

THE MESSENGER

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The Key to the Church

Wilma Wake

This is the fifth article in our series on church systems, and the fourth one about the members of the fictional Johnny Appleseed Church taking a seminar on how to make their church healthier. The previous three articles had the entire congregation gather at the church over three Saturdays to explore their church dynamics. In this article, a dozen leaders of the church are meeting at a local restaurant with their trainer, to learn how to model and instigate healthy functioning.

Splat Splatters Viruses:

Renewing Parish Health

It was early Saturday morning as a dozen people were arriving at a private dining room in a local restaurant. Most made their way to the coffee urn and helped themselves to fruit and muffins.

As they settled around a large round table, they heard from Sam, the chair of SPAT [Swedenborgian Parish Action Team]. "I'm so glad that I've been able to be here for your series of Swedenborgian seminars. And SPAT is so proud that you will be our first SPLAT group."

Pastor Pete choked on his coffee, and Mary, the church president, looked startled.

"Oh, didn't you hear? SPAT is developing teams of parish leaders to get special training in being the immune system to fight parish viruses! We are calling them 'Swedenborgian Parish Leadership Autoimmune Teams' SPLAT. You folks will be SPAT's first SPLAT!"

"Uh, I guess we're honored," muttered Pastor Pete.

"Yes, of course you are! And to start off this special day of training for parish

leaders is Mildred McGill. She has studied with the Alban institute and the Interim Ministry Network, and will help you learn to be an auto immune system!"

There was tepid and uncertain clapping as Ms. McGill brushed blueberry muffin crumbs from her lap and stood up.

"Well, I don't have the background of your astute speaker last week, Peter Steinke, but I've learned a lot from him. I especially value what I've learned about seeing a church as a system, and as a body. Many churches see themselves as the body of Christ."

"Yeah, but a lot of us think more about being a mini Universal Human," noted Mary.

"I agree!" noted June Jones, the treasurer. "Swedenborg says that heaven is this Universal Human having different parts, like a body. The Lord is the ultimate Universal Human. It seems to me that a parish system is sort of a mini version of heaven."

"Uh, yeah, if we can keep it from becoming hell!" called out Doug from the buffet table where he was buttering a muffin. Everyone laughed.

"Good points! Your parish system is like a body. Like a body it can get sick, and it can heal to become healthy. Peter walked you through those concepts last week. Now let's look in detail at the role you folks have as leaders in the parish."

"As proud members of SPLAT," Pete called out, and everyone laughed.

"Ok, SPLATters," everyone laughed as Mildred continued. "You might want to write these down, from page 15 of Peter's book *Healthy Congregations*."

Ten Principles of Health and Disease —Page 15

1. Wholeness is not attainable. (But it can be approximated.)

2. Illness is the necessary complement to health. (It is all right to be sick, feel burdened, and be down.)

3. The body has innate healing abilities. (No one can give you - or the congregation - what you don't already have.)

4. Agents of disease are not causes of disease. (All disease processes are enabled.)

5. All illness is biopsychosocial. (Wow! Everything is connected.)

6. The subtle precedes the gross. (Early detection is the best treatment.)

7. Every body is different. (There's no universal treatment for every organism - or congregation.)

8. A healthy circulatory system is the keystone of health and healing. (Feedback systems promote health.)

9. Breathing properly is nourishing to the whole body. (The Spirit must be active among the members of the body of Christ.)

10. The brain is the largest secreting organ of the body, the health maintenance organization (HMO) of the body. (The mind converts ideas into biochemical realities.)

"These are important dimensions of maintaining the health in your church. You might want to read Steinke's material in detail and discuss how you can contribute to each one in your parish."

"Look," chimed in Sandy Moss, chair of the Parish-Pastor Relations Committee. "Why is it that we are supposed to be the ones to do this? I know everyone thinks the pastor should be the one, and we try to educate the congregation that we all have to do it. But why us dozen people?"

"Great question, Sandy," Mildred continued. "This takes us back to Steinke's point about leaders in any parish."

"Leaders have the capability of spreading the virus in the church body."

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Loving Our Enemies

Robert McCluskey

Politics and religion: instead of keeping them separate, we're beginning to see that they are inseparable, for both ask and answer the question, "How should/can we live together? How do I respond to offense, to the enemy?"

Contrast: the hope/joy of Easter with the hopeless misery of the Middle East. Contrast: the teachings of Christ with the rhetoric of politicians and media. Contrast: the legacy of non-violence (Jesus, Buddha, Gandhi and King) with the popular celebration of military and economic force. These contrasts compel the Christian to speak out and to act on behalf of the good and the true. They speak to the need and difficulty of the commandment to love our enemies, to love others as God loves us. Everywhere we see one side calling the other evil and justifying itself as righteous.

Those who justify their position by relying on what Swedenborg calls "revelation alone" usually deny reason, appealing to tradition, the imagination and emotions. Jihads and Crusades, all leading to Armageddon, a final and inevitable conflict, with God destroying the enemy, imposing a just society on earth for all true believers. Those who justify their position by relying on what Swedenborg calls "reason alone" usually deny revelation, appealing to logic and materialism. It rejects religious arguments of any kind, and uses instead a blend of military, economic and political power to determine the players, the game, and who wins and loses.

With the rejection of revelation, the only alternative is a conflict between competing forces. With the rejection of reason, the only alternative is conflict between competing theologies.

Does our foreign policy really regard all persons as equal, or just those who support American policy without question? To say you are either with us or against us is equivalent to saluting only our brethren, loving only those who love us. To demonize others as "pure evil" allows you to suspend

the normal rules of engagement. If you are going after terrorists, you don't have to treat them as brothers and sisters, or valued simply because they are human; they are expendable, collateral damage.

From a purely external point of view, the solution is equally simple: retaliation. (A recent Navy ad offers: "life, liberty, and the pursuit of those who threaten it." As if happiness is getting the bad guy, but good!) Recent events have brought the spirit of revenge and retaliation out in full force. Journalists and politicians have made it very clear what we are to do with our enemies: when we are hit, we hit back, and if we're hit again, we hit back harder. When it comes to the mid-east, the conversation is all about force. On all sides aggression is in the ascendancy, with the ranks of the extremists growing daily. If you don't believe violence begets violence, you have not been paying attention. Both sides seem determined to use the heightened violence as a window of opportunity to press their side harder. And I think we all know that if "might makes right," the battle will simply continue in new forms in the future.

