

THE MESSENGER

Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

June 2004

Editor's Note: The following address was given to Urbana's graduating class May 1, 2004. Christine Laitner is the Swedenborgian Church's president-elect. She was awarded an honorary doctorate during the commencement ceremony.

Urbana University Commencement Address: May 1, 2004 "You CAN Choose Your Plays"

Christine Laitner

President Head, members of the Board of Trustees, distinguished faculty and administrators, honored guests, friends and families of the graduates, and, most importantly, the excellent class of 2004: Greetings!

In preparing for this talk, I realized that I had very distinct differences in my own mind when considering the words "graduation" and "commencement." My connotation for each word created different focuses: to me, graduation represents a kind of end, a leaving of something; while commencement is a beginning—a fresh start. Certainly today signifies a new process for each of you who are receiving degrees. No matter whether you're going to work at the same job you've had for years this next Monday, or whether you're still in the process of finding the position your time here has trained and readied you for, each of you receiving acknowledgment today for the successful completion of a particular degree is different than you were yesterday—and it's because you made a choice to focus on and pursue a goal. While there may be many steps along this journey you've taken that were very important, today is the day that you begin to take the steps forward from that place. Today you'll re-



ceive the document that says, "Yeah! I did it!" It's a very good day!

Many of you are much luckier than I was because you've already identified what your true life path is. It took me awhile past my BA to figure out where mine was. As a university student in the mid-1960s my choices of professional career focus were still somewhat limited because of some "social boundaries." There are still some boundaries, perhaps invisible, yet definitely deterring, but we're living now in a time when choice of professional career is not limited by quite as many social taboos. Some of you are part of the continuing process to eliminate those barriers right now, and I want to say thank you! And I also offer my deepest thanks to those who encouraged and taught you. I look forward to the changes that will come about because of your choices.

You may be wondering whether the person delivering this address has any real credibility or any actual connection to you. Let's see: I know that this

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is Urbana, Ohio (not Illinois); I can translate the motto on the Swedenborg library as an important quotation, recognizing the permission to understand the secrets of spiritual development as it relates to life; and, finally, I've also listened to some commencement speeches in my life. Sadly, I must admit that I don't remember them much at all, which is, alas, a situation that you may also encounter...with no offense taken. So we have some points of connection. As to the thoughts that I will share with you today, I should tell you that my first experience with a philosophy class was at the ripe old age of nineteen, as a college sophomore. The first major assignment, very early on, was to write a personal philosophy of life. I did so, smugly satisfied with my excellent, creative prose, and turned the paper in. A couple of days later I got the paper back, with an E on it. So, just for the record, today's commencement address is being given by someone who failed her philosophy of life. Frightening thought. However, God is good, and I had a very wise roommate who reminded me that maybe what I thought the assignment had been really wasn't what had been asked. Paper in hand, head (and ego) hanging, I took my frustrated, hurt, mystified, and slightly angry self to see the professor. The tale has a happy ending: I successfully rewrote the paper following the correct parameters. It was a valuable lesson. Even today, though, there's something kind of morbidly funny about receiving a failing grade on one's philosophy of life...the moral of the story is that there are always second chances—and that growth comes from them.

Some weeks ago a friend called to share a statement heard during a radio broadcast, something about a

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Editor's Note: *The president's report from Ron Brugler is in the form of a letter to our president-elect, Christine Laitner, who will take office in July during the annual convention. Ron's letter is followed by a list of his activities for 2003-2004, starting after last year's convention.*

Dear Chris,

In less than two months time I'll be handing over the reigns of the presidency to you. I am sure that you can understand that I do so with mixed emotions. On one hand, I will greatly miss this job. I've worked hard, have enjoyed traveling to our churches and meeting so many Swedenborgians, and I truly feel that in several areas I've been able to make some positive contributions to this denomination. But on the other hand, I am tired, on the verge of burning out, and I fear that many of my efforts have been in vain. Although I am the first to acknowledge that I spend way too much time at self-criticism, I am finding it more and more difficult to appreciate what good things God has helped me to do. I guess that this means that it is time for this transition to take place. I wish you well.

My mind keeps going back to a visit that I made to one of our churches that was facing a difficult challenge. One of the members emailed me before the meeting expressing her appreciation for the fact that I am an excellent cheerleader. She added that I have a talent for motivating groups to pull together and work as a team. But then she added, "but when you meet with us, I'd really prefer that you be honest."

I thought about this statement and quickly realized that this was not a criticism, but a plea for help. That congregation needed to take a hard look at some serious problems. I took this suggestion to heart, and believe that it really helped make that visit a positive one. I was honest with them, Chris. But I was still a "cheerleader" for them. I guess that I share this with you only to underscore the fact that it will serve you well to be both of these as you step into this job. The president must be honest and frank, and sometimes, a bit of bluntness is also beneficial at times. But cheer-leading is also an integral part of the job. So one

suggestion that I have for you is this. Never leave your pom-poms at home.

In light of this suggestion, I want to share with you that I believe that I am leaving you a denomination that is both stronger and weaker. My inner fear, however, is that the times of weakness seem to be becoming all the more frequent. That might not be such a bad thing, though. Our teachings are pretty clear about the fact that one cannot address areas of concern until one sees them. So, if this is the truth (and I believe that it is) you are going to be very busy!

How are we stronger? And how can you be the "cheerleader" that we need you to be? Allow me to list three ways:

The first involves the headway that we've made in terms of youth ministry. Before my presidency, having a denominational Youth Director was but a dream. It is now a reality. But it is still in its formative stage, Chris. I urge that you continue to help it grow and prosper.

