however, that a few others do!) I feel blessed when I raise my right hand at the end of each ceremony, allowing the Lord to flow through my being and my words—I believe the spiritual blessing these couples receive is heartfelt and genuine.

Most churches in America, although not all, require that the betrothed be members of their church, believing that the future spouses must belong to *their* particular brand and vision of God's church before the Lord will give his blessing to the marriage. Recently, I heard the tale of a couple who were rejected and prevented from having their marriage blessed by their church after they had hastily chosen to be married by a justice of the peace—their reason was that the man is in

military service and was initially told last December that his ship was being deployed to the Gulf. The order was later rescinded and so they went back to their pastor. They were rejected for doing what they thought was right. I'm proud that our church doesn't engage in such attitudes and beliefs.

Another interesting difference I run into often is *where* clergy of various faiths place the *origin* of the power for couples to be married. My experience tells me that many ministers and laypersons from various churches believe strongly that the actual *power* or spirit of marriage is controlled by the church and the clergy—their perception seems to rest in placing the primary substance of “the church” in the organization and the powers granted to ministers. Swedenborg essentially refuted that belief, stating that the origin of genuine marriage love flows from the Lord, through heaven, and then into the minds and souls

of one man and one woman who deeply love each other, love the Lord, and believe and try to live according to the truths found in his Word. Those who do so can be more and more interiorly open to the love, passion and insights that come through spiritual marriage love.

Swedenborg wrote that marriage love grows from the conjunction of the Lord and the church *within* individuals and between two people by means of the conjunction of goodness and truth inside of them. He wrote that the attraction of Divine Love and Wisdom for one another within God is a *passionate* one, which is what essentially creates such glorious passion within men and women to find each other and become one—as the Lord is One. He wrote that the vibrancy of this marriage love stems from the quality and substance of said conjunctions within and between them; what this says to me is that the *quality* of the love and truth within the man and woman is what really matters and impacts greatly our openness to the Lord and marital love. For it is *those* aspects of the human spirit that allow the Lord to flow in to a greater or lesser degree with His love and wisdom.

On earth we're each on a lengthy, sometimes extremely difficult journey toward growth. Fully mature and regenerate people or angels of heaven do not have to struggle so deeply with their marriage love, because their

spiritual growth and healing are ultimately done. But *we*, on the other hand, are in the middle of our spiritual regeneration, which means it's appropriate that we encounter the dark aspects of self that are not yet deeply open to God's love and wisdom, and therefore to marital love. For the sake of our growth and salvation we *must*, at points, be let down into our own selfishness and irrationality so that it can

hopefully be seen, recognized and dealt with, with God's help—*regenerated*. To use biblical language, we're each very likely somewhere in between the Creation Story and the descent of the Holy City New Jerusalem, and until the Holy City descends completely within our own minds, fully mature marriage love will not be attained...although glorious glimpses of it along the way are possible, I believe. I've done many reaffirmation services and I'm convinced that during such services those husbands and wives are feeling genuine marriage love.

The major issue regarding marital love is, what is going on *inside* the souls and minds (and therefore the lives) of those seeking marriage, and what's going on within the couple's deeper *intentions*. If their intentions are good, holy, and connecting in God, and if their minds are open to God's truth

*If their intentions are good, holy, and connecting in God, and if their minds are open to God's truth as they can best perceive it, then the particular church organization and clergy who bless and ratify the marriage is not a big issue.*

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## Our Wedding Ministry: Dynamic, Creative, Useful *(Continued from page 85)*

as they can best perceive it, then the particular church organization and clergy who bless and ratify the marriage is not a big issue. As we know, there are many paths up the mountain to the one Lord of Heaven and earth.

Interestingly, Swedenborg learned that the spiritual joining between a man and woman takes a major leap when they become engaged, yet their joining becomes more grounded, sanctified and ratified on the wedding day. Our teachings do say that the spiritual presence and the blessing given by the minister is quite relevant, as we read in Swedenborg's work *Love In Marriage* no. 308: "The marriage should be solemnized by a priest (or minister). That is because marriages regarded in themselves are spiritual and thus sacred; for they descend from the heavenly marriage between good and truth, and the various elements involved in marriage correspond to the Divine marriage of the Lord and the church. Marriages descend therefore from the Lord himself, and are formed according to the state of the church in the contracting parties. Now, because the ordained clergy on earth administers matters which reflect the priesthood lodged in the Lord, that is, which reflect his love, thus also matters which require His blessing, it follows that marriages ought to be solemnized by His ministers. And because His ministers are also then the chief witnesses, a couple's consent to the covenant ought to be heard, approved, ratified and thus firmly established by them as well."

It appears that the cooperation, mutual enhancement and blessings from the Lord's church inside and outside of a man and woman joining as husband and wife are *very* important. The Lord cares deeply about the internal and external levels of people coming together into conjunction and correspondence, where our external aspect of personhood *corresponds* to our internal and where outward love and truth connect with the *inward* love and truth growing from the warmth and light of heaven.

As a final note, given that I'm very much involved in psychology as well as theology and spirituality, I learned many years ago that sometimes in this level of life there's another enormous power that may also draw a man and woman together. It can be not so much those deep stirrings of marriage love flowing from the Spirit of God within them, but rather that of serious, unresolved emotional wounds and feelings from childhood, which are often created from unmet basic needs and pain. These factors, as well as actual *psychospiritual selfish or evil tendencies*, which we inherit from humanity as a whole and also through our parents and ancestors, sometimes draw people together like magnets. Our old hurts and unresolved pain from long ago, living quite well within the subconscious, may powerfully influence our selection of a mate for the purpose of *resolving* those wounds—that is, to *hopefully* facilitate difficult but useful emotional and spiritual healing and inner growth. When these inner issues are the primary driving force behind two people getting married, the ultimate use of the marriage may be some very important but painful personal growth, as two people drag one another through the

mud of their deeper emotional traumas from early life, with the marriage sometimes ending in divorce. I believe that it's important for the church to deeply understand these realities and recognize the importance of the usefulness of divorce, which may ultimately open two people up to finding and enjoying a marriage relationship that will have a greater openness to the stirrings and growth of the marriage love that Swedenborg wrote about, the kind that the angels in heaven enjoy every day.

