
THE MESSENGER

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National Council of Churches Report

2004

Kit Billings

Last month in *The Messenger* I re-introduced everyone to the National Council of Churches of Christ in the U.S.A. (NCCC). Our church (General Convention) is one of 36 member communions or denominations. In that article I gave you an overview of the NCCC and why I am excited that our church is part of it. The NCCC is a diverse collaboration of Christian churches that are passionate about core spiritual unity and promoting justice, both here in our country and abroad. The NCCC takes God's Word at its word and enacts the principles of God found in the Bible, since we are all part of God's great family. But there is more to the NCCC than peacemaking and justice work. It studies and reports on issues concerning faith and leadership development.

This month I am presenting a summary report as a fill-in delegate for Convention on the work that has been done by the NCCC in 2004, including new or recent policy statements adopted by the NCCC. There is an enormous amount of work that the NCCC accomplishes every year. Therefore, I must pick and choose, to a degree, on what to share.

At this year's General Assembly, a new vision for children in the 21st century has been adopted. It is entitled "The Church and Children: Vision and Goals for the 21st Century," and it passed unanimously. It represents a holistic view of childhood and the diversity of children's gifts and needs. It is a great statement, one that every member communion is called to adopt and follow, assuming we believe in it. Quoting from it:

"Created in the image of God, children are a gift to the whole of humanity. God has made them full members of the covenant and of the Kingdom; we are responsible for and to children as we nurture children into the fullness of life for which they were created. ...reflecting this free and immeasurable gift we are called to provide for children. As God has nurtured the church so too are we to nurture children in the love of God made manifest in Jesus Christ."

This vision supports the creation of safe and loving families, as well as physically and emotionally safe environments. Also, it states that children deserve quality public education as a safeguard to help them break free from poverty; it also calls

for quality health care for every child in America, and access to food, shelter and housing, as well as clothing and transportation. It warns against the new trend of re-segregation happening in America and bids us to ensure that our cities and communities are not part of this backward slide. Quoting again from this statement: "How we value and respect children reflects who we are and the kind of world in which we want to live. We call on all members of the NCCCUSA to be intentional and vigorous in assuming this responsibility for all children, God's children." This statement also refers to new brain research on children and their development.

As I noted above, the NCCC is concerned with Christian education and leadership formation. In her annual report, the Associate General Secretary for Education (who works under the Education and Leadership Ministries Commission of the NCCC) quoted these findings from research done several years ago by the SEARCH Institute...I found them illuminating and worth noting: "Christian education matters much more than we expected. Of all the areas of congregational life we examined, involvement in an effective Christian education program has the strongest ties to a person's growth in faith... While other congregational factors also matter, nothing matters more than effective Christian education (p. 2). "If a congregation seeks to strengthen its impact on faith and loyalty, involving members of all ages in quality Christian education is essential" (p. 42). "Changing the way congregations think about, plan, and implement Christian education programming is a complex task...It will alter the priorities not only of congregations, but also of denominational offices and seminaries. It will be a longterm, sustained effort in which the revitalization of Christian education is held up as an ongoing national priority (p. 65)." (from a study titled: *Effective Christian Education: A National Study of Protestant Congregations*)

This year's general assembly happened in the wake of a heated national presidential election, one where Christian values and ethics were expressed in ways that pitted Christians against one another. An open letter and policy statement were drafted that express: "we believe that what Christians hold in common outweighs their differences, and that all Christians have something to learn from those Christians with whom they disagree. . ." Further, "this General Assembly boldly affirms and gives public voice to the belief that Christian values include the work of eliminating poverty, preserving the environment, and promoting peace; and in addition boldly claims and shares the Christian principles developed for this election

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The following talk was given at the Portland, Maine Swedenborgian Church January 18, 2004, and repeated again on Martin Luther King Sunday, January 16, 2005.

What Does it Take?

Roger Buck

My service today is different from my others. This one is too confrontational, too political. But so was Martin Luther King. They say a minister's job is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable. You may not think you're comfortable, but we are, all of us. In terms of income, the average American is 56 times as comfortable as the average of the 1.3 billion people in low-income countries.

Tomorrow is Martin Luther King Day. You'll probably see a short excerpt of his "I Have a Dream" speech on the news. I get goose bumps every time I hear it. The man was inspiring; that speech is just incredible. Part of it goes like this:

"I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: 'We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.'

"I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at a table of brotherhood.

"I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a desert state, sweltering with the heat of injustice and oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice.

"I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. "I have a dream today."

It is easy to be inspired by Martin Luther King. We do it once a year, on this weekend. And on Tuesday we will return to business as usual. It was a bit different in 1963. Martin Luther King was a dangerous man, a threat to the status quo, to the comfortable, to those who enjoyed the privileges which were denied to the Negro. White people were afraid of him.

King's interests went beyond racial

equality. He opposed what he saw as "the moral coma of the country's whole corporate order: its loud and vicious void of materialism." He called for a more equitable distribution of wealth. He opposed the war in Vietnam and US foreign policy in general. He was accused of being a communist.

Today, however, he is canonized and revered. A mythic figure, a man of God, pious, committed to non-violence, willing to die to bring about justice and racial equality. Why do we love him now, when many bitterly opposed him when he was alive?

Why? Because it is easy. He requires nothing of us. After all, racial discrimination is illegal. Overt, legally sanctioned discrimination against blacks is a thing of the past. We can therefore self-righteously condemn outright discrimination and exalt the courageous leaders of the civil rights movement because we have nothing to lose. So it is easy to love Martin Luther King. It is easy to be outraged over slavery. It is easy to be outraged over the horrific subjugation and slaughter of Native Americans.

It would be a lot harder if we were born into the landed aristocracy of the antebellum South, when the end of slavery would be devastating to our way of life, when our comfortable existence would become economic ruin and a life of poverty and hardship.

It would have been harder had we been pioneers for whom hostile Indians were a mortal threat.

It is easy to jump on the bandwagon of freedom, justice, and equality once the battle is mostly over.

When I was about 13, I saw a commercial which showed this hippie type reciting "A Poem to Save the World." It was a Peace Corps commercial, and a voice-over said, "It will take more than poetry to save this world." Well, I thought of myself as a hippie, and I was offended. I decided that I would show them that we hippies could and would "save the world."

