

THE MESSENGER

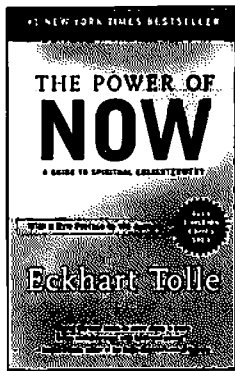
Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

December 2007

~ BOOK REVIEW ~

The Power of Now from the Perspective of a Swedenborgian

Reviewed by Wilma Wake



Eckhart Tolle,
*The Power of
Now: A Guide
to Spiritual
Enlightenment*
[Namaste
Publishing and
New World
Library, 1999,
2004]

Some years ago, before Eckhart Tolle's *The Power of Now* became a best-seller, it was known in the spiritual underground through enthusiastic word-of-mouth endorsements. That was when I first heard about it; from a friend who said it had transformed her life. I was curious about it, and she loaned me her copy.

I started reading the book, and became increasingly irritated at many statements Tolle made. I really got angry at him when I read that "all emotions are modifications of one primordial, undifferentiated emotion that has its origin in the loss of awareness of who you are beyond name and form." [Tolle, 28]. I personally believe that my emotions are *part* of who I am; not a sign of the loss of awareness of my identity. I stopped reading the book and returned it to my friend

without comment. But I certainly harbored some emotions, and they did not dispose me to want to read any more of Tolle.

Recently, Patte Levan asked me to review the book for *The Messenger*. I told her about my earlier irritation at Tolle's writing, but said I would take a fresh, objective look at him and consider how his theology compares with Swedenborg's.

Patte sent me the latest edition of the book, so I began with the new preface Tolle had written. He said that many enthusiastic readers had given a copy of his book to their friends, to find the friends could not grasp what the book was all about because they were "totally identified with the voice in their heads." Tolle said one could not grasp the book through the intellect. In fact, "the words are not always concerned with information" and they must be "experienced" or will appear repetitive. He said, "the single most vital step on your journey toward enlightenment is this: Learn to disidentify from your mind." [Tolle, 21]

We were not off to good start, Tolle and I. Part of what drew me to Swedenborg's writings was that I saw both my emotions and my intellect as part of my spirituality. Was Tolle saying that neither of them were? Was he saying if I

didn't "grasp" his book that I was "totally identified with the voice in [my] head?"

In the end, I concluded that Tolle would say "no" to both of those questions. I believe that he threw out provocative comments that were not always meant to be taken as well-thought-out theological statements. For example, "Basically, all emotions are...a sign of the loss of identity...". In a careful reading of how he defines each term, and the kinds of examples he uses to illustrate his point, I felt his initial statement was softened. For example, he encourages us to observe our emotions and thoughts to learn about ourselves; and that love, joy, and peace are natural states of being rather than emotions.

I initially resented his admonishment to "disidentify with my mind" but came to realize he meant that my mind was not my essence. It is difficult to read this book from an intellectual mode, because he is not writing a theological work. Instead, his writing is more like an impassioned sermon designed to inspire us to change. From that perspective, it does fulfill its purpose admirably.

I see in Tolle a practical manual for living out many of Swedenborg's concepts – and ideas that

(Continued on page 151)

IN THIS ISSUE:

Let Your Music Shine • Theatre Adventure Program
Creating a Swedenborgian Church in Western Massachusetts • Council of Ministers • Parish News

A final goodbye here, after nineteen years as *Messenger* editor. It would have been fun to make it a round 20, but I really felt the need to pass the torch, and so I passed it in what was probably one of the most drawn-out leave-takings on record. We had seven candidates for the job, each of whom was a guest editor for one issue, starting last March and ending with the November issue. These candidates got to see what it was really like to put together an issue, from start to finish, and they all did a remarkable job under the circumstances.

To give you an idea of the changes that take place inside of two decades, I was still using a typewriter when I put out my first issue in January of 1989. Not being terribly quick to leap into the computer age, I continued to use my IBM Selectric for a number of years. There were only three candidates for the *Messenger* editorship when I was chosen in fall of 1988; the final interviews took place at Temenos Conference and Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

I never told anyone this before, but the night before the decision was to be made I couldn't sleep. I was upstairs in the old Farmhouse, lying awake, and singing the Lord's Prayer in my head all night. It felt as if I were singing it aloud, and the music surrounded me. I felt bathed in light when I was told I was the new editor. The late Muff Worden, then director of Central Office was there, and I realized that she wasn't formidable at all, as I had at first thought, but was fun and full of wonderful stories.

It was the first year that Support Units were being introduced, and I was instructed by COMSU chair and mentor Carol Lawson to attend the first Cabinet meeting under the new denominational structure, so that I could get a grasp of the "overall." I was met at the airport

in Boston by Kit Billings, an SSR student then, and whisked to the old Swedenborg School of Religion (SSR) in Newton, Mass. I found myself in a dimly-lit mansion, with imposing busts of Swedenborg and Blake at the entrance, seated at a long polished mahogany table. The chairs of the support units were of course discussing budget, but my strongest memory is of how kind and helpful and welcoming everyone was, giving of their time to explain things; the late Bob Kirven, one of the three professors at SSR, with his wonderful wit and genuine humility that cautioned everyone not to take themselves too seriously, and Chris Laitner, who was chair of this thing called GOSU, (Growth and Outreach Support Unit) walking with me on break and filling me in on how the new structure was supposed to work.

In the course of this job as editor, I've attended 19 straight annual conventions. A number of the young ministers whose ordinations I witnessed are now in their late forties or older. In the early years I was able to bond with the lovely and wise women in the spouses group, who met with a facilitator in spiritual growth workshops during the annual convention while the Council of Ministers was in session. I owe much of my personal and spiritual growth to those times of deep sharing.

My overall theme for my editorship was *healing*. A lot of healing in this denomination has taken place over the years, but I realize that this was a movement whose time had come, and I simply feel grateful to have been a small part of it.



We (the Communications Support Unit and this editor) are pleased to announce that **Herb Ziegler**, a member of the

Cambridge church and currently on General Council, is the new editor of *The Messenger*, starting with the January 2008 issue.

In his vision for *The Messenger*, Herb writes, "*The Messenger* knits together the far-flung Swedenborgian community of General Convention. It is a source of news from central bodies, societies and individuals, and a vehicle for communicating ideas, reviews, history and experiences. My vision for *The Messenger* is a newsletter that is informative, readable, inspiring, compelling, professional, friendly and attractive. It will enrich its readers through well-written, attractively presented articles... continuing *The Messenger's* successful mix, each issue would have a unique focus in its leading articles and include recurring forms such as timely news items from denominational bodies and societies, announcements, editorials, book and movie reviews, essays, and theological articles."

(Continued on the following page)

THE MESSENGER

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

December 2007
Volume 228 No. 10
Whole Number 5325
Patte LeVan, Editor

Typesetting & Layout
Town and Country Press
Plymouth, IN

Editorial Address:

The Messenger
P.O. Box 985
Julian, CA 92036

TEL: (760) 765-2915

E-MAIL: patricia.levan@att.net

Business & Subscription Address:

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

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

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

Editorial

(Continued from previous page)

Herb brings journalistic, photographic, and design skills, plus a deep love of the church and Swedenborg's teachings, to this editor's position, and has, in addition to being the editor of the Cambridge church newsletter for several years, faithfully served the denomination in various capacities.

