

THE MESSENGER

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Further Reflections on Heaven



Erni Martin

In the April issue of *The Messenger*, I shared some reflections on Heaven. I spoke particularly of the gap between the

laity, who continue to be fascinated by life after death, and the professional clergy and academics who are self-conscious about even talking about heaven. I referred to articles in the news media, like *Time* and *Newsweek*, and also learned histories of heaven. *Heaven: A History* by McDannell and Lang had a lengthy section on the Swedenborgian view of heaven, but the authors said that interest in the Swedenborgian view had waned in the twentieth century.

Since the April article, I have read a newly-published history, *Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in Western Religion* by Alan F. Segal. It is a solid piece of work of more than 800 pages. If you are not up to tackling the whole book, I recommend that you read the Introduction and the Epilogue. In the Introduction, Segal describes what Americans actually think about heaven, taken from a public poll by Gallup and Castelli. Following is a basic list of talking points by Segal:

Gallup Poll What Americans Think about Heaven

- The afterlife will be a better life and a good life.

- There will be no more problems or troubles. "No trials and tribulations...worries and cares will vanish...no worries, no cares, no sorrows. I think to be worried all the time would really be awful."
- There will be no more sickness or pain.
- The afterlife will be a spiritual, not a physical realm. "Totally spiritual...lack of physical limitations...there's not going to be a three dimensional experience."
- It will be peaceful. "I think we'll be more peaceful because you really live your hell on earth."
- The afterlife will be happy and joyful, no sorrow.
- Those who make it to heaven will be happy.
- They will be in the presence of God or Jesus Christ.
- There will be love between people.
- God's love will be the center of life after death.
- Crippled people will be whole.
- People in heaven will grow spiritually.
- They will see friends, relatives, or spouses.
- They will live forever.
- There will be humor.
- People in heaven will grow intellectually.
- They will have responsibilities.
- They will minister to the spiritual needs of others.
- Those in heaven will be recognizable as the same people that they were on earth.
- There will be angels in heaven.

In drawing up this list, Segal remarks that we tend to project on our view of a happy afterlife those things that we think are best, most lasting, virtuous, and meaningful in our earthly lives, while eliminating those things we think are the most difficult, frustrating, evil, and inessential. Respondents to the Poll are

If we awaken in the spiritual world the same people who died, can we expect an instant transformation, becoming more loving, thoughtful, sympathetic, appreciative and humor-loving? Won't we take with us the same traits of character that kept us from full joy and happiness on earth?

not speaking from any experience of a life after death, but are sharing what they think would be the most attractive qualities of heaven, if God should ask for their advice.

As I review the list of what Americans think about heaven, I am struck by the number of points that are compatible with the belief of Swedenborgians. Review the list for yourself and check those items that you see as being consistent with the teachings of Swedenborg.

As I went through the list a second and third time, and reflected on it seriously, I had some questions or misgivings. For example: The assumption is that in heaven we will have no problems, troubles, worries, cares, and sorrows, and yet we will grow spiritually.

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A Short New Year's Message

In late summer of this past year, I was advised to sell my house in order not to lose money because, I was told, the market's going flat here for a long time in California, and I could lose money if I waited and tried to sell it two or three years from now, or five, or even ten. (The details leading up to this are boring and irrelevant.)

So I listed my 78-year-old house, and set to work on repairs to septic, dry rot, replacing part of the roof, etc. (My house was in good shape, I thought; a number of potential buyers deemed it utterly charming—"Look at that rock wall—ah! And the oak trees! This is like a treehouse!") But I was advised by the realtors that I should do certain repairs to satisfy inspectors and potential out-of-town buyers who weren't necessarily aware that in Julian part of what you're buying is "quaint" and "historic." My son, who lives about 450 miles up the coast, suggested I stage our 8x10' storage cottage to look like Mark Twain's cabin. "It has that little stone fireplace—never mind that it doesn't work—nobody cares, they just want to picture THEMSELVES out there in this cozy quiet place, writing that great novel or their memoirs. You put in one of those little old writing desks with a single drawer, an antique pen and a book, a kerosene lamp, an old wooden chair..."

I acknowledged that it was a really creative idea, but reminded him that the storage cottage was presently full of...storage. "Do you want to come down here and help clean it out?"

"Well, no, I would, but I'm really busy re-writing this script right now."

So I set to work scheduling the work to be done, AND cleaning out. *Cleansing*. Getting rid of everything we hadn't used, would never use again, was obsolete, and the baffling category of Things that had invaded the house at some point unbeknownst to us. "Who did this? Where did this come from? I never saw this before, who does this

belong to?" Be ruthless, I continued to remind myself. The era of "I may need this someday" is OVER. Remember, you **don't** want to *pack* this stuff and *move* it.

The arguments. "Why do you need three sets of speakers?" "Why do you have so many *plastic bowls*?" "It's ugly and you never wear it, so *what* if your sister gave it to you?" Finally, the huge satisfaction of putting 10 or 12 bags of trash out each week. Actually selling a few things. Giving things away to people who might really need and want them (you hope). Donating books and videotapes to the library, the church. Sending some things to the archives.

The Ramona Thrift Shop, bless them, takes ALL donations. Coat hangers, curtain rods, iffy appliances, old kitchenware, 20-year-old polyester, dried flower arrangements, chipped vases. You drive in with a car load and the workers trudge out from behind the chain link fence looking like the Oompah Loompahs from Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, a permanently resigned expression on their faces as they help you haul the boxes and trashbags out of your trunk and say in a flat monotone, "Thank you, would you like a donation receipt?"

We accepted an offer on the house. Panic ensued and the cleanout activity was accelerated.

No matter how much we did, there was no end in sight. Then, fifteen days into escrow, the buyer cancelled. Luckily we hadn't done anything we had to undo. We never got beyond cleaning out.

I got another offer, but it sounded weird, and I suspected family dysfunction could become a problem. I'm no stranger to family dysfunction scenarios, but I don't need to buy into *other people's*. (The details are, in this case, rather interesting, but not appropriate to go into here.) I'm tired. I take the house off the market. I feel good about

the decision, in fact, good enough to mention it as chief among the things I'm thankful for at Thanksgiving.

We won't be moving. But we continue the rigorous cleansing process. It's good for the soul. It's been said that you have to clear out the old stuff (mental, physical, and spiritual) in order to make room for the new to come in. It's a great way to start the New Year. I highly recommend it.

This wasn't as short as I intended.

Wishing you all a Happy, Peaceful, Useful and *Cleansed* 2006.

—Patte LeVan ☐

Where are we really going? Always home!

—Novalis

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A Praise and Worship Weekend

My Experience at the Christian Music Summit



Ken Turley

I first saw the notice of the weekend workshop for Christian musicians and worship leaders as an unsolicited email. I almost didn't open it: *more junk*, I thought. But it was about music and so I looked. And while I was put off by the obvious conservative, mainstream Christian tone, what it was offering was exactly what I am interested in. And so I checked out the website and the list of workshops and although I didn't recognize a single name (I've since come to find out many are leaders in the Christian music world), I was very interested. A month later I was on a plane headed for Seattle.

I first knew I was in for an experience when I drove up in my borrowed car to the Overlake Christian Church in Redmond, Washington, and the parking lot was already three-quarters full. This might not seem remarkable in and of itself, except for the fact that the distance from the entrance of the parking lot to the front door of the church was nearly a half-mile! (Yes, I checked it with my odometer!) The second indication that this would be an experience was, after registering and heading for the first session, I entered the church sanctuary and it had seating for more people and had bigger and better sound and visuals than any performance venue in all of Portland, Maine, including the minor league baseball stadium! So I gathered myself and took a seat among the couple of thousand other people who were there and got into the music being played by the band on stage.