The second area of strength involves the results of the work that was done to transform the Swedenborg School of Religion into the Swedenborgian House of Studies. And although this was not an easy thing to do, it will serve us well for years to come. I hope that you will become an important member of the SHS board, and help this institution become all that it can be.

And third, during these past six years, you and I have worked together to re-establish our connection with the other branches of the Swedenborgian Church. We have been very successful with the British Conference! Please continue these efforts as president. We need to learn from them. They need to learn from us. So, go to England, Chris, and meet with our brothers and sisters in the faith!

And for the sake of "being honest" I also want to list three areas where our weaknesses are showing and changes need to be made:

First, please do what you can to move this denomination away from yearly funding of churches and projects and toward adherence to three-five year plans! This practice is hurting us in many ways. The Spiritual Ministries position was terminated in its first year! Ministers are reluctant to attempt new ministries because of the instability in their lives that

is brought about by yearly grants. And for our church boards, the uncertainty of funding is the cause of many ulcers. We don't need to treat our ministers and churches this way, and I hope that you will help to bring about change.

Second, we are heading toward catastrophe as local congregations and ministers turn too quickly to the Board of Mediation and the Board of Inquiry without sincere attempts to work their problems among themselves. This "lawsuit" mentality has got to stop. This is an area in which I urge that you be honest, frank, and yes, blunt.

And third, we both know that our denomination is in a precarious financial state. But in our attempts to address this situation, I am convinced that we have gutted our Support Units' and Council of Ministers' ability to fulfill their functions. We've reduced our ability to produce new outreach programs and materials, while at the same time, increasing the percentage of our budget that is spent on administration and meetings. I share this knowing that this is debatable, and that some positive outcomes will result from the 48% budget cuts. But I also come from a farming

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"You CAN Choose Your Plays" (Continued from Cover)

person being on "the cutting edge of mediocrity." I laughed out loud at this slightly oxymoronic statement. I'm bringing it to you today because no one here is in that position. A few years ago Whoopi Goldberg stated in a commencement address to graduates of Wellesley College that "You are more prepared right now than anyone else here. You are facing stuff that we never had to think about. This world truly does require your help. Everything you say and do from here on has taken on new meaning." I would underscore that today. The world *does* need what you have to bring it, and you are NOT the people for whom the phrase "the cutting edge of mediocrity" was created. There is simply no mediocrity here!

You all have had the benefit of excellent instruction and training through Urbana University. This institution was originally founded in the middle of the 1800s by far-sighted, thoughtful, intelligent people who had a need to create a place that provided quality education without reservation or discrimination. These people, members of the Swedenborgian Church, felt that *every* person had the love and power of God flowing into them and had the responsibility to grow throughout their lives not only intellectually, but morally and spiritually as well. To this end, individual paths of instruction, working with small groups and presenting a solid educational foundation were part of the original process, as well as identifying the application of that knowledge to real life, and recognizing the impact that life choices have on spiritual development. Today's incorporation of critical reflection on moral and ethical values that is part of the Urbana University experience continues that early tradition of responsibility for self growth and focus based on the best choices for developing one's spiritual self. The Swedenborgian Church stresses charity, stating that real charity is dealing fairly and faithfully in whatever position, business, or work one is engaged in, and this includes all persons with whom one comes into contact.

Your work here has underscored that same sense of thoughtful grounding and bringing a fair, broadminded, charitable approach to all you do.

Stephanie Burns is the president and CEO of the Dow Corning Corporation. Dow Corning has its headquarters in Midland, Michigan, where I make my home. In a presentation to business majors at Central Michigan University in the neighboring city of Mt. Pleasant, Burns encouraged them to work on negotiating skills, confidence-building, and learning ways to relate to other people. She underscored the need to choose ethical principles that are sustainable in global business, stating that ethical principles should govern who we are because it is in who a person is that strength is found. So, the legacy of the early founders lives on in this place, and you are the recipients, well-prepared to move into the various fields, endeavors, and professions that you've chosen.

Choice is always an issue. When I was asked for the title of my talk, I had only a folder with some ideas in it—no central topic; no outline; certainly no title. However, I did like a quotation that I had written down from a novel called *A Miracle for St. Cecilia's* by Katherine Valentine. The character, Harry, was on his way to a full-ride college football scholarship when he broke his hip in the high school playoffs. He was no longer a contender for the scholarship. His philosophy? "You can't always pick your opponents, but you CAN pick your plays." Hence, the title of this talk. As an aside, I'll tell you that for the last fourteen years of my teaching career, I had a principal who used sports analogies the way others use oxygen: always. Over the years, we had several chats about this concerning the possibility that sports metaphors and analogies don't work well for everyone, but to no avail. Personally, I'm astonished at my choice of titles, and I suspect that if he ever learned of it, he'd probably—well—just plain pass out! However, this title is true: choosing your actions, proactive and reactive, is up to you.

Choice is a constant in life. By assuming the responsibility to always choose the better course, we empower ourselves and those around us. Choices

occur in everyday things and are also present at what might be called "cross-roads moments" – those moments where we know that our choices will make an impact on who we are, what we are, what we're doing, and on our relationship with the people and conditions around us. We can't abdicate the responsibility of choice and we can choose the better course in all things. The purpose of life is to live it, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experiences. Refusing to step up to our choices is to choose to be powerless; to choose not to participate in the richness of life.