We welcome and support Herb in this very important, and, yes, life-changing undertaking, and wish for him all the rich experience, growth, and blessings that this editorship can provide.

Please send *Messenger* submissions to hziegler@springmail.com

Patte LeVan

PS. I also want to thank Martha Bauer, Central Office Manager these many years, for her unflagging support and good humor, and all present and past COMSU members for their wisdom and humor and caring. And the readers. And the delightful woman in Kansas who loved my Shaggy Chicken story. Awrrright. Stop now. *Stop.* Wishing you all a peaceful and blessed Christmas. ☸

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>The Power of Now</i> from the Perspective of a Swedenborgian.....	149, 151-153
Editorial.....	150-151
Church Calendar	153
Identical Vision-The Story of "Let Your Music Shine"	154-156
Theatre Adventure Program	
A Theatre Arts Program for Children, Youth, and Adults with Disabilities.....	156-157
A Litany of Haiku:	
Images of Jordan.....	157
The Council of Ministers	158-159
Ready, Set, Go!.....	159-160
Holistic Fair	160-161
We Dream of a Church in	
Western Massachusetts.....	161-162
San Diego Church	162-163
Correction.....	163
Passages	163
Merry Christmas!	164

The Power of Now from the Perspective of a Swedenborgian (Continued from page 149)

are in major world religions. Our Swedenborg gave us an incredible theology, but not necessarily practical advice on how to implement it. Tolle gives us very detailed suggestions and exercises that will allow us to live our theology more fully. He does not have the depth of our Swedenborgianism – or of Buddhism or Hinduism. So I think Tolle's impassioned practical life lessons are best absorbed from the background of a complete theological system.

I am going to look at Tolle's writing through my Swedenborgian eyes, and consider how his manual might improve the spiritual dimensions of those of us striving to live our lives by Swedenborgian concepts.

Oneness

What Tolle and Swedenborg have in common is more significant than their differences. It is in their central concept of oneness, of universalism, that they are together.

Early in the book, Tolle says that he will quote from a variety of sources, such as Jesus, the Buddha, and *A Course in Miracles*. He does not wish to compare traditions, but rather to "draw your attention to the fact that in *essence* there is and always has been only one spiritual teaching, although it comes in many forms."

My inner Swedenborgian did a little dance of delight in recognizing the universal dimensions I so love in Swedenborg's writings.

Swedenborg, of course, provides much depth from his understanding and his experience about why this is so. Wilson Van Dusen writes: "When we look at Swedenborg's writings, we also see a view of religion that transcends the differences." [Van Dusen, 29] Van Dusen

describes existence as a "stupor" or multilevel monument that shows existence as a hierarchy; with the highest level flowing into the lower levels.

Mystical State of Oneness

Tolle and Swedenborg have a similar concept of a mystical state of oneness.

Tolle describes the state of "now," or "no-mind" which is "enlightenment" to him. It is a state of "pure consciousness." In that state, you feel your presence with such intensity and such joy that all thinking, all emotions, your physical body, as well as the whole external world become relatively insignificant in comparison to it. And yet, this is not a selfish but a selfless state. It takes you beyond what you previously thought of as 'your self.' That presence is essentially you and at the same time inconceivably greater than you." [Tolle, 20]

Tolle is describing a universal mystical state. Such states were described in *Varieties of Religious Experience* by William James. They exist in the mystical traditions of all traditions. Swedenborg knew those states well.

Tolle's book includes many suggestions for learning to access and use this state. "In your everyday life, you can practice this by taking any routine activity that normally is only a means to an end and giving it your fullest attention, so that it becomes an end in itself. For example, every time you walk up and down the stairs in your house or place of work, pay close attention to every step, every movement, even your breathing. Be totally present." [Tolle, 21]

This is a way of living meditatively that we find in the Eastern traditions, and, in some respects, in Swedenborg.

(Continued on the following page)

Being and Doing

Here is where I see Swedenborg and Tolle veering in different directions. The debate over “being” and “doing” has always been a part of mystical theology. Is our spirituality based on what we experience inside? Or is it based on what we actually do in the world? Swedenborg settled the debate with a “both-and.” We must transform within and at the same time work to change our society. However, he emphasized the importance of “uses” and “charity”: it is in the living a life of “uses” that we find our enlightenment, our salvation, our regeneration.

In our state of reformation, we do good prior to significant change in our inner being. As we become more a part of “regeneration,” our inner being is transformed and serves to guide our outer actions.

Swedenborg’s universalism is based on action. “So how does Swedenborg come to a universal religion? He makes clear that the great essential is the quality of our conduct with one another. Cultural differences, different forms, practices, doctrines, etc., are incidental to this.” [Van Dusen, 32]. Swedenborg’s New Church is “an inward or spiritual church that unites all those who live in compassion, kindness, or charity. When people go out of their way to help others of a different race, culture, or religion, they make this New Church visible.” [Van Dusen, 33]

Maybe Tolle means the same thing. But he focuses on “being,” and says little about “doing.” Here is an example that particularly concerns me:

Tolle takes a question about people who seem to want to suffer. The questioner asks about a friend who is in a physically abusive

relationship. She has also been in previous abusive relationships. The questioner asks: “Why does she choose such men, and why is she refusing to get out of that situation now? Why do so many people actually choose pain?”

Tolle says that “it is misleading to say that somebody ‘chooses a dysfunctional or any other negative situation in his or her life.’ Without consciousness, there is no real choice...Your friend is stuck in a relationship with an abusive partner, and not for the first time. Why? No choice. The mind, conditioned as it is by the past, always seeks to recreate what it knows and is familiar with. Even if it is painful, at least it is familiar...so your friend, being identified with her mind, may be recreating a pattern learned in the past...Of course her situation is self-created, but what is the self that is doing the creating?...Tell her about the pain-body and how to free herself from it. Teach her the art of inner body awareness.

... As soon as she is able to access the power of the Now, and thereby breakthrough her conditioned past, she *will* have a choice.” [Tolle, 227]

Perhaps you can hear my inner feminist screaming in dismay that we are advised to help a victim of domestic violence by teaching her meditative skills. I suspect our shelters and hospitals are full of severely beaten women who believed learning to meditate would end the violence in their relationship. Of more immediate use would be to give the woman the phone number of shelter or a domestic violence hotline.

It’s not either-or. Of course, meditation is important, too. But there are priorities on our earth, and I can’t find Tolle actually saying that.

I wondered if I was misunderstanding Tolle’s approach to social action, so I did a web search to find other places where he has spoken on the subject.

This is from an interview by Andrew Cohen for *Enlightenment Now* magazine:

Tolle says:

“...right action can only flow out of that state of transcendence of the world. Any other activity is ego-induced, and even doing good, if it’s ego-induced, will have karmic consequences. ...

... first things first. What comes first is realization and liberation, and then let action flow out of that—and that will be pure, untainted, and there’s no karma attached to it whatsoever. Otherwise, no matter how high our ideals are, we will still strengthen the ego through our good actions.