It was through funding from Convention's Council of Ministers for continuing education, and with permission from my home church, that I was able to attend this weekend Christian

Music Conference being held in this Seattle suburb. It was also a gift to be able to stay with Rev. Eric Allison and his wife and musical partner in worship, Lisa Grace Allison, and to end my visit by joining them in worship with the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound. A big "Thank you!" to all who made this possible.

It was impossible to get to all the classes and workshops I wanted to attend, and impossible to tell you all that I experienced. So I'll do here what I could only do there: hit the highlights. Let me first say that three times a day everyone gathered in the main sanctuary to hear performers. Almost all were backed with what I would call rock bands although the musical style varied from soft pop-rock to country to eighties guitar-rock. Yet they all did music that was oriented around the singing, and many of the songs were composed with choruses intended for group singing along. The lyrics were projected on three big screens and superimposed over images of the performers who were being videoed and projected live on the screens. The music

Genuine love of the Lord is being sung with enthusiasm, skill and joy by people in every size church, in every denomination, in contemporary styles of music and with all kinds of instruments all over the country, in fact all over the world.

was upbeat and engaging. The lyrics, primarily of the "praise the Lord, for he is worthy" were occasionally thought-provoking, touching and even humorous. The performers' spoken raps between songs were testimonial mini-sermons delivered over soft arhythmic music that tied one song to the next. The speakers were engaging, humorous, challenging, biblically oriented but ecumenical in theology. And very life oriented. And the people loved it all and enthusiastically sang along with every opportunity.

When we broke for smaller classes, that is when it got difficult. There were just too many good offerings to choose from. I changed the plan I had made for myself beforehand with the first workshop and instead of a class on songwriting, or lead guitar, or what makes the funk funky (all offered workshops among the other 16 in that time slot) I attended "The Prophetic Journey In Worship" by Leann Albrecht. We actually met in a lobby between hallways, and after some technical difficulties with the PA she began speaking to the 60 or 70 of us who were there. Her entire talk was delivered over quiet piano played in the background by her partner. I loved the concept as it was inspirational, practical, biblically based and entirely "Swedenborgian." Yet it was affirmation of what I both knew and had experienced: the spiritual realm is real and accessible and music and worship is a means for transformational spiritual experience.

As each session of classes came and went I was forced to choose between lots of inviting options. I attended a class on Successful Booking which was a teaser designed to get you to purchase her books and CDs, one on getting your band to sound like a praise and worship band, which was mostly about being simple and tight with good tone, and avoiding musicians who are on ego trips trying to impress with technical excellence and no sense of the group. I did learn that while many bigger churches employ professional musicians for their bands (some churches have as many as five and six choirs and as many music ensembles), many churches have a small choir and a band made up of members of varying skill levels that love to play for the Lord. They rehearse once or twice a week. Yet almost all, even the small churches, have employed music ministers/directors.

I attended workshops on arranging music for horns and strings, on setting old hymns to new music, on how to play

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2005 National Council of Churches Report



Alison Lane

I had the opportunity to attend the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches of Christ, held in Baltimore, Maryland, November 8-10, with my fellow delegates, Rev. Kit Billings (St. Louis) and MaryAnn Fischer (Cincinnati). Founded in 1950, the NCCC is an incredible organization that makes it possible for some 45 million Christians from 36 denominations to work together in ecumenical cooperation. This was my first experience serving as a delegate for our denomination, and I have to admit that before attending this year's Assembly, I knew very little about the National Council of Churches and what kind of role they play in the world. After arriving at the site, however, it wasn't long before I felt overcome with awe at the amazing ways in which this organization works to serve the world.

To let you know what I mean when I say "amazing work," the following is a report of some of the ways that the NCCC and Church World Service have been serving the globe this last year (Church World Service is a relief organization the NCCC created to serve the wider world). I hope it will help you understand my sense of awe. In describing their relief efforts this past year, it seems only fitting to begin with the reminder that within this past 12 months, the world has experienced an extraordinary series of natural disasters. On Dec. 26, 2004, a 9.0 earthquake and resulting deadly tsunami claimed more than 200,000 lives in South Asia. In early October, 2005, an earthquake in Pakistan left almost 80,000 people dead, and another 2.5 million homeless. The United States was no exception, experiencing a record-breaking hurricane season, including three category five hurricanes, Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, as well as a series of severe tornadoes. These are not the only incidents, but these in particular have proven deadly and in their aftermath we find millions of people

who are without shelter, without food, without health care, and many without family to care for them.

Church World Service (CWS) has been providing aid to those suffering from these natural disasters, with a mission to embrace the dispossessed. In hoping to relieve some of the pain of tsunami survivors in South Asia, CWS provided mattresses, blankets, health and baby kits, family-sized tents, cooking stoves, utensils, fuel, food rations, tools for rebuilding, and has worked to develop clean drinking water supplies for thousands of survivors. CWS is also working to meet the health and psychosocial needs of the people, including children, who are taking part in play and therapy activities to help them recover from the loss of loved ones. Furthermore, CWS is providing agricultural and fishing equipment and micro-enterprise training to help people regain their livelihoods.

As a response to those suffering from the earthquake in Pakistan, CWS is assisting 20,000 of the worst affected families with shelter kits (which include a family-sized tent, ground sheet, plastic sheet, 2 iron poles, and 4 blankets), family food kits, and providing medical assistance to 100,000 people. The Pakistan army is working with CWS to help distribute the kits by airlifting them to hard to reach areas. In addition, CWS is working to provide psychosocial care as well as working in partnership with Norwegian Church Aid to construct a new pipeline system to provide clean water to 5,000 families, as well as repairing damaged systems for approximately 15,000 additional families.

As a response to those suffering from hurricane season here in the U.S., Church World Service has provided more than \$1.4 million in material assistance (blankets, recovery kits, medicines, etc) thus far to areas affected. In providing aid, CWS has been working with FEMA and the American Red Cross to meet the needs of survivors. Furthermore, CWS is organizing some 25 long-term recovery programs to address the massive unmet

needs related to the disaster. With affiliate offices in ten states, CWS will also facilitate the relocation of an initial 500 displaced people with participating area churches. In addition, CWS is offering support and training for clergy, chaplains, lay leaders and other caregivers in congregations and communities responding to the needs of survivors.

Another kind of disaster our planet struggles with is the AIDS epidemic. Believe it or not, almost three fourths of all people living with AIDS live in Africa (that is 28 million!). Because this disease has been so deadly here, Africa now has some 12 million HIV/AIDS orphans, many of whom now are called upon to be heads of households. In addition to this health crisis, Africa is in the grip of severe poverty – hunger is a major issue here, as well as the fact that nearly every region faces water shortages (more than one-third of people living in sub-Saharan Africa do not have access to clean water). Furthermore, Africa has experienced wars and civil conflicts for some time now, leaving a large number of displaced people uprooted from their homes, and their children without education. CWS is working to alleviate some of this suffering by creating an Africa Initiative program; this initiative targets Africa's most at-risk populations, including children, people living with HIV/AIDS, and uprooted people including refugees and migrants. The initiative will also give attention to the needs and rights of African women and girls, peace-building and conflict resolution, and trying to make clean water accessible to all.

