

THE MESSENGER

Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

October 2005

A Feminizing Church

Editor's Note: The following talk was, unfortunately, shortened at Convention's July 12 Women's Alliance luncheon due to time constraints. It is printed here in its entirety.

Jim Lawrence

In America, women attend church in significantly higher numbers than men in almost all denominations, including evangelical denominations. Thousands of mainline Christian churches, Catholic parishes and Jewish synagogues have found men dwindling in numbers in recent decades. This is true in movements in which the clergy is open to women, and it is true in movements which still preclude women from the ministry or priesthood, such as the Catholic church and numerous evangelical churches.

George Barna, a leading scholar on American church sociology, writes that in 1992 43 percent of men attended church at least occasionally; in 1996, only 28 percent would attend a church even occasionally, and that figure is down to about 20% today. Patrick Arnold, a Jesuit scholar, claims that at many Catholic parishes around the country it is not unusual to find a female-to-male ratio of 5:1.

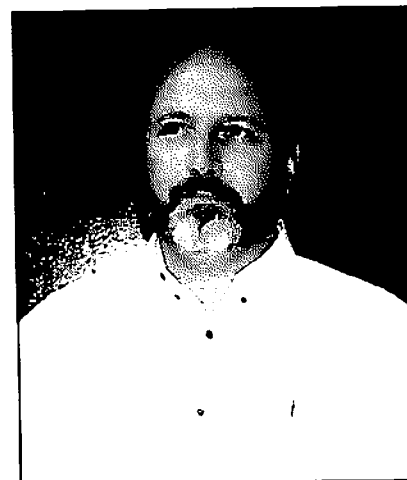
People are now wondering if the trend will simply continue or whether there is a way to stem the flow of men out of the church. The "feminization of the American church" has drawn a great deal of scholarly interest among church sociologists. Leon Podles, for example, generated much conversation with his book a few years ago entitled *The Church Impotent: The Feminization of Christianity*. He attributes the phenomenon to a feminizing influence within the spiritual-

ity styles of the faith, which he tracks all the way back to the twelfth century and the advent of "bridal mystery" theology and imagery. These characterize the church as a receptive bride for the inflowing ministry of Christ. The visceral mode of this imagery, according to Podles, led naturally to a feminine attitude toward church participation. Podles also holds that Christ at this time was also feminized by bridal mystery theology in striking contrast to the warrior Christ of righteousness motif in the Middle Ages and antiquity.

Many besides Podles say that the feminizing ethos is turning men away: a sort of chicken and egg argument—unless the church finds ways to reach out to a broader segment of the male character, the problem will grow like a snowball rolling downhill.

The overall decline of the church is also often cited. Some say men are less interested because ministry itself is losing social prestige and social power. In a very small denomination like ours, ministry is a very risky career move, and men are less apt to take that financial risk.

Whatever the causes, the most pronounced shifts of American Christianity toward a feminist ethos is occurring in the liberal Protestant churches. Since 1990 the number of women has consistently exceeded men in liberal mainline seminaries. The number and percentage of women clergy has been on the rise for a long time now, and concurrently the rise of laywomen holding institutional positions of power



has also been increasing. Add to this a broadly spread shift in the style of worship in liberal churches from formality to informality, from a dogmatic focus to a nurturing, community-building focus, and what you get is an ethos in organized religion, according to Podles and others, that is a place for women to gather, network, support one another and socialize in ways that are much more common in women's groups than in men's groups. Church sociologists also note that the male who enjoys today's feminizing Christianity is an identifiable sub-strata of the male population—the "soft male"—who values the nurturing community motif and a great deal of talk about community and personal spiritual life.

This might be a good place to mention our denomination. In the new millennium at SHS, we have seen a striking consolidation of the gender shift in those training for ministry. Of sixteen students

(Continued on page 112)

IN THIS ISSUE:

Katrina • Urbana University Update • Fryeburg Viewed by a Newcomer
Ministry as Vocation • Invitation • Film Review • Poetry • New Book Room Coming

Katrina

Editor's Comments: The following notice went out to all our churches and centers from President Chris Laitner through Central Office on September 1, 2005. Although most of you won't be reading this in *The Messenger* until sometime in October, we are by this time aware that the devastating effects of this disaster will continue for months, even years.

Help for Katrina's Victims

One emergency worker has described the devastation caused by hurricane Katrina as "massive and unprecedented." The relief operation is expected to be the largest in U.S. history. Affected areas are: Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama where the hurricane winds and flooding have damaged or destroyed tens of thousands of homes and businesses, and also in Georgia, Kentucky, and Tennessee where tropical storm-based heavy rain and wind have damaged huge areas.

As a member denomination of the National Council of Churches and its relief agency, Church World Service, and as a signed-on denomination to the work of Faithful America, we have several opportunities to offer financial support to rush aid to the devastated areas. Church World Service works in liaison relationship with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters, and with a multitude of faith partners.

There are several ways that we might give assistance. We can, as we did for tsunami relief, take special collections in our churches at some time over the next two Sundays and send our donations to Central Office by Thursday, September 8. The Central Office will make one denominational donation from our special collections.

There are also several places where donations can be made online. The CWS site is: www.churchworldservice.org

Another site recommended through Faithful America is:
<http://secure.ga3.org/03/katrinarelieff>

Direct mail contributions can be made to

Many of the organizations that mobilize to alleviate the immediate misery also continue to help people put their lives back together long after the media have moved on, and it is important to lend as much support to their ongoing work as possible. At this writing, it's predicted that it will take close to three months just to pump the water out of New

Church World Service, P.O. Box 968, Elkhart, IN 46515, or by calling 1-800-297-1516.

We are people who know that serving, helping, and supporting the neighbor is a basic rule of life. While we are deeply saddened by the huge disaster that now lies in Katrina's wake, we need to offer what we can to help. Prayer is one of the most important offerings we can make. Let us hold all those who have been affected by this horrible disaster in our hearts and lift our prayer for their health, safety, and recovery.

—Chris

Giving money and praying for those people is important. Remember that the crime rate in Washington D.C. went down 50% when 5,000 meditators came there for a summer to meditate on peace and non-violence.

From Rev. Eric Allison, Council of Ministers Chair:

There are two issues here.

First of all, just like the tsunami, this is not the punishment nor the will of God. The physical world is a but a dim representation of the spiritual world, and comes with imperfections. "God never hurts or punishes for this is as far away from the nature of God as Heaven is from Hell." Swedenborg. God puts up with these things, but does not will them.

Second, we see the worst of humanity in the shooting, the looting and the violence. While this is not acceptable, it is understandable and expected. People do

Orleans, and evacuees, many of whom will not ever be able to return to their homes and communities, are being transported to shelters and relocated all across the nation. There will be updates here in the months to come on our creative outreach efforts, large and small. —PWL

desperate things in desperate circumstances. Put yourself in their situation. What would you do? We have many metaphors which refer to being overwhelmed when the dam breaks. Even the story of Noah is about a flood of falsity that overcame the right thinking of the people during that age. Today we are seeing lots of people who were living without health insurance, home insurance, and just scraping by. Then, the dam literally broke.

Getting through a hurricane was tough enough and then losing everything and being flooded out with no place to go and no help when you are still reeling from the storm brings a level of fear, frustration and hopelessness beyond what most people have experienced. Add to all this that you are stuck without food or water for days with no official

(Continued on page 113)

THE MESSENGER

Publisher: The Communications Support Unit
Published monthly, except July and August, by the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America).

