

THE MESSENGER

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The Key to the Church: Practical Uses of Church History

Part I

Wilma Wake

I arrived at the Portland Swedenborgian Church in January of 2003 as a halftime minister. The congregation told me they had issues with communication and community, so we did a series of community building workshops when I began. One of my favorite congregational experiences is an exploration of a church's history with a sharing of personal past memories. This experience was eye-opening for all of us. I was struck by important patterns and events of the past that still seemed to have an emotional pull on the congregation. We went deeply into portions of the past, which has helped to heal and provide deeper community bonds. We have just begun, and some of us are continuing to probe our history to help us clarify our present and plan our future. COMSU, our denominational Communications Support Unit, is supporting congregations in researching and writing their history. They asked me to write this brief summary for The Messenger on how this work is impacting us in Portland.

The congregation laughed heartily as I held up a church key during my short talk.

"I've been a parish minister with you for two months now, so perhaps you'd like a report on what I have learned: how to lock up the building. One night recently, I was the last person to leave the church, but was secure in having recently acquired my very own key. A statement of trust from the congregation, I felt!

"I soon panicked, however, in realizing that I didn't know how to turn out the lights. I did find the switch panel by the door, but there was only one switch that could possibly turn off the lights in the sanctuary.

"Yet, there was a big sign taped under it saying: **Do not touch**

this switch. I knew I was at a moment of truth juncture in my parish ministry. If I obeyed the sign, undoubtedly approved by the Church Council whom I served, then I would leave lights burning all night. A terrible environmental and financial choice! Yet if I risked pulling that switch, what terrible thing might happen to me and to this church?

"I could find no one available by phone, so it was up to God and me. I felt certain God wanted me to take the bold risk in exerting pastoral authority: a statement of the kinds of hard choices parish ministers must be willing to take. Sometimes we have to disobey signs for the larger good. With fear and trepidation, I pulled down the switch."

There was clapping and shouting from the many people present.

"And the lights went out. I went home. And so begins my ministry here..."

Little did I know at my installation service that day in March of 2003, how prophetic was my decision to risk disobeying signs.

During our joyous reception after the service, I learned that others, too, had struggled with the momentous decision of whether to obey the sign or turn out the lights. It was weeks later that someone realized the sign was not



Wilma Wake

meant to refer to the switch above it, but rather it was taped over a switch behind it that had to be left on.

During my interviews for the position, I had been told that there were problems with communication and working together in the parish. I always felt a current situation couldn't be fully comprehended until the past was known. I was trying to get to know the congregation, and they wanted to get to know themselves as a church community. The next month, April, we did a Roots Night at the church to explore the parish history patterns. It was off to the past!

We put a huge roll of newsprint all around the sanctuary, marking it off by dates in the history of the church. I had done some research in our archives so that I could bring in the early pieces of the church's history. I hoped that the gathered crowd that night could share and record the history in their memories. We had a delicious meal together and began with great enthusiasm, amidst much laughter, to show our history on the paper all around our sanctuary walls.

Many were amazed to learn that interested readers had formed a Swedenborgian discussion group as early as the 1820s. There was great excitement when it was revealed that one minister, the Rev. William Hayden, had been at the church for twenty-five years and that the membership was over 180 at the time. Learning that the church had owned a huge, beautiful temple, called The Temple of the New Jerusalem, in a prominent spot in town, and that the mayor and many prominent citizens had been members, was quite eye-opening. When Rev. Hayden retired, the church membership began declining and has never returned

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Briefcase, Bag or Backpack

The Initiation of a President

Chris Laitner

On July 14, 2004, I was officially installed as the president of the denomination. As I write this article, October, in all of its autumnal glory, has arrived. I'm about seventy days into this office, and am aware that the first one hundred days of any position are important. Within the next thirty days, my calendar tells me that I will be involved with the Committee on Admission to the Ministry, a local society, and the Swedenborgian House of Studies Board. Just reading those three things gives a pretty clear picture of the diversity and large-scale involvement of the position of president. The previous nine weeks or so, with their support unit, board, committee, local and association meetings have set the tone for the remainder of the first one hundred days. What a trip! What an opportunity! What a learning experience! And finally, what an honor!

This is the time of beginning; the time of finding out and the time of learning to oversee and to help. It's the time of planning and of making outlines. It's the time of looking forward from now. There's a little feeling of suspension of reality because the parameters are changing. In fact, change is in the air, and, as with any new configuration of anything, there's a sense of renewal hovering over us all. Change is always a multi-faceted thing: is it good or is it bad? Will we move forward from here, or are we finished? Change is a "catalyst time." Something is working...but we're not quite certain where, how, why...or what the effect will be.

Which brings me to the title: "Briefcase, Bag or Backpack." We're all engaged in moving forward. For me, that means a lot of email and phone calls, and it also means twelve important trips in thirteen weeks. As prepared as I can be for each of them, I find myself every single time in a quandary that is somehow symbolic. Do I carry a briefcase, a

bag, or a backpack along with my little brown suitcase? The briefcase is symbolic of executive power, and I find that I do choose to carry that when the focus of a gathering is very specific. The bag is bigger and is open: it can carry many things that are both for use and for comfort. I find that the bag seems appropriate if the distance to travel is long and I'm not the person in charge of the meeting. Finally, the backpack isn't any ordinary backpack; it's the backpack carry case for my laptop. Thus far, the backpack hasn't gone anywhere because I am really resistant to carrying my laptop to any meeting. I've talked this over with myself, and I've (we've) decided that if we've planned well enough, we shouldn't need to access other stuff. Our meetings are intense, but they are focused, and we should be able to have with us the necessary information. It is also true that if we have either Convention's secretary, Gloria Toot, or the Central Office manager, Martha Bauer, present, we will have laptops there and I really don't need mine.

