

THE MESSENGER

Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America

February 2007

Families For Peaceful Tomorrows Update

John Titus

As I write this today, December 11, 2006, I realize the date is insignificant for most unless you have an anniversary or birthday today. But for the Titus family it has significance. Today my son, Zac is the exact same age Alicia was when she was killed—28 years and three months. We don't look for these reminders of our loss, but they are always there to remind us of what was and will never be, how life has

changed since then, and how very much we miss Alicia as we approach the Christmas season; Alicia's favorite holiday.

Grieving the tragic loss of a child is devastating. I've always maintained that this excruciating pain and deep sense of loss has the power to destroy us. It also has the transformative power to lift us up to a higher place of love, compassion, understanding and use. God indeed works in mysterious ways.

From the first moment I heard that Alicia had been murdered, I

prayed for understanding. I prayed for a greater love for our world and our family. I prayed for goodness and truth to prevail...and I found myself on a journey I could never have envisioned; how to find peace in the midst of tragedy, war and escalating violence. I stood at a crossroads and chose the road less traveled and that "has made all the difference" to quote Robert Frost.

Having lost loved ones to political violence orchestrated by religious fanatics, we have utilized our unique platform to address some of the underlying issues and causes behind the violence, looking at the root causes and possible solutions and vehemently opposing action that would perpetuate more of the same.

remember distinctly feeling the presence of God when all around life seemed so desolate.

Alicia's spirit spoke to me often and God provided the love and direction to begin my journey. I began to deeply admire the courage, the strength of

I remember my visions and dreams immediately after Alicia's death that gave me direction, strength and courage to walk the path of peace when all around the drums of war were beating. I

conviction and the sense of purpose that the great peacemakers from our past demonstrated. I saw the power that a committed few with purity in their hearts can wield to change the course of history and to make our world a better place. I realized that to respond to the violence that took my daughter's life with more violence would only engender more of the same, while learning to forgive those who did this to my daughter would not only free me from the self-destructive hate, it would be honoring the person Alicia was. She was a woman of peace. She was a soul filled with love and understanding.

Bev and I have spoken out often on issues of peace and justice, forgiveness and reconciliation and related issues across this country and other countries to college students, high school students, public forums, peace rallies,

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Celebrations

- Over 300 people attended the New Church of Southwest Florida's Christmas Eve service on the beach!
- Great, creative fundraisers are going on in our churches. Three examples:
Working at sports venue concessions (Royal Oak, Michigan); Casino nights (Edmonton); "Dinner Out" (New Church of SW Florida).

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IMSU • Film Reviews

How I Spent My Spring Vacation

In December 2005, which seems a very long time ago, I wrote about my sponsoring a child in Appalachia through Children, Inc., because of their ad I'd happened across in *Reader's Digest*, and because I wanted to personally make a difference in a child's life instead of simply contributing little sums of money to various causes without feeling that it was having any real impact. I wrote that I was impressed with the fact that the CEO answered the phone herself and we had a lengthy conversation.

In early 2006, I decided to visit the child I had sponsored, and to visit Children, Inc. headquarters in Richmond, Virginia, in late May, when I would have some time off. Children, Inc. encourages sponsors to visit the children they're sponsoring. I coordinated all this with Carol Lawson, friend, mentor, and chair of our Communications Support Unit, who lives in Virginia. She said she would be able to drive me there from Richmond, because she was going at that time to North Carolina to visit her daughter Susanna and attend her grandson's graduation.

The visit with my sponsored child had to be arranged with Children, Inc. through the volunteer coordinator who worked with the child through his school, in this case a school in the extreme southern end of Virginia. All the details were worked out ahead of time—instructions, maps, contact numbers—and on May 23rd, 2006, I arrived in Richmond and took a shuttle to a lovely bed and breakfast house where I happened to be the only guest. The next day I called Children, Inc. to tell them I had arrived and to let them know where I was staying. They sent one of the staff to pick me up and I was

taken to lunch by the Appalachian coordinator, Renee Kube, at the favorite restaurant of their founder, Jeanne Clark Wood who had recently died. I had originally thought that I would call them and they would simply give me a quick tour if I could take a taxi to their headquarters, but this southern hospitality was beyond anything I could have imagined. After lunch, I was given a tour of their new headquarters, met most of the staff members, and afterward met with the staff in their boardroom and was asked about how I thought they might improve their marketing in order to attract more sponsors, because there are so many children out there who need to be sponsored. If you're wondering from this description if the organization is top-heavy, that isn't the case, as most of the dedicated staff work for very small salaries and volunteer a lot of their time. Over 80% of what they take in goes directly to child care services.

On May 25, Gwen and Robert Griswold, staunch Swedenborgians, picked me up at the B&B in Richmond, at Carol's request, and took me to where we were to rendezvous with Carol, who was coming in from Washington, D.C. Carol and I drove four hours to her house in Dillwyn, Virginia, and at 5:30 a.m. on May 26th, we began our trip to southern Virginia. At noon we arrived at the elementary school where I was to visit A. It is a beautiful little school. I went in to the principal's office and gave them my name. The principal seemed delighted to see me and called the coordinator; she left her home and arrived a few minutes later and showed me around the school. A came back from lunch, I met his teacher briefly, then he and

the coordinator and I went into a small conference room to begin our visit. A is very thin, has large eyes and a guarded expression.

He was very shy at first. He was twisting his fingers and answering questions with one or two words, making very little eye contact. I showed him the books I had brought, and asked him about his dog. He said they didn't have that dog anymore, he had been shot. I said I was sorry, but didn't press as to how it had happened. He said they had another dog now, a Labrador. I asked him about his baby brother. He began to warm up. He seemed to light up when he was shown genuine personal attention. His baby brother is a year old. I asked if he was walking around, and starting to get into mischief. A grinned, and I said, "I'll bet you don't think he's so cute when he's getting into your stuff."

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How I Spent My Spring Vacation

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Asmiled again—he has a great smile; his eyes light up; his nose and his whole face crinkle. He admitted that, yes, his brother gets into his Play Station, and TV, and

drew for me a few months ago is like the truck his mother drives. He grins and says it was her truck he drew. He says he draws when he gets bored. I ask him what bores him. He says he gets tired

Play Station, and TV, and draws.