October 2005
Volume 226 No. 8
Whole Number 5303

Typesetting & Layout
Town and Country Press
Plymouth, IN

Patte LeVan, Editor
Editorial Address:
The Messenger
P.O. Box 985
Julian, CA 92036

TEL: (760) 765-2915

E-MAIL: messenger@julianweb.com

Business & Subscription Address:
Central Office
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460
E-Mail: manager@swedenborg.org

The opinions of the contributors do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor or the Communications Support Unit, or represent the position of the church. Subscription free to members of the Swedenborgian Church; non-members, \$12.00 a year; foreign \$15.00 a year; gift subscription from a member, \$5.00 a year; single copies \$1.00.

Deadline for material: Six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

Lament

*When last I saw her,
she was sitting on the banks of the river,
gently rocking with the waves of time,
gazing upon her reflection
in the muddy waters of life.*

*Her memory -
long, strong
and certainly never wrong
withstood tides of change.*

*She hummed a melody
flavored by the cultural gumbo
of her blood.
Her heart beat rhythms
reminiscent of party,
parade and pageantry.*

*Her flamboyant dress revealed
a red-light reputation
that has served to soothe
the purity of patrons
just passing through.*

*Her complexion, a swirl of
yellow, black, white, brown, red.
Her accent, a peculiar mix of
many faraway ports.*

*Weathered brick,
Spanish tile,
Iron wrought of history
are all mere adornments, for
New Orleans is flesh—
flesh and spirit dancing together.*

But now she is torn apart.

*She is a body divided:
part in the shock of exile,
part suffering in the waters of hell.*

*part connected to suffering through proximity
part connected to suffering by distance.*

*Those caught in her umbilical cord
gasp for air,
yet inhale only searing heat.
They thirst for water
finding only toxic muck.*

*Hands reach out for rescue
for compassion, for life.
Hands discharge violence,
anger, fear.*

*Screaming to the sky,
they hear no answer
they turn in judgment.*

*black blaming white blaming black
rich blaming poor blaming rich
looter blaming proprietor blaming looter
self blaming self*

*Her wounds,
her nakedness
served before a country
hungering for news
for a sign of compassion,
for any way to heal
a body dispersed.*

*A silent jazz funeral
echoes through the veins
of a people
dying for resurrection.*

—Mark Unbehagen

Mark Unbehagen was born in New Orleans in 1960, and raised just outside of the city in Jefferson Parish. He now lives near Berkeley, California, where he recently completed an MA at the Graduate Theological Union. He and his partner Aood just visited the New Orleans area in July—it was Aood's first visit to the city. Mark is now serving in a Lutheran Church in Danville, California, as its music minister. He is a friend of the Rev. Carla Friedrich, new minister of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church. She read the poem as part of her sermon on September 4, 2005.

Urbana University Update



Robert Head

I bring you greetings from the students, Board of Trustees, faculty and staff of Urbana University.

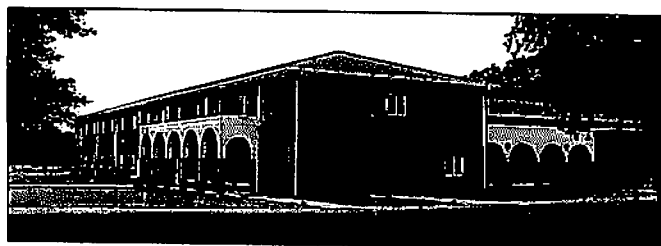
Each year I have the privilege of sharing the Urbana University story with you. This year, I want to do something a little different. I want our students to tell you, at least a portion of the story.*

...On May 14th we held our 105th Commencement ceremony where we conferred degrees upon a record 326 graduates. The class included the first graduates of our Bachelor of Science in Nursing and Master of Business Administration programs.

There were several moments of joy during the past year, and I want to share a few of those with you.

In the audience today is the Rev. Kevin Baxter, an Urbana grad and a 2004 grad of the Swedenborgian House of Studies. Kevin has completed his first year as the Director of our new Center for Applied Ethics and I want you to know that the possibilities for this venture are significant.

The work completed by Kevin this past year has laid the foundation for meaningful interaction that will enrich the lives of our students.



Sycamore Hall, Urbana's newest residence hall which opened in 2004.

One of our ongoing challenges is to continue the expansion of our academic programs and outreach.

To this end we recently announced that our new Honors College would begin in the fall of 2005. The Honors College is a program for talented and gifted students.

The program will provide a challenging curriculum, include an international component complete with a study abroad experience, and serve to further enhance the academic reputation of our institution.

In 2002, we completed the connection of our buildings and to the outside world through fiber optics. This past year we added a classroom management software package to enhance teaching and learning through technology and installed a new state-of-the-art telephone system.

During last year's Convention I mentioned a major grant that we were pursuing to add to our technological capability. I indicated that we would receive the grant decision in one month.

The bad news is that we didn't get the grant in 2004. The good news is that we were awarded the grant in April of 2005. This federal grant for \$1.8 million will lead to the purchase and installation of a new administrative software system. The new software system is designed to facilitate systems of support for students that will enhance their opportunity for success.

Growth continues at your University. Last fall, we opened our newest building, Sycamore Hall, which now houses 116 students.

Our Board of Trustees Building and Grounds Committee is already working on plans for the next residence hall, expected to be needed in the fall of 2007.

I recently read an article written by a university president wherein he stated, "The topics we address in the academy today are circumscribed by what I suspect are shrinking spheres of influence."

In a post September 11th environment, higher education cannot ignore its obligation to prepare students to participate in a world complicated by tough issues.

Urbana University, too, must continue to advance its vision of a global



Historic Barclay and Bailey Halls, renovated in 2003, used primarily for classrooms. Bailey Hall also houses the Johnny Appleseed Education Center and Museum.

education.

The picture before you is of a group of Taiwanese students who shared a summer experience, a couple of years ago, at Urbana University.

Last December, I traveled to Malaysia and met with several alumni. They relayed their experiences as students at Urbana in the 1980s.

Collectively they credit Urbana University and their experiences in the United States with providing the foundation for their success.

This past academic year, in an effort to expand Urbana's sphere of influence, we became the home of four students from China, who are enrolled and studying in our new MBA Program. This arrangement came about because of a new partnership between Urbana University and the World Trade Organization in northern China.

In addition, we now have five students from Poland and several others from Canada, Ireland, England and Nigeria.

(Continued on page 113)

The Messenger

A Newbie's View of Fryeburg New Church Assembly

Hunter Roberts: Profile

It's been a long and winding road that leads to your door, as the Paul McCartney song says. The road began in 1986, when I entered Starr King School for the Ministry, in Berkeley, California. When I graduated in 1990, I was sure that parish ministry wasn't for me. What I realize now is that UU parish ministry wasn't for me. Moreover, I wasn't ready. God had other plans, had lots more to teach me, and had to bow me low, in order to regenerate me. I now believe I also had to encounter the spiritual teachings of Swedenborg and the New Church, before I would come to the ministry God intended for me.



In the meantime, I've done many things. I've taught in history, theology, ritual and liturgy. I've worked on some large projects and campaigns, some successful and some not. I raised money for churches and social action groups. I wrote two books, one published and one not, and a novel. Most of all, I worked with people in a counseling ministry. You might say I've been in the practice of facilitating regeneration. I became an expert in transformation, and worked with a variety of people in both a private and a group holistic health practice, using a hybrid of many different therapeutic modalities, coaching, and spiritual direction. I studied and learned new and ancient tools for accessing inner life, and for re-wiring responses, so that people might learn from their past without being controlled by it. I was reasonably successful. I have happy, healthy clients living all over the Bay Area, who would tell you they are enjoying their lives, having healthy relationships and doing all sorts of wonderful things in the world, which they might not be doing if we hadn't met.