Here in the United States, the National Council of Churches is working on a handful of social issues as well. One important campaign they are working on right now is the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign, in support of legislation raising the minimum wage. The minimum wage right now is \$5.15 an hour; that means that a person working 40 hours a week, 52 weeks of the year, will make only \$10,712 a year, which is almost \$5,000 below the

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Song of Our Hands

for Hardy Jackson

So somehow I think I know
a little something about it,
because I scattered
my wife's ashes just
outside the Golden Gate
while our son, too young to
possibly understand anyway,
was distracted by the company
of his cousins and his
excitement at the captain
letting him steer the boat
under the bridge.

Through the television
the man's pain came at me
like a bolt of song.

"She gone."

He was holding one child's
hand, a couple others
were standing near, dazed.

"She said, you can't
hold me."

"Take care of the children
and grandchildren."

Even the reporter
was crying.

His voice rose and dropped
like he was singing.

She let go of his hand and
the waters took her away.


I could feel the chill
on his wrist where her
fingers had been,
feel his heart blown apart,
his eyes, his arms helpless
as she chose their lives
over her own.

So somehow something in me
dares to think I've been there
or at least in the neighborhood,
the vicinity. That note
in his voice, the grief so
exposed on his face, in his
slumped shoulders,
maybe that is a true thread
we share. His children need him
as my son needs me.

She told me the same things –
do your best, don't let him
forget me, keep safe, find
love. I've tried to stay away
from danger, even while flirting
with the ocean and big
city streets.

What will his littlest ones
remember? Are they too young,
or will they distrust water
forever? My son swims
and surfs, it can't have
scarred him. Maybe all
he remembers is steering
the boat. I don't think
he would have noticed
there were flowers
in the urn, but they were
all tinged gray. I watched
petals float away from
the boat as the ashes
sank, rocking gently
with the waves.

Tom McEntee

9-20-05 

~ READERS COMMENT ~


Response to Williams' Letter on Stewardship

Dear Editor:

In response to Sharon Williams' thoughtful letter to the editor, (October, 2005) I'd just like to contribute a few impressions of my own. For myself, my gifts of time and service are at least as important as the monetary "treasure" I contribute, and it's clear from Sharon's letter that she feels the same way. And I have come to see tithing as a spiritual discipline. Having said that, I agree it is absolutely between my maker and me to come to an understanding on this, and where the example of others may be instructive and inspiring, guilt trips are neither.

Having served on the Ministries Support Unit since 1999, I have witnessed first hand the struggles of our churches who find themselves wholly or mostly dependent upon the denomination for the funding to pay a minister, and keep the spiritual ball rolling. And many of our churches which do not call on Augmentation funds are watching their precious reserves dwindle ever lower. Where other denominations have a long-standing tradition of tithing and pledging, the Swedenborgian Church lacks this history. As a denomination we are now being forced by the financial realities of the early 21st Century to look at the way we use our financial resources. I continue to believe that we need to learn how to *do* stewardship so that we are self supporting and not dependent on anything or anybody except the Lord's guidance.

I'm hopeful that the dialogue begun by Sharon's letter will continue, and I'd sure like to hear from others on this.

Karen Nielsen Conger
Bishop, California 

How Do We Grow Our Church?



Jane Siebert

It is a common theme heard in many of our churches at board meetings, annual meetings,

potluck dinners and casual discussions; **how do we grow our church?**

Often our questions are the same. Do we have too much Swedenborg or not enough? How can we be more open to visitors and get them through our doors? Why are people not going to church these days? What would bring them back, or here for the first time?

It often feels as if the answers are just beyond our reach. We know that there are those in our communities who are searching for what we have to offer but we can't figure out how to get in touch with them.

So here's the **GOOD NEWS**. The Rev. Rich Tafel is willing to offer his expertise and work individually with churches to explore mission, develop goals and create plans for the future.

As part of Rev. Rich Tafel's ministry to General Convention he has offered to visit three churches a year to share his area of expertise which is corporate strategy. In April of 2005 he visited with leaders of the two churches in the Kansas Association in a tandem strategy session.

Rich has his own business and he travels around the United States and foreign countries working with corporations and individuals to strategize, organize and advance. If we contracted directly with Rich, this session would cost \$5000 plus expenses. As part of his ministry he gave it to us free with the Kansas Association covering only his expenses.

Rich knows what he is talking about. He is a member and president of the Washington, D.C. Swedenborgian Church, which has been without a minister for the last two years. They have undergone significant changes and

he reports that for the first time in many years they are gaining members and have balanced their budget. It has not been easy and the struggle is not over, but they are headed the right direction.

Personally, I left with a new energy and excitement about our church and what we have to offer. The discussions were realistic and yet positive about the challenges facing us in the next five years. Both churches, Pretty Prairie and Pawnee Rock, could probably go on as we have been for many years, but that would not be living up to our true use. What we have to offer our communities through our theology and service is just what many are searching for. Our challenge is to make it into a format that *inspires* others to worship with us, *nurtures* their spiritual journeys in an individualistic and yet communal way, and *serves* God and one another, which were the three words that the Pretty Prairie group thought best describes their church.

As we went around the table with introductions it was evident that most of us have a family connection to the church. We need to build upon this connection and make sure we are serving their needs. In addition we need to **personally invite others to worship and learn with us**. It is hard to enter a group where so many are related. We need to be able to comfortably share what we *believe*; prepare classes appropriate for new searchers and *serve* one another and our communities through our churches. These were the three words that the Pawnee Rock group selected to describe their church.

We also discussed the often avoided and uncomfortable issue of **fiscal responsibility**. Rich stressed the value of operating from a budget, so that throughout the year we know what we have to spend in various areas. This operating budget translates into planning for the future as to what we want to do and how we are going to pay for it. He said that without a budget we

are only reactive to what happens rather than being proactive and opening possibilities to what might happen. It is an entirely different way to operate and offers many advantages.

The goals of our two Kansas churches were similar. We identified if they were short range (this month), intermediate range (this year) or long range (five years).

GOALS:

Short Range: Get out of our comfort zone. Make our churches visitor friendly.

The first thing we did was to ask everyone to sit in a different pew each Sunday to remind ourselves what it is like to come into a new church where you don't feel like you belong.

Intermediate Range: Prepare introductory material/course for new and existing members.
We are in the middle of a Swedenborg 101 class which has attracted 12 interested individuals.


Intermediate Range: Prepare operating budget.
We are trying. This is a major change for us.

Long Range: Learn to articulate our beliefs better so that we are understood in our communities.

We spent the summer studying common Christian teachings and our Swedenborgian understanding, such as: Atonement, Justification, Sanctification, Trinity, The Rapture, Fall of Man, etc.

Intermediate Range: Kids programs, confirmation classes
Still working here.

The Rev. Jane Siebert is pastor of the Swedenborgian Church in Pretty Prairie, Kansas.

The Rev. Rich Tafel is president of the Swedenborgian Church in Washington, D.C., and was inducted into the Swedenborgian ministry in July 2004. 

Straight From the Heart

Dear Friends,

Finding a place to call home-base has not been easy for my husband and me. We met in our late twenties and had both moved almost yearly throughout our twenties. We were both drifting, trying to find somewhere we felt comfortable, at home, at peace. After living in places such as Virginia, Washington, Arizona, and Michigan, we met each other in Maine. Out of the necessity to be near family (but mostly, I think, out of habit) we continued to move around as a couple. Finally, and oddly, we found our home in LaPorte, Indiana. Neither of us ever thought we would end up in this small, but quaint, town. Neither of us had any previous ties to LaPorte, to Indiana, or to any of the surrounding area. We knew we had found a comfortable home but still craved that feeling of peace.