He drew some pictures, and go to the front of the school. I showed him a book on spiders, and we sat on the porch and read together. He was very, much like it did when he was a child. He read to my own children. He was all, and once he's been there, the new word is, he re-

I suspect his writing will pick up eventually, but he's not a right-brained, and he doesn't draw. He likes to draw the spider book; we got it from there we get

into snakes, an aquarium he visited in Florida with sharks, which he recalled in detail. I ask him if he got the picture I sent of my cat; he says he did, and says they have a cat who had kittens. I ask if they're keeping any of the kittens and he says, Yes, and his mother has named one of them "Chaos."

As we're leaving, I ask him to draw pictures of the kittens for me. He says he will. The next communiqué I get is a Christmas card that has a snowman melting in front of a fire, among other figures. That's ok. We'll get to the kittens later. I hope to visit him once a year.

Patte LeVan

To Contact: Children, Inc.
1 (800) 538-5381

I or "chosen" to do it I definitely feel a lot out against wars. It results in the death of people like that fuels the fire. It's my choice to give in to communism would ultimately lead in a direction I

our early work we found directly. The day of September 11th was profoundly

significant that there were many who felt the same as we did; others who wanted those responsible brought to justice in an international court of law without the senseless killing of more innocent people that would ultimately result from an act of war. We organized under the name of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows and our united journey began. When Bev and I first met the PT members (we had had many contacts by email and telephone prior

to this) at a rally for peace prior to the beginning of the Iraq War, a rally that brought together over 500,000 protesters in New York City alone and millions across the country, we felt an immediate kinship with them. We were all saying virtually the same things and it came from a place of wisdom and love. Peaceful Tomorrow's formation and early story can be read in a book by David Potorti entitled September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, or through our website www.peacefultomorrows.org.

On September 11th, 2006, while Bev and I were organizing a "Day of Remembrance" at Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio, our Peaceful Tomorrows group had miraculously pulled together peacemakers from all over the world for two weeks of dialogue, workshops and planning. These were exceptional people who had been victimized by violence in Palestine and Israel, Rwanda and Sudan, to the Mafia in Italy and across the globe who had chosen to

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The General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church in North America

The General Convention established in 1861 as "The General Convention of the New Jerusalem."

The Swedenborgian Church is the denomination established in 1861 as "The General Convention of the New Jerusalem."

The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord's presence and leading, especially by fostering personal and ordained ministries which facilitate the spiritual well-being of people.

Your generous contributions help to make this essential work possible. Thank you for supporting our mission!

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respond to the violence imposed upon them with forgiveness, reconciliation and nonviolence, organizing programs and developing initiatives that would stop the cycle of violence. As a result an International Network was established and will be headed by Peaceful Tomorrow's David Potorti.

In the meantime, Bev and I, along with Betsy Coffman and Alyssa Wilson from Urbana University were organizing the Urbana University "Day of Remembrance." In total we spoke to nearly 400 attendees for the different events including many students, faculty and community members. The morning was a Remembrance Service with Betsy introducing the event with a heartfelt opening, followed by an emotional testimony from Bev, a remembrance talk by John and a moving rendition of "Amazing Grace" by Rob Head (Urbana President Dr. Robert Head's son). In the afternoon, we hosted speakers Maria Mone, Executive Director of the Ohio Commission on Dispute Resolution and Conflict Management and Jim Bolland, Director of the Peace Resource Center and professor at Wilmington College. We invited local educators for training on Conflict Resolution training.

In the evening, Bev and John spoke about forgiveness and reconciliation followed by the keynote speaker and renowned author, Marianne Williamson, who gave a moving talk on issues of peace, compassion, causes of violence and how to break the cycle of violence in which we find ourselves so deeply entrenched. Through donations and the reception with Marianne, we raised over \$5000 for the Alicia Titus Memo-

rial Peace Fund, which is housed at Urbana University and used to promote peace and justice forums at the University and in the surrounding community.

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization has been actively involved in peace initiatives all over the world. We are an organization made up of around 250 family members and around 4500 supporters. We have traveled to countries around the world to promote our common



The National Peace Conference (Alleati Per La Pace) in Riccione, Italy, a national peace conference designed to influence the new government on issues of peace and justice. Gianvitor Padula (left) heads the organization that hosted the Conference, John Titus (center) was keynote speaker, Bev Titus and (right) one of the interpreters from a local graduate school.

cause of peace and justice with other organizations and to lend support for those who have been victimized by political, social, religious and other violence. Our goal is to strive to find nonviolent solutions to the violence that took our loved ones through dialogue, political action, media opportunities, programming and other civil actions. Having lost loved ones to political violence orchestrated by religious fanatics, we have utilized our unique platform to address some of the underlying issues and causes behind the violence, looking at the root causes and possible solutions and vehemently opposing action that would perpetuate more of the same. To the tens of thou-

sands of innocent Afghani or Iraqi mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters who lost loved ones to the United States bombings or the resultant civil war that has erupted, we are the terrorists! I have been made to feel the pain that they are suffering. I have developed a much deeper compassion for those who are suffering throughout the world due to violence, whether it is from a "War on Terrorism" or the "War on the Infidels." In the end, innocent people are dying, our young men and women serving our country are dying and being maimed for life and our children's children will pay the price. We must stop this cycle of violence.

Wars have been fought since the beginning of recorded history. Our country has a long history of violence and wars. We can justify them and demonstrate their usefulness. But, we now stand at a crossroads in history where this approach to overcoming evil and dealing with conflict may be more self-destructive than righteous. Our history books portray the many battles that have become a part of who we are.

Violence has become so commonplace in our society that we think nothing about watching movie after movie that graphically depicts the killing of other human beings. Our children are exposed to violence daily through television, news-media, video games and movies. Some accept this as normal. But I see it as a travesty. We should never accept violence, hatred and destruction as normal. God wills for us much greater things and divine love should be the guide by which we set our standards. I believe as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. so eloquently stated, "Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that."

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Families For Peaceful Tomorrows Update

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Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence...The chain reaction of evil—hate begetting hate, wars producing more wars—must be broken, or we shall be plunged into the dark abyss of annihilation.”

