

THE MESSENGER

Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

February 2006

Volunteers in Mission Trip to Pascagoula, Mississippi

Annie Relat

The Call

During the week between Christmas and New Year's I was offered an opportunity to be part of a relief team to Gulfport, Mississippi. The mission was sponsored by the United Methodist Volunteers in Mission (UMVIM). This ministry has response teams which answer the call for aid in disaster areas all over the world. Each member pays his/her own way to and from the sites and purchases tools and materials needed to do construction work. While a variety of relief work is undertaken, construction is a major effort.

When the Pacific School of Religion Dean, Dr. Karen Oliveto, put out the call for volunteers, my immediate email response was "include me in." I did not know where the \$800 for the trip would come from, but I learned a long

time ago to believe in Divine Providence. At our last Contexting meeting before the Christmas break, Rev. Kim Hinrichs, Assistant Dean of Swedenborgian House of Studies, told us not to be afraid to ask if there was a need. When I heard this, my first thought was "Holy Moly." Deus Providebit. So, without a question in their minds or a doubt in their generous hearts, SHS and a private donor made it possible. Ask and it will be opened.

The Briefing

Before deploying there was a team meeting at Epworth UMC in Berkeley for us to become acquainted with one another, briefed on the mission and on such matters as southern culture, hospitality, and the dignity of the residents. There is a greater formality in the South than we are accustomed to in California. Everyone is Ma'am or Sir, no dudes or bros. It is "Hello," not "Yo" or "Que pasa?" More importantly, we had to remember that our main mission was not to fix their homes but to help fix their hearts. For many of the victims, the latter would take the rest of their lives. We were told "to be present with the people, and to hear them, touch them, and let them know that you care."

The Arrival

All teams were housed at Eastlawn Methodist Church located



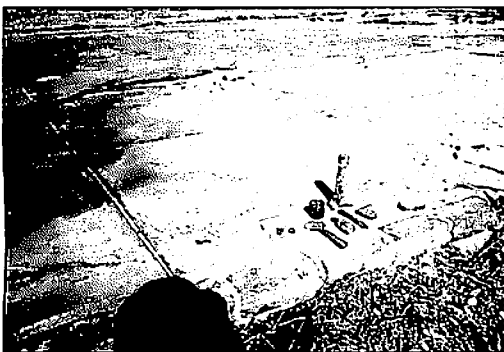
Part of the team waiting to fly to Memphis (L-R) Robin, team leader; Megan, Jeanette, Dr. Oliveto, Catherine, Martha

about one mile from water's edge. It is a large church with a church hall, a kitchen, many classrooms, one shower for the men and another for the women. The church itself had sustained much flood damage, and there was always one team working on its repair. Teams were constantly arriving and leaving and at any one time there were between 80 and 110 people at the church. There were teams from Indiana, Ohio, Colorado, Tennessee, California, Kansas, Missouri, Alabama, Louisiana, Nebraska, etc. We slept on cots or on floor mats, ate meals together, departed each day to our assigned sites, and at day's end, we had devotions before lights out at ten o'clock.

The shower rules were simple. No longer than three minutes. And by the way, there is no hot water. We were told to "pretend we were in Peru." Forget Peru; for a split second I thought I was back in the Army. Fortunately, that terrible thought quickly evaporated.

A team was always at work in the kitchen preparing meals, with each person asked to pay \$5 per day for

(Continued on page 24)



Concrete Foundation - all that is left of this home. "I gathered a few items I found on the ground: part of a gold-rimmed plate, a pizza cutter, a small screw driver, a small jar of jelly, a pen, a portion of a wine bottle, a small piece of porcelain ornament."

IN THIS ISSUE:

President's Mid-Winter Report • Book Review, Swedenborg's Secret
NCC Addresses Biotechnology • Shining Soul DVD Release • Readers Comment

President's Mid-Winter Report January 2006



October was a busy month with a meeting of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry held at SHS in Berkeley, followed in a bit less than two weeks by a meeting

of the Board of Managers of the Swedenborgian House of Studies. On Sunday, Oct. 23, immediately following the two days of the SHS Board meetings, Rev. Doug Moss was formally installed as the minister of the El Cerrito church. I must report with some sadness that I had succumbed to one of those little viruses that live in airplanes – or the people who are traveling in them – and was unable to attend the SHS Board meeting or to do the installation service. My deep gratitude to Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence and Rev. Jane Siebert for performing the service, and a special thanks to Rev. Doug Moss for understanding. For the record, “Airborne” has now become a staple of my traveling, as have enough rest and much handwashing!

In early November, the General Council met in Newton, Massachusetts. I reported on Rev. Kevin Baxter’s finishing his service as director of the Center for Applied Ethics at Urbana University at the end of the fall semester. Currently, continuing the center is under study; it is not functioning at this time. This initial trial period was funded primarily by the Ohio Association and the denomination.

I also reported on the San Diego church where new minister, Rev. Carla Friedrich, has been very busy, and where we had a good congregational meeting with professional consultant, Rev. Speed Leas from the Alban Institute. At this meeting we outlined the local and denominational goals for this ministry.

The Lansing Swedenborgian Church (Lansing, Michigan) continues to meet monthly with Jennifer Tafel as leader. This very new church (pun intended) is on target to become a recognized church in the Michigan Association in October, 2006.

Two administrative issues that I brought to the General Council were the need for a clear job description for the president of the denomination. Currently all that we have is a list of required duties and of various “ex officio” positions that can be found throughout the constitution and bylaws. This list, as well as perceived needs, are interpreted by each elected president. It would be organizationally beneficial to have a specific job description. Finally, we discussed the fact that the 2006 annual Convention is the time to elect a president-elect whose term of president will begin in July, 2007. Presidents are elected for three-year terms and can serve two consecutive terms.

Because the General Council meeting was held in Newton, I was able to attend church on Sunday in Cambridge on November 5, where I was honored to be the speaker. On Monday, November 6, I spent a day in “the president’s office” in the Central Office amazed, as always, by the amount of work in the form of reporting, answering emails, answering the phone, and gathering information that goes on in that center during the day. It truly is the hub of our organization.

Later in November, I was the special guest speaker for the Sunday, November 20 service at the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener. This was the culmination week of a multi-week “Celebrate Stewardship!” program in which the congregation was participating. There was a wonderful service, a great luncheon, and some excellent news in terms of increased pledge levels for 2006.

The last travel prior to the new year was a December 10-11 visit with the Pawnee Rock New Jerusalem Church congregation. I enjoyed a grand evening of food and fellowship on Saturday night at a gathering hosted by Keith Mull at his home. On Sunday, I participated in the church service and gave the message. After a wonderful dinner, I spent some very good time with the congregation as it begins to look at its future.

I’ve had some positive and forward-looking communications with Rev. Rich Tafel regarding the Washington, DC, Church of the Holy City; with Rev. Dr. George Dole regarding the Bath New Church; and with Karen Feil of the Chicago Society. I’ve also been in regular contact with the St. Louis Church of the Open Word as it has prepared to work on programming and planning assisted by consultant Dan Hotchkiss of the Alban Institute.

As a denomination, we recognize that we want to continue supporting our various ministries in ways that are helpful. We also need to practice good stewardship on the denominational level. I’ve assembled a small team of seven lay people and clergy who will meet early in March, 2006, to create a strategic plan for the next few years. We recognize that without regular and careful planning, we will be unable to continue supporting the work that is being done throughout the denomination.

—Chris Laitner 

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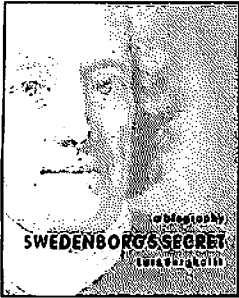
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New Swedenborg Biography Offers Fresh Twists



James Lawrence

Swedenborg's Secret, A Biography
by Lars Bergquist
(London:
Swedenborg
Society, 2005, 516
pp.)

