

THE MESSENGER

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Introducing the New Church of the Southwest Desert

Sky Paradise

This summer, the newly ordained Rev. Sky Paradise moved to El Paso, Texas with a vision to begin a new outreach ministry to the bi-national populations of El Paso, Las Cruces, New Mexico and Juarez, Mexico. Here is her update.

The mission of the New Church of the Southwest Desert is to provide a spiritual place for all people by planting a healthy and sustaining reproducing home church where multi-cultural and multi-generational diversity meets love and wisdom from the Lord and which goes on to serve the world.

The Community

El Paso holds a diverse and growing population base. It is one of the fastest-growing communities in America and holds a deep ethic of church attendance. The population of the bi-national communities of El Paso, Las Cruces and Juarez totals 3,280,782, of which almost one million people live on the El Paso side and two million on the Juarez side. This makes it the second-largest city along the border.

The median age in the community is thirty-one and the average household income is \$32,124 (US) per year. This is a community with thirty-one percent of the population living in families with children under eighteen. Thirty percent of

adults are aged 25-44 and twenty percent are aged 45-64. The number of retirees is ten percent of the



Illustration by Edgar Henderson, member of San Diego Swedenborgian Church.

population. This figure is rising due to the ever-increasing military population at Ft. Bliss who retire here. In addition, a government redeployment project is estimated to bring 100,000 more military personnel to the area. The target population for this church will focus on Mexican/a, Latino/a, Indigenous,

Anglo and Asian residents living in the central, west and upper valley areas of the county within El Paso, Juarez and Las Cruces.

The nature of the El Paso community at this time speaks to its potential for the growth of a new church. In the past year it received the following ratings:

1. Twenty-fourth fastest-growing city in America.
2. Third safest city in America.
3. Third in the top 40 commercial/industrial real estate sectors of the country.
4. It is in the top 10 most affordable housing markets in the country.
5. It is the 11th most secure city in which to conduct business.
6. *Entrepreneur* Magazine named it the fourth-hottest market for entrepreneurs.

This bi-cultural corridor is, in a sense, already engaging in dialogue about development and the future.

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Celebrations

There will be a re-dedication service for the New York New Church building on Sunday, October 14, 2007. The church has been extensively remodeled and renovated inside and out over the past several months. President Laitner and other invited guests will be taking part in the ceremony.

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A Small and Rare Church

Kim Hinrichs

The dreaded question would always come. When meeting new people in my non-church social circles, someone would eventually ask, "What kind of work do you do?" Radar activated, I would take an immediate reading to ascertain how much of the answer they would be able to take: Was she really listening? Did he really care? Had she said anything that indicated her feelings about religion? Then I'd hesitantly proffer my answer: "I'm actually a minister." And then I'd wait to see what happened next.

Sometimes people would smile politely and then initiate an awkward silence as they became immediately tense about drinking, smoking, using curse words or making sexual innuendos around me, assuming that I was some kind of nun from a strict and dated order. But sometimes, people would be curious to know more. "Oh really!" they'd exclaim. "In what denomination?" And that's when I went wrong, I'll admit.

I would offer my next words apologetically, anticipating losing their interest and respect, already feeling that I was drowning in a sea of irrelevance. "It's actually a really small Christian denomination that most people have never heard of... it's called the Swedenborgian Church."

After repeating the name two or three times in response to their incomprehension, I'd say a few words about Swedenborg and clarify that we're not Swedish, and I would almost be grateful if the conversation ended there. That way I wouldn't have to answer any further questions, especially ones about the size of the denomination. I could never bring myself to say that at last count we have 1,700 members, 35

or so churches and about 50 ministers. If I were to really lay all that out on the table they might laugh in my face and ask, "What the heck are you *doing* in such a small denomination?"

And indeed, there are times when I have wondered the same myself.

Over the past year I've spent a lot of time soul-searching about my vocation in our small denomination. And we are small. I've been enjoying reading a new publication from the University of California Press, *The Atlas of Religion* by Joanne O'Brien and Martin Palmer. In beautifully-rendered maps and charts, it conveys the current state

"Of course our voice is small — we speak of a spiritual reality that is scarcely imagined in our world."

of religion around the world. On the two-page spread devoted to Christianity, they note that it is the world's largest religion, with 2.1 billion adherents worldwide and more than 33,000 denominations. Think about it: there are 2.1 billion Christians in the world, and 1,700 of them are Convention Swedenborgians. We represent .008% of global Christianity.

As we toil away in our local parishes or try to stay connected to the denomination from far-flung locales, as we create worship services week after week, teach Sunday School, work on boards and committees, teach courses, pledge our financial support, commit our time and love and energy, I'm sure some of us from time to time wonder: why should we bother? Why don't we just throw in the towel? Are we

1,700 people who are too naïve to realize our irrelevance? Or are we 1,700 people who have been drawn to something deep and rare: a spiritual and intellectual understanding of Christianity, an ecumenical spirit and progressive polity, and a path towards opening to the divine by accessing inner meaning?

My journey this past year led me to a delightful and inspiring book: *Kabbalah: A Love Story*, by Rabbi Lawrence Kushner. It's a work of fiction that takes place in two places in two different times: one story revolves around a professor of Jewish mysticism at a modern-day university in New York, and the other around the 13th-century Spanish Kabbalist writer Moshe de Leon. Love stories are intertwined around both until, fantastically, the two stories meet across the centuries in a way that teaches as much profundity about Kabbalah as it

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Introducing the New Chair of the Council of Ministers: Rev. Andy Stinson

Where do you live and what church do you serve?