In the past year and half, Bev and I have been very active in trying to convey our message of hope for our world, a message of learning how to co-exist in peace with our brothers and sisters everywhere, a message of love and forgiveness, a message of reconciliation and peace. Our message doesn't come from reading stories about these concepts or from political motivation; it comes from the painful journey of losing a child to the political violence that swirls around us and leaves a path of destruction in its wake. Understanding the root causes of this political and religious violence is paramount in preventing it. Peace and justice will not prevail as long as the underlying conditions such as poverty, injustice, prejudice, hate, fear, inequality, disease, hunger... are left unresolved. And, creating more of the same is not the solution.

Bev and I were invited to speak at the American Muslim Voice National Conference in Palo Alto, California in late August. We had met Samina Faheem Sundas at the Department of Peace Conference on September 11th, 2005, where we both spoke. She was actively involved in an organization of Muslims who are striving for the same things we are—peace and justice and the hope of living in harmony with others. Bev and I heard stories of escalated hate crimes and prejudice since September 11th. We heard inspiring talks from Muslims who longed for a world in which we all learn to accept each other and honor one

another. We told our story and shared Alicia's life and tragic death with over 300 attendees and shared our hopes and dreams. It was a day of reconciliation and healing and it gave us hope and courage to continue on our journey.



Alicia Titus

After this event we had about a week to complete our planning for the “Day of Remembrance” at Urbana University and followed up ten days later with a panel discussion at the Ann Arbor [Michigan] Public Library in conjunction with the Magnum Photographs which were on display at the library depicting the tragedy of September 11th, 2001. Before, after and during we interviewed with dozens of newspapers, television news teams, radio shows and Public Access programs. We told our story, our tears, our hopes and our fears; and we will continue to do so as long as there are innocent people being murdered anywhere in our world.

In May 2006, we were invited to Italy by the National Peace Alliance to speak at their annual conference. While there, we spoke at two Secondary Schools in Forli and Riccione. I was utterly amazed at how much more astute these 15-17 year olds were about American politics than many people in the United States. The questions they posed were deep and thought-provoking. We also had a chance to meet and dialogue with the Bishop

of Forli and the President of Rimini Province. I was very impressed with the meaningful discussions by these great men. Along with these opportunities, we spoke at public forums and interviewed with various media along the way. Everywhere we went, the warmth, the concern and their commitment to peace was heartfelt and abundant. The peace movement is alive and well across Italy and Europe.

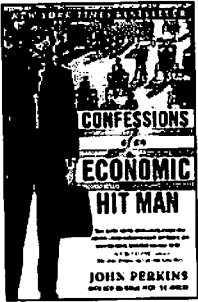
Bev and I have met some wonderful people along our journey which has taken us from the Halls of Congress to the streets of New York City. Along the way we have spoken at colleges and universities including the University of Illinois alongside Kathy Kelly from Voices in the Wilderness and Reverend Benjamin Cox, who marched with Dr. King. We have joined with the efforts of the Hibakusha, speaking out against nuclear proliferation and we have been honored with the dedication of a speech by Congressman Dennis Kucinich at a Cranbrook Peace Foundation event. We have joined with peace organizations such as the Interfaith Council for Peace and Justice, Michigan Peaceworks, the Season for Non-violence Committee, Israeli and Palestinian Mothers for Peace, Iraqi Veterans Against the War, Viet Nam Vets Against the War, The Peace Alliance, the Department of Peace regional and state committees, and many others as we strive to create a world in which we don't have to fear that our other children or grandchildren will be murdered because of hatred and religious zealotry. These acts of terrorism are not done in isolation and the sad reality is that they are fueled by a system that is uncaring and insensitive to the root causes. We all have a responsibility

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Confessions of an Economic Hit Man

by John Perkins

New York: PLUME [a Penguin book], January 2006 [Hardcover by Barrett—Koehler Publishers, Inc.; November, 2004].



Reviewed by
Wilma Wake

"The world is
as you dream it."

Quick: who
said that?

Emanuel
Swedenborg?

One of our
cousins in the New Thought
Movement, such as Unity or
Christian Science?

Actually, it's a quote from John Perkins, author of the 2004 book: *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*. He begins his astounding journey by describing his life as one of the "highly paid professionals who cheat countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars. They funnel money from the World Bank, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and other foreign 'aid' organizations into the coffers of huge corporations and pockets of a few wealthy families who control the planet's natural resources."
[xi]

By the end of the book, he is asking: "If the world is as you dream it, why had I dreamed such a world?" He invites us to join him in dreaming a world of justice to eliminate poverty and environmental destruction.

There are numerous fascinating themes in this book, including details about how a small, elite group of very rich and powerful people control international economics and politics. My own focus in reading this book was riveted on the story of a man's journey of regeneration. By the end, I was overjoyed to have come to know a pioneer who is blazing yet another trail in our world to the New Jerusalem.

Perkins story begins with a childhood in Tilton, New Hampshire. His father was a faculty member at the prestigious Tilton School which caters to the wealthy. Yet he was raised as one of the poorer children in town. I immediately connected with his colorful descriptions of the local class tensions, having lived for 20 years

just a few miles down the road from the Tilton School in Franklin, New Hampshire.

His story then relocates to Boston University, where he was a student in the late 1960s studying Business Administration. During that time, he had a series of encounters that left him certain he was being recruited by the National Security Agency to do top-secret international work as an "economic hit man." He had never heard that term before, but he learned what it meant by living it. He helped arrange huge loans for Third World nations for their economic "development" that actually lined the pockets of Perkins and his associates. And it left poor countries far poorer and deeply in debt.

He was on the road to being a millionaire by age 30. But just a few years short of this goal, he quit the business. Why? Here is one of the significant events in his transformation:

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Families For Peaceful Tomorrows Update *(Continued from previous page)*

in this quandary we find ourselves immersed in. Each of us must strive to do our part in understanding and making this world a better place to live, a better community, country, international community and universe. In the whole scheme of things, we are all children of God, which makes us brothers and sisters in the eyes of God. Accept it or deny it, but what is happening to the people in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially the innocent people being murdered daily, the violence in our inner city ghettos and all over the

world affects us in deeply profound ways. The ripple effect impacts us in untold ways and until we have justice for all, there will be no peace.