When I mentioned to my husband that I wanted to look into joining a

church, he looked terrified. (I think he was afraid I wanted to quit my job and preach eternal damnation on the nearest street corner!) Despite being married over two years, we hadn't really come to cultivate our relationship spiritually. We were both of Christian belief; I was a disenchanted Catholic, he a disillusioned Methodist. Neither of us had been to church in well over two years, so we began our spiritual journey by trying different churches in the area.

Now, both of us being in our early thirties, we had firmly established beliefs and were not looking for a church that was against these beliefs. No church seemed right; every one felt like a compromise.

And so it happened, through a co-worker of Eric's and through touring the church during the Christmas Candlelight Tour a year ago, that we found our spiritual home. For me, it was love at first sight. I knew almost immediately that I belonged. The Swedenborgian religion was in my soul before I had ever

heard it existed. Eric also felt comfortable at the New Church. After our long journey, we felt comfortable, at home, and most importantly, at peace.

Thank you to everyone who helped make us feel welcomed. Thank you, Freeman, for your inspirational sermons. Thank you for helping two wayward souls find the road less traveled. And please know, from our hearts, it has made all the difference.

Sincerely,
Katie and Eric McManus

Editor's Note: The above letter is reprinted with permission of the authors from the December 2005 *LaPorte Reporte*, newsletter of the LaPorte New Church. The Rev. Freeman Schrock is the minister of the LaPorte church. Straight from the Heart is a regular feature in the LaPorte newsletter in which members volunteer to tell how they found the church and how it has nourished them. ☩

The Politics of the Small

Elke Rosenberg

In my personal healing journey I have moved from a situation where life was dark and bleak to a place of light, hope, and empowerment. I'd like to share an important part of this journey.

I believe that as I heal my new feelings extend out to the earth. It's a way that I take care of the earth as an extension of myself. I see the earth as sacred; as the female aspect of the Divine.

My own healing involves taking small steps towards the healing of the earth. I avoid toxic household products, eat organic food as much as possible and grow some of my own food [a great way to connect with Earth's abundance.]

These actions may look minor, but they are a form of social activism. Some

people participate in more visible forms of social action, such as marching on Washington, union organization, using the media to express their ideas. Both kinds of activism are important, but my particular calling is to engage in these everyday actions that may seem insignificant. Jewish feminist Kim Chernin has coined a phrase, "the politics of the small," to focus on the actions that are temperamentally suited to and unique to oneself. These are small acts of engagement with the world that give meaning to one's life. Chernin believes that neglecting these acts can cause us to fall into indifference; a state that can lead to isolation and alienation.

Some people may believe that local and small actions are politically insignificant. Yet, these "small" actions generate consequences we can barely imagine,

like ripples in a lake circling outward.

I feel a strong connection with Swedenborg's concepts of "uses." He says that what is most important for us spiritually are the simple, everyday actions in which we are attempting to offer our caring to others and to the earth itself.

Elke Rosenberg is a member of the Portland Church.

From *The Appleseed*, newsletter of the Portland, Maine, Swedenborgian Church, Dec. 04/Jan. 05.

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Gladly the Cross-Eyed Bear

Al Geddes

The term *mondegrene* was coined by the columnist William Safire. Originally it came out of a misunderstanding of the lyrics of a folk song. "And they laid him on the green" became *The Lady Mondegrene*. Our friend Gladly has been around for quite a while. He originates from a hymn that contains the line "Gladly, the cross I'd bear." He shows up in the movie *Carnal Knowledge* and is the title of one of Ed McBain's mystery novels.

In the movie, Gladly is used as an illustration of childhood misunderstandings of prayers and hymns. In my case it was "Our Father, who art in Heaven, Harold be thy name." I didn't know who or what "hallowed" was, but I did know that Harold owned the bar where my father hung out.

Traditionally, children are taught things, especially things pertaining to religion, which they don't understand, and which are difficult for adults to explain to them. For example, when you enter any Catholic church, over the main altar is a life-sized, or larger-than-life-sized, crucifix. You know, the first question any child will ask upon seeing it is "Who is that?" My mother gave me the correct answer: Jesus. Now, some of my little chums were told that the person on the cross was God. So, I go home and tell my mother that Johnny says: *The man on the cross is God*. My mom was a true progressive and no question went unanswered. There she was trying to explain to a four or five-year-old the concept of the Trinity. How many of us, as adults, really have a firm grasp of the concept?

In fact, people have come to me and I said, "Deacon Al, I'm confused by God the Father and Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When I think about it for too long, I get a headache." And I replied to them: "Did you see last night's *Survivor*?"

As we get older, we realize that there is no ursine with convergent strabismus named Gladly. The words pertaining to the bearing of the cross take on a different meaning, usually negative and

dealing with bosses and in-laws, generally.

Where and how do we learn? What do we learn? Is what we learn always correct in the literal sense? In the spiritual sense?

Not many people know this, but Deacon Al was once Perfesser Al. I spent four years in a teacher's college, learning how we learn. In fact, people come to me and say, "Deacon Al, do you mean to tell me that you know how to use intrinsic and extrinsic experiences to form the consensus for the crystallization of values?" And I say to them, "On a daily basis! As a disciple of John Dewey, I learned to teach the whole child, and not just the part that showed up for school that day."

As a theologian, as well as a scientist, {Swedenborg} saw as an ideal an intelligence totally motivated by love, and therefore moved to act.

Seriously, there are literally hundreds of more theories of how a person learns something. The most common are what we can see, what we can hold in our hands, what we can weigh and measure. How then, can we learn about God, or other "religious" matters?

In various schools, one can be told "Read pages 112 through 117 and answer questions 1 through 8." There are Sunday schools and after-school religious instruction. The family hopefully provides some direction in matters of faith that are part of one's cultural heritage.

But these are just the outward manifestations of one's ethnic identity, of one being a _____. Fill in the blank. Does one really understand what is being taught, outside of "Well, this is a matter of faith"?

People come to me and say, "Deacon Al, if Swedenborg were alive today, what would he say to us?" And I say to them, "I really don't know. In spite of my many accomplishments, I never learned to speak Swedish."

However, there have been some wonderful translations of Swedenborg's thoughts on the subject.

As a scientist, as well as a theologian, Swedenborg envisioned a "pure intellect" that could bypass the emotions and see reality with total clarity. As a theologian, as well as a scientist, he saw as an ideal an intelligence totally motivated by love, and therefore moved to act. All of this is purely an ideal. The real world, as Swedenborg saw it, is imperfect. We will sometimes call evil good and *vice versa*. We are affected by things that have happened to us and also things that have *not* happened to us. Can we get beyond all of this?

In *Divine Love and Wisdom* he tells us of The Three Degrees of Height.

Basically, these are the Natural, the Spiritual, and the Celestial.

The Natural State asks, What? Can I use my knowledge of the physical world to do good? What is it I must do? What will be the effect?

The Spiritual Sense asks, How? How may I be of service to my fellow humans? What harm or good will my actions cause? How can I use my intellect for understanding rather than judgment?