I also decided that the cornerstone of my philosophy, of my politics, would be that "all men and women are created equal," that every baby born

into this world should have a chance to grow up, to have a job, a family, a decent place to live. And I didn't mean just Americans. I meant everyone.

Over the years I've done way too little to save the world. But I have never deviated in my belief that every baby born, anywhere in this world, should have a fighting chance at a decent life. I support politicians who stand up for human rights. I give money to organizations like Oxfam America. And in the last few years I've started speaking out, beginning, as Martin Luther King did, in church. I feel safe here. Because when I take my belief that every baby deserves a chance out there, I'm going to be labeled a bleeding-heart liberal, un-American, a traitor.

The problem of hunger and extreme poverty has been studied many times in recent years. The conclusion is always the same—we have the resources. Even in this overpopulated world, there is plenty to go around. We know how to end extreme poverty—primarily by helping poor people get access to land, water, tools, education, and medical care. Hunger exists because we lack the

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year in order to begin the urgently needed public conversation; therefore, we [desire a process in American discussions] that attempts to engage the spectrum of Christian churches in our communities in dialogues about Christian values."

Yasir Arafat died during our November assembly, and so the delegates and officers developed and passed another public statement, which was a pastoral statement on his death. It expresses compassion and prayer for Arafat's people, relatives, and colleagues. It expresses concern for children of any religious background who die daily due to the conflicts in Israel. It supports the letter to President George W. Bush written by the NCCC's General Secretary that pledges: "that we will work to bring Jews and Muslims together with Christians to provide support to a vigorous and genuine initiative toward peace in the Middle East." And further, "We reaffirm our support for a two-state solution to the conflict, a proposal which the President has also endorsed." The General Secretary's letter is quoted further saying, "the hopes and dreams of generations of Israelis, Palestinians, Americans and indeed citizens around the globe depend upon the achievement of peace in the Holy Land." Therefore, the NCCC offers "support to initiatives that lead to the achievement of this goal and calls for restraint on the part of all parties and respect for the dignity of all peoples and sacred places."

The NCCC Board last spring in Chicago called upon all member communions to intensify our efforts to stop the apparent attempt at ethnic cleansing occurring in Darfur, western Sudan, which already has claimed tens of thousands of lives, with millions becoming displaced from their homes. They urged the U.S. government to press the Sudanese government to end the horrifying genocide being perpetrated there. The Board stated: "Knowing the history of genocide in the 20th century, beginning with the Armenian Genocide through the Jewish Holocaust and ending with the Rwandan Genocide, we are appalled that this legacy of death and destruction should be carried into the 21st century." One of the best things for any Christian to do who feels for such bone-chilling death campaigns is to contact your congressman, as well as the White House, via phone call, email or postal mail and voice your opinion. Any form of communication from heads of communions can be very helpful too. In a time of war within Iraq, the AIDS epidemic in Africa, the conflict in Israel, the tsunamis in southeast Asia, and our own national concerns it can be easy to neglect the genocide happening in the Sudan.

Two boycotts were discussed and dealt with this past year, one regarding Taco Bell and the other Mt. Olive Pickle Company. The Taco Bell boycott continues, while the Mt. Olive one has thankfully ended. Every member communion within the NCCC is asked to boycott Taco Bell businesses due to the gross economic injustice still being committed against their sources for tomatoes. On this resolution the NCCC website reads: "Taco Bell's refusal to address exploitation in the fields of its tomato suppliers, particularly those of Six L's Packing Company, one of the United States' largest tomato growers, in

2003 the NCC joined the top governing bodies of three of its member denominations – the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) (3.5 million members), the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) (805,000 members) and the United Church of Christ (1.4 million members) – along with the American Friends Service Committee in endorsing the boycott. 'Anytime a Christian community comes together and seeks to exercise economic justice in this way, it is because there is a very serious injustice that cannot be resolved in any other way,' said the Rev. Clifton Kirkpatrick, Stated Clerk of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.), who noted that the Taco Bell boycott resolution came to the General Assembly at the request of the Presbyterian Church. Gerardo Reyes Chavez, a Florida farm worker and member of the Steering Committee of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers, described farm workers' low wages and lack of any benefits such as health insurance or overtime pay. According to U.S. Department of Labor data, the average piece rate paid to tomato harvesters in 1980 was 40 cents per 32-pound bucket. Today, harvesters are paid the same average piece rate, earning less than one-half of what they did 20 years ago in inflation-adjusted dollars. At the 40 cent piece rate, workers must pick and haul two tons of tomatoes to make \$50."

At our November 2004 General Assembly Mt. Olive Pickle Company was awarded special honors for resolving its wage injustice, ending our boycott of their products, which proves again that collective, widespread, unified opposition created by massive boycotts can work to change the slave-labor conditions that supply the food we Americans eat.

The international arm of NCCC's social justice ministries called Church World Service (CWS) continues its Africa Initiative given that region's severe problems. In the CWS annual report for 2004 they state: "Church World Service believes that one of the greatest tests of our humanity, of our ability to respond to God's call to be neighbor to one another, exists in Africa today. Working in partnership the Church World Service Africa Initiative addresses five critical areas of concern: conflict resolution and peace-building, refugees and displaced people, hunger and poverty alleviation, water resource development, and HIV/AIDS. As part of the Africa Initiative, the AIDS Orphans and Vulnerable Children Program is underway, and the School Safe Zones program and Eminent Persons Peacemaking Initiative are being launched." CWS has continued to change many lives for the better in 2004. They sponsor and help develop and nurture local, grassroots development in many third-world countries. For example, as their report states: "In Bangladesh, day laborers, sharecroppers, and small shopkeepers (mostly women and ethnic minorities) are participating in savings and credit groups, agricultural services, and animal husbandry training via a CWS-supported program. Three villages in southwest China are building bio-gas systems, which in addition to converting plant and animal waste into methane to power cooking stoves and lights, also improves health and sanitation practices. Families can also use their time freed from gathering wood for more productive uses. In Rwanda, AIDS orphans and households led by children are receiving literacy and vocational training such as sewing, shoemaking, carpentry, and computer programming, which

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political will to end it.

When people hear this argument, they are likely to say, "I've been hearing this for years, but nothing ever changes. It's hopeless." It's not. Europe has solved its hunger problem. China is well on its way to ending hunger. "But Africa is different. We've been trying for years to help Africa, but we've failed."