It's quite the "playing field" God has put us on, wouldn't you say? I'm thankful that our ministers and our churches have the insights and support of our theology, as well as modern psychology, to help us gain a better grasp of what we're dealing with in a wedding ministry like ours, as well as congregations like ours.

Going back to Swedenborg's essential framework on marriage love, don't we have an amazing and beautiful perspective on marriage love in our church, where it's origin lies, and what role and help we clergy have?! I'm profoundly proud to be a minister in a church that looks at marriage love this way, that can serve many people who come to us seeking the church's blessing—seeking *God's blessing*—as we honor and celebrate the unique and powerful love in marriage that draws a man and woman together, *hopefully* forever.

*The Rev. Kit Billings is pastor of the Swedenborgian Church of the Open Word in St. Louis.*



## FOCUS ON YOUTH

### HELP!

I am looking for an assistant SCYL youth leader to help me at this year's annual Convention in Geneva, New York on July 5 — July 9. The selected person will join me in youth outings, youth meetings, SCYL worship planning and other teen supervision duties. I can offer you free room and board, some travel assistance, a small stipend and a completely valid excuse for not attending any business meetings! Please contact me if you have any interest at all or know of someone who might be interested. Anyone aged 23 and over who is not required to attend the business meetings is welcome to apply. Please give serious consideration to this offer. Our teens need you! Thanks.

*Kurt*

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### Teens Study Religion and Pop Culture at the 2002 SCYL Winter Retreat

Pop culture today has tremendous power and influence over our thoughts, feelings and perceptions. Popular films, television programs, magazines, music, radio and the world of fashion all shape our lives to an extraordinary degree. To a large extent, pop culture tells us what to do, how to live and who we are. It sets our goals, forms our dreams and secretly molds our lives. We aspire to be the famous actor or actress, popular musician or to live out our life like a popular TV sitcom, drama or afternoon soap. It is undeniable that pop culture is an unavoidable force constantly striving to govern our life. How do we react to it? Exactly what messages are bombarding us? How does it relate to another unavoidable force...God? How do the media and Hollywood depict religion?

At this past Winter Retreat (December 27-30, 2002), forty participants (26 teens, 14 staff) discussed religion and spirituality in popular culture at the Almont New Church Retreat Center. The Rev. Carl Yenetchi started us off with two sessions titled *The Last Judgment and the Birth of Pop Culture*. We explored Swedenborg's writings concerning the birth of the new spiritual age. Carl explained that a result of this heavenly gift of new individual human freedom in the mid-1700s was the real beginning of our modern popular culture era. Bill Baxter led our Saturday afternoon session where we next considered religion and the influence of TV. Then Katie Shelley and Youth Director Kurt Fekete facilitated a workshop looking at pop culture brand advertising and consumerism. We discussed the power and influence of brand names and how they relate to religion. A creative evening activity was held where each teen looked at developing his or her personal brand logo and/or individual life mission statement.

On Sunday, the Rev. Junchol Lee took us down the path of religion and the movies. In Junchol's two sessions we viewed clips from *The Matrix* and *What Dreams May Come* and compared these movies to Swedenborgian concepts of the spiritual world. We concluded the spiritual retreat adventure with an engaging Sunday evening worship service which included a walking "emotion" tour where we experienced the joy, despair, fear and wisdom by visiting four different rooms filled with corresponding emotional music, physical presence and energy. ☩

—Kurt Fekete, Youth Director  
(See Erika Penabaker's report, page 88)



(L-R) Katelyn Lord, Merry Conant and Emily Turley seamstresses extraordinaire.

### Merry Hat Band Caps Heady Weekend

On March 29<sup>th</sup>, 2003, eleven young people aged 11-18 from Swedenborgian churches in Maine and Massachusetts gathered for a fun community service weekend at the Fryeburg New Church. The overnight event involved making fleece hats for oncology patients as an extension of a project between the Women's Alliance of the Fryeburg New Church and Bridgton Hospital. With guidance from four members of the Women's Alliance (Debbie Dolley, Mary Dysinger, Sally Gibson and Jacqui Skinner Light) the youth cut and stitched over 52 hats. Each cheerfully colored fleece hat was individually packaged with a hand-stamped and decorated card reading "The Fruit of the Spirit is Love" and "Made by the Fryeburg New Church Youth Group" before being donated to the hospital. A local business in New Hampshire donated and sold for half price much of the fleece used.

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## FOCUS ON YOUTH

### Merry Hat Band Caps Heady Weekend

(Continued from page 87)

Youth Director, Kurt Fekete; Fryeburg youth leader, Laurie Turley; and youth worker volunteer, Chris Dutton led the event. After working the entire Saturday afternoon the youth had a chance to spend some free time together eating pizza, playing card and board games and watching movies. The group stayed overnight in the church and woke up to greet the congregation and attend the Sunday morning worship service. We hope to hold many more overnights like this, at Fryeburg, and at other churches as well, where youth from several different regional Swedenborgian congregations can join together with their friends, have a great time and help our community by providing service and donated goods.