In this sacred time of the year when we celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ in the world and in our hearts, let us deeply feel and truly envision what it would be like to have "peace on earth and goodwill toward man." My pain is deep, yet through my pain I have come to realize that there are many in this world who are suffering, just as I am. This heartfelt compassion has grown from my heartache and I am absolutely certain that I

can never be a part of any act that inflicts pain and suffering upon another human being like the pain and suffering my family has been made to feel. Our September 11th group borrowed our name from Dr. Martin Luther King in a speech he made in which he said, "...the past is prophetic in that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows..." May God's love and heaven's peace be upon you.

John Titus is on the Board of the Swedenborgian House of Studies and on the Board of Urbana University. He lives in Dexter, Michigan. ☒

Confessions of an Economic Hit Man

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"On my last night in Indonesia, I sat up in bed and switched on the light. I had the feeling that someone was in the room with me. I peered around at the familiar Hotel Intercontinental furniture... Then the dream came back.

"I had seen Christ standing in front of me. ... He bent down and heaved something up to his shoulder. I expected a cross. Instead I saw the axle of a car with the attached wheel rim protruding above his head, forming a metallic halo. Grease dripped like blood down his forehead. He straightened, peered into my eyes, and said 'If I were to come now, you would see me differently.' I asked him why. 'Because,' he answered, 'the world has changed.'"

Perkins could not go back to sleep, so he went out to the hotel gardens. "I sat down in a lounge chair and wondered what I was doing here, why the coincidences of my life had taken me along this path ... I knew my life had changed, but I had no idea how drastically." [pp. 57-58].

Being a Friend of Swedenborg is to hold night-time visions of Christ in particular reverence. As we would expect, Perkins was never again the same. He had begun a path of repentance. His soul would not rest until he left his work as an economic hit man.

In March of 1980, he was on vacation in the Caribbean with a friend. He saw people enjoying their lives, and felt intense anger. "The emotion would not leave. I was angered by those voices from history and the way I had used them to rationalize my own greed. I was furious at my parents, and at Tilton – that self-righteous prep school on the hill – for imposing all that history on me." He took in the idyllic surrounds while remem-

bering that hundreds of African slaves had died on that land. "The tranquility of the place masked its history of brutality, even as it masked the rage that surged within me. I came face-to-face with the shocking fact that I too had been a slaver." [pp. 174-75]

As soon as he returned home, he walked into his corporate offices and resigned.

The revelation of international intrigue did not surprise me; I had assumed that the world worked in this way. But I didn't know the details of how it happened. I now feel far more deeply informed about the systemic evils that we must eradicate to dream a world as Swedenborg envisioned it.

He started Independent Power Systems, Inc (IPS), an alternative energy company. Yet he continued working for his former employers as a highly paid consultant. He knew that his exorbitant consulting fees were an unspoken bribe for him to keep his mouth shut about his previous life as an economic hit man.

For a while, his reformed soul accepted the bargain. He kept quiet about his past, as he performed "uses" of numerous good deeds. He founded a nonprofit organization called Dream Change Coalition to help people achieve their personal goals. He worked with natives of the Amazon at reclaiming the environment. He wrote books and gave workshops. He was the model of a soul in reformation: He changed his behavior in the world. But the inner man had not significantly altered. God wanted more of him.

One weekend in 1997, he was teaching a workshop for the Omega Institute in the Caribbean. As he sat quietly on his hotel

balcony, he suddenly realized that he was at the same place where, seventeen years earlier, he had realized he had to leave his job as an economic hit man. "Throughout the week, I spent much of my free time on that balcony, looking down at Leinster Bay, trying to understand my feelings. I came to realize that although I had quit, I had not taken the next step ... By the end of the week, I had concluded that the world around me was not one that I wanted to dream, and that I needed to do exactly what I was instructing my students to do: to change my dreams in ways that reflected what I really wanted in my life." [222].

He returned home to quit his consulting practice and returned to a manuscript he had started and stopped many times: the story of his life as an economic hit man. In November of 2004, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* was birthed, and published by Barrett-Koehler, an independent publisher committed to "Creating a world that works for all." [www.bkconnection.com]. Within its first week of publication, it was the fourth most-sold book at Amazon.com. It then made *The New York Times* bestseller list, and was in its fifth printing in its fifth week. The book has since been re-published as a paperback, and translated into at least twenty different languages.

In addition to this book being an inspiring story of modern-day regeneration, what does it have to teach us Friends of Swedenborg?

It is an essential item in our toolbox for creating the New Jerusalem. Systemic change begins with an understanding of how the current system works. The revelations of international intrigue did not surprise me; I had assumed that the world worked in this way. But I didn't know the details of how it happened. I now feel far

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"For the Healing of the Nations" Theme of NCCUSA and CWS General Assembly 2006

Doug Moss

When the National Council of Churches USA (NCCUSA) gathers to meet, they proudly display a patchwork quilt, one patch representing each of their thirty-five communion denominations. For more than forty years, one of the patches in this quilt has been the Swedenborgian Church of Canada and the United States.

This past November 7-9, 2006, NCCUSA and the Church World Service met for their annual General Assembly in Orlando, Florida, with the theme "For the Healing of the

Nations." At least they told us we were in Orlando. Mary Ann Fischer, of the New Church of Montgomery (Cincinnati), and I never set foot off the Wyndham Orlando Resort property during the entire three-day convention, and I shuttled from and back to the airport under cover of darkness. Except for the palm trees surrounding the pool, we could have been anywhere. Mary Ann had attended this gathering many times previously; this was my first experience.

The Church World Service (CWS) is actually the older of the two bodies that make up the General

Assembly. Established just after the Second World War as a vehicle for delivering relief aid to the ravaged populations of Europe, the CWS continues to provide direct, on-the-ground missionary aid around the world. NCCUSA works more specifically as an educational and lobbying arm, bridging inter-denominational divides in an effort to identify and promote a consensus of Christian values on a wide range of contemporary issues. In Swedenborgian terms, these organizations correspond to charity and faith.