I live on my sailboat in Washington, DC. I serve the Swedenborgian National Church, Church of the Holy City, in Washington, DC.

How did you become a Swedenborgian minister?

I was not raised in any faith tradition and a friend of mine suggested that I should check out the church in Portland Maine. I did, which began a love affair with Swedenborg's writings. Swedenborg articulated the way I knew the universe worked but had never heard articulated before. From there God began to work on my heart for about five years and the Lord's Providence led me more and more toward the ministry. I truly am called to have what I think is the best job in the world: a Swedenborgian minister.

What role does the Council of Ministers play in the life of the denomination?

The Council of Ministers (COM) is the body which is the collective ecclesial voice of the denomination and the ministers. That means it is the group that both represents the ministers and leads on matters of faith. As the exclusively ministerial body, the Council is called to be the pastor and prophet to the wider church and world.



profoundly changed the landscape of America physically, spiritually, politically and intellectually. We have much to be proud of in what we have accomplished as an institution and as leaders.

In our charge, each of us were imbued at our ordination, "From the Lord's Holy Word, according to this doctrine lead the people...." The saints that came before us boldly proclaimed the Gospel of the New Evangel in the world through words and deeds, and we are again called to raise the banner of the new church. For too long we have treated our churches and communities as enclaves of wisdom. Valuable wisdom, to be sure, but the world has changed and we must begin to lead our congregants and the world in the way of the Holy City.

What do you see as the critical challenges facing our denomination?

The decline of the church's numbers began at the same time the Augmentation Fund for minister's salaries was established. I think there is a correlation. We must begin strategically to use our assets to positively spread the good news of the Lord's New Church. Our obsession with simply sustaining ministries must end. It will be a hard bit of truth-telling but I am convinced that the Lord's providence is in every step of this reformation.

Second, we must find new ways to preach the Gospel. We are no longer in a Christian culture. For us this has great advantages and disadvantages but what it means more than anything is that we are

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What are your top three goals for leading the council of ministers?

I really only have one goal: I want us as ministers to remember our heritage and our charge.

In our heritage there have been 481 ministers ordained into the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. We are an elite group who if you compare to any other group of 481 religious leaders over the past 200 years have had an amazing influence on the world. The shepherding of great men and women of faith has

Introducing the New Church of the Southwest Desert
(Continued from page 117)

A light rail system will be online within the next six years. The light rail will connect major parts of El Paso and all ports of entry on both the Mexican and the US side. Industrial development in manufacturing and tech businesses is on the rise. It is completing major urban re-design for an inter-cultural corridor to connect three of the ports of entry on the Juarez side with the ones in El Paso. A major arts corridor is being constructed through the middle of downtown El Paso to Juarez. The percentage of new building is rising dramatically. Development reports state that the city will be entirely built out by 2025. This development is positive for some individuals but develops a burden for others who live in the *barrios* and *colonias*. This is where we are needed the most.

The Ministry

Our ministry will embrace the model of the "emerging church" by creating opportunities for emerging conversation in small discussion groups and classes. The emerging church is a contemporary Protestant movement that seeks to engage post-modern and un-churched folks into conversations about spirituality that are non-hierarchical, interested in personal narrative and integral living, and which often begin in house churches. We are currently offering a class called "Living Spiritually" to a group of interested participants. We are also developing a web site and initiating discussions within the larger theological community about the emergent church.

The plan for the initial phase of development is to evolve small study groups into small intimate worship groups which would develop a multi-generational, multi-cultural place for celebration,

worship, prayer and meditation, inter-faith dialogue and community-based social justice projects, eventually expanding into a larger emergent spiritual growth center. The timeline for development of such a project is eighteen months or more. We hope that the initial phase of establishing a study group will lead to an opening worship celebration by Christmas 2007. In order for a church to be healthy, it must lie on a strong foundation of a vision of ecumenism, commitment to prayer and service. The emergent nature of such a church supports these efforts and the honoring of multiple traditions.

The process of emergent dialogue would occur organically and then grow into a larger spiritual growth center which collaboratively addresses our relationships with each other and the Lord as found in many traditions. In addition, this

"The process of emergent dialogue would occur organically and then grow into a larger spiritual growth center which collaboratively addresses our relationships with each other and the Lord as found in many traditions."

community would also live their love and wisdom through use to the barrio—a place which is rapidly becoming gentrified and dispossessing thousands of individuals with little or no resources. We are currently working with Border Interfaith in a project to bring electricity and potable drinking water to families living in an area on the US side of the border who have nothing. This geographical area is a rapidly growing community which needs such a church.

What the New Church Offers

In place of the literalism to which other churches are bound, the New Church offers an inner sense,

a whole world of metaphysical truth awaiting investigation. In place of the pietism and other worldliness to which



more "traditional" branches of the church are tending in their reaction to modern materialism, the New Church offers a far saner philosophy in its belief that the two worlds, though separate and distinct, are yet mutually interdependent, and that the highest form of life on the material plane, the fullest and the richest is at the same time the highest form of spiritual life (Block, 1984, p.416 -417). El Paso has been dominated by the Catholic and Methodist churches for the past 200 years. There are a great many people searching for a different expression of the Divine in their lives. It is hoped that we can propose that opportunity.