Politics and religion? Let's be clear: this conflict is not about either; not good politics or good religion, anyway. Instead of politics ruling the day (debate, compromise, commitment) we have displays of military and economic power. Instead of religion ruling the day (selflessness, compassion, forgiveness), we have an identification with particular historic, ethnic and cultural traditions. Reason without revelation, and revelation without reason.

In fact, this conflict, like many others, helps to reveal the true nature of religion by indirection and contrast, by what is lacking: freedom and rationality in spiritual matters, the movement beyond superstition (supernaturalism) and the cultural/ethnic dimensions to religion. True religion is not about history or family or region or custom or tradition, or even doctrine ultimately. It's about being real, authentic, caring, and above all selfless, incapable of simply seeing one side, and eager at all times to see as

many sides as possible. This is New Church religion, and it's more common than you think! Many in the Middle East and in this country continue to call for a genuine peace. Their starting point is not history, or politics or even international law. It is a call made from a specifically religious/spiritual perspective. It is based on a vision of wholeness, of the unity of all people in the one God.

The internal problem in brief: too much certainty, too much belief in one's own version of the truth. Case closed. An unwillingness to reconsider, think again (repentance, *metanoia*), to even imagine we might be wrong or at least incomplete in our thinking and deliberations; a lack of humility and openness, the hallmarks of all genuine truth.

Mere reason or mere revelation both fall into this trap. They are the opposite of openness, holism, diversity, depth, nuance, and even growth (if you already have the absolute truth, there is nothing left to do except wield it against others!). Think of it. Individual crimes of passion are emotional and chaotic. Genocide is cold and calculating, rational and objective. It results not from emotion, but from a commitment to an

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Loving Our Enemies

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ideal, even if that ideal flies in the face of compassion and justice. Those who commit crimes of passion often speak of not being able to help themselves, of not knowing the difference between right and wrong. Those who practice genocide will offer research and argument to defend their actions; they know all too well the difference between right and wrong, and would be happy to prove it to you!

Where does all this certainty come from? From eating the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. Thinking we know what is good and what is bad. It's that simple, that deep, and for that reason, so hard to simply undo.

The result is well known: staying alive (naturally) involves labor and pain; being alive (spiritually) involves work and sorrow. Suffering is our lot, on both levels of life, because attachment is our condition. And therein lies the path to freedom. To disengage from our intuitions of certainty; to intentionally suspend our own reactionary judgments (who is the enemy and what do they deserve?), and to compel ourselves to put on the spectacles of the gospel. Here begins a new understanding of the "problem," and a new and better solution toward which we can work.

"All those are in the good of charity who have conscience, and who, from conscience, think well of the neighbor, even if he should be an enemy. . . . Conscience is a new will and understanding implanted in a person by the Lord; thus the Lord's presence is with him to the degree in which he loves goodness and truth [for their own sake]." (*Emanuel Swedenborg*)

Loving our enemies seems like the right thing to do; it seems so obvious to one who has been on the spiritual path. The problem comes when we fail to realize just how profound, difficult, and rewarding this command is.

John and Bev Titus have rejected, openly and clearly, any suggestion of revenge or hatred against those who killed their daughter Alicia. This was not a feely-touchy decision, but an integral part of their spiritual character, intentionally formed (chosen) over many

years; a mature blend of revelation and reason. One of the reasons they can do this in this "large" case is that they have been practicing it in countless small ways for a long time. They show us that such compassion does not come easily or quickly, but it comes.

Are we not our brother's keeper? Can we love and pray for our enemies? Can we refrain from making spiritual judgments about other people? Can we acknowledge and confess and repent of our own sins and offenses? Can we really say we love God when we cannot keep his commandment to love our neighbor as ourselves?

The challenge facing the disciples after the resurrection, after the departure of the risen Lord, was clear: how to love their enemies as they were "commanded" to, without the external assurance of Jesus' power to protect them. This is the challenge we all face today: between the call of scripture/conscience, and the press of the world (in all its forms): the threat of violence and the experience of attack; the attraction of force and power; the ease of taking sides (as opposed to seeing all sides); the persuasive power of our own prejudices (known and unknown), born of family, culture, media, and proprium.

How do we love our neighbor, even our enemies? By doing the work of regeneration. How do we do the work of regeneration? By loving our neighbor, even our enemies! If you don't want to do one, you cannot do the other, (good intentions not withstanding.)

Judgmentalism and condemnation and partiality are incompatible with the heavenly life. As long as we're eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, we will never get to the tree of life.

And so we are commanded to love. We are *commanded* to love because genuine, spiritual love does not come easy; because we tend to judge others so easily rather than love them first. We are commanded to *love* because this is the way of God, of life, the way of our spirits; it's what we were created for; even though we have all grown accustomed to partial and limited attachments, which lead us away from love. And yet here we are, joined in spirit by countless millions, who continue to struggle with this com-

mandment, who sense its immeasurable value, who understand that what seems like a difficult task is actually the path to freedom.

The Rev. Robert McCluskey is a Swedenborgian minister and former pastor of the New York New Church.

Reprinted from the New York church's newsletter, sermon preached April 7, 2002.



Splat Splatters Viruses:

(Continued from Cover)

Peter says that these churches have "autoimmune disease" where the leaders overreact to things. It's not the issues themselves that spread virus; it's when the leadership overreacts—when the leaders participate in people blaming and accusing each other, allowing secret meetings to take place. If the leaders are in that place, then who maintains the boundaries and the vision?" [see p. 108-09 of *How Your Church Family Works*].

"Hey, how about Pastor Pete? Isn't that what he's here for?" joked Judy. Pete pretended to scream and everyone laughed.

"You try to depend on one person to do that job, and the virus will take over for sure! Unfortunately some ministers actually participate in the spreading of the virus. Those who are trying to lift up the vision and maintain boundaries will get drowned out by the voices of the virus. Only *you*, the *leaders*, can prevent the virus from sucking the life out of your parish."

Everyone was silent, sipping coffee, and staring out the window.

Mary spoke first. "Somehow we thought if we hired a minister, then he would fix everything. But I'm realizing that our path to health is for all of us in leadership positions, including the minister, to work together with a common vision of being the immune cells in our parish body."

"Bingo, Mary. You've got it."