So, the upshot of the title of this article is that we have a pretty good system in place so that the president, who often functions as a keeper and conveyor of information, can attend and sometimes lead meetings and can also provide important information for the work of that group. A second meaning for the title is that our gatherings have focus and order and so it is not always up to the president to bring everything to the meeting. In fact, most gatherings provide new information for the president to pack into "the bag." We are a wonderful group of people who bring important reports, ideas and insights to the work of any part of our organization — so, unless I am just wanting to play free cell solitaire, I really don't need to bring the backpack at all. There's a great deal of comfort in that thought, because it indicates that we're in the capable hands of boards and committees whose members work hard and well.

Finally, acknowledging that the president is a kind of recipient of all that has gone before in this (or any) organization, and thus is the next person in line to lead the community forward, I'd like to share a little community definition

story with all of you. I used this at our recent Cabinet meeting, and I've read it over and over myself as a kind of learning mantra in relation to the ongoing good work of our denomination. This example of a real truth is from *Love and Profit* by James A. Autry:

In the oldtime religion of my youth, we believed that through the ritual of what we called "The Lord's Supper," we communed with the saints, with all of those who had gone before.

I was struck with this old image at a retirement dinner as the retiree invoked the names of company people long dead and spoke of them as if they were just on some kind of sabbatical. He talked of what they had taught the people who had taught him, and how he had tried to teach others who were now teaching the beginners.

As he spoke, we realized that a true community has no limit in time. He made us feel the extension of our community of work, into a time long before us and into a time yet to come. As if the work exists in and of itself, and we come and go from it in a kind of continuum of endeavor, in a kind of communion.

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to the numbers of that era.

Many years followed when no minister stayed for long. Lay leaders ran the church for decades on end. The last Swedenborgian minister before me had stayed for seven years before leaving in 1996. Now seven years had passed before the congregation was willing to hire another Swedenborgian minister. (They did have a short interim with a Unitarian minister a few years previous.) When we reached 1996 on the timeline, the easy laughter and jovial atmosphere vanished. The air crackled with tension. People became angry, yet reluctant to share details of the events of that period.

I mulled over these events in the next few days. It seemed to me that there were lingering feelings from the past, and they probably needed to be talked about if there was to be healing. I began encouraging parishioners to share memories, feelings, and impressions about this period. I was met with an array of responses, such as:

- What happened is so awful, I'm never going to talk about it.
- What happened then is of no significance any longer.
- It's done with. I can't be bothered by having to talk about it again.
- Let's move on.
- The one thing you must NOT do is ask people about that period. It has to stay in the past.
- Look, the problem is *those people*. Talking about it won't change anything.
- They forced the minister to leave, and now you have to force them to leave so we can move on.

Hmm. Had I hit a raw nerve? If so, it was rooted in the past. I spent some time pouring over the timeline and reviewing the parish history. I noted a number of historical trends that could be contributing to the current feelings. In particular:

Most of the trustworthy leadership throughout their history had been from the laity. I am still learning about all the lay

leaders, but here are some:

Dr. Timothy Little had initially wanted to be a Unitarian minister, but ended up as a physician who discovered the writings of Swedenborg when he moved to Portland in 1825. He led a small group of readers into incorporating a church in 1831. Little led the church through several short-term pastorates until the 1850s when he died and Heyden came on board.

T.D. Sturdivant was licensed in 1846 as one of the first denominationally-approved lay leaders in order to serve Portland.

William Hayden actually began his ministry with Portland as a licensed lay leader who later became ordained.

Mr. Harry Cram and son Robert, both Portland attorneys, led the parish through many decades of ups and downs in the 1900s.

Robert Gass joined the church in 1921 and was an active leader for several generations.

Michael Salvetti joined soon after Gass and was also a stable and significant leader through the long periods with no minister and short periods of professional leadership. Most of the ministers during this period simply came as guest preachers. Eventually, students from the seminary would come up from time to time to offer sermons.

Most ministers left after very short pastorates. From what I could see in the archives, it seemed that these lay leaders (licensed or not), were largely trusted and beloved leaders who kept giving keys to new ministers, and then had to take them back only months, or perhaps a year or two, later. Hardly enough time, it seemed to me, to learn how to turn out the lights. Why did ministers not stay? Well, it can get cold and snowy in Maine winters! But there was an ongoing struggle over money revealed repeatedly in the archives. Throughout this history were letters to the augmentation fund begging for money, and letters from ministers saying they would have to leave if their salary was not increased.

Was the struggle over money connected to a deeper reality? Perhaps it was hard to be motivated to pay a minister who would move on quickly, whereas a lay leader would be stable and not expect a salary. Perhaps the ministers got discouraged by this attitude toward their professional role and left, which reinforced the attitude that ministers leave quickly. I was sure it was a lot more complicated with many individual variations, but perhaps this was a piece of the puzzle.

In any case, I wondered if the history carried the feelings of a church community that felt abandoned again and again by clergy. The previous minister of seven years served one of the longest pastorates they had had, with the exception of Hayden's 25 years [which had been broken by a brief pastorate elsewhere in the country].

What I was hearing from people suggested to me that the congregation had not fully said goodbye to their last minister and could not move on from that event. But was that situation simply the latest in a long line of ministers leaving throughout history who had not been grieved? Were there perhaps buried feelings in the history, such as: What's wrong with us that our ministers keep leaving?

The congregation had a short collective memory. I was stunned to realize how new every single person in that church was. There was only a small group left in 1989 who had called the previous pastor. Most of them left soon after the new minister picked up his keys. Only a couple of people had any memory of church life before 1989 and they had since left. Most of the people who went through the trauma of losing their minister in 1996 had since left the church. The current congregation was basing its feelings about the period primarily on what they had heard about it.

The current parishioners had little experience of church life. Many of them were people who came to the Portland church not from other denominations, but rather from the ranks of "unchurched" who tended to

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avoid churches. They brought a spiritual vitality that was a strength in the community. Yet, they also had little understanding of the tide of church life, with pastorates ending. In 1996 virtually every congregant had come during the time of and often because of the previous pastor. For him to leave was a deep wound that had not been normalized by years of church life and had not been grieved.