Unfortunately, you cannot fulfill the commandments unless you are egoless—and there are very few who are—as all the people who have tried to practice the teachings of Christ have found out. ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ is one of the main teachings of Jesus, and you cannot fulfill that commandment, no matter how hard you try, if you don’t know who you are at the deepest level. Love your neighbor as yourself means your neighbor is yourself, and that recognition of oneness is love.”

Yes, that recognition of oneness is love. However, Jesus does not say that we do not need to bother following commandments until we have reached a point of pure love. We are meant to do all that we can to live them now; even though our full realization of love will not come until later.

This is distinctly different from Swedenborg’s “reformation.” We are to do good in the world *before* we have made an inner transformation. And changing our outer behavior is part of the path of changing within. During reformation, we do good things from rote because we are told to – by society’s laws, by our church. We obey, but we do

(Continued on the following page)

not yet have an inner motivation – we have not had the “enlightenment” of which Tolle speaks, and which Swedenborg would call *regeneration*.

With Tolle’s emphasis on “being,” he looks for inner explanations for behavior, and advises us to go within to change ourselves first and then the world. Swedenborg is clear about “both-and” throughout the journey. Our journey towards enlightenment [regeneration] involves both inner and outer work in order to get there.

To Swedenborg, right action is part of the road to enlightenment. As we reach regeneration, we continue to be active in the world, but we are now coming from that place of oneness with all.

So, this difference is not on *being* vs. *doing*. It is primarily *being* vs. *both together*. Does this difference between them really matter?

I think it matters. I think it matters a lot how we view violence in our society and how we respond to victims and to perpetrators.

Evil

This difference between Swedenborg and Tolle also gives us different perspectives on evil.

To Tolle, evil doesn’t seem to exist in the physical world, but in our minds. “...what we perceive as evil from our limited perspective is actually part of the higher good that has no opposite. This, however, does not become true for you except through forgiveness. Until that happens, evil has not been redeemed and therefore remains evil.” [Tolle, 180]. He also writes: “all evils are the effect of unconsciousness.” [Tolle, 203].

Am I to forgive those who perpetrated the Holocaust? And if I forgive them, does that change the

evil of anti-Semitism in the world? No, it doesn’t. Part of my purpose on earth is to work to change the character of my world’s anti-Semitism and other forms of discrimination. We cannot wait to be active in the world until we are enlightened. By that time, there may not a world left.

As George Dole says:

“...if every increase in my happiness [which we can and must extend to include ‘my party’s’ or ‘my team’s’ or ‘my church’s’] means a decrease in yours, if every increase in yours means a decrease in mine, no culture on earth can devise a way to satisfy us both. There is no way you can be different from me and united with me. It will be your destruction. This may play itself out in any number of ways ... On the other hand, if I find delight in your happiness and you in mine, we can probably manage to find ourselves a home in any culture.” [Dole, 60].

Conclusions

So, how do I view Tolle’s *The Power of Now* as a Swedenborgian? If I look at existence as a *stupa*, as Van Dusen suggests, then I see both Tolle and Swedenborg fulfilling different functions in the whole of the universe, and each offers something important to the journey.

However, I’m left with discomfort by Tolle’s focus on the internal over the external. He seems to say that evil only exists within, and that we eliminate it within. The purpose of life is to live in the now.

I value having Swedenborg’s books by my side as I read Tolle. They remind me that both spirit and matter exist, and that I must integrate each realm into my life everyday. They call me back to the Lord’s purpose in creation, which has a lot to do with learning how to treat people and the environment with love.

I think it is essential to read Tolle from a Swedenborgian perspective [or from Buddhism or Hinduism, etc]. Otherwise, it is too easy to get caught up in a one-dimensional focus on *being* to the exclusion of *doing*.

Perhaps you know friends enthusiastic about Tolle who don’t know Swedenborg. My suggestion: loan them a copy of *Divine Love and Wisdom*, and tell them it transformed your life.

References:

Cohen, Andrew. “Ripples on the Surface of Being.” in *What is Enlightenment*. [fall, 2000] <http://www.wie.org/j18/tolle.asp>

Dole, George. *Freedom & Evil: A Pilgrim’s Guide to Hell*. [West Chester, Pennsylvania; Chrysalis Books], 2001.

Van Dusen, Wilson. *The Design of Existence: Emanation from Source to Creation*. [West Chester, Pennsylvania: Chrysalis Books], 2001.

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is pastor of the Swedenborgian church in Portland, Maine. She has authored several books, among them Crystals, Crosses and Chakras, available from the Swedenborg Foundation, and Wings and Roots, available from the Central Office. ☸

Church Calendar 2007-2008

December 25-26, 2007

Christmas • Central Office Closed

January 1-2, 2008

New Year’s Day • Central Office Closed

January 31 - February 1, 2008

Wayfarers Board • Wayfarers

May 28-29, 2008

Memorial Day • Central Office Closed

June 29 - July 6, 2008

Convention 2008 • Eastern Massachusetts

July 11 - 14, 2008

Gathering Leaves UK • Purley Chase UK

Identical Vision—The Story of “Let Your Music Shine”

Lisa Grace Allison and Linda Sebenius

From our first moments singing together in the womb, Linda and I have shared a passion and a joyful vision of what our lives were meant to be. Although our paths have been different in some ways, we both have felt called to the same life's work: encouraging all young children to “Let Your Music Shine.” This is the story of the blessings we share—and how God is working through us.

For the first 18 years of our lives, we shared many of the same family musical experiences. We both remember the day we discovered our mutual joy of performing. When we were only four years old, our biggest fan, Grandma Hofman, offered us \$1 to dance and sing. We went on to even greater neighborhood fame: As young children, Lisa and I put on many original “shows” in our family room bay window, complete with makeup and costume, charging a nickel for all who would attend. What a thrill! We never guessed that this pastime would become our life's work!

We grew up in a vibrant, dynamic, busy household of eight. We all sang at home, in the car, and in our Methodist Church Choirs. With a budget stretched to the limit, our parents believed in our talent and gave Linda and me many gifts—ten years of piano lessons, tap lessons, jazz dance lessons, flute lessons, sewing lessons and many, many opportunities to shine. What a blessing!

After high school, our paths diverged: Linda went on to get her music composing degree, moved to Seattle, got a job at IBM, and met her husband Frank. Right out of high school, I fell in love, married, and started a family. For 12 years,



both Linda and I went about our lives, marrying, raising our sons (Linda has three sons, I have four sons). At this time neither one of us was involved in music or a church. It was the time in our lives when we were undergoing a very intense education in early childhood development. We both always felt close to God and knew there was divine purpose in our lives—we just were not sure where it would lead.

Looking back, much of my connection to music as my Divine path comes from finding my spiritual home—the Swedenborgian Church. It was 1989 and I was going through a divorce with four young children. I really needed a spiritual home. I did some church shopping and couldn't find the feeling of unconditional love I wanted from a Christian community. When I literally stumbled into the Stonehouse Bookstore in Redmond, Washington, Rev. Paul Martin and all the wonderful people in the Puget Sound Church made me feel completely at home. There was so much love in this group. Smiles, hugs, and acceptance. And a theology which matched my belief in living a useful life—a theology that respects individual paths to God. I

had found my spiritual home.