Mildred was silent for a moment while everyone absorbed this. "Now let's move on to look at some of the steps involved in this. Your parish is one

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Splat Splatters Viruses:

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where you have had several ministers leave without having a clear process of parting ways."

"Yeah, and the last one was sort of kicked out in a murky mess that no one understands, but we all blamed each other for something."

"Your situation is not that uncommon. The Interim Ministry Network was established to help congregations heal from those confusing and often traumatic times. Here is some information about them from their website," Mildred handed out sheets with this information on it:

What is Transitional Ministry? For congregations, it's the ministry between settled pastors, associate pastors, Christian educators, lay leaders.

Who provides this type of Ministry? Trained Intentional Interim Pastors or Trained Transitional Pastors.

What will a Transitional Pastor do for our congregation?

The trained Transitional Pastor can help the congregation look at who they are and where they are going. Also they help the congregation to look at its own ministry under the previous pastor's leadership. This will identify and create the emotional space for the new pastor. The congregation can take the time to look at what has worked well in their ministry or what has held them back, so that they can look forward to the future to build the type of ministry that will serve the entire congregation.

Where can a congregation find a Trained Transitional Minister?

Most denominations will go through their bishop or judicatory. However, some independent denominations will have to seek other means for their search. For example, advertisements, word of mouth, other congregations.

<mailto:info@interimministry.org>. If you have questions please contact the Interim Ministry Network 800-235-8414 or e-mail us at info@interimministry.org <http://www.interimministry.org/index.html>

"Of course, not every church who needs this specialized ministry is able to

get such a pastor. Many congregations may not even be certain for awhile that they do have this need. The Network provides a lot of material that can be helpful. Let's look at some things that I think could be used by you SPLATters in your parish. There are some characteristics of congregations in that situation that are common. Here is the list from the Network:

Characteristics of the Interim Congregation

1. **Grief.** There can be many complicated feelings; especially if there are mixed feelings about the pastor's leaving. Some members might believe that others conspired to get rid of the minister.

2. **Conflict.** The congregation can be divided into hostile camps. Unless this is resolved, the chances for another successful pastorate are reduced.

3. **Secrets come to light.** When there is important information known to only some of the congregation, the congregation can become seriously stuck. Revealing the facts to everyone can allow people to move forward.

4. **Opening to denomination:** Often denominations provide help for congregations in an interim situation.

5. **Low self-esteem.** Congregations may feel that there is something wrong with them that they can't keep pastors.

6. **Lagging stewardship.**

7. **Rebuilding the infrastructure.** New leadership needs to be identified and trained.

8. **Ambivalence about change.** Fear of more change is common.

9. **Mixed feelings.** Many feelings swirling around and needing to be addressed.

[Nicholson, "Characteristics of the Interim Congregation," in *Temporary Shepherds*.]

Mildred asked the group to move into four groups of three and review the list. She asked them to check each characteristic that was active in their parish, and to jot down a few examples of how they were manifesting.

That task, and discussing its meaning, took the rest of the morning. The group found a sandwich-platter buffet set up at lunch time and milled about the patio soaking up the early spring sunshine.

Doug and June Jones sat together on a bench as they ate their sandwiches. June commented, "What I find so amazing is that we're being told that the leaders of a congregation can be the

From: Roger Nicholson, "The Challenge of the Interim Time," in *Temporary Shepherds* [Alban, 1998].

The group was again divided into smaller groups to look at each item, and suggest ways that the leaders could facilitate each task. They came back together to offer their reports:

Pete said: "I was meeting with the team doing item #1: Coming to terms with history. We've been doing that with our 'roots' evening and discussions we've been having. We need to have more sharing on memories and events of the past. I think we're starting to let go of guilt and hurt from the past."

"Yes, you are addressing this task and doing it well," noted Mildred.

"What about the team for task #2?"

Mary reported. "It's confusing to think about a new identity, since we aren't sure what our old identity was! We agreed that after we look more at our history, we need to figure out what things from the past are important to us, and what things we don't want to keep. Then who are we today? What is our mission now? What about all the new people starting to attend? How much of our identity is solid, and how much needs to be shaped by the new people who join us? Somehow we have to put it all together."

"Good summary," commented Mildred. "Clearly you are well on your way here, as well."

June reported on tasks #3 and #4. "We are so grateful for these SPAT seminars. They are helping us get closer to our denomination. We want more of our members to get to Convention this year and get to know more about our other Swedenborgian churches. And we know we need to move towards leadership changes. Some of us have been in leadership roles for years and we're tired. And newer faces with new ideas would be good for us."

"Of course, be careful to keep a mixture of leadership. Churches are healthiest in transition if there's a mixture of both your experienced leadership and new people, and folks who haven't stepped up before. Get a good mixture in your leadership roles of

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Editor's Note: Authorized by President Chris Laitner, this appeal went out via email to our list several weeks prior to the publication of *The Messenger*.

♥ AN URGENT APPEAL ♥ For Tsunami Relief From Sri Lankan Swedenborgians

Martha Bauer

We have been in contact with this Sri Lankan Swedenborgian church for years and with Walter Jaywardene, the secretary. As soon as the disaster hit, we began trying to reach him at the last email address we had. I know that most churches and individuals have already given to tsunami relief but this is a special opportunity for the Swedenborgian Church to help one of its own and through them to give direct aid. I hope to collect funds here [11 Highland Ave., Newtonville, MA 02460] and to wire money all at once to Sri Lanka if we can collect a significant amount. Checks would be made to the "Swedenborgian Church" for the Sri Lanka disaster relief fund.

From Walter Jaywardene:

Relief aid such as in infant formula, infant clothing, diapers, bed sheets, blankets, drinking water, water tanks, antibiotics, dehydration salts, and first aid items are urgently needed. Medical aid is urgently required as the possibility of infectious diseases is high due to overcrowding in the relief centers which do not have any basic facilities, resulting in poor sanitation.

These are very important areas that we can do. Anyway our members are highly appreciative of your decision and they believe that they have international church sisters and brothers. They believe that they are not isolated. If you need any details we can send that as soon as possible.

At present our main church group is in Colombo. We have five church groups in different part of the island. Only three groups had been effected. All together our membership is 250.

Please write us. we are awaiting for your response.

We are highly appreciate your prayers.

With kind regards,

Walter Jaywardene



WHAT'S GOOD FOR ME?