But have we *really* tried? The 1992 summit conference in Rio de Janeiro set a target for "Official Development Assistance" from the world's 22 wealthiest countries at 0.7% of Gross National Product. As of 2002, five small European nations met that target. But none of the world's larger economies did. The United States was dead last, giving only 0.12% of GNP.

And even that is not directed at ending extreme poverty. Who needs our help the most? Zimbabwe? Sudan? Bangladesh? Who do you think the largest recipients of U.S. development assistance are? As of 2001, they were, in order: Russia, Egypt, Israel, Pakistan and Ukraine. Why?

Israel has long been at or near the top for political reasons. We want to stabilize Russia because it has a lot of nukes. Egypt is being rewarded for the Peace Accord with Israel. Ukraine, probably part of a deal that sent their Soviet Union nukes to Russia. And Pakistan has both nukes and a large Islamic fundamentalist population that would like to overthrow its U.S.-friendly government.

The purpose of U.S. development assistance has always been to reward strategic allies, not to eradicate poverty. Now, I think stabilizing countries that have nukes is a good idea. But it is not an effort to end hunger and extreme poverty.

Another common objection is overpopulation—that helping the world's poor will only increase the "excess population." But it is a well documented fact that an increase in a country's standard of living always—always—slows population growth. When people know that all of their children will live, they have fewer children.

And consider the immorality of that

argument—I'm sorry, little Ndeki, but there's not enough room at the inn, you're going to have to starve to death. Remember Scrooge? When told that the poor would rather die than live in the squalid poorhouses, he said "Let them die, then, and reduce the excess population."

Remember when he asked the ghost of Christmas present whether Tiny Tim would live and she reminded him that Tiny Tim might be "excess population"? Or that, in the eyes of God, maybe Scrooge was "excess population"? If lack of resources is the problem, Third-World children aren't the ones who must die, we are.

Then there's the argument that it's not our problem. That's always a good one. Slavery wasn't my problem, or my ancestors' problem. They were white. The slaughter of Indians wasn't their problem. They were white.

What about the global community, the world-wide web, free trade, and all that stuff that's supposed to bind us together? I hate to tell you, but most of the Third World isn't on-line. It's not just that they don't have computers. They don't have electricity.

But they do work hard. They make lots of stuff that we use. Or wear. When I was writing this, I was wearing this shirt, and I didn't know where it was made. So I checked—Bangladesh. Pants—Mexico. This T-shirt is from Chico Hot Springs Montana—nice resort—you can swim in a pool that's 96 degrees, go horseback riding. Lots of fun. This T-shirt was made in El Salvador—by someone who I bet has never been to Chico Hot Springs.

So I think we have some connection to the Third World and are probably benefitting from their labor. And as Martin Luther King said, "Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

History will view us no better than we view European colonists, or Southern slave owners. I think that when future generations look back at us they will see something like the "tall white mansions and little shacks" of the antebellum South. They will see part of the world driving SUVs to their big, comfortable houses to watch wide-screen TVs, and part of the world living in little shacks

and hovels without running water, trying not to starve or die of some simple, curable disease.

How big is the problem? By some estimates 34,000 children under the age of five die of hunger or related causes every day. Suppose for a moment that God is saddened by needless human suffering. Not so much by accidents and incurable diseases, but, say, stuff like people dying from war and violence, hunger, and simple, curable diseases. Let's suppose that God is obsessed with such tragic, needless loss of life, that he mourns it 24 hours a day.

God was certainly upset when the terrorists struck the World Trade Center at 9 AM on September 11. But by 11 AM that day, God had moved on. That was a bad day. When you add the 3,000 Americans who died in that horrific act of violence to the 34,000 children who died needlessly from hunger and related diseases, it was a bad day. Worse than most days, but not by much.

There are two main reasons we are obsessed with terrorism. It is not because 3,000 people died in that awful attack. One reason is that it was sensational, violent. The other is that 3,000 Americans died. If 3,000 Rwandans died, we would hardly have taken notice. In the movie *Head of State*, the opposing candidate for President ends his speeches with "God Bless America. And no place else." I admire his honesty. Because I suspect that that is what some people really mean when they say "God Bless America."

What will it take to end hunger? Seven tenths of one percent of the annual income of the 22 richest countries for, say, ten to twenty years. Wisely spent on long term development assistance, together with a concerted effort to mitigate war and government corruption. That should do it. That would be an extra \$62 billion per year from the United States. That's a lot of money. To put it in perspective: The war in Iraq has cost about \$152 billion *so far*. Defense Department spending in 2003 was about \$358 billion.

But just think of the opportunity. From the dawn of the human race, mankind's principal challenge has been the same as most other animals—stay-

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ing alive. As individuals, tribes, and nations, we have struggled to feed ourselves, provide clothing and shelter, and in recent years, cure disease. It is only within the last two hundred years that some nations have essentially solved this problem. Europe, North America and parts of other continents have prospered so that hunger is no longer an issue in those countries. For the first time in human history, we have the means, the wealth, the technology, the opportunity, to end extreme poverty and hunger forever. This will be the greatest accomplishment in human history.

No one can do it alone. Bill and Melinda Gates are pouring billions into Third World health programs, but not even Bill Gates can do it alone. But if enough people in the world decide that letting children starve to death is wrong, we can stop it.

If you don't want to wait for the government to act, try giving seven tenths of one percent of your income to an organization like Oxfam America. If you make \$10,000 per year, that's \$70. If you make \$50,000, that's \$350. I'd like to start a movement called something like "Part of the Solution." All you have to do to join is decide that you're going to be "part of the solution." You decide how you're going to help. Give money. Advocate. Buy "Fair Trade" coffee. Oppose unfair barriers to imports of African agricultural products. Oppose the genocide in Darfur. Support the forgiveness of Third World Debt, and lowering the cost of life-saving drugs. Vote for politicians who support justice and development assistance for Africa, or at least for those who don't argue against it. Make it your own, but do something. Be "part of the solution." Part of the greatest accomplishment in human history. What could be more exciting, more satisfying?

You don't have to be a martyr, like Martin Luther King. You don't have to lose your whole way of life, like a slave owner. It really doesn't take a lot to stand on the side of justice and equality. But if we are going to celebrate courageous men like Martin Luther King, we need to do something

to combat the greatest injustice of our time—the punishment for the crime of being born in the wrong place.