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Confessions of an Economic Hit Man *(Continued from previous page)*

more deeply informed about the systemic evils that we must eradicate to dream a world as Swedenborg envisioned it. The book is also a guide on how to make the initial steps towards the New Jerusalem. As Perkins worked to change the world, I kept thinking of the speech by Kathryn Whitmire at our 2002 annual convention in Maine. She inspired us with the essential need to live our lives in simplicity; voluntarily giving up the capitalistic excesses by which so many of us live our days on earth. After reading Perkins' book, I understood Whitmire on a deeper level. I cannot just read a book about international exploitation, and be relieved that at least I'm not one of THEM. In reality, I AM one of them. Everyday, my life is easier because of the energy and resources I can squander due to our exploitation of Third-World countries.

Perkins refuses to let us read this book as *his* story. It is *our* story, and he ends his book with

this challenge: "For me, confessing was an essential part of my personal wake-up call. Like all confessions, it is the first step toward redemption. Now it is your turn.


"Ask yourself these questions. What do I need to confess? How have I deceived myself and others? Where have I deferred? Why have I allowed myself to be sucked into a system that I know is unbalanced? ... What course will I take to end the needless starvation, and make sure there is never again a day like September 11th? ... What changes will I commit to making in my attitudes and perceptions? What forums will I use to teach others and to learn more on my own?" [264]

Unlike so many pioneers for change, Perkins does not abandon us at the end of his book. His final chapter is filled with ideas on "What You Can Do." They include: "cut back on your oil consumption ... The next time you are tempted to go shopping, read a book instead, exercise or meditate. Downsize your home, wardrobe,

car, office and most everything else in your life." [261]

Thanks to modern technology, we can become a part of newsletters and conversations about changing our world. Of particular note is that one of his websites gives guidelines for an Economic Hit Man study group. These are not groups that just talk – the guidelines give numerous suggestions of how we can support each other in changing our everyday lives. It would make an outstanding church study-action group. It can be found on the web at: http://www.dreamchange.org/index.php?module=pagemaster&PAGE_user_op=view_page&PAGE_id=8&MMN_position=9.9

Perkins is an inspiration for us to claim our dream of the New Jerusalem, and to take the daily, practical steps to get us there.

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is pastor of the Portland New Church in Portland, Maine. She is the author of several books, including Crystals, Crosses & Chakras, available from the Swedenborg Foundation: 1-800-355-3222. 

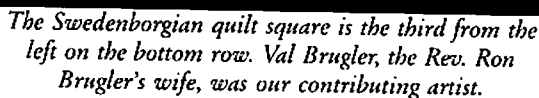
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reported that recovery in the region will be measured over decades, not years. Yet a focal point of this effort in

To that end, the Assembly considered and passed a pastoral message calling for "an immediate phased withdrawal of American and coalition forces from Iraq." (Will there be a response to the President's latest "surge"?) The message declared that "As men and women of faith, we believe that freedom, along with genuine security, is based in God, and is served by the recognition of humanity's interdependence, and by working with partners to bring about commu-

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tion and opinion through a Christian lens. From this policy position, the General Assembly generated and



**"For the Healing of the Nations"
Theme of NCCUSA and CWS
General Assembly 2006**

(Continued from previous page)

nity, development, and reconciliation for all, and that such freedom and security is not served by this war in Iraq." This message was approved with one dissenting vote and two abstaining, from an assembly of three hundred.

The following day, I attended a brief seminar on "Armageddon Theology and Its Impact on the Middle East." The leader of this class, Robert O. Smith from the University of Chicago, explained that modern Zionist activity has Christian philosophical roots that predate the Jewish movement (comparatively more practical) by several decades. He made the disturbing observation that there are extremist Christian groups who are not troubled by unrest in the Middle East, seeing in it nothing more than an acceleration toward the *eskatos* and rapture that they anticipate will accompany Christ's Second Coming. In simplest terms, some Christian theologies find no reason to seek peace in the Middle East.

Later in the afternoon one of our tablemates approached me, greatly shaken by what he had heard. "We Quakers believe that the Lord comes again to each of us, individually, as we are prepared to receive him," he informed me. When I explained to him that we Swedenborgians hold a very similar view, the two of us became fast friends and allies; I was never at a loss thereafter for companionship at meals. Indeed, Mary Ann and I found fascinating company in our three days, sharing dinner one night with the bishop of the Mar Thomas Church in America, another evening with the prelates of the Armenian Church.

The value of this experience to me personally cannot be overstated.

One of the great allures to me of our New Church theology is its pluralism, the way we accept and embrace the truths of other faith traditions. Yet I found myself curiously duty-bound, as the lone representative of Swedenborgian clergy, to remain doctrinally correct—*True Christianity* and all that—in this gathering. This left me feeling quite uncomfortable. Through incidents such as that described above I found myself able to lay down my defensiveness and in a true sense of ecumenism join together with others in doing the Lord's work. It was a true gift from above to be able to worship and study with these good people. "Thus from all the differing churches there would be made one church; and all the dissensions that come forth from doctrine alone would vanish; yea, all hatreds of one against another would be dissipated in a moment, and the Lord's kingdom would come upon the earth." [*Arcana Coelestia* (AC) 1799.4]

On a larger scale, I feel that our denomination's continued participation in this body benefits everyone. Our small numbers often frustrate us when we wish, as a communion, to actually live a life faithful to our "doctrine of uses." Small-scale efforts in our local communities—food and literacy programs come to mind—are certainly essential to building the New Jerusalem, but we simply do not have the critical mass of numbers to address larger needs in our world community. How, for example, could we have assisted with Katrina, or how can we have any impact on the AIDS epidemic in Africa? And where can we quickly turn for enlightenment on modern issues such as biotechnology, environmentalism, social justice and world peace that is wisely informed by experts of varying beliefs but all devoted to the Word? Do we ignore such larger needs because we are tiny, or satisfy ourselves with teach-ins?

Just as significantly, where can we find a better forum for our own voice to be heard, to share the teachings of the New Church and our love and wisdom with others of good faith, lending a hand to inform the ethics and morals of God's people? Swedenborgians were once quite active in the NCC, most recently Reverends Marlene Laughlin and Robert McCluskey; these two are still fondly remembered there (to take nothing at all from the devoted efforts of Mary Ann Fischer to interdenominational and women's caucuses). Both ministers have moved on in their lives, though, and in recent years we have had something of a revolving door approach to our participation, myself being the latest in a string of short-term representatives. At this rate, we truly are just hanging on. Should we reassert ourselves at this table, or must we humbly retire?