The project was approved for Ministry Support Unit (MINSU) funding of \$15,000 for this year as a start-up fund. The actual project approval was given at our recent denominational convention in Michigan. Since that time, we have been active in the design and provision of written materials, community presentations and the development of a culturally appropriate web site for this work. We are offering classes to the public beginning this month and are searching for a location which can be rented for events and classes. In addition, I am currently enrolled in a bi-lingual class to learn Spanish. The project has been submitted for a second year of funding and is being considered by MINSU as we speak. It will then apply for an Aug-

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A Small and Rare Church
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does delight in the divine design of creation. It is truly a remarkable piece of literature.

It was fascinating to learn about Kabbalah, the ancient Jewish mystical tradition, which to my continual surprise has very much in common with Swedenborgian biblical hermeneutics, or the method of reading the Bible through the language of correspondences. In Kabbalah, as in our tradition, the words of scripture themselves are pathways into dimensions of greater meaning that lie within the text. The visual forms of Hebrew letters themselves are understood to have specific symbolic meaning. What's more, the meaning to which the words and letters point is deeply metaphysical, speaking to the origin and nature of the divine-human creation. Sound familiar?

Somehow, learning about this ancient mystical tradition validated my own. The Kabbalists have been around for 700 years and are a respected, though admittedly small, contingent of the Jewish religion. The way Kabbalists and Sweden-

borgians approach scripture is not a quirky or antiquated relic of history, but a dynamic approach to deriving wisdom for spiritual living through an inquiry into the mystical nature of reality itself. This is not your everyday religious undertaking. It is unique. It is esoteric. It can be dense. It's not for everyone. But for those who are interested, the rewards can be both mind-blowing and heart-expanding.

And in a world burdened by religious fundamentalism, violence, injustice, ecological destruction and rampant materialism, the mystical voice of Swedenborgianism is even more valuable for its smallness and rarity. We proclaim that the external world is not all there is—that there is a vast expanse of spiritual meaning surrounding us at every moment. We proclaim that it is possible to understand reality and the meaning of our individual and collective lives in terms of an eternal divine design for wholeness.

We are not the only religious tradition to do this, of course, nor are we the best. Our denomination has many shortcomings and is facing many challenges. But I'm coming to

wonder if perhaps our .008% share of global Christianity is enough. Of course our voice is small—we speak of a spiritual reality that is scarcely imagined in our world. And because the mystical understanding of life is so rare and endangered, it is needed all the more. Like the prophets of the Hebrew Scriptures, we stand at the outskirts of the mainstream, holding up belief in the beauty of divine life and human wholeness that the world around us desperately needs to hear.

So I have changed. Yes, Rabbi Lawrence Kushner convinced me that being Swedenborgian is *cool*.

Now I'm redefining my understanding of small. Instead of associating the word with *weak* or *insignificant*, the words I choose now are *rare—potent—nimble—focused—passionate—stewards of a valuable and necessary tradition*.

These days, when someone asks me what I do, I lift my chin and declare: "I'm a Swedenborgian minister." If they say they've never heard of it I say, "You haven't? It's a Christian church with a focus on spirituality and mysticism." I don't need *small* anymore. ☛

Introducing the New Church of the Southwest Desert

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mentation Fund grant and hopefully will grow into financial sustainability.

Rev. Carla Friedrich's collaborative work with the General Church in providing Spanish translations of Swedenborg's writings will eventually serve as a springboard for work in the Juarez area. This is an exciting time for this project. We are learning daily about how to work with the media which is at the foreground of people's day-to-day experiences. It is a time when the expressions of what "church" has traditionally meant have been challenged.

It is a time of "listening" for how people want to worship, to work and live together in an emerging and postmodern world. It is also a time when people are struggling with the basics that others take for granted in life. I am amazed that in the United States we have people living in conditions that resemble developing nations and that social denial seems to keep them in place. We must help, and we believe this project will help.

Prior to seminary, I lived in the southwest and watched as people struggled to come to grips with a search for greater meaning in their contemporary lives and a means with which to understand their relationship with God. In addition, the need for social justice interven-

tion seems very strong here with thirty percent of the people living below the poverty line. It is where I feel most led to serve. I expect to do it with dignity, love, and wisdom. I believe that the Lord has called me to be here in this time and place. We are living in difficult times. I believe that as Swedenborgians, we have a message the world needs to hear and experience. I believe that planting a new church here will grow a better community and a better world. We invite you to celebrate the birth of the New Church with us by keeping us in your prayers!

For more information about the Church of the Southwest Desert, contact Rev. Sky Paradise at 915-887-9532 or Newchurchswdesert@yahoo.com. ☛

Church Strategy Memo: Avoiding Clergy-Congregation Conflict

Rich Tafel

Over the past four years, I've done eighteen strategy sessions for churches in our denomination. The single most common crisis I'm asked to get involved in is a soured relationship between the congregation and the minister. My first question is: "Do you have a contract?" The answer is almost always either "No," or, "We have a boiler-plate document that doesn't mean much."

A written, detailed contract or covenant is the single best way to prevent conflicts and misunderstandings in churches. Contracts sound so business-like that churches and non-profits often shy away from them. Our teachings tell us that when love and compassion are not married to truth and wisdom they are incomplete. Getting a clear agreement between a congregation and a minister is a perfect real-world example of the importance of marrying our love with truth.

I often meet ministers doing some amazingly hard and thankless work. The only problem is that that work is not what the congregation wants or needs most. The flip side of this is that many congregations are engaged in their own projects, which the minister often finds unhelpful and sometimes creates more work for the minister. Both "sides" believe they are doing this task for the other without having ever really asked them. Each "side" continues doing what they think is for the other only to end up bitter at the lack of appreciation.