I believe we will end extreme poverty and hunger. If we begin now, we could end it in my lifetime.

I'll leave you with two quotes. First, from Dr. King:

"I refuse to accept the view that mankind is so tragically bound to the starless midnight of racism and war that the bright daybreak of peace and brotherhood can never become reality. I believe that unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the final word."

And from Tiny Tim:

"God bless us, each and every one."

Roger Buck is a member of the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church.

Throughout these past weeks we have all been stunned by the horrible scenes from the Indian Ocean. I should first say that Swedenborgians do not believe that this was the will of God. God never hurts or punishes. Such natural disasters are never punishment. These are some of the things that God puts up with or tolerates for the greater good that we would have the experience of physical life. The real world is spiritual and eternal. The physical world is temporary and a very dim representation of the realm of the Spirit. Because the difference in quality between this world and the spiritual world is so great, there are many aspects of life here which seem inherently negative. From the perspective of eternity the great tragedies of life on earth we can see are not really as bad as we think. Death is not a bad thing. However, no theological explanation can offer much comfort to those left behind. So many families and communities have been devastated by the tsunami. Let us all remember them in our prayers and pray that during the coming year we will all have the strength to do our part in working with God to make this world a better place.

—Eric Allison, Chair
Council of Ministers

CELEBRATE LIFE!

A Book of Meditations and
Family Prayers



by Paul Zacharias
Second Edition
2004

This is the latest edition of Rev. Paul Zacharias' classic work. There is probably no better way to summarize its contents than to quote Paul's own brief but evocative Preface:

"Everything in life is born or created for some purpose. In all things, if we look long enough, we find a sense of history, a reason for being that transcends the object itself. So it is with this little devotional book.

"The genesis of *Celebrate Life!* is quite simple. For many years now I have become increasingly convinced that God is alive and well; that his divine spirit permeates all of creation (which includes every individual—you, me, everyone); that God is a loving, approachable friend with whom we can have a kind of personal relationship. If God is like this, then obviously he knows each one of us and in turn wants us to respond to him. This is the only kind of God that makes any sense at all. I simply assume all of this is true; proof is neither necessary nor desirable. Let the wiser theologians and philosophers quibble over the finer points of doctrine.

"Out of the growing conviction that God is real and present in life, these devotional readings have struggled to the light of day. Essentially they are impressionistic pictures describing the way I feel about the most precious things around me: God, marriage, friendships, vocation, holy days, life, and death. And most important, the daily stuff out of which life is made. What else is there?

"I realize it is impossible to convey, adequately, feelings with words because emotion by its very nature defies and eludes rational thought. But try we must, and this applies both to the writer and the reader. All of which leaves you, the reader, with a certain responsibility—that being to recognize and respond to the mood evoked by the readings in your own way. What do these pages say to you of life—your life!

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From the President:

A Major Legal Issue in the Life of the Denomination

In the late spring of 2003, the Swedenborgian Church in North America was asked to respond to a request for assistance in a matter regarding the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem. The President of Convention enabled the process of two bodies of the denomination: the Board of Mediation and the Committee on Inquiry. These two groups began by structuring their work based on legal advice from the denomination's corporate lawyer and also from the lawyer who is counsel to the process of misconduct determination within the Council of Ministers.

In midsummer, 2003, a decision was made by the General Council of the denomination to investigate the possibility of legal action in response to the concerns raised through the investigative processes of the two above-named bodies in regard to the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem. This led, ultimately, to the retaining of a team of litigators from the same law firm through which the denomination has long had corporate counsel: Holland and Knight in the Boston, Massachusetts, office.

In the fall of 2003, the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem (the Church), with a majority vote of its members, chose to sever all ties with the denomination and with the Massachusetts Association. This vote, along with a page of the signatures of those voting affirmatively, was sent to both the denomination and the Massachusetts Association. The Church then continued as an "independent" church, identifying itself as "The Church on the Hill" in common usage. Our suit alleges that the Church's (BSNJ's) severance (or disaffiliation) from the denomination mandated the transfer of all Church assets to the denomination pursuant to a Church by-law provision in effect at that time. The provision indicates that the denomination will hold the assets in escrow for a period of years during which time a new Swedenborgian church, which is affiliated with the denomination, in the Boston area would be created.

From March 2004, through early December, 2004, the denomination, the Massachusetts Association, and a member of the Boston Society have been pursuing a multi-faceted legal claim in which Edward MacKenzie, Tom Kennedy, the Church, and the Bostonview Corporation are named defendants. As noted above, the denomination's claims include one seeking recovery of the Church's assets, which include those owned by Bostonview, based on the by-laws of the Church in effect at the time of its vote of severance in October 2003. The Massachusetts Association has assisted in this process both by being one of the three claimants and by covering half of the costs incurred since the filing of the suit.

Our case was originally filed in Federal Court. It was later remanded from Federal Court to the State Court in the summer of 2004. While we were pursuing our case, the Attorney General's office of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts was also investigating the charitable spending habits of the Church, and had, as a result of its investigation, established a consent judgment/agreement with that body stating that, among other requirements, there had to be a Chief Financial Officer who was acceptable to and reported regularly to the Attorney General's office regarding the Church's finances.

After the entry of the Consent Judgment, our Federal judge remanded the case from Federal Court to the State Court system, assuming essentially that the presence of an Attorney General approved CFO would ensure that no more alleged racketeering practices would transpire. "Remand" means that the case was sent, intact, to the State Court with all discovery, all motions and all previous legal opinions attached to it.

We were able to get a *lis pendens* attachment during the case, which means that anyone purchasing all or any part of the property under dispute would do so subject to our claims. This is a warning to anyone who would consider buy-

ing into either the Church or the Bostonview apartment complex that they, too, will become part of the legal battle over the property.

In early December, 2004, our lawyer again went to court to argue against motions entered by the defendants to dismiss our case. These same motions had been successfully argued against by our lawyer in March, 2004, in Federal Court. They were placed by the defendants' lawyers into the State Court case, and, on December 7, 2004, Judge Brady, a judge for the State Court system, ruled that the case should be dismissed on all five counts. The denomination had thirty days from the date of the Judge's opinion to file an appeal of the opinion.