Finally, the Celestial State asks, Why? What is the purpose of our actions? Do they proceed from the wish to avoid evil, not because "I fear the loss of Heaven and the pains of Hell," but because we recognize evil and wish to avoid it because we wish to do good rather than evil? This is Divine Wisdom, and as Swedenborg writes in *Heaven and Hell*, "For people who love matters of divine and heavenly wisdom, a light shines from Heaven and they have enlightenment." (H&H 265)

Each level qualifies the preceding, Good and Evil, True and False, Pleasure and Pain.

Are these levels attainable?

Swedenborg writes:

Insight from above into what is below (or from the more inward to the more outward, which is the same thing) is called inflow, since it occurs by means of inflow. For example, if our more inward sight

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Further Reflections on Heaven (Continued from page 1)

Aren't our worries and cares often based on interpersonal relationships? If we continue our relationships in the spiritual world, what will keep us from the conflict that comes with individual differences? Surely we can't blame our physical world environment for all our problems. No worries, cares, or sorrows? What about our compassion, our concern for those who are struggling to find meaning and purpose in life? Surely the experience of dying will not give us all the answers. "Heaven will be peaceful." How will that be different from boredom?

"The afterlife will be happy and joyous, no sorrow." What is the essence of joy, and how is it attained? Millions of Americans today are dependent on anti-depressant drugs. What is it about dying that will resolve depression? "There will be love between people." If loving relationships are so elusive here and now, how will dying make that love more attainable?

Swedenborg wrote that the marriage relationship can continue in heaven, but that few couples choose to maintain the union. If a marriage on earth ends in divorce or separation, it seems "natural" that the couple would have no inclination to continue a marriage hereafter. If brothers and sisters, cousins, aunts and uncles have little in common, in their earthly lives, why should we expect that they will develop deepening relationships in the world of the spirit?

Respondents to the Gallup Poll said that life in heaven will be peaceful. But if we believe that peace comes through the resolution of conflict, and there is no conflict in heaven, how does peace come about? We're told that the afterlife will be happy and joyful, but is that possible for those who have not achieved a measure of joy in their earthly lives? If we awaken in the spiritual world the same people who died, can we expect an instant transformation, becoming more loving, thoughtful, sympathetic, appreciative, and humor-loving? Won't we take with us the same traits of character that kept us from full joy and happiness on earth? Traits such as ignorance, poor judgment,

lack of common sense, lack of perspective, intolerance, prejudice, annoying foibles, etc.? If we had problems in developing a deep bond of love with our spouses and children, family and friends, and associates, while on planet earth, why should we expect to become angelic by passing through the pearly gates?

Millions of readers of the "Left Behind" series of novels look forward to the "Rapture" when they will be whisked into Heaven, to be with God, and to live happily ever afterwards. What is so transformative about the whisking process? How and when does spiritual growth and regeneration occur?

We speak of heaven as the domain of good people, and hell the domain of evil people. But where is the line between good and evil? President George Bush says he has no patience with grays—everything is either good or evil, right or wrong. If life were only that simple! Alexander Solzhenitsyn, the exiled Russian novelist, said: "If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart."

William James at Chautauqua

As we try to envision what heaven might be like, or how we would fashion a utopian community, consider the experience of the American philosopher and psychologist William James as he spent a week at the Conference Center on Lake Chautauqua, New York, in the late 1890s.

"A few summers ago I spent a happy week at the famous Assembly Grounds on the borders of Chautauqua Lake. The moment one treads that sacred enclosure, one feels one's self in an atmosphere of success. Sobriety and industry, intelligence and goodness, orderliness and ideality, prosperity and cheerfulness, pervade the air. It is a serious and studious picnic on a gigantic scale. Here you have a town of many thousands of inhabitants, beautifully laid out in the forest and drained, and equipped with means for satisfying all

the necessary lower and most of the superfluous higher wants of man. You have a first-class college in full blast. You have magnificent music—a chorus of seven hundred voices, with possibly the most perfect open-air auditorium in the world. You have every sort of athletic exercise from sailing, rowing, swimming, bicycling, to the ball-field and the more artificial doings which the gymnasium affords. You have kindergartens and model secondary schools. You have general religious services and special club-houses for the several sects. You have perpetually running soda-water fountains, and daily popular lectures by distinguished men. You have the best of company, and yet no effort. You have no zymotic diseases, no poverty, no drunkenness, no crime, no police. You have culture, you have kindness, you have cheapness, you have equality, you have the best fruits of what mankind has fought and bled and striven for under the name of civilization for centuries, you have, in short, a foretaste of what human society might be, were it all in the light, with no suffering and no dark corners.

"I went in curiosity for a day. I stayed for a week, held spell-bound by the charm and ease of everything, by the middle-class paradise, without a sin, without a victim, without a blot, without a tear.

"And yet what was my own astonishment, on emerging into the dark and wicked world again, to catch myself quite unexpectedly and involuntarily saying: 'Ouf, what a relief! Now for something primordial and savage, even though it were as bad as an Armenian massacre, to set the balance straight again. This order is too tame, this culture too second-rate, this goodness too uninspiring. This human drama without a villain or a pang; this community so refined that ice-cream and soda-water is the utmost offering it can make to the brute animal in man; this city simmering in the tepid lakeside sun; this atrocious harmlessness of all things,—I cannot abide with them. Let me take my chances again in the big outside worldly wilderness with all its sins and sufferings. There are the heights and depths, the precipices and the steep

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Further Reflections on Heaven (Continued from page 9)

ideals, the gleams of the awful and the infinite; and there is more hope and help a thousand times than in this dead level and quintessence of every mediocrity.”

Riding on the train back to Harvard University, William James meditated “on what was so lacking in this Sabbatical city, and the lack of which kept one forever falling short of the higher sort of contentment.” It struck him that “in this unspeakable Chautauqua there was no potentiality of death in sight anywhere and no point of the compass visible from which danger might possibly appear. The ideal was so completely victorious already that no sign of any previous battle remained, the place just resting on its oars. But what our human emotions seem to require is the sight of the struggle going on. The moment the fruits are being merely eaten, things become ignoble... At Chautauqua there were no racks, even in the place’s historical museum; and no sweat, except possibly the gentle moisture on the brow of some lecturer, or on the sides of some player in the ball-field. Such absence of human nature *in extremis* anywhere seemed, then, a sufficient explanation for Chautauqua’s flatness and lack of zest.”

As I reflected on the experience of William James at Chautauqua over 100 years ago, I wondered how he would react to the picture of heaven held by respondents to the Gallup Poll. Would a week be enough for him in that heaven? I thought back to the 1963 session of our General Convention in Miami Beach, Florida, when on the first day many of us felt that we had arrived in heaven—the luxurious Americana Hotel right on the beach, gourmet meals, air-conditioned splendor, swimming pools, beautiful meeting rooms. Within five days, however, many of us were ready to go back home. There may have been some friendly arguments on the floor of convention, but they could hardly be called struggles. There must be more to life than Miami Beach! William James might have been happier attending our mini-convention at Lake Chautauqua in June 1942. At least there was a war going on.

Process of Spiritual Growth

Swedenborg spoke of the goal of life as growing into angelhood. The growth begins here on earth, but it must continue if we are to become truly angelic. I like to think that the advantage of full consciousness in the spiritual world will be invaluable, but if growth is to continue there must be continuing struggle.

Heaven will not be heaven without cares, passion, struggles, sorrows, and responsibilities. How we will cope with these concerns hereafter is being determined now by our daily choices and commitments. The Buddhist monk, Jack Cornfield, deals with the integration of the natural and the spiritual in his book *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, in which he shows that we can’t achieve heavenly bliss without dealing with daily concerns like the laundry.