From here my life as a performing musician began. Rev. Paul Martin invited me to share my piano playing and singing so I shyly began playing for the group. I had always had a secret wish to share my voice but I was completely untrained and unprepared. I said a lot of special prayers during this time. “Please help me Lord!” and “thank you for the help, dear God!” During this time, Linda also joined the church and we started singing together for the church. We honed our skills – singing along with karaoke tracks - quite funny when looking back! But it was our start as a performance duo, and we can thank the Swedenborgian Church for that!

Next steps for me were attending the University of Washington and getting my B.A. and M.A. in music education with five years of private voice training. Linda and I together sang for three years in a “Dickens's Carolers” performance quartet. “Lisa the performer” was born or should I say released into her life's dream. All the while, the church acted as loving supporter and willing audience. Truly a more supportive group could not exist.

When our Mom went through her eight-month ordeal with cancer, Linda's creativity spiked. When Mom passed on July 11, 1994, Linda had the sensation of being a part of both worlds for quite a while. This opened up a floodgate of composing. From these songs our first CD, “ECHO” was released.

With the release of the CD, we two grown girls began touring Hawaii, Ohio, Indiana and of course Washington State, doing Hospice benefits to honor our Mom. But

(Continued on following page)

Identical Vision - The Story of "Let Your Music Shine"

(Continued from previous page)

hey! How much can we do? We have seven young sons between us! We know this is not the time to tour a great deal and be away from our families. There will be a time for us to do more of our music.

The perfect job for me, raising four boys as a single mother, was school teacher. One day, at my job as music teacher, I was asked "What do you really want to do Lisa?" Something unexpected burst out..."I want to produce an award-winning children's television show." It felt like a dream so big but so true that it couldn't be suppressed. It felt like there was a flashlight from heaven pointing the way.

A TV show? For young children? It wasn't too long after this that I completed my Masters Degree with a focus on children's media. My research project was titled "Beyond Barney: Music Education via Television for the Young Child in the 21st Century." During this research, I connected with Dr. Dorothy Singer of the Yale Family Television Research Center. What an amazing individual! She continues to this day to be an important part of the life's work Linda and I are involved in.

Another person I met during my Master's program was Dr. Patricia Kim who just happened to be the Education Director at the Seattle Symphony. At the same time, Linda had in one of her Kindermusik classes the daughter of the Executive Director of the Seattle Symphony. Together they asked Linda and me to create "Tiny Tots" shows for the Seattle Symphony! Ah, now the blessings really start to flow!

What an amazing experience! To perform for more than 3500 young

children in a weekend and to feed off their joy. The perfect figure 8 – their joy is our joy. Our joy is their joy, each magnifying the other. And what a perfect combination of the necessary skills for Lisa and me to do this work. From stitching the costumes, to composing the tunes, orchestrating the instruments to singing the songs. But when will this work, our life's calling, get to be known by the wider world?

It is 2005, and after 15 years of teaching children music, it was time for a change for Linda. She de-

What an amazing experience!
To perform for more than 3500
young children in a weekend
and to feed off their joy. The
perfect figure 8—their joy is our
joy. Our joy is their joy, each
magnifying the other.

cided to change careers and go into real-estate and for two years she tried to be all that our Mom was—a caring, knowledgeable realtor—but Seattle real estate in 2006 is very different from Mom's little town of Troy, Ohio, in 1980.

On a sunny September day in 2006 Linda fell. This was not any ordinary fall – but a combination of miracles.

Miracle 1 – it happened at our church friend Bettina's house, and she lovingly and carefully got Linda to the hospital – there is no one more caring than Bettina--thank you Bettina!

Miracle 2 – the x-rays the doctor looked at were not Linda's, and she didn't have a broken bone jutting through her ankle. But, her leg could be amputated if there was vascular damage.

Miracle 3 – no vascular damage, Linda gets to keep her leg. But, all four ligaments were torn or damaged. Linda's husband Frank was there beside her every moment. Thank you Frank!

Miracle 4 – our season opener, seven Tiny Tots shows were one week away. Rev. Eric came over and did healing work on Linda's knee. Thank you Eric! Our wonderful Swedenborgian Church embraced Linda in the healing circle and she got support from Marshall and John and Tom who have a close knowledge of knee injuries. Linda practiced and practiced, inches at a time, and she is able to walk on stage with a hidden brace and no crutches—saving the audiences of parents and small children from worry.

Miracle 5 – surgery is being scheduled for December, after our 24 Tiny Tots shows.

Miracle 6 –looking at not walking for a very long time, Linda realized that if she had one day she could walk, it would not be to a real estate client's house, but to do more music. Thank you GOD! Linda re-commits her life to music and children.

Miracle 7 –our brother Michael leaves his job and commits to doing something more meaningful. Michael's good friend Peter leaves his software job in marketing and is looking for ways to re-invest some of his stock, putting his great efforts to good uses. And so the dance begins with Music Shine Media in February of 2007 – Michael, Peter, Linda and me. Thank you Michael and Peter!

So what is our life's work today? We are blessed to be living our life's dream. This week I am performing with my very healthy and fit twin sister Linda for the Seattle

(Continued on following page)

Theatre Adventure Program

A Theatre Arts Program for Children, Youth, and Adults with Disabilities

Laura Lawson
Tucker



For twenty-one years I ran an early childhood program, Laura's School, from our family house in Guilford Center, Vermont. I closed my program in June, 2006. During those twenty-one years I was blessed with sharing the lives of so many young children and their families. I am honored that our house will always hold the memories of children playing, circle time singing, cooking, and stories being acted out on our "Blue Rug Stage." Not to mention that our yard will always carry the energy of children exploring and creating in the sandbox, in the brook, and under the trees. It was a very big decision for me to close my school. I loved being with children and their families. However, I also knew that it was time for a change. Closing my school meant that I could pursue in depth a theatre program that I had started three years earlier with Darlene Jensen, Theatre Adventure Program, at New England Youth

(NEYT), in my neighboring town.

My training as an educator first began in the expressive arts. So, I find it quite interesting that Theatre Adventure Program (TAP) has become the center of my professional work today. I have circled around and returned to my roots! TAP is a theatre arts program for children, youth, and adults with disabilities, and a few of their typically developing peers. We have reversed the standard inclusion model and created quite a different one. We have a majority group of participants

We are seeing the power of the arts to transform lives!

with disabilities and a minority group of typically developing participants. Our students enjoy singing, dancing, percussion instruments, costumes, story-acting, and creating a staged performance. We currently have three weekly classes. We have added a new adult group that meets on Thursday mornings. We have also added a Wednesday morning class for children and youth, some of whom come from their school program and others who are home schooled. Our Wednesday

afternoon program, now in its third year, meets after school. TAP is now serving a total of thirty-two area families in three weekly classes. There are plans to add a second summer session in order to meet the needs of the growing TAP roster.

I love my work! What a gift to participate in the creative process with three mixed-abilities groups. Two of my favorite times for me during Laura's School days were story-acting on the Blue Rug Stage and creating stories on the great outdoors stage.