There were weak connections to the denomination. It looked from the history that the ties to the denomination occurred primarily during the tenures of ordained ministers. This group did not feel particularly helped by the denomination after their pastor left in 1996, and seemed to be a weary band of survivors without clergy or denomination. It's been a pattern for Portland since the 1820s. Our denomination still does not have adequate resources to provide support to parish and pastor in a leaving process.

I was just absorbing these discoveries when my hunches seemed confirmed. It was only a few months after that installation service that chaos emerged, centered around anger at me for my ministry role. There was such a stream of complaints about my ministry that I couldn't begin to address one before another emerged. They included:

- I wasn't assuming enough leadership. I should take charge, give the congregation a vision, and lead them there.
- I was taking charge of too many things, interfering with the system that was in place before I arrived, and I should step back from leadership.
- My sermons were too good. They were drawing people on the alternate Sundays when I preached, and I needed to improve the lay sermons given when I wasn't there [in my half-time ministry].
- I wasn't bringing in newcomers, as had been hoped in my hiring. In fact, some people had left because of my presence. People complained that they thought having a minister would mean less work, but I was giving community

building workshops and trying to get people to talk about things. It was exhausting. I was meddling in the past and had no right to go there.

- Since my arrival, everything was falling apart. They at least had some stability before I arrived; now all was chaos.

The "walk through the wilderness" took about ten months, from when chaos emerged to when we changed from a hurting community to a healing one. It was ten months of a terrifying roller coaster ride through past, present, and future.

The process is a long story, but I can share some highlights. I must admit with great humility that I really don't think that any one thing pulled us through, and I'm not sure what we did that made a difference. More than anything else, I credit our many heart-centered prayers for help, and the feeling of Divine Providence at work amongst us.

I went through a time of profound humility about the powerlessness of the parish pastor. Just as I began to gain insights that I felt could lead to healing, I lost all credibility as a leader. Whatever I said evoked anger in someone and raised criticism about how I was fulfilling my role. I was acutely aware of my tentative status in the community. This was a group with deep roots to the past, even though those roots were not in the direct memory of the current members. I was a leaf blowing in the wind around this deeply-rooted tree. The way things were going, that tree was going to blow me off and shoo me away soon. And the rooted community would go on. I knew that the only way

there would be change was if the trusted leadership from within the congregation embraced it and led the way through the wilderness. They would need a paradigm shift in the culture of how their system functioned for that to happen.

It was, ultimately, the *commitment* and determination of the informal and elected leadership that broke the pathway through the wilderness. I felt I was watching God at work, birthing new life as old ways died off.

Here is a summary of the ways I felt the Spirit at work amongst us during those long, dreary ten months:

Pathways to healing

- **I got consultations.** I knew that I was in the midst of complex and confusing dynamics, and that I was increasingly becoming a part of the "family system" myself. I knew I needed outside help on how to pastor effectively. I found a clergy consultation group co-sponsored by Bangor Seminary that was led by a highly regarded consultant. She had worked with the Interim Ministry Network and specialized in situations where a new pastor became a "lightning rod" for unresolved past feelings towards clergy. I was profoundly grateful for what I learned in this group. They helped me sort out the difference between complaints that related directly to what I was doing, and complaints that were buried in the system from the past, for which I was a lightning rod. The wisdom of the other clergy members, and the experiences of the consultant, were invaluable, as was the inspiration to return to my collection of books on parish systems theory.

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IMPORTANT CHURCH DATES, 2004-2005

November 4-7, 2004: General Council @ Wayfarers Chapel, Palos Verdes, CA
November 12-14, 2004: EDSU @ Missy Sommer's home in Potomac or Gaithersburg, Maryland (TBA).
May 7, 2005: Investment Committee @ Central Office, Newtonville, MA

July 5-8, 2005: Council of Ministers @ Berkeley, CA
July 10, 2005: General Council @ Berkeley, CA
July 13, 2005: General Council @ Berkeley, CA
July 9-13, 2005: Convention 2005 @ Berkeley, CA

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I also turned to my own peer group within the denomination. I hesitated to do this because one of my peers was the minister who had left Portland in 1996. It is not the norm generally for present and past clergy of a church to discuss that church together. I didn't know if such a conversation would be welcomed or useful, and I wanted to respect the boundaries of our roles. I came to feel that the contact was another God-inspired healing step. I was able to hear the minister's account of his leaving process and could quickly see what rumors and distortions had entered the grapevine after he left.

- **Changing leadership with a commitment to teamwork.** This is, I believe, the single most effective way for transformation to occur in the parish. Without a supportive leadership, I would not have been able to continue a ministry. Many of the elected leaders during my first year became exhausted from the chaos and fighting. Many resigned. Other people emerged with a willingness to serve in chaos and a commitment to doing everything possible to make our fledgling ministry work. We had some people with significant experience in the church leadership willing to serve again, as well as some newcomers willing to play a role on the church council.

The really hard work began. The new president ["new" again in an old role he often had before] and I began spending hours together talking about how the council and I could be a leadership team together, committed to addressing the culture of blame and anger. I shared in great detail about all that I was learning, and I trusted his wisdom on how best to share the information.

We agreed that a retreat time with the council would be best. This was a group still traumatized by a very hurting "processing" of feelings in 1996, and highly suspicious of any requests on my part for time to talk about things. But because the president understood why it was important, and because he endorsed it for the council, we were able to have a retreat.

On September 23rd, 2004, the Portland church youth had an interfaith program with a representative from the Hillel Foundation at Southern Maine University. He told them about the Jewish celebration of Sukkot, a time to remember the years of wandering the wilderness, living in temporary huts, or sukkbas. He helped six young people and a few adults build a Sukkba hut. At their Harvest Service on September 26, the congregation honored their own wilderness wandering as a church, and celebrated having survived the wilderness years, with a bright future ahead.