Ernest Martin

If you know what's good for you, you will do what I tell you!" Have you ever been assailed with this charge? It's a very hostile remark, and assumes that we don't know what's good for us, and the person speaking to us knows best.

One of Swedenborg's most oft-quoted statements is: "All of religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." I have been aware of this quotation all of my adult life, and I pretty much took it for granted. I understood it to mean that our religious convictions should apply to all of our behavior and relationships, but more recently I have been moved to explore its deeper meaning and implications.

"The life of religion is to do good." That sounds fine. Who could argue with it? But what do we mean by doing good? In any particular situation we find ourselves, how do we decide what is good? What are the criteria for goodness?

Our church teaches us that if we consistently make good choices throughout our life span, we will grow into angelhood and inherit the kingdom of heaven. But there is little agreement on what choices are good. We're all aware of the divergence of opinion on capital punishment, abortion, gay marriages, and for Americans today, who would make the best president.

What part does our religious faith play in making good decisions? The Swedenborgian Church declares that "It is the purpose of divine providence that we should act from freedom according to reason." We are indebted to the Bible for its general principles of behavior, but we don't see it as a legalistic code that tells us what to do in every situation. The Lord doesn't treat us like robots, but grants us the freedom to think for

ourselves, and minds to lead us to truth.

Freedom is a sacred gift, we say, and millions of people have laid down their lives in defense of freedom. But I contend that our freedom is extremely limited. It is limited by our genetic makeup, our education, our family background, our culture, the media which impacts us, addictions, compulsions, etc. It is almost universally acknowledged that the political candidate with the largest campaign chest is most likely to win an election. It is agreed that a New York billionaire became mayor of the city because he did more advertising than anyone else. Was he the best candidate? Is there a correlation between advertising and truth?

Social scientists have made serious research studies on how we make decisions. They conclude that most of us often act very irrationally in making our decisions. From all sides, we are being told that obesity is reaching epidemic proportions. We're told we should exercise our freedom to eat smaller portions, pass up fatty foods and rich desserts, and engage in regular exercise. Why, then, don't we use our freedom and reason in the pursuit of good health?

When I ordered a cup of coffee at Starbucks the other day, the clerk asked if I wanted whipped cream on top. "Oh no," I said, "but I will take that big round chocolate cookie."

I think most of us know what's good for us, but we don't do all that well in carrying it out. The Apostle Paul said: "The good that I would I do not; but the evil which I would not, that I do." Ovid said: "I see and approve the better. I follow the worse."

I have said that our freedom is sacred, but limited. My conviction is that our reason is even more limited than our freedom. Our reason is distorted by our emotions — our fears and

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WHAT'S GOOD FOR ME? *(Continued from page 29)*

anxieties, our insecurities, our poor self-image, lack of self-respect, and again, like our freedom, our genes, environment, intellect, education, etc.

Sailing on the Nile in Egypt a few years ago, a Muslim crew member told me of his fervent religious faith, and how he prayed five times a day. He also said that Muslims don't drink alcohol. "But," I said, "you have been drinking in the stern for the last half hour." "Yes," he said, "but I have been under lots of pressure." This was rationalization, not rationality, and it is common to all of us.

In speaking with a church colleague recently—a man who was highly trained in philosophy and theology, and possessed a brilliant mind—I shared some situations in the church where I felt that people had acted in ways that were diametrically opposed to their religious values. I then asked my colleague why this had happened.

His answer was that there was a disconnect between their faith and their actions. Eric Allison said, "That's just human nature." My minister daughter said, "Dad, no one's perfect." Where does that leave us?

Preachers keep urging their parishioners to try harder to live good lives. And yet my observation is that most of us think we're doing pretty well right now, and that if the rest of society acted lovingly and justly and compassionately, as we do, the world would be a wonderful place to live.

We take great pride in our nation, land of the free and home of the brave. A greater percentage of Americans attend worship regularly than in any other country of the world. And yet a greater percentage of Americans are in prison today than in any other country of the civilized world. One fourth of all people imprisoned in the world are from the USA.

What is the answer to this dilemma? How can we know what is good, and then not act to carry out that good? It's certainly not enough to memorize Bible stories, or the Ten Commandments, or to pledge our allegiance to the flag.

We celebrate our freedom and the power of our religious convictions, and yet we spend billions of dollars on drugs, like Prozac, to combat our deep depression. The USA is heralded as a Christian nation, but there is much evidence that we worship the almighty dollar. The former head of World Com has been indicted for defrauding his stockholders of eleven billion dollars. A TV expose reveals that millions of citizens shoplift billions and billions of dollars worth of merchandise every year. (I can't believe that none of those shoplifters is a church-goer.) The same expose showed how some of the largest banks of the nation defraud the IRS of billions of dollars of taxes every year.

Don't we know the difference between right and wrong? President George Bush is spoken of as the most religious of our presidents, committed to the good, and opposed to the evil. The President says he has no patience with the grays; something is either good or bad, right or wrong. There are no in-betweens.

If life were only that simple! Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the exiled Russian novelist, said: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

I know a couple, lifelong Swedenborgians, married to each other for over 50 years, with doctorates from Harvard, who consider themselves free and rational, and who consistently support opposing political parties. How come? Who's right and who's wrong?

The Lord of the Rings won most of the Academy awards last year for best film. People flocked to see the battle between good and evil, on the wide, wide screen. When I first went to the movies, as a teenager, I thrilled to the cowboy and Indian

battles, with Tom Mix and Hopalong Cassidy, and we always knew who the good guys were, the

cowboys with the white hats, and the bad guys were the Indians. Later on, it was still clear, in the Zorro films, who was good and who was bad. Screen writers and directors have a more difficult time

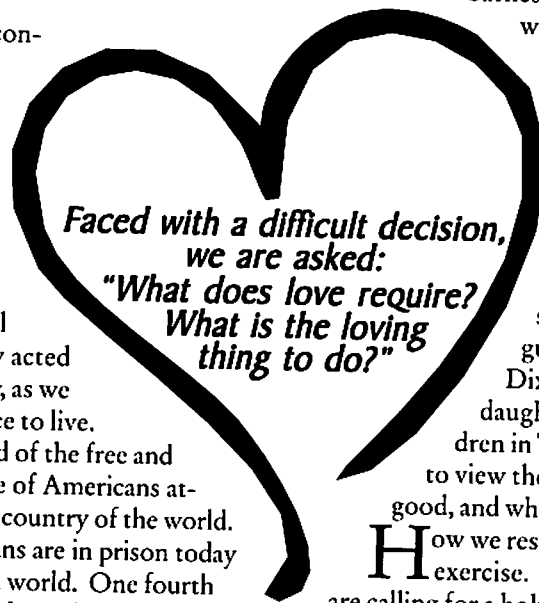
dealing with something like the Civil War, or as it is called in the South, "the war of Northern aggression." The decision as to who were the good guys and bad

guys depended on what side of the Mason-Dixon line you were born on. My youngest daughter, a damn Yankee, is raising three children in Tennessee. I wonder how they will come to view the Union and the Confederacy. Who was good, and who was bad?