One of this university's greatest strengths is its diverse student population. Urbana University offers a variety of programs that welcome a heterogeneous mix of students, who, because of their variety, create an atmosphere that in itself is one of the best kinds of classrooms: learning to live, interact, and grow in a multi-age, multi-ethnic, multi-talented and richly-backgrounded venue. For many, this multi-faceted interaction is as much a part of the learning experience as classroom instruction. The connecting piece is that most everyone in this kind of heady, diverse mix of ages, stages, and focuses is involved in self-betterment through knowledge. Whether you have spent time as a resident student, a commuting student, a student at an off-site location; whether you have just completed a Bachelor's Degree, an Associate's Degree, or a Master's Degree, you've all had the benefit of interaction with others who have brought new thoughts, ideas, and awarenesses to you. Your instructional and personal time through this university has been a very special, meaningful time, and you'll miss it.

Now that you've reached the point of commencement, you are prepared to go out and "do your thing" with the best. Will you succeed? Probably so, but, similar to my recounting of my failure to write what my professor deemed a good philosophy of life, you may find some stumbling blocks along the way. I read a little tag line on a Website that stated: "Failure can mean a person is still in the learning stages of success." You know, I think that we're all still

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Editor's Note: There will be more coverage of the historic Gathering Leaves Women's Retreat in the September *Messenger*, but we were able to get this preview into the June issue to give readers an idea of what this inspiring event was like—it exceeded all our expectations, including this editor's.

Report on Gathering Leaves Women's Retreat

Jane Siebert

"I have a friend who was an adoptee. In her need for medical history she found she was the middle child of nine and had the opportunity to meet her eight siblings. That is how I feel after attending this retreat. I have found a family of lost siblings and now I feel more complete."

"Finally I have found wholeness in the Swedenborgian church and it all fits for me. There are parts of the church that work for social justice, parts that are more inclusive, parts that dance, parts that honor and protect tradition. I have found the complete church through this gathering."

"I see it as a puzzle. You must examine each piece independently, turn it all directions, truly look at the variety of colors, to see how they fit together. Each maintains its individuality, boundaries and integrity while needing the others to make the whole picture complete."

"I had many dreams for this gathering and knew I wanted to attend from the beginning. But I had not been able to dream this big. My hope for the church has been re-kindled."

"I am going back to my home church energized and ready to continue to put all my energy into the church. I was discouraged before I came, but through the interaction and love of all these women I found our diversity brought us closer to heaven on earth. I believe even stronger in what we have to offer the world."

Balance, completeness, unity, sisterhood, wholeness, hope, were all common words in the closing session of the Gathering Leaves Women's Retreat from which the above statements were taken. The Temenos Retreat Center was the perfect setting for the growth of sacred unity among the 77 women: General Convention (29), the General

Church (34), the Lord's New Church (6), the British Conference (4) and unaffiliated or dual membership (4). Women from four countries (U.S., Canada, Great Britain, and South Africa) gathered for this historical event May 6 – 9, 2004.

The time was right for the coming together of these women who "refuse to be enemies" as pointed out by Louise Rose, General Church. As our matriarchs, Louise and Alice Skinner, General Convention, closed the meetings with words of wisdom and hope. They were joined by women of all ages, backgrounds



Photo: (l-r, back) Lisa Hyatt Cooper, Jane Siebert, Jody Hyatt, Liz Waters Heinrichs, Lynne Smith, Rev. Susannah Currie (l-r front) Star Silverman, Emily Jane Lemole, Roslyn Taylor, Dawn Potts, Siri Hurst.

and vocations in the affirmations that they proclaimed regarding the weekend. Louise concluded with these words: "To have balance in a tree all the branches cannot grow up side by side, straight up. The tree needs the branches to spread

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"You CAN Choose Your Plays"

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in the learning stages of success! No one is free from making mistakes or running into obstacles. Ernie Harwell, longtime baseball announcer, said that there's an old baseball saying that if you get three hits in ten times at bat, you're a big league star. We need, he says, to keep on doing our best, moving forward to the next project. We need to keep our feet on the ground, our heads up, and just keep swinging. So very often we learn and grow from those missed hits, those obstacles.

What, in the end, does commencement mean? Take who you are and what you've learned and go out to live and work with passion and intelligence. Find a center for yourself to help your spirit continue to grow. It might be as simple as the exhortation from the book of Micah in the Bible: "What does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your god." Paul Sperry, in a little book of collected life thoughts based on insights from Emanuel Swedenborg's writings, says that the quality of a person's life is from the use, good or bad, which he or she makes of the love and power flowing in from the Lord. This love and power is life. Your life, what you do, how you live, is who you are. You've come to this moment in your life because of all that's gone before. Swedenborgians believe that a person must live a moral and civil life, recognizing that all people are in some sense neighbors to


whom one must show charity. Charity is willing and doing well by the neighbor and, in so doing, one is living what can be called a heavenly life. As you move on beyond this day, you need to remember that it doesn't matter how WELL you do if you don't do GOOD as well.

And so, the title of the talk: You CAN pick your plays. It's true; you can't always choose your opponents, but you can pick your plays. You have the tools in hand to create the playbook right now. You'll find more. You are here today because you have the will and the knowledge and the skill to succeed. And you will.

I'll close with the words from a plaque that I have on the wall of my office. If you remember nothing else from this address, please remember the last two lines from this list; it's a good list to include in your playbook. I call this list "The Best Thing."

The best thing to give your enemy is forgiveness,
To an opponent, tolerance
To a friend, your heart
To a child, a good example
To a father, deference
To your mother, conduct that will make her proud of you
To yourself, respect
To all people, charity

Choose your plays carefully and with charity as you move on from this day.