The members of the General Council asked questions, held discussions, received legal information, and prayed in preparation for a conference call on Dec. 21, 2004, where a decision would be made as to whether or not an appeal of the opinion should be lodged. The General Council debated the merits of either decision and shared all information with the executive board of the Massachusetts Association. On Dec. 21, 2004, the General Council held a conference call and reviewed the options facing the denomination. If the General Council voted not to appeal the decision, these legal issues would be forever finished. If it voted to appeal the decision, the process, after filing a notice of appeal, could go on for anywhere from twelve to twenty-four months, and, if the appeal were successful, it'd most likely mean going back to court again. The votes of the thirteen voting members of the General Council were received by the denomination's secretary on Dec. 23, 2004, and the decision was 11-2 to appeal. The notice of appeal will be filed by our lawyer on or before January 7, 2005.

The ramifications for all of us:

We are learning from this action. As a denomination, we have an obligation to our various constituent members to assist in protecting assets of the community if we have been identified in that role. It is the denomination's role

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THE HEALING BEGINS

Swedenborgian Parish Action Team

SPAT, PART IV of the Series,
The Key to the Church

by Wilma Wake

"YOU HAVE A VIRUS IN THIS CONGREGATION!" Shouted the man from the podium.

There were shocked faces throughout the sanctuary of the Johnny Appleseed Church, where members and friends had gathered early on a Saturday morning for a workshop from church consultant, Peter Steinke.

"How many of you think this is a bad thing?"

Almost all of the hands went up. Judy, one of the teens in the corner – still yawning from the early hour – called out; "But don't we have to recognize we're sick before we can get well?"

"BINGO!" called out Steinke. "Looking at a congregation systemically is like looking at a person's body."

"Oh, yeah, like *Universal Human*," muttered Judy, now fully awake.

"Hey, good point," called out Pastor Pete. "Swedenborgian theology really supports the idea of comparing the human body with heaven, and I think using

a congregation makes real theological sense for us!"

"Well, for the immune system of a body to develop, it needs to encounter disease, to fight it, and to build up antibodies," noted the speaker.

"So this means we need to fight each other?" called out Mary, the church president, as everyone laughed.

"Yeah, I do mean you need to fight each other," Peter said to shocked faces again. "A healthy congregation needs to be aware of its conflicts and to talk about them. If things are too quiet, with everyone smiling and being nice all the time, your immune system isn't developing healthy antibodies."

"Well, we've always thought that usually it's better to be quiet about problems and just try to move beyond them," said Mary. "This is really new for us."

"Yeah, and that's true of most congregations – in all denominations. We all need to learn the elements of good congregational health. I've worked with a lot of churches that deal with their problems in secrecy; like talking about people behind their backs. That doesn't help healing. The disease needs to come to the light for healing to happen."

"So that's why you're having us find out all those secrets from our past history?" asked Joe.

"EXACTLY!"

"Yeah, but," Joe continued, "what about this secret we uncovered last week that the minister, the treasurer, and the money in our account all disappeared together. True, this was 100 years ago, but members of the families still live in town. No one from the church has said anything about it these hundred years."

"Well," commented Peter thoughtfully, "this is not so uncommon in churches. Look, it could be that there is a reasonable explanation for all this that you don't know because you won't talk about it."

Gumbles of "not likely", "ha!" and "I'll bet" were heard around the room.

"And let's assume the worst. Let's say the treasurer and minister were having an affair, stole the church money, and ran off together."

There were murmurs of "right" and "that's gotta be how it happened."

"These things do happen in families and in congregations. If that happened, what does it serve to protect them from having broken the law? How do you get justice for getting your funds back? What about the unethical and illegal behavior of that minister? Wouldn't you want it reported to the denomination so he couldn't keep functioning with the credentials of a minister?" Everyone was quiet and thoughtful. "Too often we think that Christianity; including the New Church, is about being nice. The Bible talks about justice. 'I, the Lord, love justice,' Isaiah 61:8.

Pastor Pete spoke up. "And let's think about uses. Is it useful to the health of our congregation or our society to aid in the covering up of crimes and of professional misconduct?" After a few moments of silence, he continued. "I have a question for you, Rev. Steinke. How should a pastor deal with secrecy? I walked into this parish filled with secrets from the past, and I know that many secret meetings have taken place since I've arrived."

"One way is simply to announce it: 'We've had secret meetings. We need to deal with things openly here.' As in Matthew 18, go to the offending brother or sister. If need be, bring it to the entire community. This is how healing begins. With the light of truth."

Sally, practically a newcomer, asked, "How long does it take for an unhealthy parish to get a strong immune system?"

"Thanks! That's a great question. I say it's usually two to five years." There were groans around the room.

Steinke continued, "Edwin Friedman once said, 'For any chronically anxious system to get better it has to go through an acute phase.' The biggest enemy of the healing process is to short-circuit the change or conflict or whatever is creating the acute phase. I think it was Kierkegaard who said, 'In order for the wound to be healed, the wound must be kept open.' When the system has conflict, the system opens up. It's a wonderful time for the whole church to grow. But the first thing a system wants to do is close up again. For example, when a

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A Major Legal Issue...

(Continued from page 18)

to nurture and protect its constituencies, and this unhappy and uncomfortable legal process is part of keeping that trust. Several of our societies look to the denomination as the place where their assets can be both protected and utilized to establish new affiliated centers in the event disaffiliation from the denomination should ever occur. While the current legal action is very unique, it does indicate the highest level of difficulty that could occur, and the final result will have to be scrutinized carefully.

God be with us in this ongoing endeavor.

—Christine Laitner, President
the Swedenborgian Church of
North America



THE HEALING BEGINS

(Continued from page 19)

church loses a pastor, the first thing it wants to do is get another one, quickly. Instead, the church should use that period for learning; perhaps by getting an interim minister."

Congregants looked around guiltily at each other, remembering how quickly they had hired Pastor Pete rather than face conflicts with the previous pastor.

Pastor Pete spoke up again, "OK, so I showed up here before those conflicts were faced and found the place full of anxiety. How can I, as pastor, avoid getting anxious myself?"

Steinke said, "Let's remember that Anxiety, like a virus, needs a host cell to survive. A host cell provides a virus with shelter and nourishment. In a church, a staff member can become a host cell to a group that is complaining in a way that undermines the leadership. I look to see who generates the anxiety and also who is hosting it, allowing it to grow. If you as the pastor become the host cell to everybody's anxiety—you try to make everyone happy or you try to quiet those who disagree with you—you're simply providing shelter and nourishment for the virus of anxiety."