- **Retreat with Council.** I shared my information with the Council on a Saturday in March. It was almost exactly one year since my installation, and exactly seven years since the parish had been in the midst of the trauma over the process of the minister's leaving. I shared the essence of my conversation with the previous pastor and the letter we were writing together. Although many specific details remained mired in mystery with people having different recollections, I discovered a core of truth that all could embrace. The minister was clear that he had made his own decision to leave. It was a very difficult decision that had involved many factors. At root was that he felt called by God to another ministry. He was clear that he had not been forced out by anyone in the parish. I suspect that many pastors in Portland's history felt a call to leave, yet their departures were not mourned or the wounds healed.

From all that I was reading and learning in my consultation group, I knew that many "generations" in parish life can be impaired by inaccurate perceptions of past events. Amazingly, it has been shown over and over again that people do not have to actually hear the misinformation to absorb the dynamics that result from it. I shared this knowledge, along with the types of misinformation that newcomers reported to me they were told by people in the parish; particularly that they heard that a few people in the parish had forced their

minister out many years ago.

I shared what I was learning from my consultants about the process of a pastor leaving a parish, and I brought in material from the Interim Ministry Network about how congregations can heal from an emotional leaving process; even one from years previous. I shared that this Network has learned that when a congregation doesn't grieve the departure of a pastor, it is common for them to find scapegoats to blame in the congregation. It is a process that often ends when the facts are clear and the grieving is supported.

Sharing this information felt to me like a sacred moment; a telling of the truth that I could find from the past. After seven harsh wilderness years for this parish, much of the conflict over the leaving of the previous pastor had been about events that had never taken place.

It would be up to the council to decide what to do with the information I brought them. They decided to take on the role of truth-tellers. They would end the rumors as they had started; in private conversations. They would share the truth whenever it seemed called for. Council recognized that it was up to them to change the culture of rumors, blaming, and scapegoating that came out of misinformation on past events.

I have no idea exactly WHAT happened or WHY it happened. But I witnessed change happening throughout

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the church after that council retreat.

By the next day, Sunday, there was a new feeling in church. More people came; people who were less grumpy and showed more smiles. I became aware over the coming weeks that the blame and anger were melting. New energy for new projects was popping up. Over the coming weeks, people made commitments to change patterns of hostile and critical communication in the church. People came to me quietly to share grieving about the previous pastor and the hard years that had followed. I suspected that as the previous pastor was grieved, many generations of leaving pastors were also grieved. Some parishioners shared with me their anger at a denomination that had supplied no resources for their process of saying goodbye to a pastor and little help in recovering from the aftermath.

I most valued what I heard about coffee hour. In my first year I would hear from visitors: "I really like the service, but coffee hour was a downer. People complaining about each other! Not my kind of church." Now I was hearing, "A nice service, but it's the coffee hour I really loved. Such warm and welcoming people. Just the kind of community I've been looking for."

- **New Role for Council.** The council took on a new role. They became a place where rumors would be investigated and the facts made available. They became examples of refusal to keep secrets. Instead of talking behind people's backs, they help model being open, yet also finding compassionate ways to communicate. At our retreat, they designed a button for the congregation, saying "Walk A New Path." For a number of weeks, many people wore their new buttons to church.

- **New role for the Minister.** I did start claiming more authority and leadership. But not as the one with the vision or providing protection from chaos. In fact, I talked about how chaos often has to precede transformational change. I became a strong voice for a healthy

parish. I claimed a role as pastor to the health of the congregational system; not just to the individuals in it.

- **Non-violent Communication:** Some people in the church began to study the non-violent communication techniques of Marshall Rosenberg. One of our parishioners led a discussion group on his materials. Now, there is a new group forming with even more people interested. More people are practicing a way of honestly sharing and deeply listening without judgment.

- **New sense of who we are:** We are becoming a community again. People are talking through their differences instead of labeling another person. I feel that I have a unique role in the congregation as a minister, and that I am appreciated and affirmed in the role. I also know its limitation, and I affirm the many roles that only others can take. There is still a great deal we have to work on. But a key difference is that we seem to interact with each other as the people we are; not as shadows from the past.

Facing the Future

I believe that Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom* is expressed well in modern understandings of parishes as systems, impacted by the past and the dynamics of the present.

In the next issue of *The Messenger* I will share more about what we are learning about Swedenborgian theology and parish systems theory.

I don't have to struggle any more to lock up and turn off the lights. I think more about how it feels to arrive at the church, unlocking the church door and turning on the lights. I like feeling the sunshine and fresh air blowing into the sanctuary and the feeling it gives me of a Guiding Presence at work amongst us as a congregation.

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is half-time pastor of the Swedenborgian church in Portland, Maine; author of Crystals, Crosses and Chakras, published by the Swedenborg Foundation; and Wings and Roots, published by J. Appleseed. She is also Spiritual Ministries consultant, although that position is currently unfunded due to budget constraints. She can be reached at wakewil@aol.com

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The backpack isn't necessary because the briefcase and the bag are both prepared with the right information to connect with that which has gone before. And there's still space for that which is to come. Our work is in the present and continues the line from the past into the growing edge of the future by means of the things we are led to do with and through the love of God.

"President's Travel" as completed and scheduled into mid-November, 2004:

Church of the Holy City,
Washington, DC, August 7 – 8.

Wayfarers Chapel Board meeting,
Wayfarers Center West
Rancho Palos Verdes, CA,
August 19 – 22.

MINSU meeting,
Ft. Myers Beach Florida,
August 25–29.

Rev. Jane Siebert's installation,
Pretty Prairie, Kansas,
September 9 – 13.

Cabinet Meeting,
Cincinnati, Ohio,
and visit to Kemper Road Church,
September 23–26.

Concurrent meetings,
Michigan and Ohio Association,
Almont NCA, October 2–3.

Committee on
Admission to the Ministry,
SHS, Berkeley, CA, October 6 – 9.

Visit to
Church of the Good Shepherd,
Kitchener, ON, October 23 – 25.