There are many ways for a congregation to create a contract. Here are my suggested steps.

Brainstorm Needs

Spend the money to get a paid facilitator to guide your meeting.

Then, take time to sit down in an open brainstorming session and put everything out there on the table. You might start with these two simple questions:

1. What would the congregation love to see their minister doing?
2. What does the minister love to see the congregation doing?

Listen

Once all of these items are listed there is usually an "a-ha" moment when the minister learns that the congregation is actually expecting less of her than she thought, but these are different things than she

"A written, detailed contract or covenant is the single best way to prevent conflicts and misunderstandings in churches."

thought. The congregation is often surprised to learn what the minister really needs most from them as opposed to the things they'd been doing because they thought the minister wanted them.

Prioritize

Often congregations wrongly imagine they've hired out their spiritual work by paying a minister to do it for them. On the other hand, ministers can be unrealistic about just how much time members really do have to participate in church work. Together eliminate the items at the lower end of the priorities. Agree together that you want a realistic list of priorities for both parties.

Keep it Real

Now you both come up with some clear expectations. The min-

ister is usually doing this work on a full or part-time paid basis so probably has more time and expertise to do more things. The congregation might be surprised to learn that hiring a minister doesn't mean you've got "paid staff" to do all of the spiritual work. To be a healthy church, hiring a minister usually means you have some new theological expertise and leadership and this may require even more work from the congregation. The minister, on the other hand, might be surprised just what people's schedules are like and can look for ways to accommodate that reality.

Understand

Take some time to discuss out loud exactly what you mean by the priorities. Be prepared to discuss items that fall through the cracks when a minister feels that some items are outside her responsibility or when a congregation feels they can't do what the minister is asking of them. Now is a good time to add some compassion to the truths being shared.

Measurable

Agree on a realistic set of priorities for the minister and the congregation. Try to take these priorities and make them specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and tangible (SMART). For example, instead of "we want our minister to do outreach," how about something like: "the minister will speak at three local community events over the course of next year." Or instead of "I want the congregation to be more supportive," you might say exactly what the minister had in mind: "the members of the congregation commit to attending three church activities each month."

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The Messenger

Aging Gracefully

Erni Martin

Have you ever lost track of what day it was? I have always been critical of people who needed to look at their watch to know the day of the week. Yesterday I awoke not sure whether it was Wednesday or Thursday. If it were Thursday, then I had a dental appointment. I thought of calling my son to ask him, but that would be embarrassing. He would be sure that I had lost it.



As we age, and are in retirement, one day follows another, and are pretty much the same. My sister says that one sign of age is the number of pills on the breakfast table. And there have been times when I wasn't sure whether I had taken my pills or not.

Aging can be a very lonely process, especially if we are living by ourselves. When I visited my mother in her 92nd year, she told me the exact number of years since my father had died. It had been 25 years! I didn't think they got along all that well, but it was evidently better than being alone.

To combat loneliness, some sell their homes and move into a retirement community. Others, like myself, are invited to live with one of their children. This is a difficult decision, for we don't want to lose our privacy, or be a burden to our children.

If we have serious physical ailments, and are living alone, we fear what would happen if we fell or had a stroke. It is important to discuss

these concerns with family, to determine the best course of action.

My son Ben wrote a song about Joe McBold, "who did as he was told. He looked at the calendar to see if he were old, and he looked at the thermometer to see if he were cold." As I grow older, I can sympathize with Joe, and not see him as a figure of ridicule.

Our church teaches us to value the useful life, but as we age we often wonder whether we are more of a burden than a help. I found it difficult to ask my son to take me to the hospital at 6 a.m. for a morning operation. I felt sure I could drive myself, but since I would be having anesthesia, I wouldn't be a good risk on the road home! We put great value on our independence, and having to ask for help limits our independence.

As we age we are constantly reminded of our increasing frailty. We make regular appointments with doctors to deal with our ailments. We attend more and more funeral

"A large part of the aging population is alert and vital into their 80s and 90s. It is essential that they keep their mental wheels turning, as well as engaging in regular exercise."

services, as friends and loved ones "pass on." Our church assures us of the reality of the life further on, but there is something within us that urges us not to let go. At the age of 101, my grandmother was ready for "graduation", but her amazingly sturdy body got in the way of an orderly transition. We sometimes think that the number of our days is foreordained by the Lord, and that there must be a divine reason for

the time of the death of our earthly bodies. "There must be a lesson we have to learn, or those around us need to learn." Poor theology!

There is a tendency to confuse the quantity of our days and the quality of our lives. It is encouraging that more and more people are adopting living wills, granting a power of attorney to a family member, and declaring that they don't want to live on as vegetables, and to have their lives unreasonably prolonged. If our faith in a world not built with hands is sincere, why should we be so hesitant to move on?

I don't think that death will solve all our problems and grant us angelhood overnight. If we awaken the same person we were before, there will be much to work on. If we have trouble getting along with parents and siblings or co-workers, in our earthly life, no angel waving a wand will transform us. We can hope for a more supportive environment that will enable us to mature spiritually, and grow into angelhood.

The President of the United States traditionally sends congratulatory telegrams to all who reach their 100th birthday. The assumption seems to be that longevity is to be celebrated. But what about those who are sitting like zombies, strapped to a wheel chair, gazing blankly at a television screen? I would certainly not want to spend my last days in a vegetative state, a burden to my family, and taking valuable resources from a younger generation. A problem that few are willing to face is who decides to insert the feeding tube, pull the plug, or administer the morphine. The living will is one approach to this growing problem.