Lars Bergquist has written what is hailed by the publisher as the first major study on Swedenborg in a half-century. This claim refers to three significant biographies on Swedenborg by Ernst Benz, Cyriel Sigstedt, and Signe Toksvig, all produced within a four-year span (1948-52) in the mid-twentieth century. Benz and Toksvig, non-Swedenborgians, were professors, respectively, of church history at Marburg and of psychology at Yale; Sigstedt was a lay member of the General Church. Since that remarkable burst of scholarly investigation of Swedenborg's life, none of the many volumes of Swedenborgiana published since then fall into the genre of biography or of full-life assessment. Now, the London Swedenborgian publishing house, the Swedenborg Society, has released an English translation of a biography first published in Sweden in 1999 under the title *Swedenborg's Hemlighet* by a widely-recognized author.

A career journalist, a diplomat in Sweden of considerable repute (he has been Sweden's ambassador to China, Russia, England, Poland and Vatican City), President of the Council of Culture from 1993-1997 in Sweden, Bergquist has authored numerous brisk-selling fiction and non-fiction works, including a commentary volume on Swedenborg's dream journal. Translated by Rev. Norman Ryder, former president of the British Conference of Swedenborgian churches, Bergquist's

435-page biography (with another 70 pages of notes and indexes) is an altogether striking contribution to the province of Swedenborg biographies.

The genre of Swedenborg biography is a special favorite of mine (I converted while reading George Trobridge's *Life and Teaching of Swedenborg*), and perhaps an overview of the field is useful in order to situate Bergquist's contribution. For a straightforward, fact-filled, chronological history of Swedenborg's life, Sigstedt's *The Swedenborg Epic* is unsurpassed. The great advantage of Sigstedt's work is her focus on getting facts straight and presenting a wealth of information on all phases of Swedenborg's life in an organized fashion. Fluent in Swedish, Sigstedt mined the enormous trove of material available only in Swedish (and much of it in Sweden). Plus, she "tells a good story" all along the way. I keep an *Epic* at home and office and find it both an immensely useful reference book as

[Bergquist] presents Swedenborg sympathetically, yet he seeks a human Swedenborg, not a one-dimensional saint.

well as a marvelous good read every once in a while.

For contextualizing Swedenborg in the history of Christian thought and for understanding the development of his intellectual life, Benz is the best (by far). Benz was both a world-class historian and a sympathetic reader of Swedenborg; his skill is evident on every page. The Swedenborg Foundation recently produced a new translation under the title *Swedenborg: Visionary Savant in the Age of Reason*; it is required reading at SHS. The problems of fact and interpretation in Toksvig's *Emanuel Swedenborg: Scientist and Mystic* far outweigh its merits. This widely

distributed biography claims that Swedenborg's theological works are the product of "automatic writing" and paints Swedenborg's father, Jesper Swedberg, as the devil's principal agent on earth. I never steer people towards Toksvig and keep my personal copy tucked away where it can do no harm.

The category of major biographies also sports two hefty nineteenth-century works in addition to the three mid-twentieth century works. Benjamin Worcester's *Life and Mission of Emanuel Swedenborg* (1883) is still a good read, whereas Edward White's two-volume *Emanuel Swedenborg: Life and Writings* (1867) is a meandering and mean treatment by a disgruntled former employee of the Swedenborg Society. White's work is hard to find, which is no loss to the world.

In the category of short book-length biographies, the afore-mentioned Trobridge, a British Swedenborgian artist in the early twentieth-century, has the field all to himself. Recently updated and modernized by the Reverends Richard Tafel Sr. and Richard Tafel Jr., this biography is a fast read but also a competent and thoughtful presentation of Swedenborg's life and his religious system. A reader might be forewarned that

as with Sigstedt's, this biography is written by an obvious "believer," but it is deep even as it is concise—an excellent "first" book to give to a newcomer or an inquirer.

Brief biographies (less than 50 pages) of Swedenborg are far too numerous to list, but the two best in my opinion are introductory chapters in overview books on Swedenborg: George Dole's in *A Thoughtful Soul* and Sig Synnstedt's in *The Essential Swedenborg*. For a competent online brief biography, "Swedenborg: A Biography" by Bryn Athyn College professor Jane Williams-Hogan is available at

(Continued on page 26)

The National Council of Churches Addresses Biotechnology

Editor's Note: *This is the second article in the two-part series of NCC reports by the Rev. Alison Lane. The first, a general report, was published in the January 2006 Messenger.*



Alison Lane

In 1986, the National Council of Churches of Christ issued a statement on genetic science,

challenging Christians not to remain aloof from the genetic revolution. This statement served as a reminder that to love God with all our mind implies a serious regard for new insights into God's creation. This statement also called for Christians to remember our mandate to love all of our neighbors, including "the least of these," as this scientific movement grows to affect the lives of increasing millions. Though the principles of the statement, written almost twenty years ago, remain the same, the technology has advanced so dramatically that we are now called to new study and reflection.

In the last few years, the NCCC recognized the limitations of the 1986 policy statement on genetic science, and formed a committee to develop a more in-depth statement on Human Biotechnologies that could be submitted to members of the Council and voted on. Those on the committee represented eight denominations as well as a variety of professions, including pastors, biochemists, geneticists, attorneys, counselors, seminarians, and others. At this year's General Assembly of the NCCC, delegates received two documents on the subject, a Policy on Human Biotechnologies and an accompanying Study Document. I would say that most of us attending the Assembly

were not scientists, and the Study Document helped a great deal, providing a survey of biotechnologies and easy to understand scientific explanations.

The National Council of Churches feels this is a field that is extremely worthy of our attention because of its many ethical implications. Before I write more about these implications, I'd first like to explain what kinds of genetic technology the NCCC would have us understand; these technologies can be divided into three categories—Identification, Manipulating Embryos, and Manipulating Genes.

Identification

Identification is about genetic technology that helps us find specific genes in people. Certain genetic tests can make it possible to detect DNA sequences that may lead to certain medical conditions. A familiar example of this type of technology might be an expectant mother opting for prenatal diagnosis to see if the developing fetus may have a specific genetic condition. A more controversial example of this type of technology allows for an embryo conceived *in vitro* to be tested for specific DNA sequences. If the embryo is healthy, the embryo may then be transferred to the mother's womb; if the tested cell has a disease gene, then the embryo is discarded.

Manipulating Embryos

The second category, includes another set of genetic technologies, including cloning and stem cell research. As many of us are aware, cloning is used to create genetically identical copies of DNA molecules, cells, tissues, organs, or organisms. Human cloning has raised serious moral and ethical questions within all societies. On March 8, 2005, the United Nations approved a declara-

tion calling on all UN member States to ban all forms of human cloning, including cloning for medical treatment as incompatible with human dignity and the protection of human life.

Stem Cell Research

A second controversial subject in this category includes stem cell research. Stem cells come from a variety of sources, including embryos created for *in vitro* fertilization, cord blood from a newborn, bone marrow from an adult or some other source. Early embryonic stem cells have not yet been programmed to become any specific tissue. Eventually this small group of cells will differentiate into the 300 or so different kinds of cells found in an adult human. The stem cells may be thought of as blank computers before they are programmed to run specific applications. These undifferentiated stem cells are at least theoretically capable of being transformed into any desired tissue with a specific function to perform. Use of stem cells is envisioned in the treatment and cure of diseases that are due to the failure or death of a specific cell type – such as Parkinson's disease, diabetes, and spinal cord injuries. There is also the hope that the ability to isolate embryonic stem cells, coupled with cloning techniques, could enable us to grow our own tissue transplants.

While there is promise here for many who are suffering from such diseases, there are many divisions among Christians and within society about the consequences and implications of such cloning approaches. It calls us to again ask ourselves when we believe human personhood to begin. If we believe personhood exists from the completion of fertilization, scientists using embryos in this way are creating human beings for the purpose of generating stem cells

(Continued on page 27)

Teacher's Praise Music CD Has Message

Editor's Note: The following article about Paul Deming and his music was published in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch Oct. 29, 2005 and is reprinted here with permission. Paul, a member of the Church of the Open Word (Swedenborgian) in St. Louis, introduced his CD and entertained us with his music at last year's convention in Berkeley. On January 8, Epiphany Sunday, the San Diego church's organist was on vacation, and the Rev. Carla Friedrich played "Wise Men Still Seek Him" on Paul's CD for the congregation to sing along. She had typed the words for us, so it worked out very well, with positive comments about the song.