In the past couple of years, I realized that I wasn't living my own dream, or fulfilling on what I'm here for. While I love my clients and my work, and am grateful for right livelihood and the privilege of participating in such a sacred vocation as soul transformation, I was called to something beyond working with individuals. I felt like I was living in exile. Outwardly my life was fine. Inwardly I felt despair, as if I had fallen away from God's grace never to return. I participated in meditation retreats, attended seminars and workshops, and prayed for something to help me find my way.

Last summer I was led through an odd series of "coincidences" to make the acquaintance of a woman who helps people make life plans. After several weeks of meeting, doing various processes assessing dreams, loves, and skills, she made some preliminary suggestions. Her advice: to return to the church and parish ministry. I wanted a community with a spiritual base, as ground for speaking and writing moral theology. I wanted to continue to provide pastoral care. I wanted to share what I had learned, and to use my ritual and liturgical skills, providing people with meaningful rites of passage, and worship. It had been there all along, and I hadn't seen it.

I returned to the GTU campus to take up where I had left off. Shortly after that I began conversations after class with Carla Friedrich, a seminary student who was ordained this past July and is now Rev. Carla Friedrich. She introduced me to Swedenborg and the New Church. The more I learned, the more I felt Divine Providence at work. Now I am pursuing ordination in the summer of '06, with hopes to be in a church by this time next year. I come with an open heart, energy, tools, listening skills, and vision for building a shared dream of church community with moral purpose and liturgical power, a community able to enfold many different kinds of people. ☪

Hunter Roberts

E dna St. Vincent Millay's first published poem, "Renascence," begins, "All I could see from where I stood/ Was three long mountains and a wood/ I turned and looked the other way/ And saw three islands in a bay." It earned her a scholarship to Vassar nearly a hundred years ago, when she was sixteen. As a sixteen-year old living in Florida, sixty some years later, I was entranced by her poem about finding God in the rocky shoals of Maine. That was more than thirty years ago. Ever since then I've wanted to visit Maine.

I've traveled through vineyards in France and sailed a felucca down the Nile. I've seen rain forests in Costa Rica, and visited nearly every state in the Union, but I didn't get to Maine. I live in



Dan and Lee Dwyer at
August Camp Session

California now, so it seemed unlikely. Then Dean Jim Lawrence at Swedenborgian House of Studies in Berkeley, informed me I could go to Swedenborgian summer camp in Maine or Ohio, as part of my requirements for ordination. There was no contest. I was finally going to Maine.

I took it as a sign that at last I was on the path I'd been destined for. I prepared my lectures and packed my bag. On August 13th I landed in Portland, Maine. It didn't take long to realize I was a stranger in a strange land. As I peered clearly out the airplane window at the end of a redeye flight, I could see large wooden structures on little islands

(Continued on page 106)

A Newbie's View of Fryeburg New Church Assembly

(Continued from page 105)

dotted around Portland—large, rambling, old wooden houses, brown clapboard or painted in white and dark colonial colors. I guessed they were resorts, but they didn't look like any resorts I'd seen before...except perhaps in misty dreams of childhood's idealized summer—a world where children capered across large lawns and happily married parents and friends of all ages sat on long porches

watching them, a world of fresh boiled corn and lawn games, roasting marshmallows, and singing. I thought that world was long gone until I arrived at Fryeburg New Church Assembly camp.

The drive from the airport evoked little squeals of delight from me, as the Rev. Ken Turley drove us through little towns with old colonial houses attached to barns, and family summer homes where children dove off docks into the river. While we did pass the occasional Internet café or Latte bar, I don't believe we passed a single strip-mall or McDonald's. My eyes drank in the lush green. I inhaled the summer smell of Northeastern pine forests. We were driving through a time machine far better than Disney's Main Street. After about an hour's drive, interrupted by a



Tina Wood, Debbie Cook, Susan Curry (looking out the window), Hunter (in front), and Bob Perry (nursing his drink)

stop at Marilyn Turley's house for a hospitable glass of iced tea, we arrived at camp. Dotted through about 20 wooded acres were a dozen or so cabins, each built by an earlier resident, now bequeathed to the current campers. In the center was a large, simple wooden building. I walked up the worn porch steps, past the old web and aluminum chairs, to enter a large dining hall, and found the camp director. It was a hot afternoon, and few people were in evidence. Most were down at the Saco River.

I walked through a room with sofa, old easy chairs, a stone fireplace, and the one Internet computer on site, up the wooden steps to my room. It was simple and rustic, furnished with a single bed, a desk, and a bureau. I unpacked and made up my bed. Then I put on my bathing suit and walked a few hundred

feet across the grass to a dirt path leading to a floating dock, where teens were swaying and pushing each other, boys posturing and girls giggling and screaming. It seemed so innocent, so not Britney Spears or American Idol! I dipped into the cool water and went back to my room to nap.

At six o'clock, the dinner bell rang outside my window. Downstairs a group of about sixty people stood around wooden tables. To my amazement the teens were serving. The Rev. F. Bob Tafel led us in a cheery sung blessing, and we sat down to eat. Debbie Cook, the camp director, made a few announcements. Everyone sang a song, saying goodbye to those who were leaving, and another, welcoming the newcomers, who were asked to stand. The song asked, "Is there anything that we can do for you?" I believed they meant it. I was right. There was indeed something they could do for me. I

had arrived to find I was scheduled to preach at church the following morning, and I had packed no preaching clothes. I explained my predicament, and everyone at my table rallied to help. Within minutes I was in a car with David Keating, who generously escorted me on my power-shopping trip.

Other than my one mad dash through the discount mall, the week was reminiscent of a nineteenth century Chautauqua. Every morning at 7 a.m. a large bell rang outside my window, calling people to be polar bears and jump in the cold river. Usually there were ten to fifteen brave souls, and the polar bear quotient was reported every morning at breakfast, to cheers or sighs of mock dismay. There were lectures and a brief chapel after breakfast, swimming in the river every afternoon, dinner and games or other homemade entertainment in the evenings, and sometimes a party. Sometimes there was choir practice. In the evening games were played on the lawn in the fading sun.

Until almost dark, Trevor Woofenden ran with the children and make them laugh hard, until they were tired enough for sleep, while the adults watched and



Celia Searle, Colegate Searl, David Keating, and Betty Guin (partially seen).

chatted.. It was life as it must have been a hundred years ago, when many of the attendees' grandparents had been children there. I unplugged. Who cared if I couldn't get my email, or if my cell phone had no reception? The world would manage. I relaxed into the rhythm of Fryeburg's wholesome fun and reflection. I found I was at home.

I am a new Swedenborgian and a foreigner to the understated customs of New England. I was afraid I might be treated as an outsider. After all, many of the guests have been coming to camp since they were children. People in their seventies, who were raised together, enjoyed their children and grandchildren, and shared stories of their own grandparents. These families knew each other,

(Continued on page 107)



Jim Webb, Nancy Little, Trevor Woof, Celia Searle, and Phyllis Webb (in front).

A Newbie's View of Fryeburg New Church Assembly

(Continued from page 106)

cared for each other, helped each other, and watched out for all the children, as they had done for generations. They also cared for me as lovingly as if I, too, had been part of their families for years. They seemed genuinely glad to have me there. They welcomed me, included me, told me stories, and helped me to understand the intricate web of relationship. They asked me about myself. These gracious New Englanders even seemed to accept, with a little teasing, my odd California ways.