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Breakout!

Imagining New Directions for the Swedenborgian Church

Chris Laitner, President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America

"In what ways can the denomination be useful to the various ministries and projects that are affiliated with it?"

During the business sessions of the 2007 Annual Convention, delegates gathered in "breakout groups" to brainstorm answers to this question. Eighty participants were divided into large geographic categories: East, Midwest and West, representing both Canada and the U.S.

During the General Council meeting this November, we will finalize the process for creating a five-year strategic plan for the denomination. The results from this breakout session will be included in the strategic planning process.

I invite you to thoughtfully review this input from this breakout session. If you would like to add an item, please send your ideas along to me: chris.laitner@swedenborg.org, or 989-636-7674. I will be happy to take your ideas to the General Council meeting this November.



1. Offer periodic visits from a representative from Convention to answer questions about the denomination.
2. Provide more pamphlets such as were published by J. Appleseed.
3. Make available a paid liaison person to link congregations with administration.
4. Build connections between congregations.
5. Provide more Sunday School materials.
6. Provide more merchandise items to spread the message—buttons, keyrings, etc. that would include the convention logo or Swedenborg quotes.
7. Provide help to know who we are and what we stand for.
8. Offer more awareness of the national framework.
9. Reach into more congregations to make them grow.
10. Provide a "SWAT team" to go into a church to help the with difficulties. A list of resource persons to call upon.
11. Provide a central vision for a framework of change for the denomination.

12. Encourage growth in social action rather than "navel gazing."
13. Make web links to help discern differences between Swedenborgianism and others such as Unity, Congregational, United Church (Canada).
14. Provide national direction in stewardship with a goal to relieve the deficit.
15. Revitalize Transitions group for 18+ year olds.
16. Encourage continued opportunities for branches of Swedenborgianism to reconnect.
17. Initiate more dialogue with the General Church.
18. Market the church intentionally.
19. Provide help for folks to re-energize small congregations.
20. Share and standardize confirmation class material.
21. Publish in *The Messenger* a celebration of accomplishments around the denomination.
22. Hold a longer convention to allow more non-business and social time.
23. Have an "expo" type convention.
24. Host a free public education event at convention each year.

MIDWEST

1. Create church advertising and reporting in national newspapers such as the NY Times, Washington Post, and on TV.
2. Develop programs on PBS, etc., underwritten by the denomination.
3. Create a documentary about who are we and what makes us special; people influenced by Swedenborgian theology.
4. Develop a traveling theatre group – serious, fun, musical – to send to our churches and other denominations.
5. Provide financial assistance.
6. Provide training in stewardship.
7. Give guidance in fundraising efforts and ideas.
8. Develop cartoons targeted toward youth to teach how church is a healthy part of life.
9. Provide national assistance with a talent pool to identify individuals with specific skills.
10. Keep an updated, centralized calendar of events on the denomination's web site with meetings, conventions, association information, etc.
11. Create media: Films, downloadable videos on the internet.
12. Create a lending library for books, films, etc.
13. Develop a resource list of available workshops, advice on growth, etc.
14. Provide more Sunday School resources – update older resources, include adult Sunday School resources

Breakout!

Imagining New Directions for the Swedenborgian Church

WEST

1. Vision:

- We're seeking identification, focus, and implementation of a shared vision and mission.
- Where is our heart going?
- Who are we?
- Why are we Swedenborgians in our world?
- What is our "Purple Cow?"
- What do we offer, and why?
- What does it mean to be a member?
- What gets us excited to be Swedenborgian rather than Baptists, Methodists, Catholics?

2. Communications:

- Provide internet support for expressing the artistic vision of members through writing and other art forms.
- Develop an "intranet" for cross-denominational sharing of online resources, such as brochures, templates, forms and outreach materials.

3. Personnel

- Provide a business consultancy that would enhance our awareness, knowledge and integration of sound business practices among our congregations.
- Provide sales training to help us identify and sell our niche in our community.
- Provide networking support to help communicate our faith in the larger community.
- Shift key roles in the denomination from volunteer to paid or stipended positions.

4. Tactical Information

- Provide a hymn book published after 1950.
- Provide job descriptions for leadership positions.
- Provide information on "what's working" in different congregations.

5. Strategic

- Improve the mission statement.
- Clearly define the scope of what it means to be fiscally responsible.
- Talk about money. What are our options? How do we approach it? Is there a financial commitment requirement? National pledge campaign?
- Provide a contemporary Swedenborgian Sunday School curriculum.
- Focus on programs that matter and that impact lives.
- Define, communicate and express our social values.

6. Outreach Programs

- We would appreciate help from the denomination in addressing and responding to societal challenges:
- Develop programs for Spanish-speaking communities.
- Engage with social justice work.
- Build community partnerships – get behind programs and projects that work.
- Develop arts outreach programs. ☒

Names

Five naked pounds at birth
 My fabric the letters of a prayer
 Primordial rivers ran through me
 luminescent and dark
 Ancient breath filled my lungs
 Sound rolled over
 the surface of my tongue
 My carefully layered life
 contained every word
 spoken by God
 Name and body
 thought and water
 blood to blood I dreamed
 of open skies deserts
 filled with static air
 the only boundary
 the skin I have
 wanted to pull apart
 to find my name
 Hashem
 Krishna
 again and again
 Moses heard water
 move in vast land
 a silent answer
 to the sky
 Brahma
 Buddha
 YHWH
 annihilate
 my birth name
 I am that I am I am
 that I will be I will
 be what I will be
 in the red
 and gold dream
 of star-filled
 night

-Jeff Munnis, SHS Student

Church Strategy Memo: Avoiding Clergy-Congregation Conflict

(Continued from page 122)

Write It!