—Kurt Fekete (with references from the Fryeburg church's May 2003 Bulletin). 



(L-R) Shane Hatch and Nick Kane laying out the fleece for cutting.

### A Tribute to the Triad of Swedenborgian Summer Camps!

Kurt Fekete

Last summer I had the wonderful opportunity to do something I've always dreamed about. Do the "Big 3"! That's right; attend all three Swedenborgian summer camps in a row in one summer—Paulhaven in Alberta, Almont in Michigan, and Fryeburg in Maine. And like a miraculous and rare alignment of the planets in 2002, the summer camps fell perfectly in consecutive order. Wow, what a special treat. It was an experience that I loved and something that I would love to do again (and will!). What really astonished me was how similar the camps were. The graces at mealtime, the chapel services, the hymns, the classes, the companionship, the wise leadership, the playful spirit, and perhaps most importantly the tight bond of love. This love I both witnessed and experienced as campers young and old reunited with their friends and family for another year of learning, growing, working, and living together at their beloved summer camp.

Although the camps are very similar, each possesses its own history, tradition, and personality. Paulhaven has its top notch teen activities and recreation, unequaled enthusiasm, outlandish themes, wake-up singing of "Rise and Shine," and memorable evening campfires; Almont has its flag raising and lowering ceremony, wonderful chapel and pump organ, outstanding classes for all ages,

Survivors, all camp evening activities and Brandau Bay; Fryeburg has its stellar lecture series, outing day, Sparks, Flames, Embers, corn roast bonfire, and cool, refreshing Saco River. Our summer camps are such a wonderful part of our Swedenborgian heritage! Talk to the children, talk to the teens, talk to the adults; you will hear the same thing about all of our camps—"I love coming here." Choose your favorite and enjoy summertime heavenly bliss. Better yet, choose to visit them all! Below is a brief summary of each for 2003.

#### Paulhaven Camp, July 20 – 26, 2003

The Bible theme for Paulhaven Camp this year is the famous story of Jonah, the man who tried to run away from the Lord and wound up being swallowed by a whale! This wonderful tale has many lessons that are especially valuable for young people today, e.g., obeying or disobeying the "voice inside," being true to yourself; trusting in God or trusting in yourself alone, doing what's right when it seems wrong (and vice versa!), staying open to the goodness and truth in other people and letting go of your own pre-conceptions, etc.

We're going to learn all about these

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### Almont Winter Retreat, Teen Impression

This year's retreat was a wonderful get together. Many people were returning but there were also quite a few who were coming to Almont for their first time. Skeptical at first and nervous, on Friday night this retreat was very quiet...not much talking was going on. Soon enough though Icebreakers were played and new friends were made; people were warming up to their

new pals. The next few days went by much too quickly. The fun and games that we participated in were great. It was a super retreat and one that will never be forgotten. The theme of the retreat, Religion in Pop Culture, was very appealing to the teens and we were all very attentive. I loved it. The staff was super too! THANKS!

—Erika Penabaker, Central States Regional SCYL Officer

# FOCUS ON YOUTH

## Summer Camps!

(Continued from page 88)

things and more this summer. And when we're not busy doing that, we'll be having an awesome time camping, playing games, going on outings, hanging out with our friends, eating great food and just plain having fun. It's all happening July 20<sup>th</sup> through the 26<sup>th</sup>. So don't wind up as fish food—join Dianne Epp, camp coordinator, and Rev. John (Maine), camp pastor, and all the gang, and have yourself one heck of a good time!

Contact: Diane Epp, Camp Coordinator  
Diane\_Epp@hotmail.com

## Almont Summer School, July 19–27, 2003

At a time when the world is going through so much change and uncertainty, we hold close to the things that remain good in our lives and the things that uplift and encourage us: God's love and the promise of peace, the joy and comfort of lasting friendships, our church's vision of life strengthened and renewed through trial and struggle, and the healing that comes when we pray, learn, and play together in community. All ages are blessed when we gather in God's name here at summer school, and when we return home from our week at camp we are filled with memories of love and laughter, and we are then a light to the world, a light of love with values and character.

Our children, teens and adults, will explore the theme of biblical cities. Each morning children's lesson and adult chapel will introduce you to some of the most interesting places in the Bible, like Jerusalem and Jericho, and highlight the spiritual significance of each city in relationship to your own life journey. There is an inspired plan and order in the people, places and events of the Bible—so let's discover and discuss this unfolding mystery together!

Contact: Barb Tourangeau, Registrar  
gmarb373@aol.com

## Fryeburg Assembly, August 2–17, 2003

The strength of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly lies in its history. Tradition is carried on by people who come to Fryeburg and experience the fellowship and spiritual growth that this special place generates. The beautiful grounds keep us in touch with nature and ourselves. The reunions and new friendships form the heart of our lasting fellowship and community. The educational program stimulates our spiritual development. Week one titled *Inside Looking Out* will highlight lectures presenting an overview of the fundamental concepts that make our Swedenborgian church different from other churches and seek to explore traditional teachings that are either absent from New Church

doctrine, or interpreted in a significantly different way. Week two titled *The Gospels* will feature lectures exploring the Gospels with new eyes and new meaning. Not as a record of past events, miraculous or malicious, but a description of how God moves and works within each person who invites him to dwell with them, pointing the way to genuine justice and peace.

This year also marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Flames teen group. Past and present Flames will not want to miss the reunion BBQ on Saturday, August 6<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 pm. Come join us!

Contact: Jane Foster, Registrar  
jfooster@exeter.edu

(Camp information from respective camp bulletins.)