What was it that made this place so special, I asked myself. Was it the doctrine of uses that made people treasure each other's gifts and differences? Was it the teachings of charity that had people treat one another so generously? Was it the years of tradition, of knowing one another, that allowed for a depth of relatedness that is missing in a world where a relationship of two years is considered long-term? Was it the absence of television that made room for people to set their own standards and make their own fun? Here men whittled. Women did needlepoint and re-caned chairs. Even the teenage girls knitted in their discussion groups. Young people got together to sing rounds just for the fun of it. People went canoeing, read, pondered, and played: scrabble, puzzles, trivial pursuit, or water games. Was this a time warp? Or was it a little bit of heaven?

I suspect it was and is all of the above. Whatever it is, I feel blessed to have been a part of it. It made me realize what I'd nearly forgotten: that the simple pleasures are often the best, that love is best when it's given freely, and that children and other living things grow best in a multi-generation environment, where all are valued, and where all contribute their gifts. I hope to return to Fryeburg many times during my coming years of service. It's a valuable practice to take time out regularly with others of like mind, to relax and reflect on doctrine, on God, and on what's really important, as we strive to be of use in this usually hurried world.

Hunter Roberts is currently enrolled as an ordination-track student at the Swedenborgian House of Studies. ☩

Fryeburg New Church Assembly Lecture Schedule 2005

The Bible story is rich with families who live in relationship with the Lord. We are familiar with the idea that different individuals represent specific aspects of our inner lives and we even know something of how the relationship between men and women influence their respective correspondential meaning. This week we will be looking at families in the Bible, their make-up and their family dynamics and the correspondence of what we read about those families with the spiritual dynamics of our inner lives.

Monday

Rev. Dr. George Dole
"The Patriarchal Family: Text and Subtext"
Rev. Ken Turley
"Adam and Eve"

Tuesday

Rev. Lee Woofenden
"Cain and Abel"
Rev. George McCurdy
"Noah and His Family"

Thursday

Rev. F. Bob Tafel
"The Family of Moses"
Ms. Lana Sandhal
"Herodias and Her Family"

Friday

Ms. Annie Relat
"Lot's Daughters: Tricksters or Survivors?"
Ms. Lana Sandhal
"Rebekah and Her Sons"

Saturday

Rev. Dr. George Dole
"Family Devalues in the Gospels."
Rev. Lee Woofenden
"The Human Family"

Perhaps nothing is more fundamental to the New Church approach to life here on earth, as well as in heaven, and our process of spiritual regeneration (i.e. salvation) than the doctrine of Charity. Charity is more than giving money to the needy person on the corner or even to great and worthy causes, it is about who, what and why we love and, just as

importantly, how we love. Doctrines, by definition, are about ideas, so in this week we will examine the ways of the heart with the workings of the mind.

Monday

Rev. Ken Turley
"What is Charity?"
Rev. Dr. George Dole
"The Good of Love and the Truth of Faith"

Tuesday

Ms. Hunter Roberts
"Who is My Neighbor"
Rev. Reuben Bell
"You Don't Always Get What You Want"

Thursday

Rev. F. Bob Tafel
"Charity as Daily Living"
Rev. Dr. George Dole
"Be Careful."

Friday

Rev. Lee Woofenden
"How To Get Saved"
2. Ms. Hunter Roberts
"Living from the Heart: Charity and the Chakras"

Saturday

Rev. Lee Woofenden
"Charity as a Church"
Rev. Susannah Currie
"Charity: The Gift that Keeps on Giving"

Ordering information: To order tapes and/or CDs of the lectures, write to:

Robert Perry
61 Clark Lane,
Waltham, MA 02451

The cost is \$4.00 per day, (two lectures); \$20.00 for one week; or \$40.00 for the entire series. Please include \$5.00 S&H for each order. Checks should be made out to Fryeburg New Church Assembly. (Extra donations are always welcome!) Please specify which lectures or week, whether you want tapes or CDs, and please include address lectures are to be sent to. ☩

Bruce Almighty

Universal Pictures 2003, starring Jim Carrey, Morgan Freeman, and Jennifer Aniston.

Note: Reviews in *The Messenger* are not necessarily of new films but of films still widely available on DVD or other media that are particularly relevant to *Messenger* readers.

Reviewed by Stephen Koke

Bruce Almighty is one of the best treatments of theology in popular films. The much admired black actor Morgan Freeman has starred in over 69 films, playing nearly everything from a chauffeur in *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989) to the President of the United States in *Deep Impact* (1998), and now...God.

Jim Carrey produces one of his best performances, zaniness toned down somewhat in order to fit into his role as frustrated human being who feels that God isn't much of a help. Jennifer Aniston is his long-suffering girlfriend, Grace Connelly.

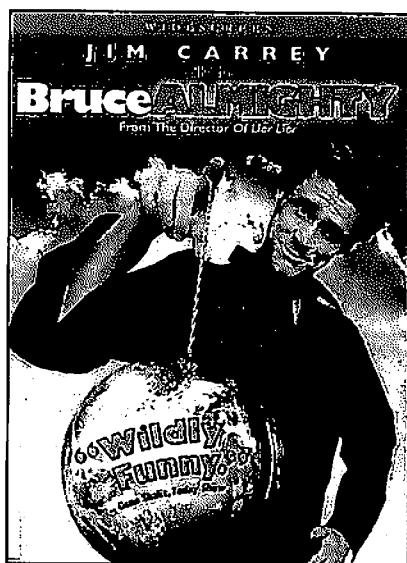
Ordinarily, one might think that another Jim Carrey film will be a reckless trip into slapstick, uproarious, over-the-top comedy, but since his moving performance in *The Majestic*, he seems to be getting into more serious, thoughtful roles. What stands out in *Bruce Almighty* is that its spirituality, its concept of God and how he guides us, is delightfully Swedenborgian.

Carrey is Bruce Nolan, a news reporter for a local television station in Buffalo, New York. He wants to be an anchor on the evening news, but all efforts to impress his superiors have gone unnoticed. His first line in the film: "God, why do you hate me?" When the local ice hockey team, the Sabres, loses an important game, he takes it as a divine slap in the face: "Of course they did. That's my team." On his way to work, he is delayed by a traffic jam: "This is my luck!" At work he says to himself, "There's an anti-Bruce barrier I can't get past." Finally he gets to do a live interview at Niagara Falls; he anticipates moving up and becoming a news anchor, but at the last minute the interview is bumped by a retirement announcement. He goes into a rage, gets fired, vents his anger at a street gang and gets beaten up.

"Thank God you're alright," Grace tells him.

"Yeah, let's thank God, shall we, for His blessings rain down upon me."

"Everything happens for a reason," she says. It may dawn on the audience at this point that she isn't named Grace for nothing.



"God," Bruce replies, "is a mean kid sitting on an anthill with a magnifying glass, and I'm it. He can end my life in five minutes if he wanted to, but he'd rather burn off my feelers with the magnifying glass."

Still, he calls upon God desperately. His car runs into a pole, he gets out, curses God some more. A message arrives on his cell phone with a number to call: 555-0123. He ignores it, but the call is repeated persistently. He finally calls back, is invited to come to an address in an obscure part of town.

He goes there, finds a tall unkempt building that looks like a good candidate for the wrecker's ball. He goes in, finds a black janitor mopping the floor. The janitor directs him to the 7th floor, room 7. Bruce takes the stairs up, for the elevator isn't working. This floor is painted in gleaming white, is open, spacious and spotless, has nothing in it except a file cabinet. There is a ladder to a still higher floor from which a bright light glows, but we cannot see into it.