How we resolve this dilemma is not just a philosophic exercise. Extremists from major world religions are calling for a holy war. Extreme Christians, Jews, and Muslims are all convinced that their religion is the one, true religion, and that all other religions must convert or be destroyed. Protestant fundamentalists are contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to Israel, to help them re-establish the temple in Jerusalem, in preparation for the Second Coming of Christ. The Jews know that Christians expect that Judaism will be destroyed when the Messiah comes, but they smile and accept the money, sure that the Christians are misguided. Fanatical Muslims are just as convinced that both the Christians and the Jews are the enemy and should be destroyed. To further complicate the matter, each of these three world faiths is hopelessly divided. Anglicans world-wide are divided on their attitude toward the ordination of homosexuals, and there is a movement to establish a new Anglican communion. The Southern Baptist Church, the largest Protestant Church in the country, is divided now between the conservatives and the moderates. They can no longer worship together. There are three tiny branches of Swedenborgians in this country, each convinced that it is the most faithful brand.

As individuals, we are often not consistent within ourselves. Spouses differ with one another in how to spend money, raise

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WHAT'S GOOD FOR ME? *(Continued from page 30)*

children, or vote politically. Children in a family have been known to argue with one another, and even to break off all communication. Wherever there is freedom, there will be differences of opinion and differences of action. People of all religions have been put to death for not conforming to the ruling of the elders. We treasure our religious faith, but when we take the position that everyone opposed to us is wrong, or evil, there is the rub.

I am committed to what is called "situation ethics," or "the new morality," that was taught by Jesus. This position was exemplified by Jesus' words: "It has been said to you of old time, 'an eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth,' but I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you." The Pharisees condemned Jesus and his disciples for breaking the religious law by plucking ears of corn on the Sabbath day. Jesus appealed to a higher law, the law of love, saying that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.

Jesus held forth the supremacy of love. Faced with a difficult decision, we are to ask: "What does love require? What is the loving thing to do?" This questioning will not guarantee the right decision, for finite beings are incapable of perfect judgment. Swedenborg said that "wisdom is the eye of love." And none of us is all-wise, but hopefully growing in wisdom. All that any human being can possess is an appearance of truth. It's the best we can do. And if we acknowledge that truth, however firmly we hold our convictions, we will have to honor the right of other peoples to the preciousness of their faith. We can say, "Here I stand," but not presume to know with finality where every other person should stand.

Let us be wary of presuming to know the will of God, and to pass judgment on the truthfulness of the faith of others, and what is good for them. We must hold everyone responsible before the law for their actions, but may we honor the right of every person to maintain his or her faith without threat or coercion. By honoring the sacredness of every child of God, we best demonstrate our faith in the God who created us, and who continues to love us.

As I close, and we go forth from this place, I hope that all of you now know what's good for you!

The Rev. Ernest Martin is a retired Swedenborgian minister, founder of Temenos Conference and Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, and a former president of the denomination. He lives in Duwall, Washington, assisting his son and their family in running Mosswood Hollow, a conference and retreat center.

The above talk was presented at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church May 16, 2004.

IMPORTANT CHURCH DATES

March 30-April 3, 2005:	MINSU @ LaPorte, IN
April 7-9, 2005:	SHS Retreat
April 27-May 1, 2005:	CAM @ SHS
April 30-May 2, 2005:	COMSU @ Julian, CA
May 7, 2005:	Investment Committee @ Central Office, Newtonville, MA
July 10, 2005:	General Council @ Berkeley, CA
July 13, 2005:	General Council @ Berkeley, CA
July 5-8, 2005:	COM, Berkeley, CA
July 9-13, 2005:	Convention 2005 @ Berkeley, CA
November 12, 2005:	RETCO (Retirement Committee, Ministers Pension Plan Trustees), Newtonville

Call for Nominees

The Nominating Committee is seeking qualified candidates for the offices listed below. If you have any suggestions or questions, please notify your minister or a member of the Nominating Committee immediately. Please know that the Nominating Committee encourages you to consider individuals who have talent and abilities in particular areas, but have not served within Convention. Swedenborg wrote that "the sincerest form of worship is a useful life." Serving on one of these committees is performing a valuable "use."

Thank you for your prayerful involvement in this process.

Vice-president: elected for one-year term

Recording secretary: elected for one-year term.

General Council: three persons elected for three-year terms. One minister and two lay people

Communications Support Unit (COMSU):
one elected for three-year term

Education Support Unit (EDSU):
one elected for three year term.

Information Management Support Unit (IMSU):
one elected for three-year term.

Ministries Support Unit (MINSU):
one elected for three-year term.

Nominating Committee:
two nominations for one elected five-year term.

Committee on Admissions at the Ministry (CAM): one lay person: elected to one-year term.

Board of Trustees, Swedeborgian House of Studies (SHS): two elected for three-year terms.

The Nominating Committee submits names for vacated unfulfilled terms on any/all of the above positions. Occasionally a person in a current position may be nominated for another position. In such event the Nominating Committee should have backup nominee to account for any position vacated by election to another support unit or board.