The Rev. Doug Moss is pastor of Hillside Church, the Swedenborgian Church of El Cerrito, California. ☛

Mite Box Recipient

The Women's Alliance Mite Box recipient this year will be Rev. Rita Russell. Rita is a minister in the British Conference who would like to join us at next year's convention in Michigan. The proceeds from the Mite Box will help to defer the cost of travel and transportation for Rita to come here in 2007. ☛

The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation

by Barbara R. Rossing.

[New York: Basic Books; a member of the Perseus Book Groups, 2004]



Reviewed by
Wilma Wake

My childhood was filled with terrifying images of Jesus returning to save the true Christians, but leaving everyone else behind to face unspeakable tribulations, followed by eternity in a fiery hell. I asked in Sunday school why God should punish people who were raised in a religion different from ours. My teacher suggested that I consider becoming a missionary, so that I could help give the uninformed a chance for salvation. I grew up shouldering the burden and guilt of believing I was “saved” but that most of my friends were condemned.

As an adult, I’m happy to be a Swedenborgian and to share with others that I believe in a loving God who does not judge or condemn anyone. I have been worried, however, by the increasing popularity of an extremely fundamentalist form of Christianity propagated by the popular series of novels: “Left Behind” by Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins. These books are based on the premise that Jesus will return soon to “rapture”—or “save”—the true Christians in an instant, while everyone else stays on earth to live through the terrifying tribulations that are supposedly foretold in the book of Revelation.

At last, we have a book that understands the “left behind” theology, and is able to show clearly that it is not Biblically

based. The author is extremely qualified to make those points. Barbara Rossing has a doctorate from Harvard University Divinity School and a Masters of Divinity degree from Yale University Divinity School. She is ordained in the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and teaches New Testament at the Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago.

Her book was released in 2004, on the same day as the 12th “Left Behind” novel, *The Glorious Appearing*, was released. She was interviewed by Peter Jennings on the evening news, and asked to give a quick explanation as to why

She writes passionately about the New Jerusalem. It “gives us a vision of a beloved community, a world of abundance for all. This is God’s vision for our whole created world—a world where people of all nations find open gates of welcome, where poor people find water without price, and where all find... a world that will not be left behind.”

she considered the “Left Behind” theology so dangerous. “God is coming to heal the world, not to kill millions of people,” she said. “God loves the world, and God will never leave the world behind.”

Rossing is concerned about fundamentalist versions of any religion that set up an “us-versus-them” mentality. She is particularly outraged by this version of her own beloved Christianity that sees Jesus with a sword killing all those who disagree with him.

One woman from Montana wrote that she no longer believed her fundamentalist relatives who were worried she would go to hell. “Now I see how the Bible doesn’t say what they have been claiming ... Your book has been a blessing.” [xii]

I found the book extremely enlightening on the origins and growth of Rapture theology. Rossing says clearly that the Bible does not “teach that Jesus will come to snatch Christians off the earth, causing ‘lots of death,’ before inaugurating a seven-year period of tribulation.” [21].

I was astounded to learn that the origins of Rapture are from 1830, in Port Glasgow, Scotland. A fifteen-year-old girl attended a healing service and had a vision of Jesus returning in two stages. This vision was picked up and preached by evangelist John Nelson Darby. Christians had long believed that Jesus would come again. But Darby changed the scenario to be two visits. The first return would be done in secret, as Jesus instantly removed every true Christian physically from the world. They would disappear in an instant, “Raptured” to heaven. Then God would send a global tribulation for seven years before finally establishing the New Jerusalem on earth for Christians.

Over time, this scenario gained detail about how the tribulations would unfold, and the signs that we are approaching it. The adherents claim that this theology is Biblical. For example, one commonly-used verse is Revelation

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The Rapture Exposed: The Message of Hope in the Book of Revelation

(Continued from previous page)

3:10, where Jesus says to the church in Philadelphia: "I will save you from out of the hour of trial." Some claim this foretells the Rapture. Rossing points out that most Biblical scholars think the "hour of trial" is a political trial or about the persecution of Christians when Revelation was written.

She decided to write this book for the public, rather than as a scholarly treatise. It is absorbing and thought-provoking to read. I can't help but feel warmly to one who studied with feminist Biblical scholar Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza at Harvard. The year I started my D.Min at Episcopal Divinity School, Dr. Schussler Fiorenza was our seminar leader, and she was instrumental in giving me insight into feminist Biblical scholarship.

I was delighted that Rossing discussed in detail historical visions of God's New Jerusalem, including William Blake who used Revelation to fight inhuman working conditions in the factories. Longing for the New Jerusalem is the theme of many African-American spirituals such as "Gonna put on those golden shoes down by the riverside." She asks where that riverside is, and answers her own question: "For slaves, the New Jerusalem vision gave hope for freedom even in this life, for a riverside not just in heaven but experienced also as a very real river in their lives that could be crossed to freedom, here and now. They found a glimpse of the riverside of God in the geography of their place. That crossing between the two worlds is key to God's New Jerusalem for us as well." [165].

She quotes Martin Luther King from his "I Have a Dream" speech. "It's alright to talk about 'streets flowing with milk and honey,' but God has commanded us to be concerned about the slums down here, and his children who can't eat three square meals a day. It's all right to talk about the new Jerusalem, but one day, God's preacher must talk about the New York, the new Atlanta, the new Philadelphia, the new Los Angeles, the new Memphis, Tennessee."

She writes passionately about the New Jerusalem. It "gives us a vision of a beloved community, a world of abundance for all. This is God's vision for our whole created world – a world where people of all nations find open gates of welcome, where poor people find water without price, and where all find ... a world that will not be left behind." [169]

She assures us that "Revelation is not a book written to inspire fear or terror. But it is definitely written to increase a sense of urgency for our world. It is an apocalyptic wake-up call for each of us, precisely because there is hope for us and for our world." [169].