We are deeply indebted to Swedenborg for the descriptions of his experiences in the world of the spirit, “from things seen and heard.” His account is wonderfully illuminating, but I am sure that if he were writing today his account would be quite different, for it is a truly subjective experience, “the kingdom of heaven is within,” and his experience as a twenty-first century Swede would be quite different, as he pecked away on his computer rather than using a quill pen.

In my twilight years, I find myself more attentive to the significance of life here and now, and how the gifts of the spirit can be developed in our work-a-day world, and how we (I) can grow into angelhood during my sojourn on planet earth. As I progress (?) on the journey, I am convinced that this will be the best preparation for what comes next, whatever that may be.

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The Rev. Ernest O. Martin is a retired Swedenborgian minister, former president of the denomination, and founder of Temenos Conference and Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania. He lives at Mosswood Hollow, a Swedenborgian retreat center in Duvall, Washington, founded by his son Paul Martin and Paul’s wife Sandra Grumman. ☩

The Fryeburg New Church Announces Website

The Fryeburg New Church, Fryeburg, Maine, now has its own website, www.FryeburgNewChurch.org. The cost for website development and hosting was donated so that members and friends can have easy access to information on the Swedenborgian Church and current news from The Fryeburg New Church. Sections on the site include *Sunday School & Sunday Worship • Teachings of the New Church • Emanuel Swedenborg • Trustees • Groups & Activities • Newsletters • Capital Fund*

The website will be a work in progress, and links of interest to the local congregation are welcome. For more information, please email Susan Wheaton Logan, swlogan@ncia.net. ☩

A Praise and Worship Weekend

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lead guitar in a praise band, and how to lead your congregation through a transition in worship style. And while this was the last one I attended and I was both tired and saturated, it was the one that was most educational and, surprisingly, most inspirational. A few things I came away with from that session were that every minister or worship leader who attempted to lead the congregation through a change in style was shocked at the level and intensity of the resistance he or she met. That it is better to approach change slowly—it may take longer, but when you do arrive at your goal, you arrive together. Good music and theatrical liturgy is not the goal, it is the means. People are not attracted to churches for the entertainment value of the worship—there are more opportunities for entertainment in this culture than ever before—they are attracted by authenticity and access to God and spirituality.

As I said at the beginning, this is just the surface of what I experienced. It was a weekend filled with lessons. The first lesson I learned is that genuine love of the Lord is being sung with enthusiasm, skill and joy by people in every size church, in every denomination, in contemporary styles of music and with all kinds of instruments all over the country, in fact all over the world. Nearly thirty years ago, as a result of being music director and playing guitar in a production of *Godspell*, I realized that contemporary music could convey a sacred message to average individuals in a way that lifted their spirits and made them feel reverently joyous and genuinely excited about God and spiritual life. And what I experienced in these two days confirmed that not only could it happen, but in fact it is happening all around us.

The second lesson, which emerged out of the first the way spiritual

meaning emerges out of literal meaning, is that the Lord's New Church is coming into being via the Second Coming exactly as Swedenborg said it would. Not by the creation of some new denomination, but rather by the emergence of the spirit of Christ growing up within the people and churches of the variety of already existing denominations. The Second Coming is indeed happening all around us, even now, and in denominations of all kinds. The joy of the Risen Lord, the Bible as something more than a literal history, a theology of a loving God, a doctrine of salvation as ongoing spiritual growth—all of these things are beginning to emerge within mainstream Christianity. Even the conservative evangelical churches are emphasizing the importance of living their faith in their day to day lives, speaking about how the spirit of the Lord and the spiritual realm is in us and around us, and very much present. And that the Lord is not some distant judge, but a loving savior present

The Second Coming is taking place . . .

It is not about doctrine; doctrine is important, present and supportive, but there is acknowledged variety of doctrine even amongst the conservative Christians. It is about spirit. It is about faith joined with love and lived out in daily life.

here and now and invested in all that is going on day to day here on earth. They are no longer trying to scare people into acting like good Christians, they are welcoming people with love, compassion, wisdom and joy into wanting to be good Christians. And after they have made people feel welcome, touched people's hearts and opened their minds with great music and moving messages delivered to large enthusiastically responsive crowds, they invite them into small groups where close personal connections are made and maintained.

Yes, the Second Coming is taking place, and while it pains me to say it, we Swedenborgians are not at the forefront of the means by which it is

happening. It is not about doctrine; doctrine is important, present and supportive, but there is acknowledged variety of doctrine even amongst the conservative Christians. It is about spirit. It is about faith joined with love and lived out in daily life.

The third lesson I learned is that it is a good thing to honor the musical and liturgical traditions of the past *and* it is a good thing to welcome the liturgical and musical innovations that speak to the younger generations. However, it is not clear that any one church can be all things to all people. A church can be traditional in its approach to music and worship. It can be contemporary in the 'praise and worship' vein of informal talks and lots of guitars and congregational singing of contemporary praise songs. And a church can be a 'blended' form that incorporates the entire spectrum within one service. However, according to one expert, the blended approach to worship is the least successful when rapid growth is hoped for and/or experienced.

I still cling to the hope that, while not without struggle and compromise, this apparent conflict of cultures can be compassionately resolved so that it is possible to honor both the traditional and the contemporary in one church. We seem to have managed it in my home church of Fryeburg, Maine. But then again, those who like the traditional hymns must endure the occasional presence of drums and electric guitars. And those who like the contemporary music must endure the responsive readings and old-style hymns played on the organ. And in Fryeburg, except at Christmas and Easter, we are far short of the 100 to 200 in attendance that is the definition of the average small church.

Ultimately, I came away from this experience with a renewed commitment to the vision I have had for the last twenty years: that of a vital church with a vibrant, inclusive and celebratory worship service that is uplifting and spiritually renewing; that challenges people yet leaves them filled with hope and joy; a church that has meaning and importance in people's lives all week long; a church that provides support for

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A Praise and Worship Weekend

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its members and contributes to the well-being of the larger community.

I have also learned that after twenty years, my inner vision far exceeds my outward practice. When it comes to music and worship, as individuals and as a church, and as a denomination, we are still very much engaged in the three-stage process of regeneration. While I now have much more information to include in my thinking about my long-held vision of a vibrant, musically engaging and ultimately spiritually transforming church, and the desire within my heart to make it happen is burning even stronger, I find that I am still left pondering the question: How do we bring the vision to life in our church? I came away from this weekend more hopeful than ever and believing that in answering the question, what the final workshop leader impressed upon us is key: that access to, and development of, a living relationship with the Lord must be the first and foremost goal, and that primary amongst the methods of reaching that goal is prayer.

The Rev. Ken Turley is pastor of the Swedenborgian Church in Fryeburg, Maine. He has been working in music and worship since his days in seminary twenty years ago. He has produced seven CDs, including A Time For Birth, an Oratorio on the Book of Revelation, three musical plays and the Songs For The Journey series. These can be purchased through the bookstore of the www.swedenborg.org website. Ken has composed a number of original songs and pieces for Convention Choir and has set over thirty of the Psalms to music. He has been Convention Music Coordinator for the past several years and through the Committee On Worship is seeking to help enliven the music and worship life of the church. Just recently he helped his wife Laurie produce her first CD of original songs. This and more info can be accessed at www.turleymusic.com and his complete bio is available at his church's website:

www.fryeburgnewchurch.org. 