"So how can I avoid being host to the anxiety?" Pastor Pete seemed to be feeling quite anxious about this entire topic.

"You've got to normalize the anxiety. Whenever there is change, it's normal to feel anxious. For example, in grief counseling, you probably tell people that it's normal and healthy to grieve a loss. The same in a congregation. You can say this in sermons, conversations, and church newsletters. Anxiety that is open and freely discussed is healing; it is the hidden anxiety that spreads like a virus."

"Sounds like I need to really take care of myself, and stay healthy in my own life," mused the pastor.

"Yes, you and ALL the church leaders. You can't do this alone. The entire leadership team can be the salvation in a church. Ed Friedman said, 'Leadership is not technique, expertise, skill. It's who you are.'"

Steinke picked up a copy of his book, *How Your Church Family Works*. "Listen

to what I wrote on page 109:

How, then, can leaders promote health, 'be our salvation' rather than our ruin. I want to propose seven health-influencing responses. The seven responses to focus on are:

- self, not others
- strength, not weakness
- process, not content
- challenge, not comfort
- integrity, not unity
- system, not symptom
- direction, not condition.

"So focused, leaders can be stewards of themselves and therefore stewards of the vision. Being self-defined, they can be trusted with the community's definition of itself.

"We're running low on time for today. I'm going to give you some homework. Next week, we'll work with the leaders on how to be the salvation, how to lead the way through the stages of healing." People of the Johnny Appleseed Church were feeling increased confidence in themselves and their future. Your church may want to do the same homework that the Johnny Appleseed Church is doing.

THE HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

I. Peter Steinke's *Healthy Congregations: A Systems Approach*, pages 26 – 37. Consider each of his promoters of congregational health and discuss to what extent they apply to your congregation, and where you can improve.

[the following summary is based on Wadehodes.com.]

1. Sense of Purpose

The human body is a purposeful organization. The body's parts must function in balance to preserve its very existence. Its surest tendency is to move toward health.

2. Appraise and Manage Conflict

Healthy congregations use their resources and strengths to manage conflict. They do not let conflict fester. They have the wisdom to face the tensions and stresses that befall all living systems. Included in this characteristic is a "sense of coherence" which is composed of three interrelated parts:

A. *Meaningfulness*: A congregation has

an overall sense of purpose. The people are willing to take up a challenge. Because life matters, they involve themselves in what is done. They make a commitment because a situation is worthy of investment. They believe the outcome of their response is of value.

B. *Manageability*: A congregation has a sense of control, a sense of being able to influence events. The people believe they can, as far as possible, shape their destiny. They believe the resources are available to act effectively. They believe their response will lead to a valued outcome.

C. *Comprehensibility*: A congregation judges reality soundly. Knowing there is little danger in viewing the world as a challenge, they must make sense of confusion and change. They use information as a stimulus for growth. They believe the valued outcome will be health promoting.

3. Clarity

One thing the physical body is quite clear about is what is self and what is not self. The entire immune system devotes itself to preserving the body's integrity. Likewise, healthy congregations are always working on clarity, whether clarity of beliefs, direction, or responsibility.

4. Mood and Tone

Moods, attitudes, beliefs, and feelings can affect the body. Mind moves matter. Consciousness interacts with cells. Mood and tone affect organizations as well. Better functioning congregations are more energized.

5. Mature Interaction

The body, being a part of nature, needs time. It participates in seasons, rhythms, and growth processes. Indeed, the body functions more like a garden than a machine, though the opposite is commonly believed.

6. Healing Capacities

Healing is the body's potential to repair and regenerate itself. The body can heal itself because it has a healing system.

7. A Focus on Resources

Healthy congregations focus on the healing resources, not the disease process.

(Continued on page 21)

THE HEALING BEGINS

(Continued from page 20)

II. Read pages 97-100, where Steinke tells us that leaders can be the salvation of a church. Have your leadership read through and discuss this section. Here is a summary of the section based on Wadehodes.com.

Functional Range-Pages 97ff.

What, then, should we look for in the functioning of a leader? The following lists summarize the range between undifferentiation and differentiation.

Undifferentiation

Opts for Certainty: Uses black/white thinking (psychologist Alfred Adler refers to either/or thinking as a form of arrested development, the way children think); wants quick fix; pushes for resolution to ease own discomfort with emotional pain, ambiguity, or cognitive dissonance.

Avoids Self: Resists insights; lacks awareness of self; behaves more reactively and mindlessly; has fewer responses available to handle life.

Looks Outside of Self: Takes little responsibility for self and blames others; sees only what is exterior (anxiety forces one to observe threat, condition, what is outside of self); has little sense of connectedness and the mutual influence of behavior.

Forces Others to Adapt: Functions willfully (one way or no way); pushes and pulls on almost anything; wants others to change; coerces or manipulates.

Seeks Cessation of Pain: Shifts own anxiety to others; blames, accuses, and whines; seeks to eliminate person/event that activates one's own anxiety.

Differentiation

Takes a stand: Works on self-definition; functions on basis of values, principles, and beliefs; knows what one believes, stays the course, and commits to the process.

Focuses on Self: Increases self-awareness; looks at own "stuckness"; modifies own exaggeration of instinctual forces (anxiety); attends to own behavior; makes changes in self.

Stays Connected to Others: Sees life organically ("members of one another"); tolerates differences; encourages dialogue.

Sets Clear Goals: Defines self from within, not over against others; knows where one is going; maintains larger view; lives with a purpose in mind; seeks clarity.

Accepts Challenge: Moves forward; stretches; knows that "pain" arises when one leads; stays focused on conviction and direction.

NEXT MONTH: The Interim Ministry Network will walk the leaders of the Johnny Appleseed Church through the stages of healing.
FINAL ARTICLE: Will be a series of exercises and resources for your own congregation.

For the central concepts and some of the quotations in this article, I am indebted to Wadehodes.com

Christianity Today International/Leadership Journal..