Paul Deming's "Wise Men Still Seek Him" will benefit Service to Humanity, a new local charity, and his church.

D. Paul Harris, St. Louis Post-Dispatch

Paul Deming, a professional musician and teacher, is giving back. He has produced a CD of religious songs to benefit local non-profit groups, including his own church.

"I certainly feel that I want to make a contribution to the community I live in," said Deming, a member of Church of the Open Word-Garden Chapel in west St. Louis County. "For me that's making music and trying to publish music."

Deming teaches music part time at the Rohan Woods Elementary School, an independent school in Warson Woods, and plays lead guitar in the Ralph Butler Band, a popular local band. He also gives private guitar lessons and is a telecommunications consultant.

"He is definitely a conscientious good guy when it comes to his personality and the seriousness about his music," said Butler. "He's an all-around really good guitar player because he can play a lot of different styles, and he plays them all quite well."

Last weekend, Deming released his first CD in a special fundraising concert

at his church, featuring Butler and other artists. On the CD, titled "Wise Men Still Seek Him," are eight praise and worship songs, all written by Deming.

More than 30 years ago, he published his first song, a musical adaptation of Psalms 113, called "From the Rising of the Sun."

"It kind of spread like wildfire just by word-of-mouth, and I published it back in 1974 in St. Louis," he said. "Ever since that time, I've been writing praise and worship songs and songs of life experiences."

Born in upstate New York, Deming, 49, has been living in the area since 1970. He graduated from Webster University. He is a divorced father of two grown sons, ages 27 and 23.

He's been playing the guitar since he was about 9 years old. Guitarist Phil Keaggy was his role model when he began to think about a career in music.

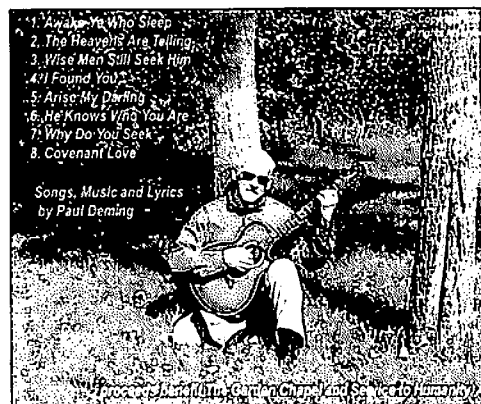
"He was a big influence in my life when I was a young Christian, like about 16 years old,"

said Deming. "I had a chance to meet him. And then later in my married life when I was in my 20s, I actually visited his home. He's been a real inspiration for me on spiritual music."

More than 20 years ago, Deming did a spiritual recording with several members of the New Covenant Fellowship Church in St.

Louis. Some of those members went on to become well-known pastors in the area. On that record, "To the Children of the King," Deming wrote one song.

The primary reason he decided to do the solo CD was to raise funds



to support Service to Humanity, a newly organized local charity, and his church, where he is worship leader and has been a member for 12 years.

"It's a very simple church," he said. "It's kind of unique in that it's the only pluralistic Christian Church that I'm aware of in North America."

"What that means is that they believe that any religion that preaches that God is love, and practices that religion, is valid."

"We're practicing Christians, but we also believe that we need to keep our minds and hearts open to other cultures and other faith belief systems."

Deming admits that his church, a small congregation of less than 30 members, has fallen on hard times. But he is optimistic about its future.

"I feel very strongly that Church of the Open Word should, by all rights, be the largest church in the world because it has such an acceptance and tolerance of other cultures and other faiths. But instead, it's a struggling little church."

Deming says he'll continue to support the church and share his talent with anyone who will receive it, especially his young students at Rohan Woods Elementary. "The kids are just great," he said. "The most important thing I think for elementary kids to learn about music is that it's a fun way of expressing themselves." "It's a really good thing to have them have

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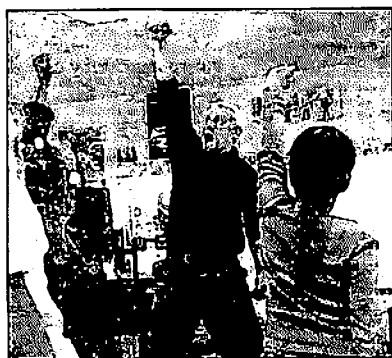
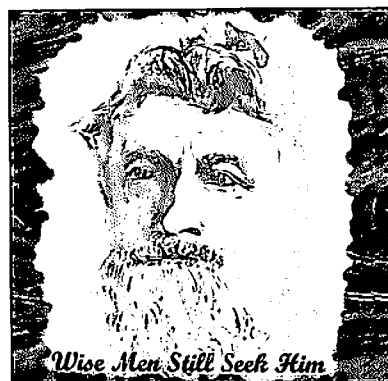


Photo by J.B. Forbes, Post-Dispatch



Put the Power Back into Valentine's Day

The Spiritual Power of Love

In a world filled with stress and meaningless activities, do we need another holiday of all fluff and no stuff? I don't think so.

Instead of mindlessly sending out cards or buying gifts, why don't you use this Valentine's Day as an opportunity to broaden your understanding of love and its power? If it is true that "what the world needs now is love, sweet love," why not put this dynamic power back into our most popular day of love?

People all over the world are learning that love is not just an emotion or a sentiment. Love is the most powerful force in the world. If you know how to use it, you can send it to heal and transform even the most difficult situations.

Why not use this Valentine's Day as a day devoted to healing and restoring the relationships in your life? The process is simple. Just follow the instructions below. Do the exercise twice a day for two weeks. Expect to see positive results. You will not be disappointed!

1. Choose a relationship you would like to see improved.
2. Sit with your eyes closed.
3. Take a moment to relax.

4. Let yourself think about the relationship that you would like to transform now.
5. Picture the person involved in this relationship in your mind's eye. It doesn't matter if you can't see an image. A thought is as powerful as an image.
6. Imagine the person surrounded with light and love (you might see this as a pink blanket of light surrounding the person, caressing him or her with love).
7. See the two of you interacting with one another in a way you would like.
8. Imagine both of you saying or doing something positive.
9. See the two of you smiling at one another.
10. Feel a positive emotion like joy as you watch this image.
11. Imagine yourself telling your best friend about how well this experiment worked.
12. See yourself joyfully celebrating the transformation of this relationship/situation.
13. Feel joy.

14. Let the image go.

15. Repeat every day for two weeks.

If, throughout your day, you find yourself mentally rehearsing the conflict, remind yourself that love works and see the relationship in a positive way.

Valentine's Day is a great opportunity for us to broaden our understanding of love and its power. We have missed the deeper meaning of Valentine's Day by singling out romantic love as the focus of this holiday's ultimate meaning.

Imagine what would happen if everyone in the world chose to dedicate Valentine's Day as a day of reconciliation and healing. Imagine broken families reunited in love, stressful work environments transformed into places of mutual support and respect, and communities united to create places of harmony and opportunity for all its members.

From "A Spiritual Oasis."

Submitted by Jennifer Lopez
Reprinted from the February 2004 Laporte Report, newsletter of the Swedenborgian church in Laporte, Indiana. ☩

~ READERS COMMENT ~

"Religion in America and in the Swedenborgian Church" Lauded

Dear Editor:

When I read Stephen Koke's article in the November *Messenger*, "Religion in America and in the Swedenborgian Church," things came together and I got a new focus for outreach and my ministry! I have for a number of years been running Frank Rose's Spiritual Growth courses and Ray Silverman's Rise Above It course which are truly Transcending and Transforming. I have also been frequently running into the concept of "God within" amongst contacts. Well, I finally put it all together and the results have been great and inspiring.

When asked, I now define the New Church as "a transcending and transforming spirituality that brings us into an experience of God within."

I used this approach in our December newsletter editorial which was read to the proprietor of an alternative website here: www.moveonnewzealand.co.nz. The response was amazing, "Could they load up the article and put a link to the church site."

The editor writes in the Spirituality page: "This message written by the Rev Richard Keyworth of the New Christian Church of New Zealand moved me deeply when it was read out to me from

a newsletter. I was inspired that a minister of a Christian Church (albeit a non-mainstream one), would think in terms of transformation and transcendence and truly acknowledge that God is with(in) each of us."