Thank you, and my congratulations on your current and future successes! 

CONVENTION 2004 REGISTRATION

St. Jerome's University, Waterloo, Ontario

"A Voice in the Wilderness"

Saturday, July 10 - Wednesday, July 14, 2004

This year's convention sessions are hosted by the Canada Association and the Church of the Good Shepherd at St. Jerome's University in Waterloo, Ontario, with some of us being housed at Renison College, which is next door. The rooms at St. Jerome's have two twin beds, refrigerators, sinks and built-in fans, and each floor has two large washrooms. Rooms at Renison are air-conditioned, with two rooms sharing a washroom. These rooms cost more, and for those who have their way paid to convention by the denomination, you will have to pay the difference in cost. The dining room, auditorium, and classrooms at St. Jerome's are all air-conditioned. Ontario summer weather can be like that of any mid-western state.

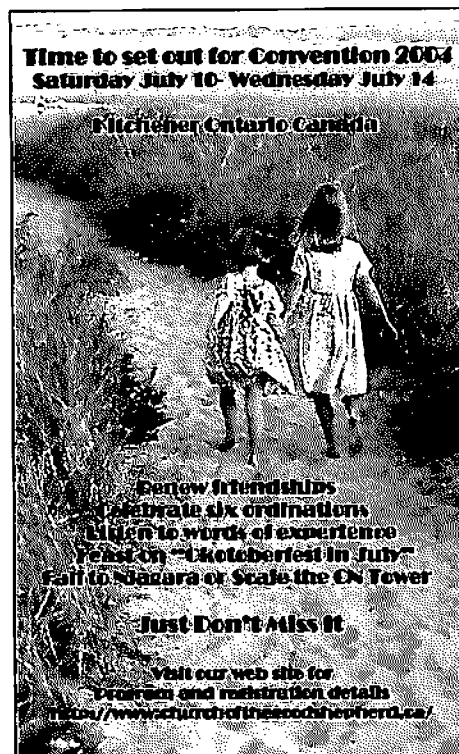
For those driving to K-W, maps will be provided once your registration form has been received. If you're flying, we suggest that you arrive at Pearson Airport in Toronto. Transportation to the campus is available at Airways Transit, located at the Out of Town Ground Transportation

wicket in each of the three terminals. This transportation can be pre-arranged by logging onto our website, or you may choose to just wait for the next available van. The cost for ground transportation is your responsibility.

Information regarding child care, and the children and teen programs, will be available in upcoming *Messengers*.

The Sunday morning worship service, and Monday evening ordination service, will be held at the Church of the Good Shepherd. On Tuesday evening we will enjoy a family oriented Oktoberfest Celebration at the Concordia Club in Kitchener, featuring German food and entertainment. Bus transportation will be provided for these events.

Our U.S. friends, upon entering and leaving Canada, will need to present a government issued photo ID and proof of U.S. citizenship. A U.S. issued passport will suffice, or you may use a driver's license and birth certificate. (It is a good idea to carry photocopies of these documents in case of loss). We urge that



you check with your health insurance provider to determine if you need to purchase short-term "out of country" medical coverage.

Additional information about this year's convention can be obtained by logging onto: www.churchofthegoodshepherd.ca.

(Detach here)

Names: _____

Names and ages of children accompanying you: _____

Street address: _____

City and Province/State: _____ Postal Code/Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Arrival _____ Departure _____ Email _____

Home Church (for your name tag) _____

	U.S. DOLLARS	CANADIAN DOLLARS			
ADULT REGISTRATION	\$95.00	\$120.00	X ADULTS	=	\$
TEEN REGISTRATION (13-17)	\$85.00	\$95.00	X TEENS	=	\$
CHILD 5-12 REGISTRATION	\$75.00	\$90.00	X CHILDREN	=	\$
REGISTRATION FAMILY MAXIMUM	\$275.00	\$350.00		=	\$
LATE FEE IF MAILED AFTER JUNE 1	\$75.00	\$100.00		=	\$
PRE-CONVENTION WORKSHOPS (see description in this <i>Messenger</i>)					
PER DAY	@ \$10.00	\$13.50	X adults _____	=	\$

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Randy Sweringen Guest at Convention

Randy Sweringen is the director of alumni/ae and church relations at Pacific School of Religion.

Formerly a Benedictine monk, Randy is also trained as a spiritual director.

Randy has served as campus minister at Santa Clara

University and was a member of New Camaldoli Hermitage in Big Sur (part of the Camaldolese Benedictine Order) for ten years. His intention in attending the Swedenborgian Convention is to strengthen relations between PSR and our church. He seeks to provide face to face contact to encourage learning of how to be supportive to our seminary community. He says, "PSR is delighted to have the Swedenborgian House of Studies as an active community at PSR, and I wish to celebrate that presence and demonstrate a commitment to the



Swedenborgian presence at PSR."

Randy will be holding a friendly lunch conversation on Monday to which he invites anyone who would like to chat more about the current setting of our seminary.

—Jim Lawrence, Dean

SHS



Child Care During Convention

During convention, child care is available for children from ages 2 to 5 in a preschool program, and for 6 to 12 year olds in a children's program. Teens (age 13 to 17) will have their own activities with our Youth Director, Kurt Fekete.

These programs are staffed by fully qualified persons who have had background clearance checks. The programs will run in the mornings, from 9 to 12 noon and in the afternoons from 1 until 5 pm. Classrooms for the children's programs are easily accessible to the residences, and there are facilities for outdoor activities.

For questions regarding the teen program call Kurt Fekete at (866) 333-SCYL.