Summer, Vol. XVIII, No. 3, Page 46

Peter Steinke, *Healthy Congregations and How Your Church Family Works*. Available from The Alban Institute: www.Alban.org/



TO THE EDITOR

Dear Patte,

Thank you for the wonderful December *Messenger*. What a great issue! Your article "The Mexican Connection" was deeply meaningful. It's so important for us to have personal story reminders to keep us aware of our multi-culturality and our responsibility in relation to others. Additionally, Wilma Wake's article on Swedenborgian Parish Action Team in Action was inspiring. I've been a systems therapist for the last 25 years doing marriage and family therapy and work with church systems. It was good to have it so clearly related to our Swedenborgian philosophy. I have been fortunate to be able to attend two powerful seminars in the last twelve months. One was in Tucson just before Bob Kirven died. It was called The God Code with Gregg Braden. The second, also with Gregg Braden, was in Kawai, Hawaii, and was called "Dancing with the Universe." The workshops contained the new physics material mentioned in Wilma's article and much more.

I will be leading the service in our Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound on February 20. The topic is "Manifesting Our Prayers" (learnings from these two seminars and more). This is a process used by the ancients and indigenous peoples. It's exciting and it works for me.

Eric Allison's article, "Letting Heaven Create Your Life" was very powerful. I am blessed to experience this every week at our church.

The Fryeburg article made me want to go there. Though I haven't been to family camp, I have experienced Fryeburg and its wondrous setting. And, congratulations Ron Brugler, on your new ministry at the New York Church. It's a great church. Also thanks to Robert McCluskey for sending the article on Christian Principles in an Election Year, I really enjoyed it.

And, Patte, thanks for a great year of *The Messenger*.

—Lorraine Sando,
Seattle, Washington



National Council of Churches Report

(Continued from Page 15)

with micro-enterprise assistance is expected to help them begin their own income-generating projects and become independent."

Returning to our United States arena, the NCCC General Secretary, the Rev. Dr. Bob Edgar, reported that dialogue continues within the NCCC-launched initiative to bring Christian Protestant, Catholic and Evangelicals to the same table and dialogue about areas of common concern where our Christian values may be of use. Hopefully, further progress along these lines will be revealed in 2005. Also within our American national scene, further reporting was made concerning the Exploratory Committee on Human Genetic Bio Technologies. A question was raised as to whether we Christians want scientists or faith communities to decide whether human cloning and genetic re-engineering should move forward. If we do not raise a voice on these activities, it is most likely a matter of time before these technologies move from theory into reality. Church communities are urged to have study and discussion on these issues. Thus, as we understand our Christian New Church theology and ethics, is it wise for us to tamper with (and perhaps see new advances made upon curing some of the serious illnesses we suffer with today) the DNA level of our humanity? Their report reads, "The power to manipulate genes raises the basic question of what it means to be human." Further research and discussion continues on this committee before any policy recommendations will be made.

A letter was drafted at our General Assembly and sent to the Armed Forces Board of Chaplains commending them on their service to our military men and women and their families, especially during a time of war (you can find it on the NCCC website).

And lastly, for the second year in a row the NCCC presented an excellent financial report to its delegates for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2004. Once again, NCCC is "in the black" and feeling much better about its direction and stability.

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



NEWS *Parish*

ROYAL OAK, MICHIGAN

A Student Intern's Vision

I Wonder as I Wander

Jennifer Tafel

When I got the memo that Christmas was cancelled—my mom and step-dad were going on a cruise to Mexico during the holidays—I needed to find a place to go for Christmas. I hadn't been to Michigan for awhile and thought I would spend time with my friends in the Midwest. It turns out I was able to complete a requirement for my ordination as well.

Rev. Renee was gracious enough to find a way for me to participate in the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan. I needed opportunities to practice preaching and learn about Swedenborgian communities. I had heard great things about the Royal Oak community, and all the necessary details fell into place.

My first Sunday at the church, December 12, was awesome! I helped by aiding Rev. Renee in preparing the worship space and leading the *Heaven and Hell* discussion group. I met parishioners who were new faces and old friends. The Advent theme for the service was "JOY." I shared a message with the group about Our Lady of Guadalupe—as her day for celebration is December 12th—as well as the concept of patience as a spiritual practice. I joined Rev. Renee, Sandy and Theron for Christmas caroling across the street at the Alexander Mercy Nursing Home after the service. It was a beautiful experience, and I highly recommend it the next time you have a chance—the residents totally enjoyed our presence. I felt like I was truly doing God's work—especially when I saw the expressions on the faces of the residents.

December 19th was my next opportunity to share a message with the Royal Oak group. The Advent theme for this week was "Love," and it was Christmas Sunday. The message: "Love Unexpressed Dies," a reflection on the unconditional love that Joseph chose to live. We enjoyed the Christmas choir performance, the annual angel auction and goodies potluck. It was a very special day of spirit and fun!

I spent a few days working with people from the Lansing New Church. This is important work that needs to be done for the isolated members of the Michigan Association and the other people unable to attend worship services in Royal Oak. Great things are happening with this group! I plan to help in the continued visioning process, writing letters, and planning upcoming worship services and events. Look for tremendous happenings in Lansing.

This year was the first time I "worked" on Christmas Eve. I've volunteered for many services in the past since my father, Rev. F. Robert Tafel and step-father, Rev. Harvey Tafel are both Swedenborgian ministers. I participated in this service by giving the children's message and creating liturgy.

While spending time in Michigan, I also participated in leading the annual Teen Winter Retreat at Almont. The theme this year was "Love." I led a session entitled "We are What we Love" based on Emanuel Swedenborg's concept of heavenly communities from his book, *Heaven and Hell*. I also co-led a session with Sage Currie, a Royal Oak church member, entitled "Endless Love" based on ideas from Swedenborg's book, *Marriage Love*. Sage and I also discussed values of love that are important for spiritual regeneration in relationships of all varieties. I had attended this retreat for many years as a teen and was excited to be part of the ministerial leadership for the church's annual youth retreat. What a treat!

Since I believe that life is about the journey, it's no coincidence that I spent the holidays on the road traveling around the state of Michigan. I would

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PASSAGES

BAPTISM


Jacob—Henry Jacob, infant son of John Dibben and Penny Kellum, was baptized into the Christian life and faith December 12, 2004, in the Church of the Good Shepherd, Kitchener, the Rev. Paul Zacharias officiating. Little Henry is the great-great grandson of the Rev. John Zacharias who served Convention churches in western Canada for over forty years.

CONFIRMATION

Smith—Evelyn Smith was confirmed into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church November 14, 2004, at the New

Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, the Rev. Lee Woofenden officiating.