Thank you Stephen Koke. The ripples go out.

Rev. Richard Keyworth
Auckland
New Zealand. ☩

General Council Report

General Council held its fall meeting November 3 – 5, 2005, at the Walker Center in Newton, Mass. The following items were covered during the meeting:

Urbana University Capital Funds Campaign

Deane Currie provided an update on the campaign. Deane, Jim Erickson, and Eric Allison will continue to work on fundraising activities for this project.

Reports

President Chris Laitner's report included updates on the Urbana Center for Applied Ethics, the San Diego church, the Lansing (Michigan) Swedenborgian Church, possible visit to Bath (Maine), presidential responsibilities and need for a clear job description, as well as the need to elect a president-elect at the 2006 annual Convention.

Vice-president Jim Erickson reported on his review of the past nine years of General Council minutes to identify trends that might assist in future decision-making. He also provided an update on the Church of the Holy City (the "National Church") in Washington, DC, which he recently visited.

Treasurer Larry Conant reported positive returns had been achieved by the investment Committee. He provided an overview of investing of the Common Fund.

The report from the **Swedenborgian House of Studies (Herb Ziegler, liaison)** covered the information regarding Anders Hallengren coming to be a visiting scholar but, due to illness, going back to Sweden. He stated that Rev. Frank Rose, retired General Church minister, will be coming to SHS as a visiting instructor during the spring semester. SHS continues to work with a positive budget, and is focusing on the development of Swedenborgian scholars and the relationship between SHS and the Pacific School of Religion. Rev. Kim Hinrichs is serving as Assistant Dean of

SHS, focused on development and online classes.

National Council of Churches

The General Council voted to confirm the appointment of Rev. Kit Billings, Mary Ann Fischer, and Christine Laitner as delegates to the General Assembly of the NCCC. (Note: for the November Assembly, Rev. Alison Lane was Chris Laitner's proxy due to scheduling conflicts. See January and February 2006 Messengers for her NCCC reports)

Augmentation Fund

A presentation of new granting procedures was made by AFC Chairman, Susan Wood. Beginning in 2007, all funding through the Augmentation Fund will be in the form of multi-year grants requiring the fulfillment of measurable objectives included in the grant requests from churches.

Prioritization

The President provided an overview of the prioritization process undertaken during the Cabinet meeting held in September. The results were used during budget discussions.

Expense Reduction

There was considerable discussion by the entire General Council on how to decrease denominational expenses.

Cyber Swedenborgians

A presentation was made regarding a new Cyber Ministry that a special committee has been working on. Council voted to set up funding and appointed a committee (Beth Harvie, Sue Ditmire, Susan Wood and Kevin Baxter) who would complete the research and get the project off the ground by Spring, 2006. The official

release will take place at Convention.

FPRSU Recommendation

The Treasurer, chair of the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit, presented a recommendation that General Council adopt minimum donations from members of the denomination in an effort to balance the current deficit budget. Discussion was held indicating that our members and involved friends need to first support local churches, but also need to contribute to the ongoing work of the denomination.

Council directed FPRSU to design a stewardship program that could be used by all local congregations. This program will be presented at the 2006 Convention in Urbana, Ohio.

2006 Budget

After considerable discussion, the 2006 budget, a deficit budget, was approved by a relatively small majority of the General Council. Work continues on ways to generate more income.

Urbana Capital Funds Drive


Deane Currie presented information regarding the Philadelphia Bookroom Fund, and, following discussion, General Council approved \$10,000 from that Fund as a contribution to the Urbana University Capital Funds Drive.

Spring Meeting

Conference call on March 25, 2006.

Adjournment

The meeting closed with prayers of peace for all.

—Susan Wood-Ashton
Recording Secretary 

Volunteers in Mission Trip to Pascagoula, Mississippi

(Continued from front page)

food. In the hall surrounding the various tables were piles of new clothes, baby supplies, new mattresses, household products, boxes of food, etc. There was also a brand new toilet waiting to be taken to someone's home. There is probably no one on the planet who would confuse this setting with the Waldorf Astoria. But no matter, we were hungry, and tired, and dirty, and grateful for all that was provided.

The Site

Our team was assigned to Mr. X's home. He lives about one mile from the church, and his home, like everyone else's, sustained much damage. But he was more fortunate than many others in that his was still standing with no condemned sign on the outside. Homes are repaired in stages, with a team coming in to clear away debris, another doing insulation, sheetrock, and mudding. Our team painted the interior and installed his new refrigerator, washer, and dryer that had been donated by the local Church of Christ. The team that followed us had professional roofers and door hangers to continue the work.

During all of this, Mr. X., alone, elderly and disabled, resides in his FEMA trailer as do his neighbors, block after block after block, mile after mile, city after city. Mr. X. was deeply depressed and offered on the many occasions that I talked with him that he wished God had taken him in the storm. This is a sentiment that many relief workers heard from many of the victims.



A typical house in "good" condition.

I took walks with Mr. X as he told me the story over and over. His depression and significant health problems caused great confusion about the event itself, the aftermath, the overwhelming amount and complexity of paperwork from FEMA and insurance companies, the difficulty of obtaining his medications with no prescription drug plan and living solely on social security. It would take a Philadelphia lawyer to untangle this mess.

Well, I love a good challenge, and because I have a law degree and a little bit of an idea of how the world works, I felt honored to be able to work with Mr. X. on some of these problems:



Children still at play.

The Challenge

My first challenge was in not having a cell phone. A land line did not exist. A very generous team member, Tony, lent me his phone for hours at a time. I wanted to reimburse him, but he was quite emphatic, that he would not think of it. OK, dear friend, but I hope to be some place else when your bill comes in.

Gathering accurate information about the new Part D prescription drug coverage through Medicare, obtaining a lost FEMA claim number and home insurance coverage are daunting enough. These problems alone might make some older Americans contemplate the advantages of life in Albania where one knows there is nothing to begin with so there is no need to ask for anything. In addition, the situation is so much more difficult when one is in a state where fiscal resources are considerably less than we enjoy in California. In any case many very kind, polite and helpful individuals assisted me with information,



This house is condemned
(condemned sign in front of home).
The inside is just a shell.

additional individuals and phone numbers, as I navigated through the Medicare and insurance maze. Mr. X. qualifies for prescription assistance as do millions more who rely on Medicare for their medical needs. He will receive such medications as he is entitled to as an individual on social security.

While there is much available assistance for Americans in need in almost every area of life, it is not widely publicized. It can be cumbersome enough for those with telephone and computer access, a minimal education, minimal language skills, a modicum of patience, and at least a little courtesy. It can be next to impossible for an elderly, disabled, depressed and deeply traumatized individual like Mr. X.

FEMA

In working with Mr. X. I learned very quickly that nothing, NOTHING, gets accomplished in terms of one's recovery without one's FEMA claim number. There is no trailer, no disaster card for groceries, no check or follow-up payments. In fact Mr. X could not even get the power or gas companies out to inspect his house without this number.

Losing or misplacing this number, as Mr. X. did, will make an already difficult life a whole lot worse. In trying to reclaim this number one does not contact FEMA by calling directory assistance and requesting their phone number. FEMA, like life itself, is messy.

Please know that I am not criticizing, merely making a personal observation.

Some Personal and Unasked For Observations:

(Continued on page 25)

Volunteers in Mission Trip to Pascagoula, Mississippi

(Continued from page 24)

I know it is not very popular to say these days, especially in places like Berkeley, "What a tremendous country we live in!" There is rightly much to criticize and question about our nation. The American people of various church denominations, whom I met in Pascagoula, were not present as emissaries of the U.S. government. This is acknowledged. However, if they did not live in the country they do live in, most would not have the physical and financial wherewithal to leave home and job in order to participate in this recovery effort. No flag waving here, just a fact.

So while there is much that is wrong, there is also much that is right. The American people are a good and generous people, as I have always believed most peoples of the world to be. We have been blessed with so much more than other nations, and I am convinced that God did shine His grace upon us.