## 2003 SCYL Officers

The 2003 Swedenborgian Church Youth League Officers and Chaplin were elected at the Winter Retreat this past December. They are:

### President:

Craig Carson  
724 St. Rt 61  
Monroeville, OH 44847  
(419) 663-5585  
Email: dayen\_haldrek@hotmail.com

### East Coast and Activities Officer:

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Erika Penabaker  
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### West Coast and Service Officer:

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### League Chaplin:

Rev. Junchol Lee  
5686 Broadview Rd Apt #2124  
Parma, OH 44134  
(216) 749-3905  
Email: intelligtia@yahoo.com

Several of our officers are repeating another term. Craig has stepped into the position of president as Dustin Wright's term has come to an end. We welcome Jessie into the position of Canada Regional Officer with Gloria Lipski's graduation. Erika has moved into Craig's prior 2002 position of Central States Officer. We have a great group of League Officers this year. I really look forward to working with them. I thank Dustin and Gloria for their service in 2002 and wish them luck as they begin their college studies. Join me in welcoming the 2003 officers, and if your travel provides you with the opportunity to meet one of them, please take the time to say, "hello", congratulate them and offer your support.

Kurt Fekete  
Youth Director



Editor's Note: George writes, "The following just came together for me in the course of working on *Marriage Love* for the NCE, and I thought it might be of interest to *Messenger* readers."

## IN

George Dole

One of the most difficult words in Swedenborg's Latin is the preposition *in*. This comes as no surprise to the linguist, because it seems that no matter what language you study, the prepositions are the hardest to comprehend. For the English preposition "in," for example, my *Random House Dictionary* lists nine distinct meanings. We can arrive in time, write in pencil, fall in love, break in half, and sit in silence. The definitions of the Latin pronoun in the old faithful Lewis and Short cover well over two pages of fine print. I suspect that if you asked ten Swedenborgians what it means to be "in good," you would get five different answers, three evasions, and two blank stares.

For some time, it has seemed likely to me that the "in" of "in good" is something like the "into" of "they're really into skateboarding." The "good," that is, is not some abstract quality or feeling, but "something that is good, something that is worthwhile." The first confirmation of this came with the discovery of the opening sentence of *Marriage Love* 14. The previous paragraph tells of visiting a grove laid out in spirals that strikes the viewers as "heaven in form." Then the scene shifts with the words, literally, "While we were in these things"—in other words, "While we were absorbed in this, while this had our attention."

The second confirmation came more recently, with the discovery of *Secrets of Heaven* 7367, which begins, "Love of self is ruling for us—that is, we are in love of self . . ." When we are "in good," then, what is good is in the driver's seat. We are committed to it, fully engaged in it. Other passages could be cited at some length to suggest that the "something good" is in fact "a use," an activity, a service. We are "in good," then, not when we are simply feeling good, feeling benevolent, or having a good day, but when we are fully engaged in doing something for the benefit of others, and when that engagement so dominates our thinking and feeling that we have no concern for what we may get out of it. We are unselfconsciously caught up in the activity itself. One nice thing about this is that I am fairly sure we have all been there from time to time, so perhaps angelhood is not so alien to us as we may have feared.

*The Rev. Dr. George F. Dole is president of the Swedenborg Foundation, professor emeritus of the former Swedenborg School of Religion, pastor of the Swedenborgian Church in Bath, Maine, and teaches online courses for the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. He is currently working on the new translation of Marriage Love for the Foundation's New Century Edition of Swedenborg's works.* ☩

Editor's Note: *The Rev. Eric Hoffman started his new position with the Virginia Street church in St. Paul on April 1, 2003. The following article was written in late February as he and his family were in town on a mission to find a home. Eric's official installation was held on Sunday, April 13, with the president of our denomination, Ron Brugler, officiating. We're delighted that Eric has returned to the ministry after a long hiatus.*

## Some Thoughts from the Mall

Eric Hoffman

In order to make the necessary preparations for our arrival this spring, I've driven here to the Twin Cities from LaPorte, Indiana (a nine-hour trip.) I knew the area has many interesting things to see and do, and so I couldn't resist taking a little extra time to see some sights. As I write these words, I'm sitting just outside Camp Snoopy in the Mall of America watching children build things with Legos, watching all kinds of people walk by with shopping bags, and wondering just how I'm going to find my way back to my car.

This place is huge! I can see how being lost here among the Saturday shoppers and tourists might make a person feel anxious, but you see, I've got quite a bit to celebrate! I've just secured an apartment in a nice suburb, and I can bring my two seventy-pound dogs! I've gotten a better understanding of the area's opportunities and services that will help my family get settled in. All in all, I'm feeling very optimistic and excited about the future, which will begin, of course, as soon as I find the third level of the East Parking Garage.

Instead of feeling anxious, I feel...adventurous! I know that in the course of finding the car, I'm going to find a world of new and fascinating things. Not surprisingly, I feel the same way about serving as minister here. There are quite a few unknowns ahead, and we will have to spend time adjusting to our new relationship. It will be, though, an exciting time filled with new discoveries and wonderful opportunities for growth. I know this is true because in my short time here I have met some fascinating people.

I am grateful to Zoe and Gordon, Rosemary and John, for giving me a place to stay this week while I tended to business. I'm grateful to Ann and to Jim for their help and information. I'm especially grateful to Charlie and Libby for giving me some intense playtime! With such hospitality in this congregation, and such youthful exuberance, I know I can look forward to some very fulfilling moments of community. I live for that! I am very much looking forward to moving here with my family, and it's not because of the Mall of America or the zoos or the museums. It's because of us, and our potential together. Here's to many years of growth, discovery and...Wait a minute. I remember now. I came in through Bloomingdale's.