Now I am extending my interest in creative self-expression with a wider range of ages and abilities. We are seeing the power of the arts to transform lives! Please

visit www.neyt.org to see wonderful photos of our TAP troupe members in recent shows, Peter Pan and Snow White.

TAP students, whether they have a disability or not, are demonstrating to the Brattleboro community their amazing breadth of talents and skills. I welcome inquiries about TAP and the work that we are doing to help make the theatre arts accessible to all

(Continued on following page)

Identical Vision - The Story of "Let Your Music Shine"

(Continued from previous page)

Symphony. It is the opening of our 8th season as Tiny Tots artists. We have seven sold-out shows in two days. A show about Beethoven—for kids newborn to five-years-old. We have performed over 200 shows for Seattle Symphony, written over 35 original shows, and are in our fifth season with the Vancouver Symphony. We are talking to San Francisco and Chicago and hope to expand into the European Market.

We are producing our second DVD with our new media company and I'm the artistic director and lead editor. Linda is the music director and marketing lead. Thank you God. All the patience, trust, and faith that both my sister and I experienced has brought us to the amazing place of joy.

As many of you know, I am still active in the Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church. I am now the music director and in very close relationship with the minister, Rev. Eric Allison (wink wink!). Often on

Sundays, I can be found singing an original composition, inspired by the quiet whisper of a gentle loving spirit guide. I believe the love I experience from my husband Eric, my spiritual community, my twin sister, and my God, opens my creative self to climb the heights. And each day Linda and I get closer to our dream of "producing an award-winning children's television show." For all of this we are deeply grateful. Namaste.

(For more information, please visit www.LetYourMusicShine.com)

Theatre Adventure Program

(Continued from previous page)

in the southern Vermont area: Laura Lawson Tucker (802) 257-7024 or laura@lauralt.net.

Laura's commentary after viewing Lisa and Linda's DVD:

"It is absolutely lovely, the way the children in the audience are engaged—the difference between what Lisa and her sister are doing and what I am doing is that their

work is performance-based. My work occurs in classes, during semesters, in the context of creating a theatre troupe that eventually performs

(check out www.neyt.org and go to "past shows" and look at Snow White and Peter Pan). Lisa and Linda also work with infants, toddlers, and preschoolers. I work with older children, youth, and adults. What is similar to our work is a belief in the inherent lovely qualities of each person and how the arts encourage and support self-expression—to let the world hear/see all of our different strengths and talents. And of course, I am working with mixed abilities."

Laura Lawson Tucker received her Masters Degree in Education from Antioch/New England. She also studied in the Dance/Movement Therapy program.



Laura with members of TAT

Since the late 1970s Laura has been a creative drama and movement artist in

the classroom with elementary students, taught photography, and directed many drama productions. Currently, she is the director and teacher of Theatre Adventure Program.

Laura is also the daughter of Carol Lawson, chair of the Communications Support Unit, Swedenborg Foundation member, and editor of the Chrysalis Reader. Their Swedenborgian roots go back several generations. Laura managed the child education programs at conventions for many years. ☸

A Litany of Haiku: Images of Jordan

Editor's Note: A National Council of Churches delegation, including our own Rev. Susan Turley, visited Israel/Palestine and Jordan in June 2007, in part to gauge the effects of the violence on women and children—Muslims, Jews, and Christians. They have filed their stories on the NCC Web page: web@councilofchurches.org.

The air smells thin and dusty
Earth tones all around
Green pines, olive trees
Tan and brown ground

The hillsides merge up
From the brown earth
Covered in desert sand,
Like a blanket of fog.

The sun, a flat disk
Hanging over the Dead Sea
Hides behind the sand-filled sky.
Mt. Nebo borders the view
In mounds of beiges, browns and tans

A cluster of young men gather under the pine trees
That line the side of the road,
While camels, with their spiny legs
Barely seem to move.

Jesus walked these desert lands
Baptized, lived and healed here
Do you feel him?
Do you see him?
Can you hear him?

Crying for his people
Wailing over spilt blood.
Children's blood, mothers' blood,
Fathers', sisters', and brothers' blood

Seep into the desert floor.
The sand flows red, purple, rose then pink.

Only for the winds to blow this life
Back into the air as if it was never there.

Our nostrils breathe in the dried, spilt blood
As the war drones on. One bomb here
One bullet there, one blast here,
One life there.

The sands of Jordan absorb the spilt blood
Of our sons and daughters
While mothers' tears flow
And the olive trees bear fruit

—Sue Turley

Reprinted from the July/August Swedenborgian Church of the Holy City Newsletter, Royal Oak, Michigan, with permission of the author. ☸

The Council of Ministers

Andy Stinson

Who we are, what we do, why we do it and other workings towards the New Jerusalem

The Council of Ministers shall have as its central focus the facilitating of ordained ministries serving the Swedenborgian Church's PURPOSE. It shall have primary responsibility in matters pertaining to doctrine and worship of the church and shall have charge of the ministry. This council shall oversee the pastoral, teaching, liturgical and administrative dimensions of the ordained ministry; it shall practice and support disciplined and creative theological research and reflection, and it shall oversee the provision of ordained ministry of the Swedenborgian Church and its collective bodies. It also bears responsibility for the pastoral support of all ministries and for providing them with clear ethical standards. It shall exercise such disciplinary functions over the ordained clergy as it may in its collective wisdom adopt, subject to the provisions of the Constitution and Bylaws.

If you are a Swedenborgian minister in our church, you are on our Council of Ministers. Through its 183-year history General Convention has had 488 ministers on its rolls. As chair of the council I stand in ordained communion with each of my brothers and sisters both past and present to bring the rites and sacraments, preaching and prophesying, and visioning and verifying that it takes to bring the Holy City into the world.

Council of Ministers is charged with four essential tasks:

Charge of Ministries

We are the spiritual leaders of the church. It is our job as a council to

lead the church in God's call for it and in the response and workings of Divine Providence within it. We consciously make time in meetings and individually to hear God's call for our denomination and to lead it into the future.

It is the Council's job to oversee the ministry of the church. It is not that we are 'in charge' of the ministries, rather it is that we understand the ministries of the church to be 'in our charge.' It is our job to take care of them, shepherding and encouraging, afflicting and comforting. This means much of our discussion and time is spent looking at how our ministries and ministers are doing and how we might better care for them.

Doctrine and Worship

We are the Convention's primary place of inspiration and understanding for interpreting and understanding the Gospels and the writings in the light of the radically changing world that is the coming of the New Church. We facilitate teaching, reflection, and thinking on both the fundamental understanding of our theology, but the implication that theology has in and for the world and practice of our living.

For example, most recently in 2005 the Council of Ministers studied, debated, prayed about, and finally adopted our denomination's policy on same-sex marriage. This was an important and vital debate responding to the need of an oppressed people and the world seeking to understand the Love and Wisdom of the Lord in a new way.

We are the primary leaders of worship within the denomination and are working fervently to understand and create vibrant worship and liturgies that are responding to our changing world. It is one of the

Council's goals in the coming years to begin the process of creating a new Book of Worship that can hold and respond to a new millennium.