As for government, it is big and cumbersome, no doubt about it. City, state, and federal regulations overlap, conflict, overrule, supersede, restrict, restrain, disallow, exclude, nullify, abrogate, rescind, and at times, appear to make no sense at all. A little example may be enlightening here—The Ten Commandments contain 173 words, the Gettysburg Address has 266. At last count, the U.S. Tax Code was 15,000 pages. You can make your own judgment about what this means.

There is so much more about this amazing experience that could be told at this time. However, after discussions with Patte, the next chapter will follow in a month. Deo Volente. There were many stories told to me of courage, selflessness, generosity and love by local residents. They deserve to be told separately. So, next month.

Dr. S. Annie Relat is a student on the ordination track at the Swedenborgian House of Studies. She will be ordained this June at the convention in Urbana, Ohio. (See Profile.) ☛

Profile of Dr. Annie Relat



Annie Relat

Patte LeVan, editor of *The Messenger*, has honored me by asking for a brief profile. I am in my last year of study at the Swedenborgian House of Studies, and God willing, will be ordained in Urbana this summer. It is probably a good idea that the church faithful get glimpses of their future clergy persons.

I am relatively new to this denomination, having arrived from a lifetime as a Roman Catholic. When I came to the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley three years ago, I took the basic Old Testament class with most other beginning seminarians. This class met in a large lecture hall, and as Divine Providence would have it, I found myself sitting next to Carla Friedrich, Sage Currie and Jenn Tafel. While the class itself may not have been a hoot, these three dear ladies were. Their warm sense of humor, acceptance, and friendship were just the right thing to help me emerge successfully from a difficult course. We all learned and laughed a lot. It is not often that both can dance in the street together.

As the academic year progressed and as more information about this guy called Emanuel Swedenborg emerged, I felt pulled in and wished to know more. In conversing with others, I found that my experience mirrors theirs. Some of his writings were offered, and the more I read, the more attracted I became to this denomination. I inquired of someone at some point, "Why does not the world know about all of this?" The writings explain so much and make so much sense, especially to a world that makes less sense every day.

However, I forget *The Messenger* wants a profile. Well, it is really quite ordinary. After completing my first Masters, this time in English Literature from Loyola University, I met a great guy, we married and started the journey.

Before we started law school, we wanted a break from (academics) school and applied to VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America), a domestic peace corps. The government in its wisdom promised us Boston and sent us to Galveston. They said there was a need. So with our surfer van and two used surf boards, no debts and no responsibilities, we left for Galveston. Our program of about twenty volunteers worked out of a rundown section of the city with a real house of ill-repute directly across the street. We all went out to look at it, expecting to see—I don't what. It looked just like any other house in the area, in need of repairs, but doing good business. I recalled Molier's statement that indeed, "The world, dear Agnes, is a strange affair."

VISTA was promoted "as the hardest job you will ever love," and love it we did. We were naive enough to think that most people possessed the same basic academic education that we had. We got a big surprise and probably learned for the first time how incredibly blessed we were. We started, administered, and taught a GED program for any interested persons. The program was free for students, and we always had full classes every three months. In a short period of time we understood the truth of "to whom much is given..."

But I digress again. After two years of volunteer service, my husband and I returned to Berkeley for three years of law school. While I found the law school experience to be an exhilarating one, the actual practice was rather boring. A five-year stint in New York City with two infants took me away from the law and into teaching at an inner city middle school and high school. Again another eye-opener, with guards at the doors and bars on the windows. It was a scene right out of the movie, *Lean On Me*. But once again God provided a wonderful environment for spiritual growth and with his good grace this is what took place. I had in my classes many children whose parents, brothers or sisters or other caregivers, were absent due to incarceration, lack of knowledge as to parenting or separation by the seas. None of these reasons is sufficient to a young child, but life is what it is and the best one can

(Continued on page 26)

Profile of Dr. Annie Relat

(Continued from page 25)

do is accept it and move along. Some of these kids did well and graduated from high school, many others were so much less fortunate. Once again, I was made aware of the undeserved blessings of my own life.

I had found a calling and literally jumped at this opportunity. I received my doctorate in education from the University of San Francisco and was offered a tremendous opportunity as Director of Education at an adult male correctional facility in central California. It was an extremely challenging position not only working with convicted felons, but also with a cadre of uniformed personnel who were hostile to any kind of rehabilitation efforts. It was also a new facility near a community with a strong case of NIMBY (Not in My Back Yard). At the warden's request, I put on my lawyer suit and promoted the benefits of a non-polluting industry, with clients who would not need any city services, jobs, growth, a higher tax base, a couple of new schools, new infrastructure, more police and fire and improved services. In a small agricultural community with a thirty percent unemployment rate among minorities who constitute seventy percent of the population, the result was ineffable. Once again for better or worse, reality and economics trumped the day.

While prison work is something that most people would not find to be a comfortable environment, even at a civilian administrative level, it did present an opportunity to experience life from the virtual bottom of the social ladder. I was able to interact on a daily basis within the bowels of a prison with nothing other than a whistle, which I lost, and a radio, which was turned off because the constant chatter was too distracting.

Before taking on this environment, the only thing I knew, or thought I knew, was what I saw on television. While the reality of incarceration does surface every once in a while, day-to-day life was not a la Hollywood. Before arriving, at the "state's bed and breakfast," I had suspected that most incarcerated individuals, except for the most vicious and evil, were mostly people like you and me.

My experiences largely confirmed my suspicions. I found many people who in fact had been dealt a bad hand. But playing it badly does not help. There were many who had gotten caught up in various addictions which unfortunately lead to prison and the graveyard. Many had few positive experiences in life with fewer choices. I even met a few I believed had no choices.

Within a short time I began to believe that something was missing and that possibly seminary and ministry were calling. I thought that if I laid low for awhile the feeling would pass and all would be well. Well, having just completed the Masters in Divinity at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, you know how that turned out.

The Swedenborgian House of Studies has come to be the icing on the cake. The theology can be as simple or as complex as the people who embrace it. The Doctrine of Charity and Uses are the two tenets that I find most compelling. In fact the Swedenborgian Church in Cambridge has a wonderful outreach ministry located right at the church. It is called Bread and Jams and during an internship there last June, I was blessed with the privilege of working with this program. It was a good learning opportunity for a future program of my own. Deo volente.

A note on my family: My dad is a retired Army officer, and he and my mom live in a large retired military community in San Antonio. My mom works at the base chapel and my dad regales his buddies with war stories while on the golf course.

My son, Hubble, is in his first year of law school after just having graduated from the University of California, Santa Barbara. He is interested in international affairs and will be attending law school in Germany next year. Oh, to be 23 again. My daughter, Erin, is in nursing school after completing a tour of duty in the Chemical Corps with the U.S. Army. Oh, to be 24.

These two wonderful human beings are the joy of my life and I thank the Good Lord every day for the privilege of being their mom.

I wish to thank Patte for this opportunity to present a profile and eagerly await ordination at Urbana this summer. Deus est summum bonum. ☩

New Swedenborg Biography Offers Fresh Twists

(Continued from page 19)

www.glencairnmuuseum.org. (For that matter, the entire *Swedenborg Epic* is available online in chapter segments at www.swedenborgdigitallibrary.org.)

Bergquist joins this array of Swedenborg biographers bringing particular strengths. First, he is able to draw upon Swedish documents in Stockholm and Uppsala; his bibliography reveals extensive reliance on Swedish materials. Second, he is a successful professional writer. His style is easy, and he, too, can tell a story. Third, Bergquist's substantial career in international politics gives him a special interest and expertise for evaluating and exploring Swedenborg's own political career. In recent times, the controversial scholar Marsha Keith Schuchard has put forth the thesis that Swedenborg maintained significant secrets during his life, which included his Masonic affiliation on the European continent and working as an agent of the Swedish government during his foreign travels. Bergquist does not venture down this far-fetched path, but he seems ever-interested in the ramifications of Swedenborg's political connections. He spies intrigue, for example, even in the omission of political angles in some extant correspondence between ES and brother-in-law Eric Benzelius: "The dismemberment of the Swedish realm and political questions in general were scarcely touched on. This need not be interpreted as a lack of interest: it could be risky to discuss politics in an open correspondence." (p. 51) This focus is seemingly instinctive for Bergquist.