*Reprinted with author's permission from the March/April 2003 Correspondences, the Virginia Street church's newsletter.* ☩



*Eric and daughter Eiryn in the Virginia Street church chancel. Photo by Eiryn's mom, Norma Hoffman*

# Portland Church Roots

Wilma Wake

## PART I

### Our Workshop

On April 2, 2003, members and friends of the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church gathered for an evening of seeking our roots. We wanted to incorporate work that had been done earlier [especially by Jay Jordan], materials from the Convention and SHS archives, and our memories of the recent past.

We put a huge roll of paper all around the sanctuary and started marking our past. We put up pink sheets of paper for events of the past, green paper for ordained ministers of the church, yellow for lay leaders, blue for other people connected with our history, and orange for any areas of conflict we found so we could consider whether that conflict still impacted us today.

We started with sharing a meal, while participants went through piles of colored papers filled with events and people. We created an archive in part of our sanctuary with piles of photos for people to identify, and documents and articles to be put on the timeline.

### Swedenborg's Writings Introduced in the State of Maine

We began by pulling together the earliest information we had. We knew that James Glen came from England in 1784 to spread the writings of Swedenborg. It is believed that some people in eastern New England obtained copies of the writings from Glen.

In 1794 Rev. William Hill, an Anglican, visited the country from England. He also preached and gave out copies of Swedenborg's writings, including a set of the *Arcana Coelestia* to Harvard College.

We know that New Church writings first appeared in Maine in 1805. The Rev. William Jenks, a pastor at a Congregational church in Bath, began reading Swedenborg and sharing the ideas with his friend.

We also heard about Mr. Savels, a

paper manufacturer, who moved to Gardiner from Dorchester, Massachusetts, around 1812. He had heard about the writings some ten or twelve years earlier through William Hill. He was a member of the Episcopal Church, and at that point, the only reader of Swedenborg in Gardiner.

In 1812, Dr. Jenks, the pastor in Bath, loaned copies of his books by Swedenborg to three gentlemen in Maine. By 1818, there were six gentlemen of Bath reading Swedenborg, and they decided to meet weekly for discussion.

We were shocked to learn that members of the "Calvinistic Church" attempted to break up this group, and the meetings stopped for awhile. Why? we wondered. We considered how heretical Swedenborg's writings must have sounded at that point in history in Bath, Maine—especially to those of a Calvinistic bent.

By 1820, however, the little group had sufficiently recovered from the controversy that they were able to send a delegate to the General Convention in Philadelphia. This was the first delegate from Maine—and probably from New England—to the Convention!

By 1821, Savels in Gardiner was finding that a number of his friends were becoming interested in Swedenborg, and were reading along with him. By the time Savels died in 1824, there were four people in Gardiner continuing to share enthusiasm for Swedenborgian doctrine.

In 1824, the little group in Bath decided that "if the Lord permit" they would meet each Sunday evening.<sup>1</sup>

### Swedenborg's Writings Find their Way to Portland, Maine

Jay Jordan writes that in the 1820s, Portland was a seaport town with 9,000 people in a one square mile area around the waterfront. The primary religious groups were the Congregationalists, the Methodists, Quakers, and Unitarians. More and more people at that time were leaving churches and opting for "free thinking."<sup>2</sup>

It was in the winter of 1825-26 that a

resident of Portland, Dr. Timothy Little, began reading Emanuel Swedenborg. He had just moved to the area. He was a physician who had once wanted to be a Unitarian minister. Going into medicine instead, he set up a successful practice in rural Maine. In 1825, he moved to Portland, and one of his new patients was a lawyer named John Meguire. Meguire loaned him a copy of *The Doctrine of the New Jerusalem* and soon Little was convinced of these truths and began sharing them with others.<sup>3</sup>

Within a year there was a group meeting at each others' homes to discuss Swedenborg's writings. The initial group was: Dr. Albus Rea, John Meguire, and Oliver Gerrish. The group grew! By 1829, the group wanted a regular place to worship and decided that Dr. Little should serve as their lay leader. For a while, the group rented space in the Methodist Church for a monthly service.

### Society Officially Formed on August 21, 1831

This is a highly significant event in our history. It seems to have been quite a grand occasion, with Rev. Thomas Worcester, minister of the Boston Church, and delegates from the Boston Church, coming to help out. Their delegates included B.T. Loring, Sampson Reed, John Allen, and Charles Bowles.

Thomas Worcester had been a Harvard student when he heard about the set of the *Arcana* which Hill had presented to Harvard College. He searched through the Harvard library collection striving to find this material and finally discovered it in a dusty room called "the Museum" which contained, among other memorabilia, stuffed crocodiles!

He was excited by the writings he found and gathered a group of students around him to read through this material in Latin. Sampson Reed was one of the students in this group. He had come to Harvard Divinity School to follow in his father's footsteps as a Unitarian minister. Instead, Reed be-

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## Portland Church Roots

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came a Swedenborgian, and so most ministry pulpits were closed to him. He became a druggist and wrote for the early church journal, *The New Jerusalem Magazine*.

As Reed graduated from Harvard, he had come to know a young freshman named Emerson. They formed a lasting friendship. It was through Reed that Emerson came to read Swedenborg.<sup>4</sup> It has been said that Swedenborg influenced Emerson more than any other person.<sup>5</sup> An early professor at the New Church Theological School stated that Emerson did more than any other to present Swedenborg's ideas within literary circles.<sup>6</sup>

Many of us were fascinated that Sampson Reed, such an important per-

son in the life of Emerson, had helped us start our society in 1831. We wanted to know more about Reed and Emerson. Some of us decided that we would find time to read George Dole's monograph from the Swedenborg

Foundation:  
"Sampson Reed:  
Primary Source  
Material for  
Emerson Studies."