Theological Research and Reflection

The Council has as a part of its job to reflect theologically on our writings and our world to make relevant and accessible the teachings of our church. Whether in individual prayer, in corporate discussion, or in scholarly research we are the body of the church that is primarily responsible to keep the incredible legacy of writing and teaching alive which has been such a strong part of our tradition. The names we all know, Rev. Dr. George Dole, Rev. Dr. Bill Woofenden, Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, and the late Rev. Dr. Bob Kirven have strongly represented that tradition. And now with new voices like that of Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence being added to the conversation, we have as a goal to move strongly into the next new conversation that is emerging in the world.

It is my hope that more voices will come forward to raise the banner ever higher for the thought and engagement in our tradition. I have great commitment to new programs and ideas that will make this possible.

Support, Ethics, and Discipline

Most importantly, as brothers and sisters in ministry together, we gather at least once a year in different sites around the country to engage in peer supervision. This opportunity to set goals, offer and receive support on our journeys in ministry, is one of the most vital programs we have in our ministry.

Lastly we are an ordained professional body responsible for support-

(Continued on following page)

Ready, Set, Go!

Ron and Val Brugler

We are beginning with these words because they reflect exactly where the New York Society is as a church. We are ready, in that our major renovation project is finished

(except for just a few remaining details).

We are set, in that we have positioned ourselves to renew and grow this congregation and ministry. We have heard the command to "Go!" by starting to host new groups and programs. We are so very optimistic about our future! We thank God for leading us to this time and place.

Some of you may recall that four years ago this congregation employed an interim minister to help them make decisions about the future. Under his guidance they determined that they had two choices: either close or give it one more shot. The congregation then decided to grow this church. They

worked on a Vision for Mission statement that outlined goals and strategies to position themselves for growth and use.

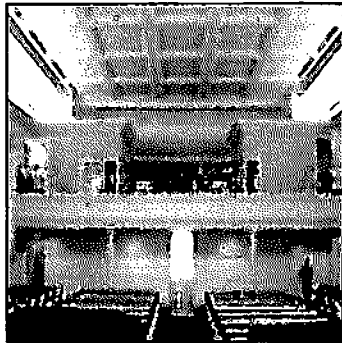
They looked at their financial and physical resources to determine how they might fulfill these. The decision was then made to sell the brownstone that they owned which would provide funds to renovate the church. After employing Ron as their new minister, we began meeting with architects to draw up interior designs that would meet our needs. The past three years have been devoted to making the renovations a reality. Doing so has not been easy. But now that it is over, we are looking ahead to great things!

This past month we have gotten off to a wonderful beginning. Over 1,000 people have entered our doors for the following events:

- "OpenHouse New York" on October 6th, with close to 300



Garden Entrance



Back Wall, Sanctuary

visitors and over 400 pamphlets distributed.

- Our Renovation Completion Renewal Celebration on October 14th, with 75 present for the morning service, 38 for the afternoon service, and some 50 or so guests here in the interim. Approximately 75 pamphlets were distributed. We thank President Chris Laitner for being here with us for this event.
- We hosted the Murray Hill Neighborhood Association on October 23rd and received a special award that acknowledged the excellent job we have done in preserving both the interior and exterior historical details of our building (the first-ever such award given by them!).
- We held our first "post-renovation" rehearsal and wedding on October 19th and 20th.
- On November 1st, Dr. Eugene Taylor of the Cambridge Society was with us to offer a lecture on "Jung & Swedenborg: A Dynamic Psychology of Spiritual Self-Realization." Over 100 people attended this event.

(Continued on following page)

The Council of Ministers

(Continued from previous page)

ing one another and the standards to which the New Church calls us. We have a regular ethical educational component as well as mechanisms for both investigating and adjudicating clergy behavior.

Conclusion

The Council of Ministers has

facilitated the ordained ministry of the church in the past and seeks to be a powerful influence for the Lord and the New Church in the future. As the Council, we seek to be partners with the people and the churches we serve as we engage in this task of ministry together.

I want to leave you with an invitation: Contact me, at stinsonad@aol.com, or any minister you know on ways that we might lead the church forward. The future of our

church and ministry together will be about our ability to engage in the conversation. The conversation of, in, and for *what* do we want our ministries to be engaged, where and how they will make their mark, and fundamentally how will they come together and worship the Lord through ritual and right practice, is the most important task ahead.

The Rev. Andy Stinson is Chair of the Council of Ministers. ☪

Holistic Fair

Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center

August 25, 2007

Jennifer Tafel

The day began with scattered raindrops and wind—the only remaining evidence from the severe thunderstorms the previous evening (tornadoes in Flint and Lansing). The day turned into a beautiful sun-filled afternoon and there was a definite buzz of excitement in the air.

There were several vendors with offerings ranging from massage therapy, tarot card and psychic readings, quantum healing, a variety of jewelry and gifts, and a labyrinth to walk.

Approximately twenty-five

visitors came to the event friends and family members of the various vendors, members of the Michigan Association as well as the general

public. Since this was the first event of its kind held at the Almont Retreat Center, the coordinators Heather Fick (ANCA manager) and Sandy Greiner (ANCA caretaker) had no idea what to expect. Success

is difficult to define for this event. Would large numbers indicate success? Perhaps. The same question could be asked about our various congregations, which are successful in their own unique way despite the number of people in the seats. What



Egyptian Gifts



Almont Yard

was a success about this event:

- Vendors new to the retreat center instantly fell in love with the facility and several gave donations to the retreat center. These vendors are eager for the next event to happen.
- People visiting the event learned about the facility and are interested in returning.
- Healing happened throughout the day and the retreat center!

(Continued on following page)

Ready, Set, GO!

(Continued from previous page)

We are also in the initial stages of planning for a March workshop with the author and radio personality, Vaishali, whose book *You Are What You Love* was the focus of this past summer's Council of Ministers' sessions. We will also be having Eugene Taylor back to offer several of the William James Lectures. Our goal is to host 3-4 such programs in the coming year.

In addition, our newly redesigned

garden courtyard is now a haven of green that is open to the public every day. Benches provide seating for people to enjoy their lunch. Soon our new fountain, complete with a specially commissioned statue, "The Angel of the Font," will provide soothing sounds.

In warmer months, we will have our sanctuary open for meditation and prayer over lunch-time. Volunteer musicians are being lined up to play, and every day I'll offer a brief reflection. We are also adding a book sales area in our lounge that will be open during this time, and hope that the Swedenborg Foundation will hold book signings here for their

new publications. New Yorkers love to go to book signings!

As you can tell from the above information, all of us at the "new" New York New Church are very

proud of what we have accomplished. We have done our best to position ourselves for growth, renewal and greater service to our Lord in proclaiming the Good News. And to all of you out there in

"Messenger Land," if you happen to be in the Big Apple, feel free to pay us a visit.

The Rev. Ron Brugler is pastor of the New York New Church. His wife, Valerie, is office manager. ☪



Michele McKee, head librarian of Kristine Mann Library, with Eugene Taylor.