For questions regarding the children's programs call Susan Hemmerich at (519) 885-4427



Welcome Teens to Convention 2004!

Convention isn't just for adults. This is a wonderful annual event where youth can learn and grow by experience to be responsible members of our church on a national level. There are many worthwhile fun and enlightening activities planned for teenagers. Teens get an opportunity to interact with Swedenborgian ministers and seminary students in a relaxed, casual environment. It is an opportunity to ask questions about and explore our Swedenborgian faith in a safe setting. Teens get to meet new Swedenborgian youth from all around North America. Often, rewarding Convention friendships are established in the teen years that grow and strengthen well into the adult years. Come to Convention and let your energy, enthusiasm and talents shine! For more information, please visit www.churchofthegoodshepherd.ca/tfaqpage.cgi or contact Youth Director Kurt Fekete at kfekete@hotmail.com or toll free 866-333-7295.



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Please indicate your selection of workshops and mini courses using the list and codes in the accompanying article.

Preconvention workshop	P001 <input type="checkbox"/> P002 <input type="checkbox"/>					
Mini Course selections (circle one) Monday	A001; A002; A003; A004; A005; A006; A007; A008; A009					
Mini Course selections (circle one) Tuesday	B001; B002; B003; B004; B005; B006; B007; B008; B009					
ROOM & BOARD (Please take one option)	U.S. DOLLARS	CANADIAN DOLLARS		# OF NIGHTS		
DORM ROOM SINGLE	@ \$52.00	@ \$66.00	X PERSONS		=	\$
DORM ROOM DOUBLE	@ \$48.00	@ \$61.00	X PERSONS		=	\$
RENISON SINGLE	@ \$60.00	@ \$ 76.00	X PERSONS		=	\$
RENISON DOUBLE	@ \$56.00	@ \$71.00	X PERSONS		=	\$

All bills must be paid in full by June 15. No registration refunds after June 1. Bills may be paid by VISA and MasterCard. Provide number and four-digit expiration date.

VISA ☐ MasterCard ☐ Number: _____ Expiration: _____

Make check payable to: **The Swedenborgian Church**

U.S. Attendees: Please send form with checks to: *Central Office, The Swedenborgian Church, 11 Highland Avenue, Newtonville, MA 02460*

Canadian Attendees: Please send form with cheques to: *Church of the Good Shepherd, Convention Registration, 116 Queen St. North, Kitchener, Ontario N2A 1Z2*

Special needs: (dietary, handicapped access, roommate requests, etc.) _____

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact Central Office at 617-969-4240.

Editor's Note: This informal book review just came in from Paul Zacharias. It sounds like such great summer reading we wanted to include it in our June issue.

The Five People You Meet in Heaven

I just finished a remarkable book I wish everyone would read: *The Five People You Meet in Heaven* by Mitch Albom, who also wrote *Tuesdays With Morrie*, another outstanding must-read book. The plot grips you from beginning to end, and it's chockfull of lovely spiritual insights. Ponder the following (and these are all quoted verbatim):

- Each of us is who we are, and where we are, for a definite reason.
- All the people you meet in life have something to teach you.
- We are all connected; nothing is random.
- What happens to us here on earth is only the beginning.
- Sacrifice is an essential part of life.
- What you see isn't what I see.
- You have peace when you make it with yourself.
- Things are not always what they seem.
- Holding on to anger is a poison.
- Love never ends.

Several Sundays ago at the Church of the Good Shepherd we had our last session on Swedenborg's *Divine Providence*, after a year-long study of this wonderful book. This was a summary overview of the entire book, and in the course of our discussions the following key teachings were brought out:

- True love shares what it has with others; it cares for and wants the best for others. #27
- Union takes place by attentiveness. #29
- The more we know the Divine, the wiser and happier we become, and the more we seem to be our own. #34
- Divine Providence always focuses on the long-range picture. #55
- We are because God is. #57
- Be wary of external appearances. Things are not always what they seem. #162

- The laws of permission. God permits, not wills, bad things to happen to us. #234
- Learn to accept, and make the most of, our present situation. #254
- Divine Providence works in the smallest of details, and everything happens for a higher purpose. #287
- We are responsible for our own spiritual journeys, and ultimate destination. #294

The bottom line—God's life/Spirit infills everything that is. All things are interconnected. And everything is ALIVE.

Notice how in so many places these two lists intersect and almost blend into one. It's all so incredibly beautiful. How much we owe writers like Mitch who are sharing these spiritual insights with millions of people around the world. And his concept of heaven is right on target:

- After death people wake up immediately and are still very much themselves.
- They meet up with those they love and continue their relationships.
- Their surroundings are extensions or expressions of their inner spiritual states and affections.

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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background, and I know that a farmer cannot stop planting seeds and expect a greater harvest. You'll need to help us deal with this situation. We need any guidance that you can offer.