Martin Luther said: "If I knew the world were going to end tomorrow I would plant a tree." Rossing wants us to plant more trees as long as we have life. Like John Perkins' book, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, this one gives us more tools for living our Swedenborgian theology day-by-day on the earth.

The Rapture Exposed leaves us with the background we need for having conversations with our fundamentalist neighbors. It is readable and thought-provoking. This book is ideal for a church discussion group, and her last

chapter is a reader discussion guide.

The book beautifully articulates the mainline Christian understanding of Revelation and the second-coming; as such, it is a vital argument against Rapture theology. But another question needs to be asked: What does it mean to step away from *any* belief that Jesus will return; believing instead that he has already returned spiritually, and lives every day in our hearts? That, of course, is our Swedenborgian question. Undoubtedly, many readers of *The Messenger* have thoughts about the Swedenborgian contribution to this discussion. Please share them with me, and I will write a follow-up article comparing the Rapture theology with our Swedenborgian theology.

The Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake is pastor of the Portland New Church in Portland, Maine. ☩

Important Church Dates 2006-2007

March 17, 2007 12:00 p.m. EST
General Council conference call

April 13-14, 2007
SHS Board of Trustees, Berkeley, CA

April 24-26, 2007
Committee on Admission into the Ministry (CAM), PSR/SHS, Berkeley, CA

May 5, 2007
Investment Committee.
Central Office, Newton, MA

May 18-20, 2007
Swedenborg Foundation Board meeting, West Chester, PA

June 24-July 2, 2007
Convention 2007, Hope College, Holland, Michigan ☩

The Information Management Support Unit

Over the next several months, the *Messenger* will be carrying short, descriptive articles about the work of several of the various groups that carry out denominational programs. Because our churches are scattered throughout North America, and because governance is local, many people throughout the denomination are unaware of the variety of projects, assistance, and programming that is handled or supported by people who are elected, hired, or appointed to denominational positions. So, with this series of articles, we hope to acquaint readers with the "denominational-level" processes. It is sometimes difficult, in a decentralized system such as we have, to identify just what one's financial gift-giving is used for. We hope that this series of monthly articles will provide some useful and interesting information and that these articles might also better describe the uses of your financial gifts to the work of the denomination.

With sincere thanks,
Christine Laitner, President

Herb Ziegler

In the early eighties, forward thinking Swedenborgians considered the potential of newly emerging micro-technologies. They responded, as part of the restructuring of Convention in the late eighties, by creating IMSU, the Information Management Support Unit. The original goals of IMSU focused on providing societies with the means to better and more efficiently manage the information they needed to thrive, including administrative, historical, financial, and pastoral information. They met the goal by purchasing and providing societies ready to accept them with new Apple computers, and basic software and instruction.

IMSU helped transform the information management function for many societies, but as advances

in knowledge and technology changed the capabilities and uses of computers, so too did the goals and uses of IMSU change. The program to provide hardware ended as prices of personal computers dropped and their accessibility increased. Soon, few societies needed encouragement to utilize computers for their information management. Still, they needed support, advice, and instruction, and IMSU continued to provide much of this.

IMSU identified a new goal of electronically indexing 150 years of *Messengers* and the denomination's other vital information for easy access by members, and so embarked on a long-term project to accomplish it. After several years of progress the ongoing project was passed to the Library and Documents subcommittee. The resulting indexes continue to assist Central Office in fulfilling member requests for information.

In the mid-nineties, as the internet was emerging as a rival and companion to information management as a primary application of information technology, IMSU began redefining its mission in terms of information management and access through the internet. Responding early enough to the Internet explosion to secure the domain name of "swedenborg.org," IMSU created a website for members and the public at large to access different kinds of Swedenborgian information through a single portal.

Information available on the website includes sections on beliefs, sermons, societies, and ministries. Continuing and extending the denomination's traditional emphasis on distribution of the works of Swedenborg and associated collateral literature, IMSU has provided access to them through both an online bookstore and an online library.

Any Internet user worldwide can access the complete works of Swedenborg and many collateral works online through the Swedenborg.org portal. One can even access Amazon.com and other Internet booksellers through the portal, thereby directing a percentage of money spent at those sites to General Convention.

Information technology is in constant flux, and IMSU has performed well in responding to the changing dynamics of available technology and denominational needs. The future requires a continuance of this change and response dynamic, and IMSU is ready to respond. Kevin Baxter, new chair of IMSU says IMSU is soliciting ideas and evaluating needs in light of new and changing technology. He would like to see an improved denominational website that, in addition to its present functions, provides access to more information and tools for members and societies to assist them in communication, learning, management, and spiritual growth.

We learn as we grow, and grow as we learn. This is a core idea of Swedenborg. IMSU has embodied this idea as it has evolved over the last several decades. It has provided members and societies with tools that have helped them function and grow, and it has established an effective presence on the web that has both enhanced all aspects of communication and further distributed the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

The other members of IMSU are Rev. Lee Woofenden and Bob Hinrichs.

Herb Ziegler is a member of General Council, assistant treasurer on the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) Board, and a member of the Cambridge Chapel in Cambridge, Mass. ☩

Happy Feet

Editor's Note: The following films are two of the season's best "feel-good" movies, with similar inspiring messages: to find the courage to be true to who you were meant to be, no matter how hard the struggle.


Reviewed by Steve Koke

This film looks like a shoo-in for Best Animated Film, both at the Golden Globes and at the Academy Awards. The New York Film Critics, the Los Angeles Film Critics, and others, are making it look as though the voting may be unanimous. Its outstanding visual characteristic is very detailed Antarctica scenery and character rendering that make the imagery difficult to distinguish from ordinary photography. For example, in

quite a few scenes we see a thousand or more emperor penguins at a distance, each of which is moving independently of the others. Tall mountains of ice and snow look as though one could just grab the snow and make snowballs. Water ripples and reflects light as one would expect.

Born into this masterful setting is an emperor penguin named Mumble (voiced by Elijah Wood) whose feet move incessantly in happy dance rhythms. Penguins are not supposed to tap dance. Every other penguin, we learn, is born with a unique song in his or her heart; each song attracts a mate who is especially charmed by it. Mumble, however, cannot sing. He tries, but what

comes out is a rasping squawk. He is set apart and regarded as a misfit.