Champagne Toast

We Dream of a Church in Western Massachusetts

We dream of a spiritual home for people who are homesick for a place they've never known. We dream of a space where questions are asked, without easy answers. We dream of a mission-driven church big enough to share our truths with the world. We dream of worship that is open, exciting, stimulating, up-to-date, and flexible, with dynamic preaching and great music, to attract the young and young-at-heart. We dream of inspiring celebrations that aren't stuffy, but hold a child's attention; timeless wisdom shared in the contemporary language of sacred arts—audio, visual, and kinesthetic. We dream of a Spirit-filled community that has room for all people who desire to live in Love and Wisdom. It will be a home for seekers, serving its community as the Lord did, prophesying for these times, and modeling what is possible. We will be a New Church for the Twenty-first Century.
(the Launch Team of the Western Mass. New Church)

Creating a Swedenborgian Church in Western Mass.

Nancy Little, Mass. Association

The idea of creating a new Swedenborgian Church in Western Massachusetts came about last summer at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly when Rev. Hunter Roberts said she has always wanted to start a church. She was disappointed that, after her ordination in 2006, she had not been called to serve a parish. I asked her if she really wanted to start a church and if she really wanted to be a parish minister and she eagerly and enthusiastically answered, "Yes!"

Ever since my husband, Trevor Woofenden, moved to the area from Pennsylvania in 1982 and I moved to the area from Eastern Mass. in 1998, we wanted a church here. Having grown up in Elmwood and spent most of my teens and 20s involved in the church on a local, state, and national level I really miss having a Swedenborgian Church nearby that I can call home.

Trevor and I are not the only Swedenborgians who call the Pioneer

Valley of Western Massachusetts home. My older sister, Audrey, lives in Holyoke. Beki Phinney graduated from UMass at Amherst and until very recently lived in the area and is still very excited about the idea of having a church here. Trevor's kids – Jason & Myrrh-- live locally. Ross Woofenden's kids – Mike Woofenden and Ken Woofenden-- also live locally. Andrew Dole and Sarah Buteux live in Amherst. Two members of the General Church also live in the area. Without even trying very hard, we have at least 12 people who are interested in having a Swedenborgian Church in the Northampton area. We will form a core to reach out to hundreds, or even thousands of people who have never heard of Swedenborg.

We are not interested in just serving ourselves. We want to create a church that people will want to come to and are excited about. We are using a model for church launching and growth that has been very successful with all kinds of churches, nationwide, *The Purpose Driven*

Church by Rick Warren. Hunter has attended workshops and training and has the enthusiasm to make this happen. She envisions 50 – 200 people attending our first service. We want to share the message of the New Church with as many people as possible. Thinking about this brought to mind Matthew 5:14-16.

"You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven." –Matthew 5:14-16

Hunter spent the week of October 27 to November 2nd in the area. Monday was spent with Trevor conducting a spiritual survey in Northampton and Amherst, asking mostly un-churched people on the street what they would want in a church, if they were to attend. On Tuesday, Hunter met with Rev.

(Continued on following page)

Holistic Fair

(Continued from previous page)

- Future vendors who couldn't make this event are excited about future holistic fairs and learning about this facility.
- People in the town of Almont saw road signs for the fair and came to learn about the facility, ready to hold their next event at the retreat center.
- Positive press about this event in the local newspaper led to

a positive relationship forming between the *Tri-City Times* and Heather Fick, manager of the retreat center.



Jenn (r) holistic healing

This was a great day and a great way to show off the Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center to the public. There are new relationships being formed out of this event. The buzz of excitement in the air continues, as a new chapter for the retreat center is being written by a variety of authors.

The Rev. Jennifer Tafel is pastor of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church in Lansing, Michigan. ☪

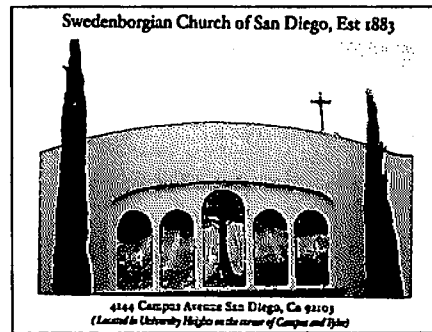
San Diego Church

Connecting the church with neighbors, business, and community

Carla Friedrich

San Diego is a city of small closely-knit neighborhoods, and the Swedenborgian Church sits in the context of historical and artistic University Heights on the edge of Hillcrest, a culturally diverse neighborhood, self identifying as GLBT friendly. University Heights (UH) prides itself on its historical preservation, and its focus on the arts.

This year, as part of our community outreach, the church assisted Judy Riffle, Founder of the University Heights Art Association and Coordinator of the UH ARTS



OPEN, by actively participating in every aspect of the annual event, which took place in mid-September. Judy single-handedly does most of the work, but the church helps.

Our involvement included helping organize, sponsor, and host the

participating artists, musicians, and performers (we hosted the artwork or performances of nearly 40 artists!). We were also actively involved in the Ostrich "EGGStravaganza" Art & Auction in which local artists paint or otherwise embellish real ostrich eggs (the ostrich is our neighborhood's official mascot.) Congregational members gave of their time, talent, materials, technical expertise, and also brought refreshments for our exhibiting artists and visitors. Several showed up as participating artists as well. In further support of local artists, the church purchased

(Continued on following page)

We Dream of a Church in Western Massachusetts

(Continued from previous page)

Sarah Buteux and Evelyn Harris (formerly of singing group Sweet Honey in the Rock). Evelyn is very interested in creating a music ministry. Hunter met with other local ministers on Wednesday including a youth minister who was very excited about a ministry targeting young adults (of which there are many in the area). She also met with the Dean of Religious Life at Mount Holyoke College to discuss the churches in the area and options for young adults. Thursday was spent preparing for our worship and dinner that evening. Eight people were in attendance—Trevor Woofenden, Nancy Little, Sarah Buteux, Andrew Dole, Lee Woofenden, Lorena Costello, Hannah Simons, and Hunter. Sarah read from Luke 24, the story of encountering the Lord on the road to Emmaus. Hunter then spoke about finding the spark of the Divine in one another as we break bread together, and served communion to begin our communal potluck meal. Following dinner we

had time to discuss our Purpose, Vision and Plan.

PURPOSE:

Presence the Possible—Increase the

Odds on Love

1 Speak Truth

2 Praise God

3 Transform Lives

4 Find Purpose

5 Do Good

NEEDS/PLAN:

1. Launch team

2. Percept study of area: Northampton, Amherst, and Springfield

3. Write business plan with budget, milestones, and timeline

4. Obtain funding

5. Develop seeker service with artists

6. Previews and potlucks leading up to launch

7. Launch!

Friday morning Hunter had a follow-up meeting with Trevor and Lee and set three main goals for the coming months.

1. Get Hunter to Western Mass. by spring 2008 to do further research (she currently lives in Napa, California), get to know the community, determine best venue and gather together a launch team
2. Develop infrastructure and procure funding for preliminary Phase 1.
3. Continue throughout the winter to hold social gatherings with spiritual component to maintain momentum.