The Swedish journalist also enjoys playing the sleuth, and he opens some new subjects. For instance, one entire chapter (28: "Money from Paris and 'a good king'?") plays detective in answering the question, "Who paid for the writings?" He analyzes Swedish government documents and the work of a Swedish author, F.G. Lindh, who in the 1930s investigated Swedenborg's personal finances (income and cost of living), and also his estimates of the

(Continued on page 27)

New Swedenborg Biography Offer Fresh Twists

(Continued from page 26)

likely cost for expensively produced theological works. Both Lindh and Bergquist's conclusion: Swedenborg did not have enough cash to finance these fulsome printings. The retired gentleman was well-off in total assets but did not have ready liquidity in the bank, and his pension was modest. Bergquist next makes note of some interesting sums of deposit in Swedenborg's bank accounts in tandem with evidence that Swedenborg took pains to keep his bank accounts a very private matter. This he juxtaposes with a *realpolitik* analysis of monies regularly channeled from France to supportive "Hats" (which might have included Swedenborg) who in the Swedish parliament helped maintain a favorable Swedish policy towards France (Swedenborg was certainly favorable towards France as a political ally). Bergquist's tantalizing surmise: Louis XV, King of France, is the benefactor of the writings! (Get the book and see if you think he makes his case.)

In another example of novel approaches to Swedenborg's biography, Bergquist draws upon the work of Swedish and Latin literary specialist, Hans Helander, who has evaluated all of Swedenborg's youthful extant poetry. One is printed in full: a poem Swedenborg penned while staying in Oxford at about age 22. Apparently, Swedenborg and one of his friends from Uppsala then studying at Oxford went on a drinking and carousing adventure, and Swedenborg later wrote a poem about it. Bergquist avers the poem suggests "the two young men were filled with a quantity of wine, and one of them was compelled to unburden himself hastily of what he had consumed." (p. 41-2) Furthermore, he interprets the poem as leading the reader's thought clearly to having intercourse with two women, a girl and her mother. Such an angle would be inconceivable in the hagiography often characteristic of Swedenborg studies, but in Bergquist's hands it feels respectful enough. He presents

Swedenborg sympathetically, yet he seeks a human Swedenborg, not a one-dimensional saint.


For me, the most significant limitation of *Swedenborg's Secret* is the other side of the coin to one of its strengths: Bergquist's journalistic style. This is not a book by a scholar, but rather by an intelligent layperson. Subjects are often presented without deep investigation, as most of the book's 35 chapters are divided into many short sections, frequently only several sentences in length. Bergquist's treatment of Swedenborgian ideas pales in comparison with Benz's work. The discussions on pietism, eschatology, Christology, hermeneutics, among many theological topics are begun quite capably, but they stop well short of in-depth treatment.

Swedenborg's Secret, A Biography is in the end a readable, sympathetic presentation of Swedenborg for a well-educated but largely uninitiated readership (let's remember the original audience was the Swedish public, who do not know much about Swedenborg). Yet due to extensive Swedish-source data and Bergquist's discerning and able eye, even long-time avid Swedenborgians will find a lot to ponder and also enjoy in these pages. Bergquist never quite tips his hand as to his real opinion about Swedenborg. I doubt he is a member of any Swedenborgian church, but I wouldn't be surprised, if he were asked about his own religious predilections, to hear him employ "Swedenborgian" as one of his adjectives.

While the Swedenborg Foundation's recent English edition of the Benz biography is an attractive tome, there's really no contest if you want a fetching volume to keep out on the coffee table for people to pick up and peruse—it is the difference between *TIME* magazine and *The Economist*. The trim size, the exquisite dustjacket, the overly generous white space in page design (characteristic of all of the books by the Swedenborg Society these days), and the frequent illustrations (43 black and white illustrations and a glossy-paper section of ten color portraits of important figures in Swedenborg's life) all render this a peruser's delight.

Swedenborg's Secret, A Biography is available directly from the publisher's website (www.swedenborg.org.uk/) and is also distributed by the Swedenborg Foundation (800-355-3222).

"Swedenborg's secret," by the way, is indeed revealed—in the penultimate chapter. But you're not getting it from me. Buy the book: you won't regret owning it.

The Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is Dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies and Instructor in the History of Christianity at Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley. 

The National Council of Churches Addresses Biotechnology

(Continued from page 20)

and then destroying them. Christians who do not share this view may nevertheless object to a process which they believe changes a potential person into an instrument. As the NCCC reminded us, this objection should be kept in mind, even if cloning ultimately receives the approval from American society, as callousness remains a moral danger.

Manipulating Genes

One example of this is Gene Therapy/Enhancement; gene therapy changes the genetic makeup of a person by adding a functional copy of a missing or non-working gene, thus potentially eliminating the symptoms associated with the non-working gene. One common argument against this approach is that it may have nothing to do with disease. For example, a person who simply wants to be taller could take advantage of a genetic technique designed to correct a gene involved in human growth hormone deficiency, and increase his or her height. Another form of technology that falls under this category is called Germ Cell Gene Therapy. In this technique, a normal gene may be introduced into a cell destined to become a germ cell (the cells of sexual reproduction) in a person with

(Continued on page 28)

The National Council of Churches Addresses Biotechnology

(Continued from page 27)

a genetic abnormality, thus changing the genetic makeup of future generations.

These are only some of the genetic technologies that are being researched and used today, but they provide us with a place to start if we wish to become engaged in this field and its implications.

After exploring the science involved, the committee developed a policy statement they hoped would be acceptable to members of the Council, recognizing that it would be difficult to come to agreement on many of these issues, and seeking to include as many insights as possible. I'd like to briefly share with you now some of the issues of concern to the committee and the theological understanding on which these are based.

The committee is concerned with a number of implications that could arise out of the use of these genetic technologies, including the perception of disability, the conduct of the biotechnology industry, and the future of the common good.

As the committee has written, "The promise and danger of biotechnology is perhaps nowhere more obvious than in the ways it affects people with disabilities and their families. There is no one 'disability' perspective on the use of biotechnology, for people with disabilities and their families are first of all people, with different values, theologies, and understandings about the purpose of life and God's call to care for one another."

Though the tools of biotechnology are designed to relieve unnecessary suffering or pain, biotechnology becomes profoundly disquieting to many with disabilities when disabling conditions or predictions are equated with lifelong suffering, imperfection, or disease. When those personal and social values are combined with the power of technology to prevent the birth of a child with a disability or defect, the possibility of a new eugenics (a philoso-

phy which advocates the improvement of human hereditary traits through social intervention) becomes quite real. "Our reflection causes us to challenge the assumption that everything needs to be 'fixed' or 'improved' and that we know best how to do this; and that just because something *can* be done does not mean it *ought* to be done. Science cannot save us from our finitude." The NCCC affirms our irreplaceable value, and that each of us is qualified to serve God and our fellow human beings in a unique way. As the application of biotechnologies continues to move forward, we must work to avoid discrimination and protect fully the human rights of disabled people.

The Conduct of the Biotechnology Industry

Another area of concern is the conduct of the biotechnology industry. Recent decades have seen the unprecedented growth and development of biotechnology companies. The rapid advance in science coupled with a vigorous and well-financed corporate infrastructure has outstripped governmental capacity for adequate regulation. The federal government, at this time, does not have nor does it appear to seek a proactive role in proposing regulation that would limit forms of experimentation that are highly controversial. Currently, there are no regulations that would impede a private clinic, university, or corporation in the U.S. from altering the genes of prospective human beings. With a sense of thanksgiving for the advances made possible through emerging technologies, the NCCC nonetheless, urgently seeks a more stable, accountable regulatory environment in the interest of the human community. Genetic information is a deeply personal possession, and public policies must be fashioned to prevent pressures from governmental agencies, insurers or employers to have such information released.