Steve Thomas, chair
177 Soon Rd.
Kitchener, Ontario N2G 3E1 Canada
(519) 579-1392

Nominating Committee:
Steve Thomas, Kitchener
Mary Crenshaw, Nevada
Laurie Turley, Maine
Rev.Dr.Jonathan Mitchell, PCA
Michelle Huffman, Georgia

2005 SCYL Officers

The 2005 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Officer and Chaplain elections took place at the Winter Retreat this past December. The results are:

President:

Ben Currie
283 Macintosh Rd
West Chester, PA 19382
(610) 430-7069
email: benjamin_sanborn@yahoo.com

East Coast and Activities Officer:

Miles Stroh
94 Shaker Rd
Harvard, MA 01451
(978) 772-6482
email: miniselim@charter.net

Central States and Finance Officer:

Erika Penabaker
21545 Curie
Warren, MI 48091
(586) 755-4993
email: ihaveacomfycouch@hotmail.com

SCYL Ambassador to West Coast and PR Officer:

Ethan Turley
22 Elm St
Fryeburg, ME 04037
(207) 935-4500
email: django_tzo@yahoo.com

Canada and Service Officer:

Brittany Fleming
123 Tillson St
Romeo, MI 48065
(586) 336-0558 -or-

604 Laurier Dr
LaSalle, ON N9J 1M5
(519) 734-1987
email: forevergreen@kaxy.com

Editor, *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS):

Brendan Dzeba
6109 Kenyon Ave.
Cleveland, OH 44105
(216) 641-0051
email: lilownerfinncafe@highstream.net

League Chaplain:

Rev. Kevin Baxter
Urbana University
Center for Applied Ethics
579 College Way
Urbana, OH 43078
(937) 484-1298
email: kbaxter@urbana.edu

We say farewell to 2004 West Coast Officer Karen Degi, CBS Editor Gabe Lipski and League Chaplain Jun-Chol Lee. Karen represented the west for one year and we thank her for her



SCYL Officer Pyramid: See how our 2005 SCYL Officers stack up!

service. Gabe published two wonderful issues of *Clear Blue Sky* in her one year as CBS Editor. Her original and playfully interesting artwork graced the covers of both issues. Jun-Chol served as League Chaplain for three years. He wrote numerous articles for CBS and provided spiritual guidance and inspiration. He attended all winter retreats as League Chaplain and is appreciated and loved by us all. We will miss him in his Chaplain role but we know that we will see him at future retreats, camps and other events.

Thank you Karen, Gabe and Jun-Chol for your active and caring participation in the SCYL.

We welcome newly elected CBS Editor, Brendan Dzeba. Brendan has been active in the SCYL for several years now and has contributed to past CBS issues. He has attended many retreats, annual Convention as well as both Almont and Fryeburg summer camps. We look forward to assisting him in publishing exciting CBS issues this year. Ethan Turley has joined the 2005 SCYL Officers as an ambassador to the west coast and League public relations. With no teens from the west at this year's winter retreat, and with Convention 2005 being held in Berkeley,

California, I felt it was important for the Youth League to reach out to our friends in the Pacific states. Ethan, who lives in the east, will help me connect with the teens out west and introduce them to SCYL programs and events. Rev. Kevin Baxter was elected to the position of League Chaplain. Kevin grew up actively participating in SCYL activities and retreats. He is an ideal League Chaplain as he is also now the Director of Almont Summer School. We are honored to have him as our spiritual advisor. The rest of the SCYL officers, Ben, Erika, Brittany and Miles are returning as incumbents. We are so grateful for their continued support of the youth league. Please join me in congratulating all of our 2005 SCYL officers and our new League Chaplain. This is a great group of teens. I look forward to working with them and I hope that you have an opportunity to meet some of them in the coming year.

Kurt Fekete, Youth Director



2004 Winter Retreat at Almont

During the week of December 27th through the 30th, the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) gathered together at the Almont Retreat Center for the annual Winter Retreat. The retreat brought together twenty-one teenagers (counting the two teen one-day visitors) from the Midwest, East Coast, and even Canada!

The retreat topic, this year, was "love." With the many sessions given by the adult leaders, we were able to cover many aspects of love. We discussed love, the history of it and the effect of it on different people. We discussed how to love and how to be loved. As a group exercise we talked about what we want in our conjugal partner, the values and characteristics that absolutely must be there, and even a few values we were able to compromise on. Also discussed were "toxic" relationships including how to recover from them and how to avoid them.

The entire retreat wasn't all serious,

(Continued on page 33)

2004 Winter Retreat at Almont

(Continued from page 32)

however. On the last night there was a dance held in the Rec Hall. Unlike previous years when "The Four Guys" would DJ the dance, this year we had Ed as the DJ. The people staffing the retreat provided all the lights and equipment. This all made the dance a tremendous success.

Since the retreat was in Michigan and in December there was plenty of snow. As the week progressed there were numerous snowball fights. Many snow angels received their wings.

Every year during the Winter Retreat the SCYL officers are elected and this year there are three new faces. Ben Currie is returning as the president of SCYL, Brendan Dzeba is the newly elected *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) editor, Miles Stroh is also returning as the east coast representative, Erika Penabaker is returning to represent the Midwest, Brittney Fleming is also returning as the Canadian officer, Ethan Turley, for the first time, was elected to be the West Coast representative, and the new youth chaplain is the Rev. Kevin Baxter (who is also the new director of Almont Summer Camp).

This retreat was an incredible experience, just as it always has been. Undoubtedly, next year will be just as good, if not better. I highly suggest that any teenager able to go to the retreat give it a try.

Brendan Dzeba, Your new CBS Editor



Youth Worker Conference

Kurt Fekete

Ten enthusiastic and energetic youth workers came to Temenos Retreat Center in the spring of 2004 to attend the Youth Worker Conference. The group, led by Swedenborgian Youth Director Kurt Fekete and United Church of Christ Massachusetts (MAUCC) Youth Associate Carl McDonald, consisted of three Swedenborgian ministers, one SHS student and six volunteer youth leaders. The sessions, which covered many different aspects of youth work from safety and liability to games and worship, were lively and full of interesting questions and discussion. In our three days together, the twelve of us attentively listened, youthfully played and trustingly engaged in experiential and inspirational learning.

After settling in at Temenos Thursday evening, the Conference sessions kicked off on Friday morning with a romping introduction into games, play theory and discussions on purposes and objectives to youth activities. The following session Carl and Kurt presented safe church policies reviewing the guidelines and low risk practices to work securely with youth in different situations and environments. A youth work liability and risk assessment checklist was included in the package of materials each participant received. In the third session we covered youth leadership models and then broke out into smaller groups to grapple with various youth group scenarios. The small groups did some insightful and intelligent brainstorming and then presented a summary of their thoughts

and conclusions to the rest of the Conference attendees.