So, we're off and running. We are asking the Mass. Association to recognize us as an ongoing Mission, until we get on our feet. Our first step will be to raise \$24,000 to cover the costs of the first phase: research, development, and feasibility studies. We will be sending a letter this month asking for the help of our fellow churches to seed a new sister church. When we raise the money we need to start, a new church will be born with the New Year, and grow like a seedling, sprouting with the spring. ☸

San Diego Church

(Continued from previous page)

member/artist Eddie Henderson's gorgeous Ethiopian Orthodox-style ostrich egg. The music and entertainment were phenomenal! A local coffee house (David's) brought enough coffee for all and Domino's pizza donated 25 very hot and delicious pizzas. Friends of the church (not even members yet), pitched in to help keep food, equipment, and people on the move.

Many community newspapers gave the event articles and write ups, and almost all with images: *Presidio Sentinel*, *Adams Ave Herald* (front page), *UH News* (front page and a four-page insert), *North Park News*, *Gay and Lesbian Times*, *Citybeat*, *Reader*, and others. Our name was plastered prominently in them. The church received thousands of dollars in free advertising.

The San Diego Convention Center made it a featured event, and it was in many hotels' travel event pages: Marriott, Sheraton-Hawaiian Airlines to name a couple. We were also featured on Sign-On San Diego, KPBS, KUSI, FOX6 News, Voice of San Diego. Most of the ARTS OPEN sponsorship this year was in kind, including some printing.

Despite all this external "success," the Lord decided to keep it very real and so within the first few minutes of opening events, He sent us a family in need; a mother and two twin boys (age 15) from Kosovo with no resources or place to go. With shelters booked to the hilt on the weekend, we were able to quietly take up a collection for the corner motel for two nights until they could be connected with local agencies. The twin boys, Arbner and Ardite, helped paint our new arch panels, which were designed by Eddie Henderson, in comic-book style; a combination of Star Wars (space blasts), Water-

ship Down (animals and nature), and Swedenborgian metaphor/Correspondences (Divine Human). Our prayer was for a child-friendly multi-cultural all-kid paint during the event. I think the Lord delivered abundantly.

Other community connections we are making include being a distribution center for an organic farmers' co-op. We in turn get to share our church's unique spiritual perspective with numerous individuals who would never have shown up for church and also have organic fruits, etc., to offer during our social/coffee time.

Giving back within the community is good, right, and beneficial. Our blessings are ongoing as we are building deep and abiding relationships within the immediate neighborhood. The whole weekend was a free-flow and sharing of goodwill, gifts, and resources in what could be called an "economy of grace." Surely the joy which comes from these kinds of community "uses" demonstrates the celestial principle on which heaven is built.

"Thy will be done this day! Today is a day of good and useful purpose; I give thanks for this perfect day, miracle shall follow miracle and wonders shall never cease."

The Rev. Carla Friedrich is pastor of the San Diego Swedenborgian Church. ☸

Correction

In the November 2007 Messenger the Masthead incorrectly listed Rev. Kim Hinrichs as Guest Editor for that issue. The Guest Editor for November was Rev. John Billings. We apologize for any inconvenience or confusion this caused. ☸

PASSAGES

Confirmations

Kern, Ludwigsen, Mammen, Sarrafian - Bob Kern, Sue Kern, Kristine Ludwigsen, Janet Mammen and Mike Sarrafian were confirmed into the membership of the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos in West Chester, Pennsylvania, November 11, 2007, the Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Peters, Stevenson - Bill and Gayle Peters and Linda Stevenson were confirmed into the life of the Urbana Swedenborgian Church November 18, 2007. Consecrated Lay Leader Betsy Coffman officiating. The congregation welcomed them with joy and thanksgiving.

Deaths

Dillaway - Alice H. Dillaway, 95, formerly of Waltham, Mass., a long-time active member of the Cambridge, Mass. Church, entered the spiritual world October 29, 2007, at the Birchwood Terrace Nursing Home in Burlington, Vermont. Alice was born March 20, 1912, in Wilmington, Mass., the daughter of John and Sarah (Young) Hathaway. Her memorial service was held at the Cambridge Chapel November 3, 2007, the Rev. Kevin Baxter officiating.

Mrs. Dillaway was predeceased by her husband Manson in 1977. She is survived by her daughter Charlotte Hagos of South Hero, Vermont, and her grandchildren, Zeryai and Zufan.

Holden - Cynthia Holden, long-time member of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cleveland, and beloved wife of Steve Dzeba and mother of Brendan Dzeba, transitioned to her next life of usefulness on May 15, 2007. Her arrival in Heaven was joyously greeted by her son Justin Holden, who passed on to his eternal reward in 1973 at age 7, as well as by her mother and father. Her physical presence with us in the natural world is greatly missed, but we know that she is being of even more use in her newest incarnation. Cynthia's memorial service was conducted at the Chapel May 19, 2007, the Rev. Jonchol Lee officiating. ☸

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.

MERRY CHRISTMAS!

You know, when I was younger, Christmas was a far simpler affair. My Christmas list could be written on a single page: there were Mom and Dad, my four sisters, my grandparents, and my dog. As long as I made certain that there was a gift under the tree to each of them from me, Christmas was covered.

That all changed in my early twenties. My first niece, Angelica Elizabeth, was born in 1985. She got added to the list. I got married in 1988. The list doubled. For awhile there was a steady flow of nieces and nephews, all of whom got something from Uncle Eric and Aunt Norma every Christmas. Eventually my sisters and I, with their husbands, decided that our respective lists were getting way too long and that we should draw names, each one of us responsible for buying a gift only for the name we have drawn. It served to take some of the pressure off, but who were we fooling? Everybody on my list at least was going to get a little something from me anyway. Add to that all of the Christmas cards and letters every year, and pretty soon I began to understand why Christmas begins in November; we needed the extra time just to stay ahead of a growing family.

Don't get me wrong—it's a wonderful problem to have! I love my family and get a real charge out of giving them gifts (especially when they actually like the gift)! As far as I'm concerned, the longer the list the better! It means that there are many more people in my life that I value, and that's a life worth living.

Jesus of Nazareth had a small family, genetically speaking. He wasn't an only child (the Bible hints that he had at least one brother), yet

still, the number of people in his household was relatively small. Even so, he made the people who came to him a part of his spiritual family, incorporating them quite easily into his sphere of love and concern. He didn't stop there, either—his attitude revealed that he considered the global family of humankind as part of his extended household, as it were, and the gospels reveal a sense of kinship with all life. Obviously they didn't celebrate Christmas in his day (that probably began sometime in the fourth century A.D.), but if the man had to write up his Christmas list, I'm sure there's no scroll large enough to hold it.

I guess this is just my offhand way of encouraging each of you to expand your own Christmas list—that list containing the names of all those you cherish and for whom you would gladly buy a gift if the budget allowed. Make certain your list grows from year to year, and if anyone be excluded from your list, take time to wish that person especially all the best wishes your heart can muster. Christmas cannot be an occasion limited to a select few; if we are to be true vehicles of Christmas spirit, we must open our arms wide and embrace the whole world.

All my best to you and yours this Christmas,
Eric Hoffman

Reprinted from the Virginia Street Church Newsletter, December 2005, St. Paul, Minnesota. The Rev. Eric Hoffman is pastor of the Virginia Street Church. ☿

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

Address Service
Requested

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