Now that you've finished really listening to each other, cement that understanding in writing. It is amazing what we all think we hear and how different we remember things. Take the time to put into writing a covenant or contract between the congregation and minister. Acknowledge that you'll both use the contract to evaluate the relationship over the next year. Check in with each other on the written contract quarterly to adjust for changes. Come together in a year and evaluate honestly how you both did and begin the whole process again for the next year.

Leave Nothing to the Imagination

The bulk of your church's covenant or contract will consist of the "Duties and Expectations of the Minister and Congregation," including a clear description of the performance assessment process. In addition, here are some areas you might want to spell out in detail: compensation, honoraria, leave, continuing education, changes to this covenant, expenses, termination/separation procedures and the process for dealing with conflict within the congregation.

Clearly understood and realistic expectations are the foundation of a successful church.

Resources

If you are having a hard time getting started, take a look on the web at these templates:

Go to office.microsoft.com and search for "independent contractor employment agreement." Or, go to www.lawdepot.com and search for "employment contract."

You can also request samples from me: rich@rltstrategies.com.

Rev. Richard L. Tafel is the denominational strategist for the Swedenborgian Church and lives in Washington, DC.

Aging Gracefully

(Continued from page 123)

A large part of the aging population is alert and vital into their 80s and 90s. It is essential that they keep their mental wheels turning, as well as engaging in regular exercise. One way is to expand our reading beyond the morning paper and the glib news weeklies. To stretch my mind, I subscribe to *The New York Review of Books*. As an alternative to *Time* and *Newsweek*, I read *The Economist*, the *Washington Post Weekly*, and *The Nation*. To keep up with movements within Christianity, I continue to subscribe to *The Christian Century*, and of course *The Messenger* is always beside me.

Although I was dragged reluctantly into the computer age, I am grateful for the internet as a way to keep in touch with my widespread family. I have also purchased a genealogy program that helps me to trace my family's roots, and keep the family informed of their ancestral tree.

I look for ways to stretch my mind, reflect on the deeper questions of life, read those classics that escaped me in school, and reach out to family and friends who have moved away, or that I write to only at Christmas. I value activity in my local church and welcome opportunities for volunteer service, such as chauffeuring at Mosswood Hollow. When I reach the age of 90, I will check in with you again, if I can find the time.

Meanwhile, keep in touch and let the editor of *The Messenger* know what you are doing in your advancing years, as you age gracefully.

The Rev. Ernest O. Martin is a retired minister living with his son Paul and family at the Mosswood Hollow Retreat Center in Duwall, Washington, in the foothills of the Cascades.

**Introducing the New Chair of
the Council of Ministers:
Rev. Andy Stinson**

(Continued from page 119)

surrounded by spiritually starving people.

Third, we have to get hungry again. Hungry to change people's lives in the way our lives have been changed by the truths of this church. Hungry to tell people about who and what we are as New Church people. Hungry to be witnesses to the resurrection of the world which is taking place through the descent of the Holy City.

**What do you see as our
denomination's greatest
strength?**

Our greatest strength is that we go for Christ. In all his forms and fashions we go to bring Christ's love and wisdom to the heart and souls of a world that desperately needs it. The grand and simple notion that God is coming into the world: into our personal lives, into our streets, into our churches, into our communities, into our nations, and into our world. Swedenborg's vision of how the church might go for Christ and how we might be in the world is our strength.

**How would you like to see
the denomination grow over
the next ten years?**

Some might disagree, but I think we are on the vanguard of the descent of the Holy City. If you look at the work that has happened over the past twenty years in our little denomination it is amazing. All of the divisive issues that are now tearing apart the mainline and conservative churches—same-sex marriage, the environment, so many other issues—we have already navigated.

I would like to see us aggressively begin to plant churches around the country. We truly are no longer a house divided against ourselves and we can begin to offer powerful truths in places we have never gone before.

**What is your favorite
Swedenborg quote?**

This changes all the time, but right now I am pretty partial to "A person who lives a life of love and compassion is constantly at worship." -AC 1618

I have been thinking a lot about the 'practice of Swedenborgianism' these days and this seems to be at its core.

**What is your favorite memo-
ry of your time in the
Swedenborgian Church?**

At the risk of being self-referential, I have to say it was my ordination. It was a powerful day for me. I was ordained at Wayfarer's Chapel and the beauty and majesty of the day was just stunning, as well as being surrounded and celebrated with some of my very favorite people. It was the culmination of four-plus years of work for me, and I was humbled and honored to be there.

**What is your favorite thing
to do in your free time?**

This changes often too. Recently I have taken up playing poker (No Limit Texas Hold'em). I really enjoy trying to get a 'read' on someone at the poker table. Also, I like to ride my motorcycle—it is simple and freeing and is a wonderful break. I also enjoy sailing and a good book, not at the same time, nor in that order. ☛

I Saw My Soul



*I saw my soul
And it was Yours.
I was your angel
And you - Mine.
Every decision
To face Love, lived
Eternal, breathing, edged in
Metallic splashes -
Dancing across light years
Others emerged
Magnificent, Laughing,
Gathered in Celebration.
We saw our souls
And It was theirs.
We were Their angel
And They - Ours
Every decision to face
Love, lived
Connected, aligning, drenched in
Waves of revelry.
The Waves slowed long
Enough to mirror its newfound
Wealth.
Lights lit up the Sea.
Perfect Expanded
Lost is Found
I saw my soul
And it was Yours.*

*- Amy Hitchmoth,
Member, DC Church*



Urbana University Update: Address to Convention

Dr. Robert Head

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

again for your visit to our campus last year; having you there was indeed our pleasure!