The janitor must have reached it pretty fast somehow, for he descends the ladder. He says, "You must be Bruce. I've been expecting you." He sheds his coveralls and stands before Bruce in a white two-piece suit, white shirt and white tie.

"Who are you?" Bruce asks.

The now dapper janitor waves his hand as if a bit tired of explaining. "I am the One, Creator of heaven and earth, the Alpha and Omega. I am God."

Bruce laughs at the joke. This requires some proof! Bruce puts his hands behind his back and extends a few fingers. "How many fingers am I holding up?" The man gives the right answer each time he is asked, then Bruce extends five from one hand only. "Seven." Obviously wrong! Bruce whips out his hand triumphantly, but it has suddenly developed two more fingers! Of course they quickly disappear.

There are more demonstrations, including a very long file drawer filled with information about Bruce, but God notes Bruce's many complaints about God and challenges him. "You think you can do this better? So here's your chance. When you leave this building you will be endowed with all my powers."

There are only two rules: First, Bruce must not tell anyone that he is God. ("Believe me, you *don't want* that kind of publicity.") Secondly, he cannot mess with free will.

"Can I ask why?"

"Yes, you can! That's the beauty of it!" He says no more.

Of course Bruce at first leans toward self-indulgence; entering a diner, he tests his new powers by parting the tomato soup in his bowl as if it were the Red Sea. What a rush! He gets even with the thugs who beat him up. He parks cars in a second when delayed by a traffic jam. To impress Grace, he pulls the moon into a new position closer to earth. But

(Continued on page 114)

Dream Coming True - New Bookroom Born in Columbia, Missouri

Becky Maring

During my initial excitement about the New Church and Swedenborg's writings back in 1969, in St. Louis, the Rev. Dr. Bill Woofenden appointed my now ex-husband, Paul, and me to teach Sunday School to several of his eight children. This was very wise on his part because I was forced to learn "fast" to keep up with the kids. This learning formed the basis of my belief system, carrying me through many rocky times. I did investigate other beliefs: Course in Miracles, Buddhism, Jung, New Age literature such as the Celestine Prophecy, Jacqueline Small, Depak Chopra, etc. I even belonged to a group of (ahead of their time) Presbyterians who formed a house church. However, in each group during the past 35 years, I have bored others with my incessant referrals to Swedenborg. I finally have to admit that I am "in love" with Swedenborg's writings and what they have to offer others.

Back in the early seventies I dreamed of opening a coffee house with the writings to be sold or checked out. I had a transformation following a serious illness, so I decided in 2004 to follow that dream: Ray Guui's model in downtown Boston inspired me. He served free coffee in a setting with heavy "walk-in" traffic. Also I should mention that my brother walked into a reading room in Columbia, Missouri, in 1969, and quickly adopted Swedenborg's writings; so much so that he and his wife drove 150 miles one way each Sunday (in their psychedelic bus) to St. Louis where they were embraced with love. I saw the change in him and was curious. That's how it all began for me. Another close friend came into the church by that same reading room, headed by Nadine Coleman, a remarkable woman who was a well-known pianist and entertainer. I wish I could have met her, but she left a

legacy with other Swedenborgians still in the Columbia area, who meet occasionally through the enthusiasm of Sonja Johnson, a most angelic person.

I made contact with Sonja and we instantly became friends. She had placed an ad in the yellow pages under Churches—Swedenborg Readers, but rarely heard from anyone. I told her my dream and she became an enthusiastic supporter. I moved to Columbia, though it was heart-wrenching to leave my two daughters, two grandchildren, and mother behind. I do have my oldest daughter, Heather, who lives in Columbia.


In order to interest the Columbia community in Swedenborg and his writings, I have organized two outreaches: On Earth Day in April, I passed out tons of pamphlets, gave away books. Sonja and I also placed ads around town and on campus for a lecture and film at the library, last February 20. I was disappointed that no one arrived from the general public.

But I am determined to open this reading room. There are several possibilities for a location—one is a room in a wing of the Unity Center, which is on a well-traveled thoroughfare.

I am appealing to all who care about spreading the writings and getting them off the shelf, to lend your support. Prayer, donations of books, and gifts for expenses would be appreciated. I'm calling the fund:

Off The Shelf Reading Room.
Becky Maring
1523 Hickam Drive
Columbia, MO 65202

Phone: 573-474-7627
Email: beckymaring@yahoo.com

Lord Willing,
Becky Maring 

My Morning Glory Friend

Only for a brief time
You open your petals
To the sun


Radiant colors
Welcome the morning
Delicate frame yearns to unfold

You welcome morning's light
Tremble and close as heat presses on
Fine-tuned is your rhythm, your sense


Only for a brief time
You open your petals to the sun
To catch your beauty is to glimpse
your strength

Behold the flower

—Renee Machiniak
dedicated to Kitty Green, 2005

"My Morning Glory Friend" was first published in *Giving Voice, A Collection of Poetry & Prose*, the chapbook published by the Swedenborgian House of Studies for the 181st Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church held in Berkeley, California, July 9-13, 2005. It is reprinted here by permission of the author. 

SORRY, WE GOOFED!

In both the Nominee Slate in the April *Messenger* and the Election Results in the September *Messenger*, the title of Rev. was omitted from the Rev. Kevin Baxter's name. We apologize for the error, twice! Our apologies also to the Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell; the title of Dr. was omitted from his name in a photo caption in the September issue. 

My Thoughts on The New Church

Editor's Note: Gabrielle Lawson is the 14-year-old daughter of Susannah Lawson, daughter of Carol Lawson. They live in Dillwyn, Virginia. She is a third-generation Swedenborgian and isolated teen whose grandmother Carol is a member of the Swedenborgian Church in Washington, D.C., originally a member of the Cincinnati Swedenborgian Church. In 2004 and 2005, Gabrielle attended our annual conventions in Kitchener, Ontario, and Berkeley, California, with her grandmother. During a casual conversation with the Rev. Carla Friedrich, Gabrielle was asked to write about her impressions.

Gabrielle Lawson

Hello. Well, I want to share here some of my thoughts on different things about the Swedenborgian Church. I

think our religion should try to get more publicity. It's a wonderful church and I think if a lot of people experienced it they would like it also.

I was asked to say something about my faith tradition. I don't really know what to say. "Lots of laughs," I suppose my family and I just do the basics: prayers at supper and before we go to bed, and attend church as often as we can.

What do I think of the Swedenborgian Church? All around, it's a great thing. To study Emanuel's writings is just so interesting. And also I think it's great that we have a Convention every year because it's very nice to know that our group is growing, and to just see everyone. Our church does a wonderful job of balancing all of the age groups. ☩

The Golden Rule

Christianity

Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them; for this is the law and the prophets. *Matthew 7-12*

Confucianism

What I do not wish men to do to me; I also wish not to do to men.

Buddhism

In five ways should a clansman minister to his friends and familiars—by generosity, courtesy and benevolence, by treating them as he treats himself, and by being as good as his word.

Hinduism

Do not to others, which if done to thee, would cause thee pain.

Islam

No one of you is a believer until he loves for his brother what he loves for himself.

Sikism

As thou deemest thyself so deem others. Then shalt thou become a partner in heaven.

Judaism

What is hurtful to yourself, do not to your fellowman.

Jainism

In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self.

Zoroastrianism

That nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self.

Taoism

Regard your neighbor's gain as your own gain and regard your neighbor's loss as your own loss.