The people from Portland who were present at the founding of our society were Dr. Timothy Little and his wife Elizabeth, Samuel and Pamela Colman, Oliver and Sarah Gerrish, Dr. Albus Rea,

Ebenezer Mason, William Hunnewell, Sarah Rea [of Windham] Mary G. Walker, Lydia Sawyer, and Martha Freeman. The Boston church had also helped us become a society in 1831.

(Continued on page 93)



Portland Roots Team

## Thank You

The Messenger and the Communications Support Unit wish to thank these individuals and groups for subscriptions and donation to *The Messenger* from May 1, 2002, through May 1, 2003. We are most grateful for your enthusiastic support. We hope no contributor has been omitted from this list, but if your name is not here and should be, please let us know.

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## President's Report

(Continued from page 82)

- Another weekend of celebration took place in New York City in November when our congregation there at last was able to rededicate their beautifully restored sanctuary. This was a major project, made possible by a bequest from Adrienne Frank.
- It was also a joyous occasion when I traveled to Portland, Maine, for Wilma Wake's installation service in March. The church was filled to the rafters for this event, due in part to a busload of attendees from the Boston church, and others present from Fryeburg, Bath, and even our Ft. Myers congregations!
- And let me not forget one additional weekend of celebration, as I traveled to Edmonton to dedicate their new cross-tower (the old one had been blown down in a windstorm). John Maine is doing an excellent job in Edmonton. I was also blessed to have a nice visit with Hank and Maria Korsten.
- I have taken part in two meetings with the congregation of our Boston church in which we have praised the Lord for their many new members and revitalized sense of community service, and explored ways of continuing their growth in the coming years. Steve Ellis and Ted Klein are doing a great job serving this church.
- Although the Elmwood New Church dearly misses their pastor, Andy Stinson, during his military service, Andover-Newton student Eli Dale has served them very well this past year. Thank you, Eli!
- Wayfarer's Chapel continues to be a very successful outreach ministry for our denomination. I am sure that this will continue in the coming years with the addition of Jonathan Mitchell to the ministerial team.
- In January, Nadine Cotton received and accepted a call to serve the New Church of Southwest Florida, starting in August 2003, enabling this extremely worthwhile outreach ministry to continue after the retirement of Richard Tafel. I hope that we will all give Dick our thanks for having started this ministry and

welcome Nadine back into our active ministry with shouts of praise!

- I was pleased to spend five days in Kansas during Holy Week. I took part in the community Maundy Thursday Service in Pretty Prairie, which had been planned and organized by Jane Siebert. Over 50 people were present for this service, and I had a nice visit afterwards with Eric and Betty Zacharias. From there I traveled to Pawnee Rock, where I took part in the community Good Friday service, attended the Easter Sunrise Pageant at "the rock," and led the Easter Sunday worship service. There were 62 people in church that Sunday, and the spirit of the group was a wonderful thing to behold.
- CAM has held two meetings this past year, of note because of the increasing number of students who are preparing for our ministry. We now have eleven students, eight at SHS and two taking the SHS program via distance education!
- I regret that I must report that the Stonehouse Bookstore has closed. The impact that this will have upon the Puget Sound Church is unclear at the present time. I hope to visit there in the near future to offer whatever support I can. Even so, I want us all to offer Paul Martin our sincere appreciation for his service to this bold and innovative ministry these past 14 years.
- I have met twice with the board and membership of the New York Church as we have explored options for their future and ways to conduct a ministerial search now that Robert McCluskey has announced his departure in August 2003. On behalf of all of us, "Thank you Robert" for your 12 years of service to this ministry!
- During the past year, I have signed onto three different resolutions of the National Council of Churches; the first concerned slowing the rush to war in Iraq, the second urged continued dialogue between the United States and North and South Korea regarding nuclear disarmament, and the third concerned the environmental protection.

I also must share that I am looking

forward to this year of presidential transition. Perhaps it is needless to say, but being your president is a very big job—one in which one seldom feels "finished." Even so, I continue to enjoy it and sense that we are moving forward in service to God and our new evangel.

In closing, I offer my deep appreciation to each of you for your support and many acts of kindness.

God bless you all,  
Ron Brugler, president



## Greater Things Than These...

(Continued from page 84)

western canteen for only eight rupees. That's seventeen cents. The shop offers everything from classic Indian bed sheets to cold drinks, and everything is extremely reasonable. If you want to stay at the ashram, you can do so for about a dollar day. But this complex is small compared to the winter Ashram in Puttparthi which can house 10,000 people, and the auditorium can hold over a hundred thousand.

While there are certainly obstacles in the environment, I find myself eager to return, and I encourage everyone to go to an ashram. If not Sai Baba's, go to another just to be dipped in the spiritual elixir of India to see how the Second Coming is unfolding there.

*The Rev. Eric Allison is pastor of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound in Kirkland, Washington.* 

## Portland Church Roots

(Continued from page 92)

There was much to come after this point: our incorporation, the building of our first church, the tragic fire that destroyed it. But we are getting ahead of the story. We will end Installment #1 at this point: *To be continued.*

*The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is the newly installed pastor of the Portland Swedenborgian Church. She also works with MINSU as the Spiritual Ministries Consultant.*

(See Endnotes on page 95)

# Parish

## Puget Sound Update

Thanks to all who have shown such warm concern about the fate of our congregation in Puget Sound. There have been some changes! Those who purchased the former Stonehouse property have changed its name to the Kirkland Holistic Center. The Stonehouse has moved to a new and much better location in Kirkland. The church has been invited to leave the Kirkland Holistic Center. Our last service in the building will be our Exodus service on June eighth. My office has already been moved into the new Stonehouse to give our church a window to the world. We see this as a great opportunity to find a place where we can really grow. As part of our search we are going to have our Sunday morning service in a different sacred location every Sunday during the entire summer. We will have services at a waterfront park, a wellness center in the

forest, a Shinto Temple, a private lake, a retreat center, a park by the ocean, Mosswood Hollow, and on a Washington State ferry. Beginning June 15, our church will also offer a Sunday evening service at the new Stonehouse. We are excited about what may come! We trust that God will lead us to our promised land!