And Chris, I want to add one final point here. I completely trust your ability to lead this denomination. This trust has only deepened as we have worked together these past six years. I know that you have many talents and abilities to draw upon in this job, and what is more important, I know that you will draw upon them! I also know that you can be honest, frank, and even blunt, when necessary. But, I don't recall ever hearing you cheer. But please do not take that as a criticism. It's an invitation to come to Kitchener next winter and attend a Rangers hockey game with me. And as I said earlier, bring your pom-poms. With love, respect and blessings,

—Ron

President's Activities

- Jul. 19-27: Almont Summer School
- Aug. 4-20: Holidays
- Aug. 21-24: Wayfarers Chapel Board of Managers
- Sep. 4-7: MINSU, Portland
- Sep. 17: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Sep. 19-21: Urbana, for B&B Dedication, Sunday Worship and Meetings
- Sep. 25-28: Cabinet Meetings, Cincinnati
- Oct. 6-11: British Conference International Ministers Seminar
- Oct. 15: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Oct. 17-20: New York Church
- Oct. 23-26: General Council
- Oct. 30-Nov. 2: SHS Board, Columbus and Urbana
- Nov. 12: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Nov. 14-20: EDSU and CAM, at SHS
- Nov. 22-23: Cleveland Church
- Dec. 5-7: LaPorte New Church
- Dec. 10: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Dec. 19-21: Pawnee Rock Church

I could not attend the Wayfarers Chapel Board meeting or make a requested trip to visit Andy Stinson in Virginia due to a delay in having my Landed Immigrant Card issued by the Canadian government.

- Jan. 14: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Jan. 23-25: FPRSU Meeting, Newton
- Feb. 19-22: Urbana University Trustees, preached at the Urbana Church
- Mar. 12-13: Conducted a funeral in Pittsburgh
- Mar. 13-18: CAM meetings
- Mar. 18-20: SHS Board of Trustees
- Mar. 24: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Apr. 21: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- Apr. 24: General Council Conference Call
- May 18: Wayfarers Chapel Board of Managers Conference Call
- May 19: Convention Planning Meeting, Kitchener
- May 21-24: Visit New York Church and meet with Little Grain members
- June 4-6: Visit Church of the Holy City, Edmonton
- June 23: Convention Planning Committee, Kitchener



Thanks to SHS Donors

On behalf of the Board of Trustees of the Swedenborgian House of Studies, I wish to acknowledge and thank all those who have contributed to the current annual campaign of the seminary, as we strive to prepare leaders for the Swedenborgian Church of tomorrow. *Jim Lawrence, Dean SHS*

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The Messenger and the Communications Support Unit wish to thank these individuals and groups for subscriptions and donations to The Messenger from May 1, 2003, through May 1, 2004. 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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TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor:

What Is Our True Purpose?

There is much in Rich Tafel's article "If the Swedenborgian Church Had a Coach" (April 2004 *Messenger*) to challenge Convention and our churches. If we took our 1986 mission statement as our true purpose—to nurture spiritual well-being—how would that change our response? Is our real priority to grow our membership self-serving? Should we rather consider our Uses as an organization?

The analogy to the world of business challenges us further. Our economy and

the corporate world is based on consumption. Its purpose is to make money and its marketing strategy is to create greater wants, to make us desire much more than we need. Indeed Americans are already consuming far more than our fair share of the world resources. Every member of our church is extremely wealthy compared to most of the world.

Business goes about its business of making money regardless of the long-term effect on the environment and the depletion of the earth's resources. Might we as a church consider our uses more carefully? If we truly nurtured spiritual well-being, which people are now hungry for, would we not be creating the enthusiastic "consumer evangelists" who would grow our membership?

Perry S. Martin
West Chester, Pennsylvania



Editor's Note: The following story is reprinted with permission from the December 2003 Swedenborg Chapel Newsletter. Cliff Siegh is a member of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Mass. The Rev. Sarah Buteux is pastor.

Amir Zargari Receives Asylum

Cliff Siegh

Our prayers were answered for our resident Persian Buddhist Amir Zargari, who was granted asylum recently in Federal court. Amir is an avid reader of Swedenborg who participates every Thursday evening in our Swedenborg reading and discussion group, lending his singular perspective to all our conversations. He is genuinely interested in translating *Heaven and Hell*, *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *Conjugal Love* into Farsi (Persian).

Amir was facing deportation to Iran, where he was born and raised Muslim. He came to the U.S. at the age of 17 on a two-year student visa in 1979 on one of the last planes to depart Tehran just after the Shah fell from power and just before the hostages were seized from the U.S. embassy and held for 444 days

at the end of the Carter administration. Relations between the two countries were severed, and Amir had no chance of renewing his visa. His openly pro-western sympathies and opposition to the fundamentalist regime left him fearing for his life should he return, so he went "low profile" and stayed here, acquiring a degree from Harvard (psychology) among other accomplishments. When Attorney-general Ashcroft called for all males from middle-eastern countries to come forward and be counted, Amir had been reading *Heaven and Hell* and was inspired to come forward despite the post-9/11 climate of "house-cleaning" underway in the Justice Department.

As a Buddhist (or any other religious persuasion other than Muslim) in Iran, Amir would be, by definition, an "apostate," having been raised Muslim followed by conversion to another faith. The laws of Iran mandate execution for all apostates! The judge saw the light and granted him asylum, allowing a memorable Thanksgiving for Amir—whew!

Rev. Sarah was there for the whole hearing, lending her support.

Amir, as you can probably imagine, is on cloud 9.



My Dad's Hands

Bedtime came, we were settling down,
I was holding one of my lads.
As I grasped him so tight,
I saw a strange sight:
My hands...they looked like my dad's!

I remember them well, those old gnarled hooks, there was always a cracked nail or two. And thanks to a hammer that strayed from its mark, his thumb was a beautiful blue!

They were rough, I remember, incredibly tough, as strong as a carpenter's vice. But holding a scared little boy at night, they seemed to me awfully nice!

The sight of those hands how impressive it was in the eyes of his little boy. Other dads' hands were cleaner, it seemed (the effects of their office employ).

I gave little thought in my formative years of the reason for Dad's raspy mitts: The love in the toil, the dirt and the oil, rusty plumbing that gave those hands fits!