DEATH

Lawrence—Harold Lawrence, longtime member of the New York Society, died at home in Dahlonaga Georgia October 28, 2004. He was an attorney for Sperry Rand for much of his career and worked tirelessly for the Church during his time in New York. He was 95. The service was performed by the Rev. George Dole, his cousin. He is survived by his daughter Katherine Lawrence. 

NEWS *Parish*

(Continued from Page 22)

like to thank Elaine Staley for her gracious hospitality while I was in the Detroit area. Elaine has a beautiful home (also regenerating!) and two wonderful pets (B.B. and C.C.—dog and cat respectively). We spent several evenings discussing life, spirituality and what was next on TV. I had a great time while staying in her home.

My dear friend, Fawn Lange, and her family hosted me while I was in Lansing.

She also has a great home and adorable children, Rebekka and Kristofer. Thank you one and all for a great experience while I served the Swedenborgian Church in Michigan!

Jenn Tafel is a third-year seminary student at the Swedenborgian House of Studies. Reprinted from the Church of the Holy City January/February newsletter.



The Rev. Renee Billings Machiniak, pastor of the Church of the Holy City, is now a volunteer Royal Oak police chaplain. Since September 2004, Rev. Renee has been assisting the Royal Oak police once a month by riding along with officers responding to such needs as suicide attempts, grief counseling, domestic violence calls, teen/adult drug

abuse, and pastoral care to officers. Rev. Renee is also on call for community family emergencies one week in each month.

The Royal Oak Police are talking about creating a "Random Acts of Kindness" volunteer program linking the police with clergy in the city to offer assistance to those most in need. The Church of the Holy City's name and information is now printed among the other volunteer chaplains' churches on a newly-published grief pamphlet handed out to the public in times of grief and crisis.

KITCHENER, ONTARIO

As of December 2004, the Church of the Good Shepherd has a new Interim Minister, Roslyn Vincent-Haven. She is a specially trained and designated Intentional Interim Minister with the United Church of Canada. She says, "God has also called me to learn from you. I confess that until very recently I had no idea what Swedenborgian Christianity was. I was delighted to find through my extensive reading of Emanuel Swedenborg and his theology in the last few weeks that my belief and grounding is much the same as yours. I too believe in an incarnate God that dwells within and among us in community. I too have a profound conviction that everyone has a use and should be encouraged and empowered to use their gifts and skills for the good of all...so we begin this "in between" journey together in the season of anticipation, pregnant with promise."

Bountiful Gifts

Thank you
for the bountiful gifts we share
And give strength to the earth.
Bless our food
and the hands and the heart
That make all things possible.
Thank you for your abundance
And give strength
to those who struggle

Welcome 2005
and may we rise to the occasion
That takes us beyond ourselves
Here's to dear friends
and dear families.
Blessings now upon us.
Blessings for the opportunity
to make a difference.

Blessings to all.

—Jeff Holt 

CELEBRATE LIFE!


(Continued from page 17)

"If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.


—William Blake"

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NEWS *Parish* (Continued)

SHS

Cathy Lauber, member and vice-president of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, is entering the Swedenborgian House of Studies this winter semester as a seminary student. 

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.

Convention 2005 Friday, July 9th – Tuesday, July 13th

SPIRITUALITY & THE ARTS: Inspiring the Divine Creator Within

The Swedenborgian House of Studies is delighted to host the 2005 annual convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America! We warmly invite you to visit your seminary—located in Berkeley since 2001—and to get acquainted with our new environment for theological education.

Our theme for Convention, Spirituality & The Arts: Inspiring the Divine Creator Within, centers on the idea that we are all creative beings because of the Lord's influx. Thus, we say "inspiring" as the Latin root of the word literally means to breathe into; the flowing in of breath. "Let everything that breathes praise the Lord." (Psalm 150)

The influx from the Lord enables us to express our creativity through all manner of things. Whether you find your creative light in poetry, music, dance, art, gardening, or in playing a game with a child, surfing, golfing, or baking a cake, we hope this theme will give you opportunity to explore your approach to creativity and how it may bridge the natural and spiritual worlds. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "There is higher work for Art than the arts."

Here are just a few of the ideas we have planned to help us enjoy and be enriched by our time of fellowship and business meetings:

ART: An opportunity for all of our creative and artistic gifts to be seen and shared. We will have an outdoors Arts Festival at the Pacific School of Religion on Tuesday, July 12th. You are invited to display your painting, sculpture, handcrafts, writings, jewelry, note cards, and creations of any kind, and have the opportunity to sell your work. You may ship your work ahead of time to SHS—details to follow in future Messengers.

The Swedenborgian Church
of North America
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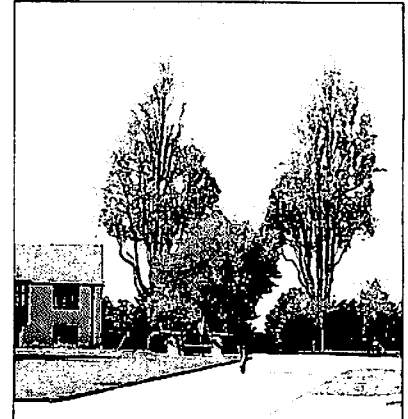
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MUSIC: As well as many other entertaining and nourishing events, Rev. Ken and Laurie Turley, along with the other talented musicians and dancers of Convention, are preparing performances that will delight and inspire the soul.

NATURE: To raise our awareness of the Divine as expressed in our natural world, as well as the ways we honor and use our earthly resources, Convention will be "green." Our Convention gathering will be mindful of the Lord's gifts to us of trees, water, power and other resources. The "three R's" refers not only to "repentance, reformation and regeneration," but "reduce, re-use and recycle" as well! We will invite all participants to join with us in practicing earth-friendly habits.

Share your light! Please submit your original poetry, short prose, song lyrics and/or artwork/cartoons to be published in a special keepsake book commemorating Convention 2005. Your submissions may be on any subject and we especially welcome any work that pertains to our theme of Spirituality & The Arts: Inspiring the Divine Creator Within. Send up to two submissions of any of the above according to the following specifications: text documents to be sent as MS Word format in Times Roman 12pt font and black/white art renderings in a format suitable for PC downloading. Please include your name, address, email, and phone number and send to Bette Mc Donnell via email: betonwords@aol.com. For questions, please call Bette at (650) 355-6020.

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