~Anonymous

Submitted by the Rev. Carla Friedrich, minister of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church. ☩

Gathering Leaves 2006

A Retreat for Women of all Branches
of Swedenborgian Organizations

The View from the Canopy

Historical and Personal Perspectives on
Swedenborgian Faith from the Branches

May 19-21, 2006

Temenos Conference and Retreat Center
1564 Telegraph Road, West Chester, PA 19382 USA
610-696-8145; www.temenosretreat.org

The Program Committee will be accepting workshop proposals through September 30th. We are looking for workshops that explore the history of theology, liturgy and community and that share personal experiences of spirituality, worship & relationships.

To submit proposals, share ideas or receive registration materials, go to the Temenos website at www.temenosretreat.org. (Registration is limited)

"The leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Rev. 22.2

Urban Ministry and Social Action Swedenborg Chapel, Cambridge

Jackie Lageson

The Men in Transition (MIT) program has morphed into the Friends-in-Transition (FIT) program, since we are working with men and women as well as family and friends of formerly incarcerated individuals. I also like the name because the acronym has a multidimensional meaning. The following is a snapshot of the work that has been ongoing at the Swedenborg Chapel in the last several months.

FIT support and services include one-on-one life coaching, spiritual counseling, as well as practical services such as online job application, assistance with applications for employment, school funding, housing, community networking, and referrals for job opportunities, support group and treatment services. In addition to the above support and services, FIT offers assistance with an individual's Criminal Offender Record Information (CORI) report.

The CORI report has become the 21st century's version of the scarlet letter. There are several concerns with the CORI reports:

- The reports are often difficult to read, contain flawed information and are based on name . . . not social security number or fingerprints!
- CORI reports never expire, thus turning all criminal sentences into a "life sentence."

• CORI was initially designed for use only within the Criminal Justice System by officials who are trained to read CORI reports.

Today any employer who wishes to see an individual's CORI report can obtain a copy. This leads to misreadings and inaccurate understandings of an individual's actual record.

In line with these CORI concerns, the Swedenborg Chapel Urban Ministry has become an official member of the Massachusetts Alliance to Reform CORI (MARC). MARC is a statewide coalition of organizations and individuals committed to reforming the critically flawed CORI system in Massachusetts. To that end, MARC is working with various city councils throughout the state of Massachusetts to pass a resolution to reform CORI and asking their respective legislators to pass legislative change. MARC is also working directly with the state legislature to draft, sponsor, and move forward bills reforming CORI legislation.


Operating from the assumption that nothing changes if nothing changes, MARC is actively training individuals directly affected by CORI to become a part of the process — it is a true grassroots movement to effect change through action. Anyone who has been arraigned by a court, regardless of the outcome, has a CORI. Since the report never expires, it becomes a "life sentence."

Currently in Massachusetts there are over 2.6 million individuals who have a CORI report, in a state of 5 million. These 2.6 million individuals include Black, White, and Latino persons; parents, young people, grandparents; and people in lower, middle, and upper income ranges.

The numbers speak for themselves; our efforts are to make the 2.6 million a strong organized voting block to effect legislative change.

We continue to work collaboratively with the Bread & Jams homeless advocacy program. Bread & Jams services the greater Cambridge area, providing quality of life assistance, access to the shelter system, and, ideally, transition into permanent housing. Unfortunately, many individuals returning to our communities after incarceration are homeless. Fortunately they find their way to the Bread & Jams program, which refers them to the FIT program. Through this collaboration, FIT works not only with Bread & Jams but also with probation officers, parole officers, judges, defense counsel, and an array of support services.

Jackie Lageson is Director of Urban Ministry at the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Mass. She can be contacted jblageson@hotmail.com.

Reprinted from the May 2005 Swedenborg Chapel Newsletter. 

Swedenborgian Virtual Bookstore

Did you know that you can support the Swedenborgian Church while doing your online shopping for books and other items? You can, at the Swedenborgian Virtual Bookstore: <http://www.swedenborg.org/bookstore>

The Bookstore lists many books by and about Swedenborg, with links to various popular websites where you can buy them, including:


- * Abebooks
- * Alibris
- * Amazon.com (U.S.A.)

- * Amazon.ca (Canada)
- * Amazon.co.uk (United Kingdom)
- * Barnes and Noble
- * Buy.com
- * eBay
- * Half.com (for new members)
- * Overstock.com
- * Powell's Books

If you purchase books or other items at these sites after clicking from the Bookstore, the Swedenborgian Church will receive 3% to 10% commission on

everything you buy. It's like making a donation to the church while you shop! To go directly to one of these sites from the Church website, and donate a percentage of all your purchases to the Church, go to: <http://www.swedenborg.org/bookstore/howithelps.cfm>

To get to this page from any Bookstore page, click on the "How your purchase helps us" link. Thank you!

—Rev. Lee Woofenden 

A Feminizing Church

(Continued from page 101)

training for a role in church leadership, thirteen are women and three are men. Will this trend continue? I don't know, but in the past five years the ratio has been running a little higher than 4:1.

The gender-lens certainly can be over-emphasized. My sense is that most congregations in our denomination are primarily interested in a competent minister and have little preference regarding gender. It comes down to the person. Though I don't pull one way or the other with respect to gender when someone is thinking about theological school (like a parent who says, "I don't care if it is a girl or a boy, just as long as it's healthy!"), I have exceedingly positive feelings about this trend towards strong female leadership. The trend not only rectifies a long-standing power imbalance in the church unacceptable on political grounds, I have also experienced the balancing of gender energies on the Council of Ministers to be a constructive change.

At my first convention in 1982 at Irvine, when I was a new seminary convert, I sat in the Council of Ministers. There were only three or four women present in a gathering of about 40 men. Very quickly during the 1980s, however, almost year-by-year, a style-shift began to occur among the clergy as the percentage of women quickly increased. The temper of discussions and the quality of processing the dynamics in the room improved, a movement that I very much associate with the much-increased presence of women. A new insertion into the dialog was fairly regular comments about underlying dynamics in the discussion, which I do not remember being made by men before the women began doing it. Now both genders will do it often.

And one of my most striking memories of the 1980s is having the

thought repeatedly, in the middle of a COM discussion, how ludicrous it is to assign love to women and wisdom to men in some sort of robotic external way. Though we might be able to discuss in extreme generalities differences in how gender sometimes seems to come into play with psychological processing, I see no grounds for the often-made contention in historical Swedenborgianism that women can only see wisdom through a male. It is to my mind an embarrassing idea to have remotely associated with our theology. Many of our men are very feeling-centered, and many of our women are our sharpest articulators.

I don't deny, though, a marvelous mystery in the complexity and diversity of gender. As women gained a foothold in the Council of Ministers in the '80s, a palpable complexity of wisdom deepened in concert with the increasing

mixed-gender configuration. Though dicey even to attempt to articulate, gender often makes a difference, though that difference is impossible to quantify or capture in a test-tube. There is frequently a kind of enlargement of the soul-capacity of a group when it is of mixed gender. More of the Universal Human seems to be present when both genders are participating and cooperating and exploring and working together. I truly believe the Council became wiser a long time ago in this journey of mixed-gender ordained leadership in the church.

At the congregational level I see a similar process much advanced. Long ago in our denomination, women rarely held the highest positions of governing leadership, yet the male clergy depended on a predominantly female volunteer labor force to help run the church. The Women's Alliance groups in churches, though, were often a locus of power, a force to be reckoned with! But it was still a caste system. Today, Women's Alliance

groups, deemed anachronistic in many of our churches, are few and far between, but about half of our congregations have their top leadership positions filled by women.

At the same time, the practice of ministry in our denomination has evolved very rapidly. Today there are very few services on Sunday that use even a modified First Order with traditional chants. At least three-fourths of our Sunday worship services have adopted features usually noted in the so-called feminization of American Christianity: more informal, more participatory, focused on themes of community and defining a holistic spirituality, and avoiding the feeling of a top-down teaching-the-truth approach.