Your University has changed and evolved throughout its 157 year history. However, one thing that has not changed is its gratitude for its founders. And thank you for your continuing stewardship and support of our mission.

One of the things I want to share with you is a story of some years ago. I had just boarded an airplane when the captain requested that everyone be seated quickly as he wanted to take off and beat the weather. Now that caught my attention and was not a comforting message to anyone on the plane. And he couldn't leave it there. He added, "And by the way, because of the weather, we are going to have a zero-visibility take-off!" Talk about words that should never be used together: zero visibility and take-off. It was humorous watching everyone who had a window seat look outside to see exactly what it was they couldn't see! The plane did take off and it was pretty rough. The higher it got, the less rough it became. And finally, once we were above the clouds, the sun came out and the ride was as smooth as it could possibly be.

The moral of the story is that the sun is always out somewhere and available all of the time. Do we choose, as Christians, to fly in



rough conditions under the clouds presented by this world – or seek the higher level of sunshine and God's comfort? That challenge is also relevant to organizations in general and Urbana University specifically.

Each year I have the privilege of sharing the Urbana University story with you and allow you to share in our triumphs and challenges. In many ways, this past year represented both the best year of my six year tenure and the worst. There were moments of great triumph and of great sorrow.

On December 9th and May 12th we held our 108th and 109th Commencement ceremonies. Between the two events, we had 251 students

of the tragic deaths of three of our Chinese MBA students – I would like to remember them with you today: Jin "Jack" Bian; Yan "Zoe" Sun; Bing "Jo" Xue.

Jack, Zoe and Jo were honored posthumously with Honorary Master of Business Administration degrees that were presented to their families during a memorial service held on campus. This horrific traffic accident brought our students, faculty, staff and community together and strengthened our bond and commitment to one another. As a community we were able to provide emotional support to our Chinese students on campus and there was a tremendous outpouring of financial support to the families of the three deceased students. For whatever role you played individually, thank you for your kindness!

This has been a difficult year, just a week prior to the loss of our three students; Bluffton College experienced the tragic bus accident that claimed so many lives. The shootings at Virginia Tech left all of us with a sense of vulnerability and an awareness of lost innocence. Nevertheless, we must go on.

During this academic year, we will continue to develop programs in Respiratory Therapy and Radiation Technology. These will be nice additions to our other allied health programs in nursing, sports medicine and athletic training. The new programs were approved by the Urbana University Board of Trustees in October of 2006 and will begin January of 2008.

We completed our first year under our new academic structure. The structure includes four colleges



The Johnny Appleseed Museum and Education Center in Historic Bailey/Barclay Hall, Renovation 2003.

graduate this past year.

One of our ongoing challenges is to continue the expansion of our academic programs and outreach. In the past year, our MBA students from China have grown from seventeen (in 2006) to forty-one! This coming fall, we will enroll our first undergraduate students from China. I will not be surprised if we have seventy-five to eighty grad and undergrad students (combined) from China during this upcoming year.

On the evening of March 8th our University reeled with the news

(Continued on page 130)

Support the Swedenborgian Church Youth League!

Lori Steinhiser

The work of SCYL is vital to the future health and strength of our denomination and as such it is worthy of our continued attention and support.

SCYL stands for the Swedenborgian Church Youth League. The mission of this program is to provide youth with an active and participatory spiritual community based in love, acceptance, and respect for individual paths guided by Emanuel Swedenborg and the teachings of the Swedenborgian Church. It is open to teens of all faiths and beliefs between the ages of 13 through 18.

As someone who has worked with youth in one capacity or another for the last 15+ years, and

as the mother of a teenager, I have never observed or been part of a group more accepting and loving of youth than our denomination and its youth workers. It is truly heart-warming watching kids blossom in a matter of days during youth retreats and camps as a result of being so warmly welcomed and celebrated as being special and significant just the way they are. It seems almost miraculous the way the walls come down and the love flows freely. Lifelong friendships are developed, including a deepening of the teen's relationship with God and our church.

The majority of the people I have met who are in their 20's and 30's and actively involved in furthering the work of our denomination speak fondly of their early and

strong connection to the Swedenborgian church through our youth programming.

SCYL fosters this sense of belonging and connection through a whole host of activities, retreats, camps, and special events for youth throughout the year. Email SCYL Youth Director Kurt Fekete at kfekete@hotmail.com or call Kurt at (866) 333-SCYL (7295) for more information on what's on the SCYL calendar for the remainder of 2007.

On behalf of the future of our church, I thank you for your continued support of this worthwhile endeavor.

Lori Steinhiser is a member of General Council and Secretary of the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana. ☩

THE SPIRITUALITY OF PARENTING

On July 14th, Rev. Kim Hinrichs led a daylong workshop for parents at the Temenos Retreat Center near West Chester, Pennsylvania. Participants included members of the Swedenborgian churches at both Temenos and Wilmington, Delaware. Rev. Sage Currie and Millie Laakko led a program for children which ran concurrently.