2005 National Council of Churches Report

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poverty level in most states. If as an individual you want to participate in this campaign, you can log on to their website at www.nccusa.org/letjusticeroll.html and they will send you information and recommendations for action.

The NCCC has also devoted some time this last year to looking into the issues of biotechnology, producing a study guide for delegates to read at this year's meeting. Within this document, the NCCC is asking for churches to consider the issues of genetic testing, cloning, stem cell research, etc. and the moral and spiritual implications of these issues. This is an area of study that many of us may shy away from because we don't understand the science behind it. The NCCC, however, is working to make the science understandable so that we can participate more in deciding whether or not these scientific developments are safe and worthwhile to humanity. This branch of technology has little regulation in the world, and the National Council of Churches believes we should be taking greater responsibility for these developments. (I will present more on this topic in next month's *Messenger*).

While the Assembly was meeting, the National Council of Churches also voted on a statement on the disavowal of torture. This came as a response to a bill that the Senate passed with "Anti-Torture Provisions," and which has now come before the House of Representatives. The NCCC is disturbed that "leaders within our nation's government oppose legislation which publicly disavows our nation's use of torture anytime, anywhere, under any circumstances." Within the statement, the NCCC reminds us that within the core of our religious tradition are Jesus' call to love our enemies, his blessing of those who work for peace, and his instruction that we are to do unto others as we would have them do unto us (Mt. 7:12). As the statement read, "Torture, regardless of circumstance, humiliates and debases torturer and tortured alike.

Torture turns its face against the biblical truth that all humans are created in the image of God."

The National Council of Churches is doing a great deal of work besides what I've written about above. They have Five Commissions, from which they base most of their work; these include Interfaith Relations, Education, Justice and Advocacy (a commission that pursues justice in church and society, poverty, racial justice, justice for women and the environment), Faith and Order (a commission that works to strengthen the ecumenical movement and promote dialogue among churches) and Communication.

Attending this assembly was a wonderful experience. Not only did I learn a lot about the National Council of Churches, but I had the chance to enjoy the company of my fellow delegates; I also met a lot of wonderful people, very dedicated to being a part of the ecumenical movement and a part of the answer for peace in the world. They all seemed very interested in the Swedenborgian church as well and I enjoyed sharing our faith. I also had the opportunity to see a new President of the National Council of Churches installed, Rev. Michael Livingston, a Presbyterian minister with a wonderful sense of humor and great leadership skills. During the installation service, the minister presiding reminded us, as we were often reminded during the Assembly, that we must continue to work for peace in the world, and that we are the leaders we have been waiting for.

One of the greatest gifts I received by being at these meetings was a reminder of the need for us as Christians to attend to all of God's creation; this includes being concerned about the minimum wage, where scientific developments are taking us, as well as those without proper access to water or food. I couldn't help but think of how easy it is for me to forget that so many people are in need when my life is filled with abundance. I may not have riches, but I do have access to clean drinking water that I take for granted; I have enough to eat and am surrounded by grocery stores piled high with fresh produce; I have a warm place to live.

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The National Council of Churches and Church World Service call for us to remember those suffering and to do something about it; they call for us to be a part of a vision far more powerful than when we stand alone.

It is a wonderful thing that the Swedenborgian Church belongs to this organization. As I thought about what I was learning at the Assembly, I couldn't help but think of one of my favorite passages from Swedenborg's *Divine Love and Wisdom*, where he writes, "The essence of love is that what is ours should belong to someone else. Feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves – that is loving. Feeling our joy in others, though, and not theirs in ourselves is not loving. That is loving ourselves, while the former is loving the neighbor" (n. 47). What would our planet look like, I wonder, if we all learned to love everyone in this way? Learning to love in this way, learning to be more concerned about others' joys and concerns, and learning to feel that what is ours should be others' as well, is what the National Council of Churches and Church World Service is about. If you are interested in learning more about the National Council of Churches or Church World Service and ways you can help, please visit their websites for more information at www.ncccusa.org or www.churchworldservice.org

The Rev. Alison Lane is an ordained Swedenborgian minister who is pursuing advanced studies at the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California. ☩

'No Child Left Behind' Act Leaving Too Many Children Behind

New York, November 28, 2005—The National Council of Churches Public Education Committee has warned that the "No Child Left Behind Act" is leaving more children behind than it is saving, especially children of color and poor children.

Instead of treating children "as unique human beings to be nurtured and educated," the statement says, the act has encouraged school districts to regard children as "products to be tested and managed."

Declaring that "Christian faith demands, as a matter of justice and compassion, that we be concerned about our public schools," the NCC Committee for Public Education has issued ten "moral concerns" about the implementation of the act.

The ten critiques examine the effects of the law on students, teachers, schools and their communities.

The committee also faults Congress for appropriating less federal funding than the law originally authorized for every year since its passage.

Today's statement decries the business-management assumptions that are the foundation of many of the law's purported reforms.

"The No Child Left Behind Act approaches the education of America's children through an inside-the-school management strategy of increased productivity rather than providing resources and support for the individuals who will shape children's lives," the statement declares.

"As people of faith we do not view our children as products to be tested and managed but instead as unique human beings to be nurtured and educated. We call on our political leaders to invest in developing the capacity of all schools."

The statement criticizes the federal education law in the context of a 1999 NCC General Assembly policy statement that affirmed: "... criticism of the public schools often ignores an essential truth: we cannot believe that we can improve the public schools by concentrating on the schools alone."

Since the signing of the No Child Left Behind Act in January 2002, the members of the NCC's Public Education Committee have met on several occasions with members of Congress and policy experts on this law.

Among 65 national organizations the NCC has endorsed a "Joint Organizational Statement on the No Child Left Behind Act."

"Overall," the statement says, "the law's emphasis needs to shift from applying sanctions for failing to raise test scores to holding states and localities accountable for making the systemic changes that improve student achievement."

Members of the NCC's Committee for Public Education and Literacy represent: the Christian Church, Disciples of Christ; the Christian Methodist Episcopal Church; the Episcopal Church; the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America; the Presbyterian Church (USA); the Progressive National Baptist Convention; the United Church of Christ; and the United Methodist Women. ☩

Caring for Ourselves and Our Neighbors



Editor's Note: This letter from our president went out to all members on our mailing list in late November. We are reprinting it here for the benefit of readers, friends of the church, and

members who might not have seen it who may welcome the opportunity to contribute.

Dear Friends,

Have you heard it? "Oh, wow! I've found these wonderful teachings! This is what I've been searching for! Where have you guys been? The world needs you!!"

This kind of excitement is catching! It's wonderful to find our teachings, our philosophy, our warm, welcoming churches and our various centers that invite inquiry; to find a place that feels like home after a long search.

We need to keep our avenues of outreach and access open. In a chapter from *Sorting Things Out*, George Dole underscores the fact that "...our task as a church is to cooperate with the Lord in His work." Prayerfully, we continue to identify and establish programs and ministries that reach out to the neigh-

bor, that serve the higher good.

We value the church in our lives. We may have a local church and a warm, caring congregation with whom we worship. We may be distant from a church center, but we may have connections with other members of the church continent-wide. We may be isolated readers and seekers who are looking for new insights from Swedenborg's writings.

No part of what we offer as a larger church comes without some cost. As good stewards of that which we love, we all have a responsibility to support the activities of the church.