I have no idea where this is all leading our church, but I believe there is a useful empowerment for the human community involved, and there is a potential loss, as well, if we were to continue a long downward trajectory of male participation. I think that would ultimately make for a weaker church. I have no crystal ball, and I don't feel I have a nose for where this is going. But we are not alone. We are a part of a much larger movement of spirituality in North America. We are flowing with one of the significant streams of empowerment and direction, and we are not experiencing this ethos-shift and this gender-shift in isolation.

As I peer forward, I would like to see a church that retains and builds upon the skills and values of community-building and relationship-building as integral to spiritual formation. And I would like to see a church that continues to promote compassion as a central ethos. And I would like to think that more men will find their spiritual selves developing in ways that they would want to contribute to such communities.

The Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is Dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. (Dr. Lawrence was later presented with a check for \$703.50 for the SHS Robert Kirven Memorial Scholarship Fund, the result of the 2005 National Women's Alliance Mite Box collection.)



Katrina

(Continued from page 102)

word coming, and you have a recipe for reaching the emotional and spiritual bottom. When there's a feeling of no hope and you are starving and dying of thirst even the best folks are going to get more than snippy. So, an evil momentum develops and people lose touch with their higher, better selves. Suddenly unthinkable things seem okay. Even a saint in this world needs food and water.

What can we do? Not enough. But something, anything, is better than nothing. A lot of little things add up to a lot of big things. Giving money and praying for those people is important. Remember that the crime rate in Washington DC went down 50% when 5,000 meditators came there for a summer to meditate on peace and non-violence. Our prayers do matter.

A prayer

Dear Lord, surround New Orleans and all the places hit by the storm with your light. Send your angels as messengers, comforters and guides toward hope. Fill them with light. Help the police, the medical people, the National Guard, all those involved in the rescue. Give everyone strength, compassion and hope. Turn the darkness into light and the fear into peace. Hold them, all of them, in your hands that they would all know that they are sisters and brother in your family.

Amen

You may also contribute to the General Church hurricane relief fund. Contact:

Franklin Vagnone
Director/Founder Charity in Action
Bryn Athyn, PA 19009
frank.vagnone@charityinaction.org

They are providing daily direct delivery of food, baby food, diapers, hygiene products, water, and medical, building, and school supplies! ☸

Urbana University Update

(Continued from page 104)

Furthermore, several Urbana University students will be studying abroad this coming fall, enjoying a semester at Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin, Poland.

Our emphasis on international activities and exposure is directly related to enhancing education.

Political, social, technological and economic issues are truly global issues and must be understood in a broad context.

We will continue to create opportunities for students to explore our global society so that they, too, might be able to broaden their spheres of influence.

I announced last year at this Convention the University's \$4.7 million, five-year capital campaign to build a student center, football field, raise endowment and operating funds, and to improve infrastructure on campus.

The campaign actually began in June of 2003, just two years ago.

In mid-May of this year, we held a press conference for the purpose of announcing:

- The June of 2005 start of construction on a student center that is actually larger than the one originally conceived in the campaign;
- The March of 2006 start of construction on an artificial turf, multi-purpose athletic field that will serve our football program, men's and women's soccer, our marching band and intramurals. This complex is a significant upgrade from the natural grass football field originally included in the campaign.

The press conference included a celebration of attaining our original \$4.7 million dollar goal some three years earlier than planned AND a public acknowledgment that the goal has been revised upward to \$6 million for the same time frame.

The additional funds are needed to support the enhancements in the facilities previously described.

Many thanks to all of you who have

supported or plan to support these and other efforts for the benefit of our students.

In December 2004, I unveiled to our campus community the vision for the next ten years in the life of Urbana University.

Our faculty, staff, students and Board of Trustees have enthusiastically endorsed the vision.

I won't bore you with the entire statement, but I would like to share some portions of it with you.

One description of Urbana University in the vision states that we will be "an engaged and energized community of learners."

People seem to find meaning in that description given its inherent visual of teachers, staff and the broader community all engaged as active partners and



The start of construction of new student center, scheduled for completion next summer.

learners.

Our vision projects a university of 2500 students.

Vision 2014 identifies three critical points of focus.

Excellence in Education
Providing a nurturing community, and
Having a strong commitment to community service.

I will spend a bit of time on the first focus, excellence in education. It includes the following points:

While we proclaim a desire for an increasingly capable student body, the development and growth of our Honors College is but one avenue to this goal. Our commitment to Service Learning and engaging students in discussions of ethics and values are also important to this initiative.

(Continued on page 114)

Urbana University Update

(Continued from page 113)

The second focus in attaining excellence in education is the development of new academic programs leading to regional recognition and being based in the existing strengths of our education, business and allied health programs;

The third focus in our pursuit of excellence is the development of a strong arts program. Theater, visual arts, choral and instrumental music programs must be vibrant at Urbana.

In 2006, it will be my pleasure to welcome you home. Our University is honored to host next year's annual Convention on our campus.

I look forward to our time together and for you to see firsthand the progress of the University that you so courageously founded 155 years ago.

With all of the good news associated with Urbana University and its students, I am indebted to an outstanding Board of Trustees. Without their encouragement and support, much of what we have accomplished would not be possible.

At this time I want to say a special thank you to those members of the Church who serve unselfishly on our Board.

Bobby Buchanan
Betsy Coffman
Frank Doyle
John Titus
Chuck Winter
Chris Laitner, ex officio

In conclusion I want to share with you a lesson that I have learned from studying the life of a great philosopher by the name of Socrates.

Socrates was a great man; he lived a long time ago. He gave long speeches and his friends poisoned him. With that, it is appropriate that I sit down. Best wishes for a productive Convention.

Dr. Robert Head is the president of Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio.

*Note: Dr. Head showed two videos of University commercials that had been made by Urbana students. ☒

Bruce Almighty Film Review

(Continued from page 108)

soon a tsunami is reported in Japan, due evidently to unusual "lunar activity."

He uses his powers to advance his career. He is "miraculously" on scene when a police dog solves a classic modern mystery, where the body of Jimmy Hoffa lies; the dog digs it up where it's been buried in a park complete with birth certificate and dental records for verification. A meteorite crashes to Earth nearby, and he is again the man of the hour with a microphone and camera. Bruce is promoted to Anchor. He's so full of himself and his power that, through a series of blunders, he alienates Grace and she leaves him.

Millions of prayers clamor as a din of voices in his head and show up on his prayer computer, on which he types spiritual email answers that will be applied automatically. Finally, crazed and overwhelmed, he types in a "Yes" to all of them at once. More chaos results.

He realizes that he can't control the consequences of his powers and is creating more harm and disturbance than he had before. He starts to question his ambition. He cries for help and instantly finds himself back in the old building with its spotless white interior. He and God mop the floor, their mops now moving in tandem.

"It's a wonderful thing," God says, "No matter how filthy something gets, you can always clean it right up."

"There were so many prayers," Bruce says, "I just gave them all what they wanted."

"Yes, but since when does anyone have a clue about what they want?...Parting your soup was a magic trick, not a miracle. A single mom who works two jobs and finds time to take her son to soccer practice, *that's* a miracle. A teenager who says *no* to drugs and *yes* to an education—*that's* a miracle.

"People want me to do everything for them. But what they don't realize is that they have the power. If you want to see a miracle, son, *be* the miracle."

Bruce wonders, "What if I need you, what if I have questions?"

"That's your problem, Bruce. It's

everybody's problem. You keep looking up."