SHS Board of Trustees,
SHS, Berkeley, CA, October 28 – 30.

General Council,
hosted by Wayfarers Chapel,
November 5 – 8.

National Council of Churches,
St. Louis, MO, November 9 – 12.



Editor's Note: This is third in *The Messenger's* series of women's commentary and presentations at the "Gathering Leaves" conference that took place at Temenos May 5-7, 2004, with women from all three branches of the Swedenborgian Church gathered for an unprecedented and memorable event that we hope will have an encore in a year or two.

A Balanced Tree

"Gathering Leaves" Address to the women at Temenos

Louise Barry Rose

Words can hardly express how happy I am to be here with you at this historic event. I have worked with women for many years, leading retreats and women's days and have enjoyed it tremendously. But you have taken it a step further, into marvelous territory we never dreamed of back then. When I think back on this experience, I will remember your kindness, your wisdom, your joy in being together and your willingness to work hard to make this happen.

I am 74 years old and the New Church has been part of every day of my life. The church has been what Linda Odhner calls "a B.B.B." - a blessing beyond belief.

A wise man (Malidoma Tome) has said "You can't be a tribe by yourself." We are all one tribe. We need each other to complete the tribe.

Men from our organizations have been squabbling about doctrine for two centuries. Now the women are getting together to be friends. WE REFUSE TO BE ENEMIES! The Writings say that doctrine constitutes the external of the church. Love and life constitute its internal (*Arcana Coelestia* 1798). I feel that women are experts in the realm of life and love.

The separations between our branches have generally occurred when two strong men began to quarrel about doctrine. Followers lined up behind each man and took sides. As things grew more heated, a split would take place. We women here today are doing the opposite of separating. We are here together seeking understanding, friendship, respect and love.

I am delighted to see that the emblem of this weekend is a tree. What kind of a tree would it be if all the branches were pointed in the same direction? A characteristic of a tree is that the branches go off in all directions. Not only in different directions, but also in completely opposite directions. This is what makes it a tree and gives it balance. We are one tree.

When my husband Frank and I were married 48 years ago, we loved using in the service the numbers from the Writings that talk about two being one. We glowed with the promise of being one. For the service we had in celebration of our 25th wedding anniversary, we rejoiced in those numbers (especially *Conjugal Love*, 316) that talk about the importance of being two. They say it takes two eyes to see, two ears to hear, two legs to walk and two hands to work. This has led to my ardent belief in having men and women work together in ALL facets of the church.



Louise Barry Rose

Where this working-together is happening, I see the church thriving. Where it is not happening and one gender is dominating, I feel that the body of the church is like a body that is trying to function with one eye, one ear, one leg and one hand. While it is possible to function that way, is it necessary? Is it ideal?

Now I would like to tell you the story of a turning point in my life. Some years ago, the Watercolor Guild that my husband belongs to and several other Guilds in nearby states were invited to have their annual show at the Tucson Museum of Art. This was an honor. The Watercolor Guild members are amateur painters and the Museum of Art is a very professional and prestigious place to hang paintings. In preparation for the show, Frank painted a gorgeous picture of some huge rocks with water tumbling down between them, which he named "Boulders."

On the night of the opening of the show, we arrived at the Museum, walked through the entrance, turned right and there was Frank's painting by itself on a panel, with spotlights shining down on it. It was stunning! We were so proud. We wended our way down the gentle spiral of the ramp to the refreshment table at the bottom. While enjoying the cheese and crackers, we were approached by an artist friend who said, "Frank, I think they spelled your name wrong on the label beside your painting." Puzzled, we made our way back up to the painting and looking at the label we saw that, sure enough, it was labeled "Frank Ross." There was a red dot (meaning it had been sold) but beside the dot was the price - \$500! The price should have been \$1500!!

I could feel the anger beginning in my feet, buckling my knees, churning my stomach, making my heart beat faster, lungs gasping for air, my head starting to throb. I was livid. Frank seemed very calm, but I immediately turned around and headed down again to the office which was at the bottom. "Did you sell my husband's painting?" I demanded in a loud voice. "Frank Rose? But of course in your list it'll say 'Frank Ross'." I was yelling. Everyone in the office turned to look at this irate person. The woman behind the desk looked it up and said, "Yes, here it is. Frank Ross, Boulders \$500." I shouted, "Have you seen this painting we are talking about that you sold for \$500? Have you seen the power and the beauty of it?" By now I was in tears. Just then, the president of the Watercolor Guild came up behind me, put her hand on my shoulder and said, "Louise, you just sit down over here and we will take care of it." Shaking, I sat down and she took over.

Eventually we learned what had happened. The Museum had fired a young man who was not working well and the last task they gave him before he left was to type up the labels and program for this show. Probably as revenge for being fired, he had put in various errors which were causing some chaos. The Museum called up the woman who had bought it, explained that there had been a huge error in the price and asked if she would be willing to make up the difference. She refused, on the grounds that she had paid the price that was posted. (The Museum eventually sent us a check for the difference.)

What interested me was the question: Why had I become so terribly upset? It seemed to be out of proportion to what had happened.

(Continued on page 128)

A Balanced Tree

(Continued from page 127)

A short time later I was working with a spiritual advisor who asked me questions about the incident and suddenly I could understand. It came to me. I was that undervalued painting!! My work was being undervalued, "sold" for less than it was worth. And who was undervaluing me? *I was!* It was an eye-opener. This piercing experience led me to look more closely at what value I was putting on the work I did and the contributions I made to the situations in my life.

Not a monetary value, but a qualitative value. I began to be more honest about the value ("power and beauty") of the things I did, not exaggerating and becoming conceited but not undervaluing either. Just trying to tell the truth about the value.

This brought about a great change in my life. As I began to value my part more, it seemed that others began to value it, too. I invite you now to take an honest look at



the amazing things you have been able to do, to tell yourself the truth about how the Lord is using you in miraculous ways to

benefit your family and the world. You are a miracle. The value of what you do is beyond all calculation.