In the fourth session on Saturday morning, we covered how to plan, organize and lead a successful outing, retreat and mission trip. Detailed information on promotion, cost, budgeting, staffing and logistics were provided. In the fifth session Carl and Kurt each led a youth worship activity. The participants contemplated youth centered activities of "coloring outside the lines" and "prayer juggling" while listening to music and scripture. The remainder of the afternoon was spent engaged in hands-on spiritual craftwork. Here, Conference members were able to visit different tables and actively create original crafts with relational spiritual and/or religious focus. This was something youth leaders and ministers could easily pull together and implement with their own youth groups. In the closing Saturday evening session we had an open Q&A and took a look at how we might respond to some "what if" situational examples. These examples provided the participants a chance to safely test out what they learned and see how they would handle different potential youth leadership challenges.

Sparked from the leaders' presentations the group shared a wealth of information. Each member of the Conference received a Youth Worker Conference binder and a MAUCC Resource booklet filled with useful information and important forms to take home with him or her. After a participatory worship service on creativity the participants left with new excitement for youth work along with the tools, contacts and materials to put their revitalized interest into action.

As Youth Director, I will continue to travel and present the different sessions as individual modules over the course of the year. If you would like me to travel to your group and present one or more of these sessions (or another youth related topic) please do not hesitate to contact me, Kurt Fekete, at kfekete@hotmail.com or toll free 866-333-7295. We plan to hold the Conference on a bi-annual basis or as soon as enough interested people request this event. Please contact me if you would be interested in attending the next comprehensive three-day Youth Worker Conference.



Editor's Note: We regret that the Youth Conference information and other retreat reports were overlooked when they were originally submitted via email during the summer. We apologize for the late reporting.



2005 SCYL Officers (top l-r) Kurt Fekete (Youth Director), Ethan Turley, Miles Stroh, Rev. Kevin Baxter (League Chaplain), Ben Currie (bottom l-r) Brendan Dzeba, Erika Penabaker, Brittney Fleming

Staff Changes at SHS



Francesca McCrossan

Welcome Francesca McCrossan!

We are delighted that Francesca McCrossan has joined the Swedenborgian House of Studies staff as part-time Administrative Assistant. Francesca comes to us with a varied and fascinating background. She is trained as a folklorist and holds a doctorate from the University of Pennsylvania. She has coordinated folklife festivals for the Smithsonian Institute for many years, and has also worked as

Community Relations Manager at a British rail company in Scotland. She lives in Oakland with her husband and 5-year-old daughter. She has hit the ground running at SHS and will be instrumental in helping to orchestrate this year's convention, in addition to handling many of the administrative tasks of the office. We are delighted to have her skills and expertise with us. She can be reached at 510-849-8228 or at fmccrossan@shs.psr.edu.

Developing Development:

Rev. Kim Hinrichs has transitioned into a new role as Assistant Dean and Director of Development. This move will allow her to focus her work in the area of development and fundraising that the SHS Board of Trustees has prioritized. Kim will coordinate the annual donor campaigns, seek grant funding for SHS programs and coordinate public relations, including a semi-annual newsletter and web site. In

particular, she will be working to expand communication between SHS and the denomination and deepen relationships with SHS friends and supporters. Under her Assistant Dean hat, she will continue to facilitate the weekly Swedenborgian Contexting Seminar, direct lay education programs and support Swedenborgian students in various ways. Kim has a part-time schedule and can be reached at 510-849-8214 or at khinrichs@shs.psr.edu.

—Kim Hinrichs

SHS Assistant Dean and Director of Development



Kim Hinrichs

Splat Splatters Viruses: (Continued from page 28)

saviors, guiding the group to a healthy existence. Or we can contribute to spreading a deadly virus!"

"It is a bit scary. I guess I've always thought of taking a leadership position in the parish as something to take on because so few are willing. And I figure my job is pretty specific and limited. I never thought of it as all of us working as a team, including the minister, to build a strong immune system. It makes parish leadership so important. I guess I thought we hired a minister to do all of that, and now I'm learning we have to do it together."

Mildred called the group back to the table for the afternoon session. "You are realizing now how important your role is, and I want to leave you with lots of tools for doing it better. Let's start with the Interim Ministry Network. We looked at the characteristics of an interim congregation. Let's now look at the steps to healing." She handed out another sheet of paper:

Developmental Tasks for a Congregation after Pastor Leaves

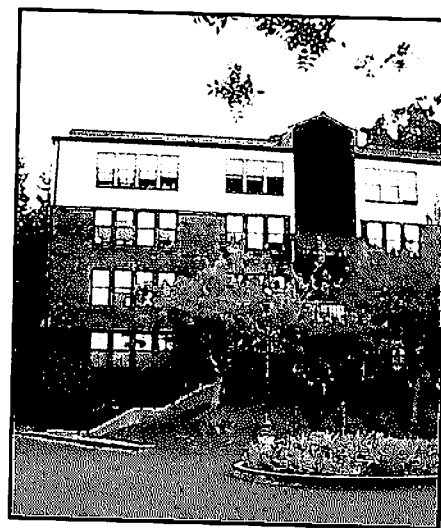
1. Coming to terms with history. completing closure with departed pastor:
 - Loss, separation, hurt, anger, disappointment, guilt.
 - If the leaving is complicated, it will be a long healing process.
 - If the grieving is not completed, the congregation is not likely to bond with the next pastor.
2. Discovering a new identity
3. Changes in leadership within the congregation.
4. Renewing denominational linkages.
5. Commitment to new directions in ministry.

(Continued on page 35)

Spirituality & the Arts (Continued from page 36)

Registration will be \$95 for adults, \$85 for teens and \$75 for children. All rates are 20% higher if paid in Canadian dollars. If you bring a car, parking is \$45 for the week.

The registration form will appear in the April and May *Messenger* as well as on the Swedenborg.org website and by mail from Central Office (617-969-4240).



Dorm

An Invitation to Display Your Artwork:

One highlight of convention will be an outdoor Arts Festival at 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 bring your work with you, or ship it ahead of time to SHS. Please contact Kim Hinrichs for more information: khinrichs@shs.psr.edu

BAPTISMS

Greene—Noe Swedenborg Perry-Greene, Duncan Christopher Greene, and Emily Nicolaus Greene, the grandchildren of San Francisco church members Frank Greene and Barbro Swedenborg Greene, were baptized into the Christian life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church January 16, 2005 at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, the Rev. Dr. James F. Lawrence officiating. Noe Swedenborg Perry Green is the daughter of Viveca Sweenborg Greene and Chris Perry. Duncan Christopher Greene and Emily Nicolaus Green are the son and daughter of Jennifer and Frank Greene.