Deeply saddened, he wanders off into the icy landscape and is finally attacked by a leopard seal. He is rescued by a group of Adelie penguins. Their leader, Ramon (voiced by Robin Williams), takes him to their home, where they learn that their fish are being taken by a mysterious predator. This leads to an encounter with a fishing vessel, and in the ensuing drama Mumble plays a leading role in protecting the ecology of the Antarctic waters. Welcomed back home as a hero, he teaches the penguins to dance and they learn that uniqueness is not a disadvantage but a new gift to be treasured. 

The Pursuit of Happyness

Reviewed by Steve Koke


Will Smith is Chris Gardner, a frustrated salesman fighting mounting bills he cannot pay while his wife works double shifts to keep the family in some semblance of control over persistent bad luck and very limited funds. The film spends most of its time following Chris as he tries to sell a shipment of bone density scanners, his last hope of some kind of income. No one has any use for them except one rather demented man who enthusiastically embraces one of them, convinced that it's a time machine. He won't let go of it. Chris has to take care of his son Christopher (Jaden), who is often simply another distraction as Chris rushes from one prospective employer to another. The landlord evicts them for non-payment, and Chris only manages to sink further

into abject poverty with each effort to save himself and his son.

The storyline is a classic example of the frantic pursuit of happyness (yes, the film recognizes that "Happyness" is misspelled; it should be "Happiness;" but the misspelling seems to suggest that what most people want is to be *happy*, never mind any larger goal or value.) Chris is entirely involved in fighting his unhappiness with his lot in life, yet events keep tripping him up like the demons in a bad dream who can't be outrun. One scene after another has him grasping at the latest straw only to find that yet one more exhausting and frustrating circumstance has suddenly appeared. Jail time, tax seizure, add to his and his son's descent into homelessness. No matter what he does he can't avoid rushing around after one more hope, only

to find that the world is just not cooperating with him.

Finally, Chris manages to secure a niche as an unpaid stockbroker intern where only one in twenty has a chance to land a lucrative full time career. His wife has left him because of this last bit of foolishness. Later, as Chris is rushing out of the brokerage house to pick up his son and find them shelter for the night, a man gets out of a taxi and asks him for a small favor, the loan of a five dollar bill for his driver just when Chris has barely acquired enough cash to see himself through another day. With an understanding smile he hands it over. That small bit of generosity seems to trigger a turning point in his life.

The film is, in fact, the true story of a man who afterwards became the millionaire head of a large corporation. 

Marriage

Washburn & Harris—Carla Washburn, daughter of longtime Los Angeles Swedenborgian Manon Washburn, and Ronald Harris were united in marriage December 19th, 2006, in Wayfarers Chapel, Rancho Palos Verdes, California, the Rev. Jonathan Mitchell officiating. Carla, who



Manon, Carla, & Ron



*Carla Washburn Harris,
Rev. Jonathan Mitchell,
& Ronald Harris*

spent three years studying at Bryn Athyn, is a motion picture screen cartoonist, like her mother,

and Ron does computer work for Disney Studios. Manon states that her son Conrad also married his wife Judy at the Chapel a year ago.

Deaths

Brandau—Ruth Brandau entered the spiritual world December 26, 2006, at Father Murray's Nursing Center in Warren, Michigan. Ruth was a lifelong member of the Detroit Church of the Holy City and active also at the Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center. She was most proud of her work with the youth at Almont and loved each and every child and teen who were under her care. Ruth will be greatly missed. A funeral service was held for Ruth December 29th, at A.J.

Peter's Funeral Home in Warren, Michigan, the Rev. Renee Machiniak officiating.



Eugene Carlson

Carlson—Eugene Ralph Carlson, age 88, lifelong Swedenborgian, entered the spiritual world Christmas night, December 25, 2006, at home in Mililani, Hawaii. He attended services at many Convention churches, including Washington D.C., Pretty Prairie, and Lenox Township Church of the New Jerusalem near Norway, Iowa. He also visited Almont Camp, where his son Michael officially joined the church. He was a presence at numerous conventions. Eugene was honored with a Veteran's funeral ceremony at Punchbowl National Cemetery near Honolulu with soldiers from Schofield Barracks performing taps and a flag ceremony. Following services, his cremains were interred at Punchbowl National Cemetery on December 29, 2006. He is survived by his four sons, John and wife Mary of Lake Mills, Norman and wife Janet of Des Moines, David and wife Chongson of Mililani, Hawaii and Michael and wife Kelli of Olathe, Kansas; seven grandchildren and three great-grandchildren. His parents, brother, and sister preceded him in death.

Dewing—Elizabeth Dewing passed into the spiritual world January 5th, 2007. She had a lifelong affinity for the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg, but only became a member of the Fryeburg New Church in her later years. Her generosity to the Fryeburg church

and to Convention were greatly appreciated.

Driscoll—Jack Driscoll, 91, longtime member of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church in the 80s and 90s, entered the spiritual world January 7, 2006, in Mt. Angel, Oregon. He is survived by his wife Aili, son Jon, a Buddhist priest, daughter Patricia and grandson Jeremy. A memorial service was conducted by Father Cosmos at Mt. Angel Towers retirement home. Jack and Aili attended many of our annual conventions and Jack was a voracious reader of Swedenborg. Jack was known for his willingness to speak out for his beliefs and not back down.

Friedrich—Robert "Bobby" Friedrich, 53, beloved brother of Rev. Carla Friedrich, pastor of the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego, entered the spiritual world January 12, 2007, in Mobile, Alabama, following a massive heart attack. Bobby attended General Convention churches as a boy and was a reader of Swedenborg. A memorial service was held January 15, at the Dauphin Way Methodist Church, the Rev. Gorman Houston officiating. He is survived by his wife Beth, two children, Louise and Alan and three sisters, Carla, Ellen, and Debbie. ☛

~ READERS WRITE ~

Correction

To the Editor:

In my response to the Rev. Don Rose in the January 2007 *Messenger* (pg. 14) I wrote: "The angels could use correspondences of the sequence of the planets from the sun (n.45) but only on the current assumption that pervaded educated Europe . . ." The paragraph number should be n.42, not n.45. My apologies. ☛