There may or may not be any connection, but about six years later, Frank and

I received a letter from the Bishop informing us that we had won the Glencairn Award for lifetime service to the Church. The letter began "Dear Louise and Frank....." To this day Frank declares that he believes they wanted to give it to me alone, but they felt that would hurt his feelings too much, so they included him!

I would like to finish with a poem by Rilke, given to me by Denise Cowley. It is from *Love Poems to God*:

I believe in all that has never
yet been spoken.

I want to free what waits within me
so that what no one has dared to wish
for may for once spring clear without
my contriving.

If this is arrogant,
God, forgive me,
but this is what I need to say.
May what I do flow from me
like a river,

no forcing and no holding back,
the way it is with children.

Then in these swelling
and ebbing currents, these deepening
tides moving out, returning,

I will sing you as no one ever has,
streaming through widening channels
into the open sea.

Louise Barry Rose is a member of the General Church and is married to the Rev. Frank Rose, co-author of The Joy of Spiritual Growth, published by the Swedenborg Foundation. The Roses' church is the Sunrise Chapel in Tucson, Arizona, where they started a Spiritual Growth Program in 1988.



TO THE EDITOR

A Sense of New Stirring

Thank you for the tone and hopefulness that's all through the September issue of *The Messenger*.

This issue conveys a sense of a new stirring within General Convention—of Spirit-moving, detaching from limiting attitudes, commitment to spiritual seeking, openness, inclusiveness, ecumenicity, communication, and outreach.

I value above all the cover page's words from Emanuel Swedenborg (aka Paul Zacharias) that take us beyond the outmoded notion that Christian faithfulness comes by the narrowly mental process of getting the doctrines and correspondences right, to an awakening of the whole person. "Focus on God's goodness and truth...not just in your head but in your heart...open up...let it in." And "know that the Lord God and great legions of angels and millions of fellow spiritual pilgrims are working with you to build up the Kingdom of God on earth."

Let's pray that we'll proclaim and live out this bright, energizing theme in a way that our young people will directly experience and embody the light of Christ.

Forster Freeman
Portland, Oregon

(Letters continued on page 130)



Editor's Note: The Cabinet is made up of the chairs of the five support units and the Council of Ministers chair, presided over by the president of Convention. Cabinet voted at its annual meeting in September to make the work of each support unit and the Council of Ministers available to *Messenger* readers through a series of articles written by the respective chairpersons during the 2004-2005 year.

WHERE CONVENTION'S COMMUNICATIONS ARE HEADED

A Backward Glance

Carol Lawson

From its beginning General Convention has been a publisher. In the 19th century our products were *The Messenger*, pamphlets, tracts, and books. Early on, New Churchmen who were printers felt that their use was to communicate with believers of the new faith and let the outside world know about the new doctrines.

People had much more time to read in those days, the 1800s and early 1900s. Over that time Convention's publishing agencies had various titles, such as Board of Publication, New-Church Press, Department of Publications, etc. There were also collateral publishers in various cities—the lungerich Fund, for example, and The American New Church Tract and Publication Society. Until fairly recently, the denomination has been publishing title after title, quite a few of them targeted to a readership primarily interested in doctrine.

Self-Assessment

At the end of the 20th century the Department of Publications, renamed the Communications Support Unit (COMSU), took a long, managerial look at what it was doing and divided its activities into two mutually enhancing functions: internal communications (*The Messenger*, primarily for our members) and external communications (*J. Appleseed & Co.*, primarily for introducing people to our doctrines).

Again, in 2002, COMSU decided to stand back and assess the situation. We discovered—to our pain and chagrin—that we had fallen down in marketing and distribution. Furthermore, the 21st century audience had very different needs: Swedenborgian users as well as candidate Swedenborgians and newcomers in our centers today want information that is in short bytes, is graphic and visually exciting, and relates to experi-

ence—it is immediately applicable to life and is downright useful.

We faced up to the discouraging fact that we had thousands of books and booklets in storage, costing at least \$2,000 per year to store that were becoming visually outdated and thus too late to market. As you may recall, in the past two years we have given away most of them to churches that would pay for the shipping. We recognized that any reprinting of this backlist must be via print-on-demand. The first J. Appleseed & Co. publication to be reprinted via P.O.B. is George Dole's *Sorting Things Out*, one of the few J. Appleseed titles that were actually out of print.

In 2002 and 2003 COMSU initiated a production control system in which COMSU members could be volunteer managing editors of each title being produced. We also instituted a title-by-title cost accounting system, so that we will know precisely how much each project costs and can set a realistic sales price. In 2004 we set up, with Martha Bauer's help, a better distribution system, which is located where it ought to be—in Central Office.

Our biggest remaining challenge is in marketing and distribution. Our new sacramental leaflets and four little pamphlets are not going anywhere! They are largely in inventory. At our next meeting, COMSU will plan implementation of our "Outreach Angels" program, which can be a way to get our six little 2004 publications out of inventory and into the hands of our local churches. It is also a way that we can get feedback from local users of our leaflets to help improve subsequent efforts. Kevin Baxter is serving as our consultant in the outreach program. Some of the participants in COMSU's Convention mini-course have indicated their willingness to serve as local angels.

Publishing Products, 2004

The titles that we published this year are:

Spiritual Sparks (2nd edition)

Baptism (2nd printing)

Marriage

Swedenborgianism: A Spiritual Journey,

The Story of Swedenborg (8th edition)

Celebrate Life (2nd edition)

Still under way are leaflets on communion, confirmation, correspondences, memorial services.

Publishing Products, 2005

If any of the above manuscripts have gotten developed far enough to be printed in 2005, we have budgeted \$2,000 for printing; we can print only a few hundred of each title. However, it is COMSU's plan to distribute those copies as samples and then to tailor our electronic files for the specific needs of any local church that wants to print its own supply. Our objective, by controlling the typeset versions, is that—at least for a year or two—we will have sacramental publications that make us look like a national denomination. So far, we have prepared local versions of the marriage leaflet for two local churches: The Wayfarers Chapel and the San Francisco Society. In addition, we almost have an online summary of the next *Messenger* ready for Convention's website. Our J. Appleseed & Co. website is also moving to Convention's website and is almost ready.