The authors of the policy statement approached these issues with Christian perspectives, united by a concept that is

our deep reality and which unites Christians – love. It is out of love that we seek to address human suffering and so applaud the efforts of science. It is love that calls us to care for one another and all of creation. And it is love that calls us to be responsible. "We bear witness to what God intended the church and the world to be." All areas of life belong to God, and so are we called to be accountable to all areas of life. We should not shy away from issues surrounding the biotechnology industry because the technology is confusing. The church has an important voice to share as this field moves forward in its advances, for our voice is one of concern for the common good, and furthering justice and peace. Having knowledge of both perils and possibilities of the new and emerging biotechnologies is essential to this mission.

The issues of cloning, stem cell research and the like are extremely controversial; the committee could only come to consensus on one of these issues; the churches are united in opposing cloning for human reproduction. But wherever we stand on these issues, the committee would have us think about the following. As the committee writes,

"The terminology associated with human biotechnology is large and complex, and the issues arising are many and serious. But with respect to these issues, the crux of the matter lies deep within us all. Human beings see other human beings not as beloved creatures of God whom God delights in just as we are, but as instruments on which to work our will. The crux of the matter changes creatures to would-be creators, fallen humans who decline to seek God's will, considering their own will a worthy substitute."

This is our key challenge.

I'm grateful I had the opportunity to attend this year's Assembly as I was called to begin thinking about these issues, for I have been one of those people who have shied away from the subject because I haven't understood the science.

(Continued on page 29)

The National Council of Churches Addresses Biotechnology

(Continued from page 28)

If you would like more information on this subject, please visit www.nccusa.org.

I'd like to close with inspiring words from Psalm 139. These words inspired this committee as they sought to outline the challenges and recommendations for the Church.