Our group is so dedicated and ready to move forward that losing our usual space is just seen as part of the process of our growth. We are flourishing and will continue to do so with the support of MINSU and all the prayers coming our way.

Blessings,  
Rev. Eric Allison

Editor's Note: The Puget Sound church also plans to provide a week-long Johnny Appleseed summer day camp for kids this summer.

## Swedenborg Chapel, Cleveland

There were 54 in attendance on Easter at the Swedenborg Chapel in Cleveland, Ohio. The Revs. Junchol Lee and Judith Dennis shared the service, in-

cluding communion, and ten children joined the Rev. Junchol Lee on the steps for the children's message. The men's group had decorated flowerpots and provided soil and seeds for each child. Outdoors daffodils and flowering trees lifted the heart, and indoors the chancel was abloom with lilies, azaleas, roses and begonias, thanks to the generous people who provided them, some in memory of loved ones. Three babies were in the congregation; two had been baptized on April 19 and one was baptized on the following Sunday, April 27.

Junchol's mother, Junghee Han, a professional flower artist, arranged the flowers in the chancel. Peter Synnestvedt graciously accompanied the hymns, and Barb Dietz joined him in the prelude "Jesu Joy of Mans' Desiring."

## Free Appleseed Video Tapes

The Johnny Appleseed Heritage Center and Outdoor Historical Drama has provided the Cleveland Chapel with a limited supply of video tapes which depict its plans for presenting

(Continued on page 95)

## The Swedenborgian Church Statistics—as of December 31, 2002

Associations	Churches		Ordained Ministers			Authorized	Members			No of
	Active	Inactive	Active	Inactive	Retired	Lay Leaders	Active	Inactive	Total	Delegates
Canada	1	0	1	0	1	1	175	24	199	19
Illinois	6	0	3	0	0	0	88	79	167	10
Kansas	2	0	0	0	2	0	86	0	86	10
Maine	2	1	3	3	0	0	143	154	297	16
Massachusetts	5	2	8	2	2	0	198	37	235	21
Michigan	1	0	1	0	0	0	63	32	95	8
Middle Atlantic	3	0	3	0	0	0	89	42	131	10
New York	2	0	2	0	0	0	57	22	79	7
Ohio	3	2	2	2	0	1	78	8	86	9
Pacific Coast	4	1	6	1	5	2	315	51	366	33
Southeast	2	0	3	0	0	0	66	4	70	8
Western Canada Conference	5	1	2	2	1	2	159	15	174	17
SCYL									2	2
<b>Societies</b>										
*Bayside	1	0	0	0	0	0	15	0	15	3
*Figures from 12/31/01										
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1532</b>	<b>468</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>173</b>

**CONFIRMATIONS**

**Boyd**—Wanda Boyd and Kirk and Mary Miller were received into Church membership in the Church of the Good Shepherd on Easter Sunday, April 20, the Rev. Paul Zacharias and Steve Thomas conducting the service.

**Coffelt, Lee**—Karen (Foster) Coffelt and William Lee were confirmed into the faith and life of the Swedenborgian Church on April 13, 2003, at the New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, the Rev. Lee Woofenden officiating.

**DEATH**



**Fekete**—John Fekete, age 82, of Naples, Florida, entered the spiritual world April 28, 2003. John participated in many activities at the Detroit Swedenborgian Church and in his later years was affectionately known as the cantankerous cook at Almont Summer Camp. Husband of Joyce, father of Paul (Debbie), the late Sherry, David, Joy Zimmer (Pat), and Kurt (Shelley). Grandfather to Matthew, Brittany, and Ava Charlotte. Brother of Margaret, Dorothy Lookabaugh, Richard, and the late Francis. A memorial service is planned for this summer during Almont Camp.



**Portland Church Roots**

*(Continued from page 93)*

**Endnotes:**

<sup>1</sup> Most of this material is from *History of the Portland Society of the New Jerusalem, with a List of Its Secretaries, Treasurers, Ministers, and Members*. By David Page Perkins. Printed "for the Society" in Portland, ME, in 1883, pages 1-4.

<sup>2</sup> Jay Jordan, "A History of the Portland Swedenborgian Church." *The Messenger*, November, 1991, page 143.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. and Jay Jordan, "We Are Building: A Brief History of the Portland Church." [unpublished paper].

<sup>4</sup> Marguerite Block, *The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America* New York: Swedenborg Publishing Association, 1984, page 144.

<sup>5</sup> Clarence Hotson, "Emerson and Swedenborg" (Dissertation, Harvard, 1929) in Block, 144.

<sup>6</sup> L.F. Hite: Swedenborg's Historical Position, page 158, in Block, p. 144.



**JOURNAL FOR GRIEF AND HEALING, When Someone You Love Dies**

By *Donnette Alfelt*

This is a guided journal. Donnette begins with a page about loss and healing:

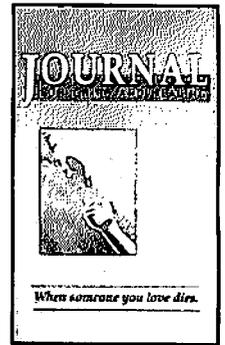
"When someone close to you dies, the impact is life-changing . . . In the midst of grief, it's often hard to know what you need. One thing that can help is to realize that your spirit has suffered a very serious wound..."