Areas needing support include: *The Messenger*; *Our Daily Bread*; church camps; annual conventions; annual meetings of the Council of Ministers; projects such as mini-courses, Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) activities, our denominational website with its virtual library, its publish-on-demand reprints, and other resources; various types of support created for our ongoing ministries; the Central Office where records are kept, church-related bookkeeping is done, and connections can be made.

Local churches are also important. Several of these churches receive some type of financial support from the denomination. Your church might use materials from the Committee on

Worship or from the Sunday School Association. Maybe you've "borrowed" something you read about in *The Messenger*.

The things mentioned above touch everyone. We cannot do an adequate job of caring for our neighbor and learning to love the Lord more fully if we neglect caring for ourselves. This is not selfish; it's supportive, helpful, and is an example of true faithfulness.

For many, the first priority of giving is to the local church. I agree with that, and I hope that you are pledging thoughtfully. However, I ask that you also think of the large role that the denomination plays in the ongoing lives of our members, our youth programs, and in finding new and better ways to reach out to the larger neighbor in a new century.

Please prayerfully consider a gift to the ongoing work of the larger Church so that it can continue to grow in usefulness to the world — in "cooperating with the Lord in His work."

With gratitude,

Chris Laitner, President

Contributions may be sent to:
The Swedenborgian Church
11 Highland Ave.
Newtonville, MA 02460 ☩

Gladly the Cross-Eyed Bear

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were not constantly flowing into our outer or eyesight, then this latter could not apprehend or discern any object.

But the same holds true also for this more inward or spiritual sight. Even this does not see of its own, but from something still deeper. It is the Lord through whom the inner person sees. He alone sees because He alone is alive and gives us both the ability to see and the appearance that we are seeing on our own. That is how inflow works. (AC 1954).

So, in Gladly's case, a child sees a bear with a vision problem, and later on, an adult pictures the act of the crucifixion, and the physical pain and suffering that is attendant with it.

As we can, we proceed with the more spiritual or abstract idea of the cross, of our wanting to put work before happiness. Of sacrifice for the good of all. That the physical act defines the spiritual act in that this is how God made it possible to save the world.

In the celestial sphere, God is working along with us, carrying the cross along with us, making it possible to attain goodness and truth.

An open mind and heart are the ways to let the love of the Lord and our fellow humans in. Also, less reliance on edubabble, psychobabble, New Age

solutions and explanations, as well as simple human arrogance.

Our churches should be centers of learning of God's will, love and wisdom.

People come to me and say: "Deacon Al, you are the cross that we all must bear," and I say, "Thanks for the love."

Lord please give us the strength to pick up your cross and follow you in a spirit of love and humility. Open our minds and hearts that we may know where to find your cross and receive your love and guidance. In your name, this we ask. Amen

Al Geddes is a member of the New York New Church. The above article was taken from a lay sermon presented at the New York church a few years ago. ☩

BAPTISM

Billings—Julia Rence' Billings, born December 8, 2004, the first child of the Rev. Kit and Penny Billings, was baptized into the Christian faith October 4, 2005 at the Church Of The Open Word in St. Louis, Missouri, the Rev. John Billings officiating (Julia's grandfather). Her middle name is in honor of her Aunt Renee' Machiniak, pastor of the Church of The Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan. Julia's mother sang to her in the service, "Suffer The Children," which was based on Christ's words to let the little children come unto Him.

CONFIRMATIONS

Graves—Claudia Graves was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church at the Fryeburg New Church, Fryeburg, Maine, in a service conducted by the Rev. Ken Turley November 27, 2005.

McManus—Katie and Eric McManus were confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church November 6, 2005, at the LaPorte New Church, LaPorte, Indiana, the Rev. Freeman Schrock officiating.

Perry, Thurston—Lawrence Perry and Robin Carlson Thurston was confirmed into the life of the Swedenborgian Church, officiated by the Rev. Ken Turley. They were voted into membership at the Fryeburg New Church, at the annual meeting on October 30, 2005.

DEATH

Sando—Lorraine Sando, Swedenborgian artist and "matriarch of the Puget Sound Swedenborgian church," entered the spiritual world November 25th, 2005, surrounded by her family and friends. She bravely said goodbye to everyone

present and hello to God. Lisa Allison sang as Lorraine closed her eyes and faded from consciousness. It was truly a lovely transition from this world to the next. Our thoughts and prayers are with her and her family. Lorraine was active locally for years in the Seattle area and with the denomination, conducting Convention workshops and serving on several boards, including the Wayfarers Chapel Board in the 90s and recently the Pacific Coast Association Board. She is survived by her sons, Rich, Don, and David, and several grandchildren. A memorial service was conducted December 4, 2005, at the Bonney Watson Funeral Home, crowded with family and friends. Her paintings adorned the walls. The Rev. Eric Allison, pastor of the Puget Sound church (aka Heaven on Earth, a Spiritual Community) officiated. ☩

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 now preparing to send out registration materials for this next historic gathering. Please email Jane Siebert, 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.

Forms will be sent mid-January and there is a February 15th registration deadline. If you have any questions, feel free to email the Steering Committee Chair, Rev. Susannah Currie at 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. ☩

2005 Journal Available

The 2005 Journal is ready for distribution. Most officers and churches will receive a complimentary copy but if you have not received one by December first, you may order it from the Central Office. Prices are: \$15.00 for the full Journal (356 pages); \$6.00 for the Mini-Journal (officers, ministers and directories only); \$3.00 for the full journal on CD; and it is free if we can send the full Journal or the Mini-Journal to your email address. Contact the Central Office. 617-969-4240 or centralo@swedenborg.org. ☩

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.

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The Fryeburg New Church Launches Capital Campaign

Faced with critical maintenance and repair projects at both its historic church and parsonage, the Trustees of the Fryeburg New Church, also known as the Church of the New Jerusalem, have launched a fund-raising campaign to pay for much-needed improvements to both properties. Some of the projects were completed over the summer; others still need to be done.


To kick off the fund-raising effort, renowned Mt. Washington Valley artist Sally Dinsmore was commissioned over the summer by the children of the late Lou and Ola-Mae Wheaton to create a watercolor of the church in their memory. The original artwork was donated to the church and now hangs in its entry hall. An 11"x14" Limited Edition, matted giclée print is available for \$29.00 per print, plus \$6.00 for packaging, postage, and insurance.

"This is a wonderful gift idea for the holidays," according to church trustee Patty Swett, "or for anyone who may have a connection to this beautiful, historic church." All proceeds from the sale of these high-quality, archival inkjet prints, numbered and signed by the artist, will be used for repairs and improvements to the church and parsonage.

The Fryeburg "New Church" is not new at all. Listed in the National Register of Historic Places, the church has been an active part of the Fryeburg Community for well over 100 years, and the New England Colonial residence on Elm Street has been its parsonage since the 1920s. The Capital Fund will provide an ongoing source of funds for regularly-scheduled maintenance projects so that these two historic build-



ings will be preserved for generations to come. Donations in any amount are welcomed and very much appreciated. Checks should be made out to The Fryeburg New Church and mailed to 12 Oxford Street, Fryeburg, ME 04037. Please write "Capital Fund" on the memo line. For more information, please call trustee Susan Wheaton Logan at (603) 694-3333, or email her at swlogan@ncia.net.

Editor's Note: The above information was sent as a press release to Fryeburg area media, and did not reach *The Messenger* in time for holiday gift-giving, but it's a splendid "anytime" gift, or buy early for next year! 

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