*O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.
You know when I sit and when I rise;
You perceive my thoughts from afar.
You discern my going out and my lying down;
You are familiar with all my ways.
Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O Lord.
You hem me in – behind and before;
You have laid your hand upon me.
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,
too lofty for me to attain.
Where can I go from your Spirit?
Where can I flee from your presence?
If I go up to the heavens, you are there.
If I make my bed in the depths, you are there.
If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea,
Even there your hand will guide me,
Your right hand will hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness will not be dark to you;
the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you.
For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made;
Your works are wonderful, I know that full well.*

~~~~~  
*The Rev. Alison Lane is an ordained Swedenborgian minister and a delegate to the NCCC. She is currently taking advanced studies at the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion.* ☩

## Teacher's Praise Music CD Has Message

(Continued from page 21)

fun and experience the positive feeling when they are in the music class. Every music class I teach, we start out by singing each of the kids' names because their names are very special."

Kelly Horn, the school's headmaster, believes the students see Deming as a role model.

"Here's a guy who is up at the school on the days when he's not working or not feeling well, setting up PA systems and all that," said Horn. "I think they kind of see him as a renaissance type guy."

"He's a professional musician, but he's not rich and famous. He's someone who dared to chase his dreams, and he's enjoying life because of it. I think that's a great thing for the kids to see and I think they appreciate that."

Deming says the new CD is his first but it's definitely not his last: "I've got more songs. I've written other spiritual songs and praise and worship songs. I'll be writing and putting out more religious music as well as a children's record and some of my secular tunes. Most of them are references to scriptural text."

Deming hopes that his music will inspire as well as encourage. "I want people to sense that there is a real positive message in the music of faith, no matter what troubles we face. There is light at the end of the tunnel and sometimes that light comes from within. That's the main message in my music."

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Paul's CD may be ordered by contacting him by email: [pdeming@sbcglobal.net](mailto:pdeming@sbcglobal.net) "Wise Men Still Seek Him" CD is \$15, plus \$2.50 s&h. Paul is making a donation for each CD sold to the Church of the Open Word (St. Louis Swedenborgian Church), and Service to Humanity. ☩

## Gathering Leaves May 19-21, 2006

The first Gathering Leaves retreat, held in 2004, joined together women from the General Convention, the General Church, the Lord's New Church, and the General Conference and we made lasting connections with each other. And here we go again!

The theme for Gathering Leaves 2006 will be "Historical and Personal Perspectives on Swedenborgian Faith."

We are still sending out registration materials for this next historic gathering. Please email Jane Siebert, [sieberts@southwind.net](mailto:sieberts@southwind.net), ASAP to request to be on the email list.

And when you receive your materials in the new year, please register early as we expect a large response and hope to have a balance of members from each of the different churches. Some scholarships are available, please contact Jane for information.

The registration deadline has been extended to February 28. If you have any questions, feel free to email the Steering Committee Chair, Rev. Susannah Currie at [revscurrie@yahoo.com](mailto:revscurrie@yahoo.com).

To make a donation to help a sister Swedenborgian to attend this event, donations should be made out to 'Gathering Leaves' and mailed to our treasurer, Jane Siebert, at 21007 South Whiteside Road, Pretty Prairie, KS 67570. ☩

### Don't Miss Out! Highlights of *The Messenger* are Available Online

Going away for awhile? Or do you want to recommend *The Messenger* to a friend? Highlights—feature articles, commentaries, photos—from our magazine are available to everyone on the denomination's website at [Swedenborg.org](http://Swedenborg.org). ☩

# Wendy Schnurr, Goodbye



Ed Schnurr

I never had a really religious youth. When we were old enough, we were

dropped off at the Congregational Church, and were picked up after we'd been dipped in religion. As I got older, I indulged in "Born Again" Fundamentalism, but that didn't last very long. Then a family moved into our town. They had a lot of kids, one in my grade, and their father was a minister. I started to hang around with, and then started to date the daughter who was in my class. One of the things that came with this was sort of an assumption I'd go to church with the family. Hence my anointment with the Swedenborgian Church.

But church wasn't enough. There was this summer camp in Fryeburg, Maine, that I should really come up and try for a couple of days. That was the summer of 1972. And 33 years later, I'm still going back every year. I'm still doing the same things, opening and closing camp, fixing things that need to be fixed, trying to keep camp running so that the next generation can enjoy what I've had. The only differences are that I'm now on the executive board (never thought that would happen), and I, along with the other members of the Buildings and Grounds Committee pay for the privilege of opening and closing camp. (We really love it, but don't tell anyone.)

That summer of 1972 was also the first time I met Wendy. She was like a mini tornado. Full of life, ready to go. She was from Philadelphia, and had also never been in any structured religious upbringing. Her neighbors, the Kleins, were members of the Philadelphia Swedenborgian Church, and in a Pied Piper way, collected most of the neighborhood kids and brought them along to church every Sunday.

When an article appeared, describing this summer camp in Maine, Wendy just had to go. So, she and her best friend, Marty {Poochie} Klein, proceeded to raid their mothers' pantries for the materials to bake cupcakes, which they then sold to their captive audience on

Sundays. And they were able to raise the money for both of them to go to Fryeburg.

Wendy and I did eventually become an item. One of those summer camp romances that lasted. So started my many weekend road trips between Boston and Philadelphia.

We were married in May of 1978. We lived in the Boston area; I was working as a mechanic, and Wendy was working as a secretary, floral designer, and student.

In the summer of 1980, she decided to work at a local farm as a laborer, figuring it would get her in great shape, and give her a fabulous tan. By the end of the summer she felt worse than before she'd started working; her main complaint being that she was short of breath. Our local family doctor had the good sense to steer her to a pulmonary specialist, and it was finally figured out to be a rare lung disease called primary pulmonary hypertension. Basically the lungs are plugged with blood clots, so you can't get any oxygen into the blood stream. Thirteen years later, we found out that no one had lived over three years with this condition. Prayer does work...

This long and winding path brought us to San Diego in 1993. We'd moved there to get Wendy listed for a lung transplant, the only viable solution for her deteriorating condition. And one of the most pleasant surprises we found in San Diego was the Swedenborgian Church, but the real treasures were the keepers of the flame there, Eldon and Annella Smith. They took us in as though we were their kids. They meant so much to Wendy that she transferred her membership from the Boston church to the San Diego church.

As we geared up for the transplant, the costs were the big bump in the road. We were looking at \$250,000 for just the procedure, barring any complications. My insurance would pay for the majority of it, but we still had the medications to deal with. Someone came up with the idea of putting an appeal letter in *The Messenger*. We talked to Patte LeVan, *The Messenger's* editor, and she was ok with the idea. And so an appeal letter appeared in *The Messenger* in the summer of 1994, and the Smiths set up a Wendy Schnurr Trust Fund. The response was amazing. Donations came in from people we knew, and people we didn't know. Large and small

amounts; it all helped. Wendy made it a point to write thank yous to everyone who donated. It was a great emotional lift to have people respond in this way, especially from people we'd never met.

Wendy got her transplant in September of '94. And it was textbook. No complications. She continued to have no real complications up to May of 2005. Then she went to sleep and never woke up.

There's this idea that transplant is a cure. It's not. It buys you time, hopefully quality time. It bought us 11 years we wouldn't have had otherwise. People with transplants usually deteriorate in a long, slow manner that is not pleasant to watch. She wanted to go quickly and painlessly, and I believe she did.

Because of our second chance in 1994, we moved back to Boston, were able to buy a house, and Wendy set about being busier than before (if that was possible). Ask any of her friends, you got tired just listening to her ideas of this or that. And the list of things to do. I knew that when I got home from work there would be things to be done, or places to go. If I was home sick, she figured I was available manpower.


Every day was another chance for her to do things. Part time jobs, gardening, sewing, cooking, baking, canning, crafts of all kinds, friendships, shopping. It makes me tired just trying to think of it all. She was our unofficial ad hoc member of the Building and Grounds Committee at Fryeburg. Just point and shoot. But get out of the way.

She lived every day as if it were her last. And then it was. Something we should all consider.

Our wedding invitation had a quote from *Conjugal Love* on it, one that she picked out, something she and I believed/believe in.

And then there's Fryeburg. Every time I go back, it's like going home. It was the most special place on the planet for us. It was where my life really started.

And now I make my own lists, and seem to be keeping myself just as busy as she used to keep me. I know she's keeping God busy.

Ed Schnurr is a member of the Bridgewater Swedenborgian Church. 

# Rooted in Trust



*Sarah Buteux*

*Rev. Sarah Buteux was invited to deliver the following address at Morning Prayers, a daily*

*worship service that has been held at Harvard since its founding in 1636.*

Blessed are those who trust in the LORD, whose trust is the LORD. They shall be like a tree planted by water, sending out its roots by the stream. It shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaves shall stay green; in the year of drought it is not anxious, and it does not cease to bear fruit. —*Jeremiah 1 7:7-8*

Once, about this time of year, when I was a very small child, I sat paging through a photo album, and I came across a picture of a beautiful place in summertime. The picture was so full of color: green leaves on the trees and the bushes, thick green grass punctuated with flowers, and a perfect blue sky, and although the place seemed familiar, I didn't quite recognize it. I took the picture to my mother and asked her where it was. I was completely shocked when she told me that it was a picture of our back yard. It was so beautiful to me because all I knew at that point in time was winter: the bare trees, the brown earth, the grey sky. I was still so young that I couldn't remember back to summer when the world was that full of color, and I didn't yet know that the color would come back again. The changing of the seasons had not yet become a part of my internal rhythm.

Even now, twenty-something years later, I'm not fully convinced that it's all going to come back. I can't quite remember what the streets look like when lined with green trees, what air feels like when it is hot and heavy as velvet, how it feels to lie in the grass at night or that one would even want to. We are now in the dregs of winter, that interminable waiting period between Valentine's Day and real Spring. We have two months of barrenness ahead, two months of walking under stark, bare, brown trees. And I find that these two

months are the hardest of all. I find myself impatient for change and searching for hope.

And then I hear Jeremiah's words about trust: that if we trust in the Lord we will be like trees that bear fruit. Even in times of drought, we will flourish because our roots are sunk deep into the source of life. The subtext is clear: do not be anxious, do not fear. What may not be readily apparent is what lies right on the surface of these verses: the idea that times of drought or barrenness are inevitable for all, even the most trusting soul. They are not a punishment for work left undone, but a natural part of life's rhythm. In this season of our lives droughts may take the form of writer's block, depression, unemployment, low energy, broken relationships, or lack of inspiration.

This is natural. We are not meant to be endlessly green and flourishing. We cannot incessantly produce new life, new ideas, new joys, nor should we. There comes a time when we, too, need to lie dormant. We need to be still. We need to stop and wait and wonder when and if the green will come again.

But even in our stillness we can still reach down and connect to the Lord—connect ourselves to whatever basic truths set us on this path in the first place. This may not be the season to bear fruit in abundance, but the simple act of slowing down and renewing our commitment to our calling or vision of what we want our life to be about, is itself an act of fruitfulness—an act of acknowledging the source of our life, our inspiration, our call. And so I encourage you, in the midst of the dark and the cold that yet remains, to become conscious of the ground beneath your feet, the foundation upon which you stand, the Lord who gives you life. Sink your roots down deep into the earth and reach out for the life-giving water that waits there. Drink deep and wait, for the Spring will come again.

*The Rev. Sarah Buteux is a Swedenborgian minister living in Amherst, Mass. "Rooted in Trust" is reprinted from the March 2004 Newsletter of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, when Sarah was serving as minister there.* ☪

## PASSAGES

### BIRTH

Heger-Alzbeeta (Elizabeth) Heger was born July 12, 2005, to Rev. Pavel and Alice Heger. She is the Hegers' sixth child. Pavel is a Swedenborgian Czech Missionary in the Czech Republic.

### BAPTISM

Robbins—Rylie Blue Robbins, was baptized into the Christian faith on Sunday, October 23, 2005, at Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Rylie Blue is the daughter of Michael and Jenna Robbins, members of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound (aka, Heaven on Earth, a Spiritual Community).



### MARRIAGE

Wood-Ashton—Susan Wood and David Ashton were married November 22, 2005, at Neko Harbour in Antarctica. The Swedenborgian ceremony was performed by Karl-Ulrich Lampe, Captain of the Research Vessel MS National Geographic Endeavour and was attended by 30 guests and 10,000 penguins. Susan is currently serving as Recording Secretary of the General Convention and is a member of the New Church of Southwest Florida.



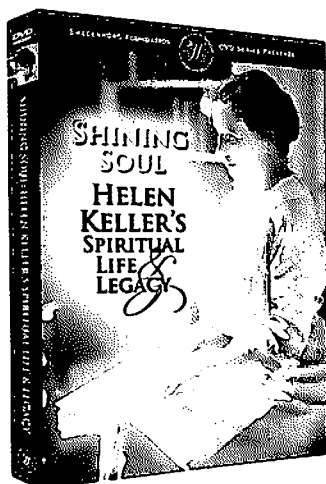
### DEATH

Schnurr—Wendy Schnurr, age 48, passed into the spiritual continuum May 15, 2005. An active member of the human race, she will be sorely missed. Services were officiated by the Rev. George McCurdy, a former minister of the Boston Swedenborgian Church, and burial was at Rockridge Cemetery in Sharon, Mass. Wendy is survived by her husband, Ed, and their cats Moxie and Twinkles. She was an organ transplant recipient, and in death, became a donor. ☪



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.

# Shining Soul



Helen Keller's spiritual life and religious legacy are newly documented by the Swedenborg Foundation's 2006 film, *Shining Soul*. The influence of Emanuel Swedenborg's theology on Keller's spiritual development and character is the theme that lightly, but firmly, binds *Shining Soul* together.

## First Screenings

Its premier screening held November 19, 2005, in Bryn Athyn, Pa., was an elegant, exciting, and cooperative event for which all New-Church people may be thankful. *Shining Soul* was viewed that evening in the Glencairn Art Museum by the film's major donor organizations, some of its cast members, by local Foundation board members, as well as by Foundation officers and several American Association of Religion's scholars in the area for meetings that weekend.

Other early screenings followed on both the East and West Coasts and were equally successful. Attendees from various faith traditions have been consistently enthusiastic, awed, and inspired by Helen Keller's remarkable life.

The film (as DVD or UPC) is 57 minutes long, and available now from customer service at the Foundation (for \$24.95) by calling (800) 355-3222. *Shining Soul* was produced by Penny Price and written by Deborah Forman; viewers of all ages and faiths will be drawn in by Penny and Deborah's artistic, yet historically accurate, documentary of a stunning achievement—Keller's long lifetime of devoted attention to the unseen, unheard, world. ☸

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