CONFIRMATIONS

McCain—Sandi and Larry McCain were confirmed into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church and welcomed into membership in the Swedenborg Chapel in Cleveland on December 5, 2004, the Rev. Junchol Lee officiating. Sandi and Larry began attending the Swedenborg Chapel after their wedding at the chapel about three years ago.

DEATHS



In Memoriam – Louise Glover, 100

Glover—Louise M. Glover passed into the spiritual world January 21, 2005, after a brief illness. Louise

was a lifelong member of the Elmwood New Church, attending Sunday School and church there for 95 years. She was the oldest and longest-living member of the church. Up until last November, she was still active in going out to lunch with the church members on Mondays, playing cards and Yahtzee with folks who stopped by her daughter Nina's house, and always interested in the state of the church, the people and the programs. Louise leaves three daughters and a son, ten grandchildren, 23 great-grandchildren, six great-great-grandchildren and many nieces and nephews.

Louise was the memory of the church, and many times would be able to answer questions about ministers who had served the church and happenings along the way

in the last 100 years. Resurrection services were held January 25, 2005. Louise will be lovingly remembered and sorely missed by her family, friends, and the church community.

Copeland—Ruth M. (Crocker) Copeland, a longtime active member of the Bridgewater Swedenborgian Church in Bridgewater, Mass., entered the spiritual world January 30, 2005, at the age of 84. She died peacefully after having suffered a heart attack the night before. Her husband of nearly sixty years preceded her in death in 2000. She was a loving mother and wife, and was known for her fine needlework which was offered yearly at the church fair. She is survived by her four daughters, Marie Benoit, Diana Leach, Francine Verheyen, and Deborah Bryant; nine grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. Ruth's memorial service was held February 4, the Rev. Lee Woofenden officiating.



Splat Splatters Viruses:

(Continued from page 34)

people representing different ideas. It will make for fertile ground to plant new seeds. Make certain that you are using a good, open process of inviting people into leadership and having fair elections. Some churches offer training for people new to leadership in the parish."

Doug gave the final report. "New ministries are important. For years, we've supported our local soup kitchen and we want to keep doing that. But also, we want to look around our community. What other needs are out there? What special skills do our congregants have that could be offered outside our church? It will be a long process, but we think we should revisit our mission statement and either revitalize it or rewrite it."

"What great work you have all done. Clearly the Johnny Appleseed Church is in fine hands with the leadership of this SPLAT! You are all becoming strong and sturdy cells of the immune system in your church.

"This is the last in our series of SPAT seminars, and your church has worked hard and learned a lot! We'll be available if you need more material or consultations. Remember that although this sometimes seems hard and scary, it's also fun. Nothing is more enjoyable and energizing than a healthy system, connecting deeply within the oneness of creation. Enjoy the journey ahead!"

Suggested Parish Exercises:

Nicolson's book [see below] had excellent material on the interim healing journey. Appoint your own SPLAT group of leaders to meet regularly for at least five times. Have them read through chapters 6-10, doing only one chapter per meeting. This gives details for the five developmental tasks that the Johnny Appleseed SPLAT worked on during their seminary. The appendix also contains more tools to address the tasks. At each discussion, consider where your congregation is in this healing stage, and what things leaders could do to model and encourage changes in this area.

Sources Utilized:

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

Roger S. Nicholson, *Temporary Shepherds: A Congregational Handbook for Interim Ministry*. Available from The Alban Institute: www.Alban.org/

Next Month: The final article in this series will offer some guided exercises for your own congregation to explore some of the same concepts the Johnny Appleseed Church has been discussing in this series.

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is half-time pastor of the Swedenborgian church in Portland, Maine, author of several books, and adjunct Professor of Spirituality with the Swedenborgian House of Studies.



Spirituality & the Arts: Inspiring the Divine Creator Within

*The Foothill
Campus
of the
University
of California,
Berkeley
July 9th - 13th*



Get ready to be inspired.... The setting, the theme, the people, the theology, the work at hand, the art and the food will lift your hearts and enliven your bodies. Convention will be held in a beautiful setting perched in the Berkeley hills.

The Foothill campus is a recently-constructed and charming living environment. Its shingled exteriors and redwood architectural details complement the wooded hills of Berkeley's popular northside. **Berkeley is cool in the summer.** Expect pleasant weather, and *bring sweatshirts!* We will be just a few blocks from the Swedenborgian House of Studies campus at Pacific School of Religion.

Lodging will be two- to eleven-bedroom suites featuring comfortable living rooms and partial views. Spacious single- or double-occupancy bedrooms, including solid oak furnishings and wall-to-wall carpeting, have large windows overlooking courtyards and patios. Restrooms are shared with

private facilities, and laundry rooms and vending machines are available. Each room has its own telephone and Ethernet connection. For more information, see <http://www.housing.berkeley.edu/livingatcal/foothill.html>

Exciting Pre-Convention Workshop: Interplay

You are invited to come to convention early to attend a special two-day workshop led by Cynthia Winton-Henry, co-founder of Interplay (www.interplay.com) and the recipient of the 2005 Pacific School of Religion Distinguished Alumni award. InterPlay is easy, fun, and life changing. It is based in a series of incremental "forms" that lead participants to movement and stories, silence and song, ease and amusement.

In the process, we unlock the wisdom of our bodies and the wisdom in our communities. Interplay brings body, mind, heart and spirit together again at last. It is an invitation to see that life can be easier, less stressful, fuller, more satisfying and more fun. InterPlay is devoted to fun. It teaches the language and ethic of play in a deep and powerful way. Come and see how these practices can transform your life and your community!



Cynthia Winton-Henry

You may choose between two room and board packages:

- | | | |
|----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. July 5 - 13 | Single \$600 | (eight nights) |
| | Double \$440 | |
| 2. July 9 - 13 | Single \$300 | (four nights) |
| | Double \$220 | |

(Continued on page 34)

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Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London 15 years after his death. This 1787 organization eventually spawned the present General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches. As a result of Swedenborg's own spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church today exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions. Swedenborg shared in his theological writings a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of Scripture as a story of inner-life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg would conclude, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.