COMSU has seven other titles planned. But, we do not believe that Convention should spend money for further publishing until we solve our marketing and distribution problem. Our "Outreach Angels" program has the potential to do that. It also has the potential under COMSU's direction to begin the national public information program that Convention needs. Paying for public relations is an exorbitantly long-term and risky expense. Just getting our primary publications used by newcomers in our centers and churches is an important step in growing Convention.

(Continued from page 131)

TO THE EDITOR

Same Sex Marriage

Dear Editor:

Re: Same sex marriage, stance of Swedenborgianism*
[September 2004 *Messenger*, Council of Ministers Report]

We are minds—both male and female, but predominantly male or female until such time we begin to develop our other side. A predominantly male mind will seek a predominantly female mind regardless of type body it inhabits—and vice versa.

—Merry Brown
Louisville, Kentucky

*Editor's Note: Ms. Brown is referring to the General Convention Branch.

Dear Editor,

I received the September *Messenger* and was very happy that the church took the stand that they did on the subject of same-sex marriage in the article "Denominational Statement on Same-Sex Marriage." [Council of Ministers Report]

I am considered a fourth generation Swedenborgian and will tell you that I am not a 'student.' It took me nearly 50 years to decide that I am not a college student therefore it may mean that I am not a heavy reader of Swedenborg. That is not usual in this church to not be a 'reader.' But I look at articles and have gone to many church functions and feel that I have a fairly strong leaning towards the writings.

I have learned that Mother Nature does not make things the same. This is for the preservation of the species. Sometimes things do not go the way we expect and I feel that Mother Nature does not care too much. It would seem that the female side of us is very far to one side and the male part of us is to the other side. If Mother Nature is constantly changing things, then the female and male parts would move toward the other. Being that there are many parts of us, some would naturally move differently or not at all. Now to make a simple statement, this would explain why gays and lesbians are the way they are. (There may be other reasons. I am not a student!) If my hormonal tendencies lead me one way, should someone else's not lean in another direction?

The civil system has used the term marriage in civil ceremonies and the religious system has used the same term in religious ceremonies, why should this not remain the same?

Ralph Kearns
San Jose, California



Meeting Our Spiritual Body



(Continued from back page)

you are the happiest, most creative and most useful. It governs your place in heaven. But it is useful to find it in this world, too. We can at least begin to explore and enjoy it here. There will be a further differentiation of yours in heaven. Mine is in making higher matters clear to others mainly by writing, as in this.

But there are other aspects of your inner spiritual being. It is full of symbolism or correspondences, as in dreams. It is full of links of this to that, quite as though we are naturally seeing ourselves and learning of ourselves all the time. That is the real potential of this inner freedom to explore. You may wonder where would be an ideal place to live. Try out places in your mind's eye, all around the world, until you find your ideal. Then furnish it the way you want.

Our society in its rather outward, materialistic emphasis puts down imagination as though it is useless and not real. Well, you can only really imagine what is part of you. Imagination is part of your freedom to explore. Perhaps you have a life of terrible demands and stresses. In your inward life why not create your perfect place. To sleep I become a furry creature curled up in a hole in the ground. I can hear distant ocean surf in the background. But for my ideal living place I simply enjoy my garden sanctuary. In peaceful comfort I let creation speak to me. Everyone needs a perfect refuge, and in the inner world it is available. So much for society looking down upon mere imagination! People with such a strange view must not have explored their inner, which is the only, the real you, your real life, and destiny. This real life simply extends and clarifies when you leave your body. We are really a spirit in a body. With body left behind, the spirit, which is the inner we have explored, comes to the forefront. In this life we set the basic nature of our eternal life, as Swedenborg makes so clear. Our greatest learning is in our inner real life. But our body plays a necessary collaborative role. Without it we couldn't get around, meet people and go through so many situations. Body/world are part of our initial school-room setting. They are a very intelligent part of the order of things. I strongly suspect we get the lessons we need and deserve. That is, the curriculum is designed for each down to the finest detail.

In our spiritual freedom we can also look at the total order of existence. Our personal order stems from, and is a part of, the whole order. Our order reflects it and is partly an image of the total order. God is, of course, the whole order. It is a curious design because the whole order reflects in every aspect of itself, including us. We come to God, or the Real Order, through ourselves. To me the fundamental thrust of religion is to enjoy and appreciate any aspect of this Order, even our little part of it. It is seldom we are shown the whole order, but obviously it is there and showing itself all the time. I went into the spiritual only when lying down since it is clearer there. But, if you notice, it is everywhere in daily life, too. So abolish any idea that you must die to enter the spiritual. You are already exploring it.

Wilson Van Dusen is a Swedenborgian scholar, a retired clinical psychologist, and author of numerous books on the inner world, among them *The Presence of Other Worlds*.



Fall Transitions Retreat

The 2004 fall Transitions retreat is taking place November 5th-7th at Temenos Conference and Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania. The theme is "Our Spiritual Communities."

Discussions will center around Swedenborg's insight into communities in the spiritual realm and will explore how our earthly experience of community opens us to spiritual good.

Transitions is a Swedenborgian spiritual community of adults (18+). Their mission is to explore, discuss, and learn about our theology and spiritual paths, to foster the development of Youth Leaguers as they move into adulthood, and to support people of all ages in times of change and life transitions.

Where Convention's Communications Are Headed

(Continued from page 129)

The challenge is to stimulate a loose confederation of ministers and local individuals to become more responsive to national needs. Somehow, we need to wisely build solid relationships with local churches that help support the outreach efforts of the ministers and the denomination. We are going to try.

Carol Lawson is chair of the Communications Support Unit and is Series Editor for the Chrysalis Reader, an anthology published yearly by the Swedenborg Foundation.