The author then briefly introduces the journal pages: "A journal is a place where your heart can speak in privacy and freedom. It is a place where it is safe to be completely honest about what you are thinking and how you are feeling. It can uncover thoughts and emotions you may be scarcely aware of."

Pages 10 through 93 provide space for journaling. At the upper left and lower right of each page spread are thoughts and quotations on grief,

healing, and after-life. Some quotes are from the Bible and Swedenborg, and some are from a wide variety of others, such as John Adams, Shakespeare, Emerson, Helen Keller, and Charles Lindbergh. After the journaling pages, Donnette concludes with some text about afterlife, and then provides a list of "Recommended Reading" books about grief recovery and about afterlife, from both Swedenborgian and non-Swedenborgian sources. This is a book that can be used to reach out to someone who is bereaved, whether he or she is a member of the organized New Church or not.

Hardcover, 97 pp, \$12.00. You can read the full text at [www.fountainpublishing.com](http://www.fountainpublishing.com). It is available from Fountain Publishing ([www.fountainpublishing.com](http://www.fountainpublishing.com) or 877-736-8598) or at [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com).



*Parish* (Continued from page 94)

the story of John "Appleseed" Chapman in an outdoor drama with other educational programs. The eight-minute VHS tape includes aerial footage of the Appleseed site and pieces of Appleseed Outdoor Drama music previously recorded in Nashville.

Playwright and composer Billy Edd Wheeler has authored the play and written the music.

The tape is narrated by Mason Adams, film and television star, who has recently served as the "voice" for the J.M. Smucker Company advertisements. Timothy Smucker, Chairman and CEO, introduces the video.

The Johnny Appleseed Heritage Center and Outdoor Historical Drama is scheduled to open in June 2004 near Mansfield, Ohio, half-way between Cleveland and Columbus.

Over and above the musical drama, the Johnny Appleseed Heritage Center

will provide an interactive museum focusing on Johnny's life, the history of the region, and the apple industry. The two-hour historical play about Appleseed's adventures in Ohio will be staged in a 1,600 seat, naturally contoured and wooded amphitheatre. In addition, the 90-seat indoor J.M. Smucker Company Auditorium and Library will be available, along with a learning center for children's programs on philanthropy, conservation and the environment. There will also be apple-menu pioneer meals, a gift shop, living history and reenactments, an orchard, garden, nature trail, festival, and an annual hero scholarship award.

To order your free video tape, contact Norm Bestor, Swedenborg Chapel, 4815 Broadview Rd., Cleveland, OH 44109. Phone (216) 351-8093. Norm has kindly offered to pay postage as well.

If you would like to learn more about the Johnny Applesed Heritage Center please visit [www.jahci.org](http://www.jahci.org)

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.

## Comsu's Johanna Appleseed

Johanna, COMSU's modern-day Johnny Appleseed, lives in San Francisco, spreading the word about Emanuel Swedenborg. She is Margaret Culver, COMSU's executive assistant.



Margaret Culver

Margaret doesn't travel by horseback. She wheels COMSU's publications down the hills of San Francisco on a two-wheeled shopping cart. She doesn't tear Swedenborg tomes in half to give to seekers but sends books and pamphlets by the United States Postal Service and United Parcel Service. Nor does she wear a cooking pot on her head, though her frequent presence draws attention to Swedenborg's writings in the local post office, copy shop, and stationery store.

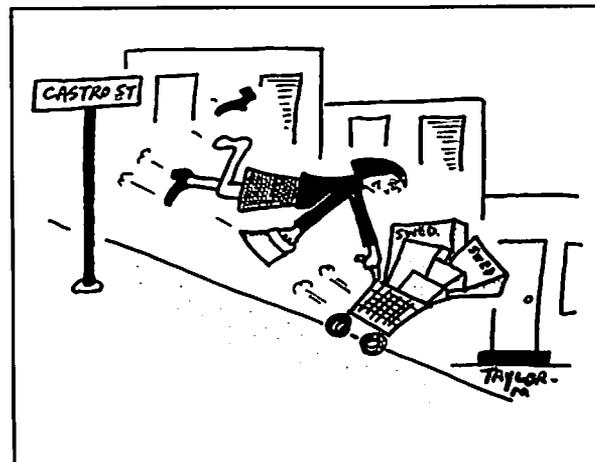
Instead of giving away apple tree saplings, Margaret has sent out over 20,000 of the 34,000 J. Appleseed & Co. books recently stored in her basement, which also serves as the Communications Support Unit California office of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. And, instead of sitting in front of rural settlers' fireplaces along the trail, she uses telephone and email to reach every church congregation listed in Convention's *Journal*. The Swedenborg Movement in the United Kingdom is in email contact with her. She has donated a copy of each book to a brand new Swiss Swedenborgian

Center building in Zurich. She has researched and generated interest in the 1895 Swedenborgian church building still standing in Riverside, California, and has been told the fascinating history of the Norway, Iowa church building.

Margaret still has a few copies of some COMSU publications. If you need any of these you can view them on the website at [www.jappleseed.org](http://www.jappleseed.org). These older publications are offered for free, provided churches pay the shipping. In development this year is a new catalogue of remaining titles. Contact her as soon as you can. New J. Appleseed publications will be coming out and storage is needed for the new titles.

When she gets her work for the church finished each day, she sits in her garden and eats Granny Smith apples from her backyard orchard.

—Carol S. Lawson, Chair, COMSU 



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