Thinking back, misty-eyed, and thinking ahead, when one day my time is done. The torch of love in my own wrinkled hands will pass on to the hands of my son.

I don't mind the bruises, the scars here and there or the hammer that just seemed to slip. I want most of all when my son takes my hand, to feel that love lies in the grip.

—David Kettler

Reprinted from the June 2002 *Edmonton Newsletter*, Church of the Holy City, Edmonton, Alberta.

PCA to Meet in October

The Pacific Coast Association will hold its annual meeting October 1-3, 2004, at the El Cerrito church (Friday dinner to Sunday lunch). The program will be presented by El Cerrito and Swedenborgian House of Studies students and faculty.

GEORGE INNESS

and the visionary landscape (Continued from page 84)

Finally a profile on Inness in *Harper's Weekly* appeared in the July 13, 1867 issue describing him for the first time as "a disciple of Swedenborg." In November of that year Inness published an article on the spiritual significance of colors in *The New Jerusalem Messenger*. On October 4 of 1868, he and his wife Elizabeth Abigail Hart Inness were baptized by the Rev. John Curtis Ager of the Brooklyn, New York church "as Swedenborgians." In his eulogy for Inness in 1894, Ager said:

It was my lot to know [Inness] at the somewhat critical point in his life when he was drifting away from every definite belief and had just begun to find in the writings of Swedenborg a solution of [sic] his difficulties. . . . In Swedenborg George Inness found the basis for his theories of art. He found there the true solution for all the problems of expression. To him all nature was symbolic, full of spiritual meaning. He prized nothing in nature that did not stand for something. (p. 25)

The spiritual world is present in the material world and shines through it; Inness wanted to depict that presence in his landscapes. Bell is particularly careful to distinguish between Inness' landscapes and those of many other painters who strive for sharp, hard-edged detail, very close to, if not mimicking, photography. In those efforts Inness saw an obsession with mere *place*. He had to pull back a bit from literal depiction and let spirit, or the feelings that one has about a scene, its moods, show through. Consequently, there is a slightly indistinct quality in his work. The real task was to reproduce on canvas the magic, the spirit that one would feel while standing there and resonating with the scene around him. He explained, "The greatness of art is not in the display of knowledge, or in material accuracy, but in the distinctness with which it conveys the impressions of a personal vital force, that acts spontaneously, without fear or hesitation." (p. 31)

Stephen Koke is the oversight editor for J. Appleseed, the church's publishing arm under COMSU, and is a member-at-large of the Pacific Coast Association.



The Five People You Meet in Heaven

(Continued from page 79)

- They gradually sluff off earthly remains.
- The spiritual world is a very real, substantial realm.

There's so much more in this remarkable book, which deservedly is at the top of the best seller lists. This would be a great selection for a local book club; entertaining, yet thoughtful and profound.

The Rev. Paul Zacharias is a retired Swedenborgian minister living in Kitchener, Ontario.



Winter, Close of Day (A Winter Sky) Bell: Inness eliminated all distracting features to focus on the way in which sunlight gradually resurrects a petrified terrain. Inness captured . . . the fundamentally and profoundly enigmatic nature of the religious experience.

Report on Gathering Leaves

Women's Retreat (Continued from page 76)

out in all directions and angles to have balance. But we are all of the same tree."

It is always easier to see the things that need to change in other's traditions. As I reflect on the weekend I wonder what glaring issue we need to address to make our branch stronger and more supportive. I think it is the unity of vision and purpose that we within Convention need to work towards with new clarity and accord. It is in the debate and articulation of various viewpoints that we will need to step up and say, "This is what I believe and it is upon this doctrine that I live my life." And through this affirmation we can hold up who we are as Swedenborgians.

Revelation 22:2b

And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

We are of the same tree.

Our Swedenborgian roots go deep into the soil of Scripture.

These roots are the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Through them we are able to receive spiritual nourishment

From the inner sense of the Word.

The trunk of this tree,

which is the good and truth that grows from the writings,

Has sprouted several branches to better serve the tree,

Because the trunk does not bear fruit, except through its branches.

The branches are the affections for the good and truth,

which come from the people.

Each branch receives its life-blood from the same trunk
and the same roots.

While growing in different directions.

The branches vary in their perception of truth
but not their love of truth.

The leaves that sprout from the branches are the truths of faith.

They serve for the instruction and regeneration of the human race.
They heal though the recreation and restoration of the spiritual life.

It is time to gather the leaves for the healing of the nations
—Jane Siebert



PASSAGES

Birth

Driver—Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church is happy to announce the birth of a son, Jacob Randall, on March 10, 2004 to member Heather Driver and her husband, Mark. Congratulations and God's blessings.

Hinrichs—A new daughter, Marielle Susan Hinrichs, was born April 30, 2004, to the Rev. Kim and Robert Hinrichs. She weighed 7 lbs, 14 oz and is very healthy. The family is thrilled, and big sister Claire "has welcomed the new family member with open arms and sweet attention."

Kim is the Program Director at the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. Robert serves the Information Management Support Unit. They are members of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church.

Confirmations

Leeman—Rebecca Leeman was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church and welcomed into membership of the Portland Swedenborgian Church November 9, 2003, in Portland, Maine, the Rev. Wilma Wake officiating.

Buss, Closterman, Ging, Larson, Ousey, Rosecky — Heidi Buss, Dave Closterman, Jolynn Ging, Donna Larson, Mike Ousey

and Robin Rosecky were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church and welcomed into membership April 11, 2004, at the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos, the Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Marriage

Moon and Lee—Heejeong Moon and the Rev. Junchol Lee, pastor of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cleveland, Ohio, were united in marriage February 21, 2004. The Rev. Dr. George Dole, pastor of the Bath, Maine, Swedenborgian Church (and Junchol's former seminary professor) officiated. Family and friends came from Korea and parts of the United States.