The Spirit of Thanksgiving

Gratitude is an essential component of our spiritual well-being. Initially, the awareness of our dependence on God and other people leads us to a simple sense of gratitude, in which our need is central. We learn to say thank you at an early age, and as we do, we become aware that we are dependent on many things and people for our natural well-being. Our parents and teachers, those who grow and prepare the food we eat, those who build our homes, and the like. And yet, as we grow into the image of the world, as we increase our sense of autonomy and independence, it is easy to lose this sense of gratitude for the many blessings we enjoy. We are no longer mystified by their origins, but instead take for granted that the structure and operation of the world is simply there, a result of careful planning and economy, perhaps, but not something that has our personal well-being in mind.

However, as we grow spiritually, our awareness of God's graciousness to us

The Swedenborg Channel on New Century TV

The Swedenborg Foundation unveiled an innovative new communication medium at its 2004 Annual Meeting.

www.newcenturytv.com/swedenborg is a web TV broadcasting site that will permit the Swedenborg Foundation to reach out to the younger generation of web-surfing "seekernauts." The website is an excellent place to steer your friends or any interested parties who would like to learn more about Swedenborg.

causes a change in our experience of gratitude. Now it is no longer our need that is central, but God's steadfast and unconditional love. Now it is not external, material blessings that are central, but internal, spiritual blessings, the wonder of our very lives themselves. Now our thanks are no longer offered reluctantly, only after we get what we want, but willingly, in the awareness that the god of heaven and earth is already providing us with what we need to become truly happy and useful: the gifts of love and truth, compassion and understanding.

This Thanksgiving, let us all be eager to turn to the Lord in a spirit of genuine gratitude and joy for the warmth and light of God's eternal friendship.

—Rev. Robert McCluskey

Reprinted from the November 1997 New York Church newsletter. The Rev. Robert McCluskey is a former pastor of the New York New Church, now living in Boston.

PASSAGES

BAPTISMS

Hinrichs—Marielle Susan Hinrichs, infant daughter of Kim and Bob Hinrichs, was baptized into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church October 10, 2004, at the San Francisco church, the Rev. Rachel Rivers officiating.

Holczer, McKendry—Aidan Holczer, son of Steve & Susan Holczer, and Tyler James McKendry, son of Ron & Laurie McKendry, were baptized into the life and faith of the New Church August 3, 2004, by great grandfather Rev. Erwin D. Reddekopp, pastor of the British Columbia New Church Society. Grandmother Sharon Williams assisted with the service.

"Nobody's Keeping Score Up There"

Are you looking for a very special CD gift to give your little ones this year? "Nobody's Keeping Score Up There" features songs of the spirit for children, with the theology of our church in mind—that of a loving God, and a gentle nature. Songs children will listen to and sing along with, over and over again—even adults will find themselves humming along! With lyrics written by Rev. George Dole, set to music and performed by Laurie Turley, they are lively, uplifting, reflective. Included on the CD is a track of every song without vocals, so you can use it as an accompaniment for your youth choir or church services. The CD costs \$15.00. Also available is a songbook, with written scores of all the music, lead sheets with guitar chords, as well as reproducible lyric sheets, for an additional cost of \$15.

To order, send a check to: Apple Blossom Music, P.O. Box 454, Fryeburg, Maine 04037. Include \$3.00 postage, and we'll mail yours to you!

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.

Meeting Our Spiritual Body

Wilson Van Dusen

I suspect many Swedenborgians believe that we have to die to discover our spiritual body. But this is far from the truth. Let us meet it now.

First what is the *physical* body? It is purely physical matter. It has weight. We will get only this one body. If we don't take care of it, tough luck for us. It is our very needed vehicle for this world. If you didn't have one, how much influence could you be in this world? None. I think of my body as a familiar and useful donkey. It needs to eat, drink, and sleep. It isn't dumb. It has its own ways, and even in its inner working it has a great deal of wisdom, more than medicine and science have yet discovered. I have had tearful prayers of thanks for my patient donkey body, or as St. Francis referred to it, "Brother Body." It has served me well and deserves respect.

Let us look at the precise distinction of the body and the mental/spiritual you. Even scientists mix these up. Your senses all the way up to brain stimuli are physical. But awareness of sensations is the correspondent of brain stimuli. The experience of sensations is the mental/spiritual you. You might think that without brain function there is only unconsciousness.

But over one million cases of the near-death experience, and Swedenborg's writings, indicate that without brain function our sensory experience gets clearer and more intense. In some ways the body is a drag on your mental/spiritual life. We are a spirit in a body. Without the body our spiritual aspect be-

comes more apparent. But we actually meet it first in this world.

Your spiritual body is the non-physical part of your life. Let us look at it when lying in bed. Very little body shows up. Perhaps your back aches a bit. You resolved you must be careful about too much work in the garden. The backache was the body speaking, but your resolve is part of the spiritual you. The spiritual you is your life, and your life is partly made up of all your past decisions and experiences. This is the real you which you meet daily.

When peacefully lying down you can easily explore the spiritual.

Events of the day come up. Something of them made them memorable. You can explore their meaning to you or let them drift by. Other images and ideas come to you. They can be explored or let go by. This is the inner you which is very inclined to show itself. And you are at the center of all these possibilities. You may look at and even evaluate your whole life. Somehow we are inwardly prodded by conscience, or by whatever else, when something is out of order. Inwardly we are all these things. Our inward spiritual nature is incredibly rich. Also it has an intrinsic drift or direction. This is what

Swedenborg calls the love of the life, life's love, or ruling love.

It is very productive to discover your life's love. It is the direction given to you by God before your entry into this world.

If you simply look at all you enjoyed the most, what was most meaningful to you, you can get near it. Look for things you did in which time seemed to disappear. These easily are remembered because you really lived then. Your love of the life is where

(Continued on page 130)

Over one million cases of the near-death experience, and Swedenborg's writings, indicate that without brain function our sensory experience gets clearer and more intense.

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