God ascends the ladder, waving a benign goodbye.

Bruce realizes he no longer wants to be God. "I surrender to your Will!" He kneels in the middle of a highway and is hit by a truck.

God reappears, and Bruce, horrified that he might be dead, says, "I want to pray."

"I want you to pray, son. Go ahead."

"Lord," Bruce begins awkwardly, "feed the hungry and bring peace to all of mankind. How's that?"

"Great, if you want to be Miss America. Now come on, what do you really care about?"

"Grace. Grace."

"You want her back?"

"No, I want her to be happy, no matter what that means. I want her to find someone who will treat her with all the love she gave to me, all the love she deserves. I want her to meet someone who will see her always as I do now, through your eyes."

"Now *that's* a prayer! I'm going to get right on it."

God zaps him back into his body, he wakes up in a hospital, and, to make this review a little shorter, he is reunited with Grace and goes back to work—happily and unselfishly using the *human* gifts that God has given him.

Note: Morgan Freeman won the Academy Award for Best Supporting Actor in *Million Dollar Baby*, 2004. ☒

IMPORTANT CHURCH DATES

October 4-7, 2005
CAM @ SHS Berkeley, CA

October 29, 2005
Investment Committee @
Newtonville, MA

November 3-6, 2005
General Council @ Newtonville, MA

November 11-12, 2005
RETCO @ Newtonville, MA

Confirmations

Garber—Mimi Garber, wife of Bill Garber, longtime member of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church and Pacific Coast Association board member, was confirmed into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego and welcomed into membership August 7, 2005, Lay Leader Eldon Smith and the Rev. Carla Friedrich officiating.

Green, Hinrichsen—Jim Green and Nick Hinrichsen were confirmed into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church at the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan, October 17, 2004, the Rev. Renee Billings Machiniak officiating.

McGale, Turner, Warthan—Pauline McGale, Aileen and Joseph Turner, Agrapina and Roland Warthan, were confirmed into the life and faith of the Swedenborgian Church at Hillside Community Church (Swedenborgian Church in El Cerrito, California), May 8, 2005, Doug Moss officiating. (The Council of Ministers granted authority for Doug to confirm these folks prior to his confirmation in July, while he was interning at the El Cerrito church. He is now the Rev. Doug Moss, minister of the El Cerrito church.)

Deaths

Harnden—Calvin Coolidge Harnden, a lifelong and beloved member of the Fryeburg New Church, entered the spiritual world August 1, 2005. He was born May 26, 1924, the fifth generation to live on the Harnden homestead. He is survived by his wife of 60 years Sally Harnden, son Dean, daughter Nancy Leach; five grandchildren and nine great-grandchildren. His daughter Susan Fox and granddaughter Crystal Harnden passed on earlier.

He ran the family farm from the age of sixteen and was a veteran of World War II. He was accomplished and respected in his chosen profession, a loved and loving husband of sixty years, a family man of deep and gentle affection and a solid member and contributor to his church and community. Throughout all these varied aspects of his life he was known for his strong work ethic, his dependability, his integrity and honesty, and his quiet good humor. Services were held at the Fryeburg New Church, the Rev. Ken Turley officiating.

Donations in his memory may be sent to the Fryeburg New Church, 12 Oxford St., Fryeburg, ME 04037.

McNulty—Karen (Klein) McNulty, 31, daughter of Dr. Mary Kay and Rev. Dr. Ted Klein, entered the spiritual world August 31, 2005. Her passing was unexpected; she died of a sudden heart attack. She is survived by her husband James and two younger brothers, Kevin and John. Our prayers are with the family.

Range—Shepard Guy Range entered the spiritual world March 19, 2005, at the Fryeburg Health Care Center. He is survived by his wife Sylvia, and two sons, Perley and Thomas, all of East Fryeburg.

Warren—Jean Stanley Cameron Warren, a beloved member of the Fryeburg New Church entered the spiritual world June 28, 2005. She was born November 28, 1922. She is survived by her husband of sixty years Willard II, son Willard III, daughter Hannah Warren and a granddaughter Katie Jean Warren.

Jean was a teacher at the Fryeburg Academy and member of Daughters of the American Revolution, Society of the Descendants of the Colonial Clergy and Sons and Daughters of Pioneer Riverboatmen.



READERS COMMENT

On Tithing

Dear Editor:

At our Annual Convention this past July, (which was, by the way, one of the most calm as well as stimulating I can remember) in Berkeley, California, the subject of "tithing" came up. People came up and told us they tithe, and many more pledged to tithe. I would like to make a few comments regarding this.

Does this mean that our contributions to various charities are not included in the tithing—canvassing as well as contributing? Many people also volunteer their time at things like Special Olympics, Scouting, Meals on Wheels, Hospices, to name a few.

What about the volunteer work lay people do to further church work?

Ministers are paid for their time working for the church. Most lay people are not. I just spent a week of my vacation volunteering at our children's camp. Is this not an acceptable offering to the Lord?

What about the people who volunteer their time and talents for greeting new people at church, providing the refreshments after the service, providing music or secretarial skills, holding offices on church boards and associations?

Stewardship is made up of time and talent, as well as treasure.

For a church professing an inner meaning to the Word, why is "tithing" taken so literally? According to my *Pott's Concordance*, tithing or ten is predicated of remains. And the tithing Jacob

promised the Lord, is meant as "the goods and truths which are stored up by the Lord in the interior of man... and which, when predicated of the Lord, are the Divine goods and Divine truths which he acquired for Himself by His Own power."

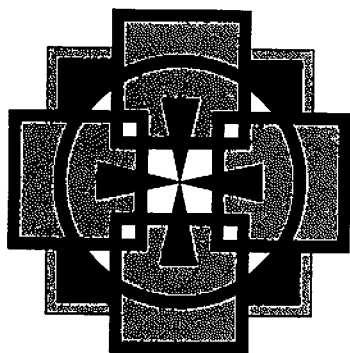
Don't manipulate us and don't make us feel guilty. I know a lot of us could contribute more "cash." And making us aware of that is a good thing. Please do not stand up in front of me and tell me what you are giving. Our gifts to the Lord, in whatever form, are between the Lord and ourselves.

Sharon Williams
Airdrie, Alberta, Canada



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.

Ministry as Vocation



SWEDENBORGIAN HOUSE OF STUDIES

at Pacific School of Religion

Are you feeling called to use your gifts in service to God's people? Are you craving the opportunity to study Swedenborg in the midst of a creative and dynamic community?

Then you are invited to a prospective student weekend in Berkeley where you can find out about the programs of study at the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion.

Ministry as Vocation November 11-13, 2005

PSR's Ministry As Vocation conference is designed especially for women and men who are interested in pursuing a call to ministry or considering seminary education as preparation for work as a pastor, chaplain, religious educator, scholar, administrator or other faith community professional.

During Ministry as Vocation, you will:

- Explore your questions about ministry and theological education;
- Meet faculty, students, alumni/ae and staff from PSR and SHS;
- Learn about the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies, PSR's academic programs, community life, field education, financial aid and housing;
- Tour the PSR and SHS campus and the Graduate Theological Union;
- Experience creative worship.

Registration: Free!
Housing: \$20/night
Travel assistance available.

For more information, please see <http://www.psr.edu/page.cfm?l=51> and contact Rev. Kim Hinrichs at 510-849-8214 or khinrichs@shs.psr.edu.

The Swedenborgian Church
of North America
The Messenger
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460

Address Service
Requested

Non-profit
Organization
U.S. Postage
PAID
Plymouth, IN
Permit No. 105