Deaths

Chivers—Isabel Chivers, longtime member of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world January 12, 2004.

Elliot—John D. Elliot, age 83, a member for many years of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world January 22, 2004. John served in WWII and was a member of the Prisoner of War Association.

Faichney—Katheryn Faichney, a member for many years of the Church of the Good

Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, entered the spiritual world December 26, 2003.

Osborne—Eric Norman Osborne, member of the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta, entered the spiritual world October 24, 2003. A memorial service was conducted in Calgary October 28, 2003, the Rev. John Maine officiating. Eric is survived by his son Bruce and two grandchildren.



CHANGE NOTE:

The VanDusen and Rivers mini-courses have been cancelled due to Van's ill health.

Call for Music Makers

Would you like to participate in the music and worship at this year's Convention? Please contact Joe Machiniak at 248-577-9187 or email him at nayshune@aol.com if you would like to share your musical ability.



The Swedenborgian Church Statistics - as of December 31, 2003

Associations	Churches		Ordained Ministers			Authorized Lay Leaders	Members			Number of Delegates
	Active	Inactive	Active	Inactive	Retired		Active	Inactive	Total	
Canada	1	0	1	0	1	1	90	30	120	11
Illinois	6	0	2	1	0	0	120	26	146	14
Kansas	2	0	0	0	1	0	88	0	88	10
Maine	2	1	3	2	0	0	143	12	155	16
Massachusetts	5	0	6	2	1	0	122	41	163	14
Michigan	1	0	1	0	0	0	68	22	90	8
Middle Atlantic	3	0	3	0	0	0	105	26	131	12
New York	2	0	2	1	0	0	49	27	76	6
Ohio	3	2	2	1	0	1	72	16	88	9
Pacific Coast	4	0	8	2	7	1	336	20	356	35
Southeast	2	0	3	0	0	0	54	5	59	7
Western Canada	5	1	2	2	1	1	205	0	205	22
Conference										
SCYL										2
SOCIETIES										
Bayside	did not report for 2002, 2003, or 2004									
Total	36	4	33	11	11	4	1452	225	1677	166

GEORGE INNESS and the visionary landscape

By Adrienne Baxter Bell
National Academy
of Design, 2003
New York

Reviewed by Stephen Koke



From January 24, through April 18, 2004 the San Diego Museum of Art presented a stunning exhibition of 40 of George Inness' landscape paintings with unabashed coverage of his debt to Swedenborg. The paintings themselves are of course among the most memorable of late 19th century American art; he is widely regarded as one of the greatest American painters.

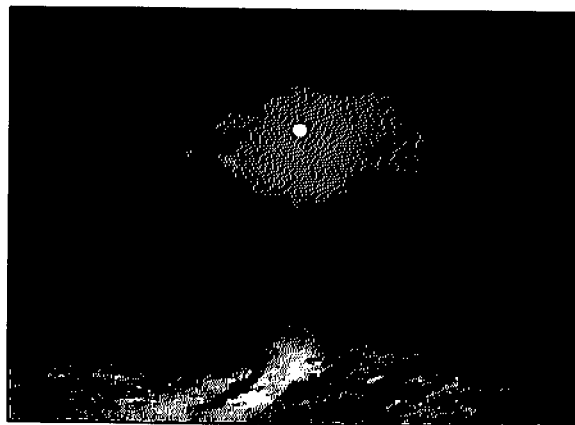
The exhibit originated in New York and for reasons unknown was intended to travel only to San Diego. It occupied three rooms in San Diego's large, ornately designed museum. Close to the entrance of the first room was an enclosure where one could sit and watch a tape on a projection television describing the paintings and spending quite a lot of time on Inness' attachment to Swedenborg's teachings, especially the correspondence between heaven and the material world. Two portraits of Swedenborg were included. Just outside the enclosure, and in each of the exhibit rooms, was a copy of *Heaven and Hell* that people could open and peruse.

On sale in the museum bookstore were paperback copies of the NCE translation of *Heaven and Hell*, copies of the Swedenborg Foundation's *Splendors of the Spirit* video, as well as the book by Adrienne Baxter Bell cited above. Her book goes into Inness' work with such depth that it is probably the most

penetrating analysis of his inspiration and style available. All, or nearly all, of the paintings in the exhibit are reproduced in the book in large plates.

Bell tells us that we don't know when Inness first discovered Swedenborg's writings, but she theorizes that it occurred during his first trip to Italy in 1851-52:

... Inness rented a studio on the Via Sant'Apollonia in Florence. Working directly below him was the portraitist William Page. Page had been introduced to Swedenborgian doctrine the previous year by the sculptor Hiram Powers. ... Page was avidly studying the subject. By September 1851, [Page] could be found reading Swedenborgian texts aloud to the poet James Russell Lowell during Lowell's visit to Florence. Later, in the 1860s and 1870s, Page would lecture on art at the Athenaeum Club and at the National Academy of Design in New York. His topics ... were all infused with basic principles of Swedenborgian doctrine. ... It is worth considering the possibility that Inness's landscapes from even the mid-1850s reflect his engagement with the mystical doctrines to which he would devote himself for the rest of his life. (pp. 25-6)



Christmas Eve (Winter Moonlight). A figure contemplates the moonlight. It could be any of us.

(Continued on page 82)

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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.