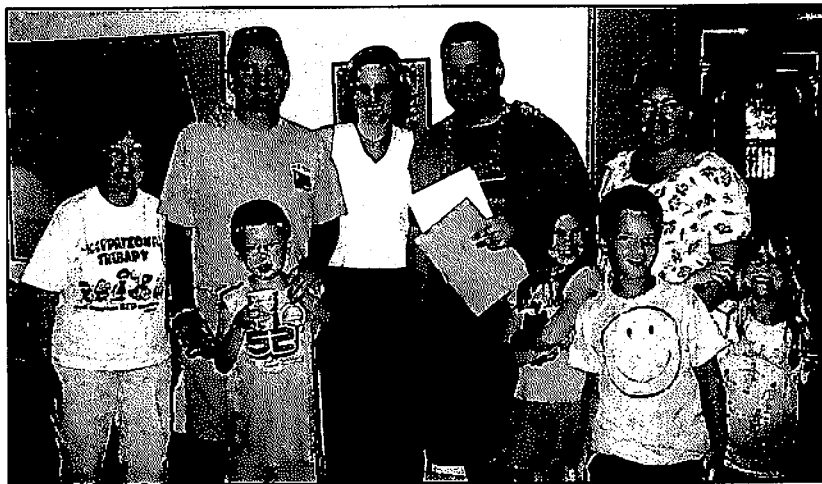
Kim's workshop centers on the belief that parenting can be an enriching and challenging spiritual practice that can open our hearts to the mystery

of God, enable us to raise healthy children and build nourishing families.

Spiritually-grounded parenting from a Swedenborgian perspective is done with mindfulness and

intentionality. It understands parenting as an ever-unfolding path toward wholeness with God, and welcomes parenting challenges as opportunities to learn more about human being and relationship, thus more about God.

The workshop will be offered again in San Francisco September 29th and in Cleveland October 20th. For more information, contact kimberly.hinrichs@gmail.com ☩



*Adults (L-R) Millie Laakko, Jeff Watt, Kim Hinrichs, David Hunt, and Diana Whaley;
Kids (L-R) Matthew, Tashia, Bryce and Ariel.*

Urbana University Update: Address to Convention

(Continued from page 128)

and one school, each with a full-time dean. Those entities are:

- College of Arts & Sciences
- College of Business Administration
- College of Education & Allied Professions
- College of Social & Behavioral Sciences
- School of Adult & Graduate Education (SAGE)

Our new student center opened and was made available to students, faculty and staff; providing a gathering place at the heart of our campus for social events, meetings and a state of the art bookstore. Ellis Field, our new athletic stadium, has an artificial turf-playing surface which now benefits a much larger segment of the student population. The artificial surface will accommodate the football program, men and women's soccer, the Royal Blues marching band, intramural sports and various other University events. Our 2008 Commencement will be held on Ellis Field.

The 'Hub' is now home providing much-needed arts space for painting and drawing, as well as being home to our choir, band and theatre departments.

McConnell Hall is set to open in late July of this year. Complete with six wings, it will provide living space for 154 students.

Our newly acquired downtown building is in the early planning stages of renovation and will serve to provide a portal to the University. Public access to an Art Gallery and the Johnny Appleseed Museum will be planned, as well as being home to several University offices.

I have previously reported that the University received a \$1.8 million Title III Grant. The result of the grant is the acquisition and implementation of Merlin, our new

administrative software system. Considering we were on the ground six years ago and have soared to over 30,000 feet, technology at Urbana University is setting the sky as its limit! Merlin, when added to our fiber optic and wireless infrastructure, and combined with our classroom technology, positions us to excel in teaching and learning. The approval and formation of a new Technology Committee within our Board of Trustees indicates the critical role of technology in higher education and to the strategic success of our university.

We experienced a record fall enrollment in 2006, however due to declining demographics and disappointing national trends toward private institutions, our fall enrollment for 2007 could be slightly less. We are dedicated to doing a better job with building our Adult, Graduate and International enrollment.

The 2006 - 2007 year was good financially, with an increase in net assets. Our General Convention loan balance stands at \$44,000, with a pay off scheduled in May of 2008.

Our Will To Excel Campaign began in 2003 with an initial target of \$4.7 million. This target was increased to \$6 million. We are currently looking at a balance of slightly over \$220,000 to complete all of the components of this record campaign. With our current donor prospects, I am confident that we will finalize A Will To Excel prior to its official close, summer of 2008.

Alisa Wilson is working with Collette Vacations to organize a trip to China for interested alumni and friends. The trip is planned for May 20th to 29th, 2008. More information will be forthcoming.

Best wishes for a productive Convention!

Dr. Robert L. Head is President of Urbana University in Urbana, Ohio. The university was founded in 1850 by followers of Emanuel Swedenborg.

Church Calendar 2007-2008

October 4-7, 2007

SHS Board Meeting • SHS Berkeley, CA

October 8, 2007

Columbus Day • Central Office Closed

October 14, 2007

Dedication of the New York Church Restoration • New York City

October 27, 2007

Investment Committee
Central Office

November 1-5, 2007

General Council • Kansas

November 2-5, 2007

COMSU Meeting • Las Vegas, NV

November 6-10, 2007

Committee on Admission to the Ministry • Berkeley

November 9-10, 2007

Retirement Committee
Central Office, Newton, MA

November 11, 2007

Installation of Rev. Andy Stinson
Washington DC Church of the Holy City

November 16, 2007

Thanksgiving Holiday
Central Office Closed

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

Baptisms

Bond, Brassington, Csuk-Schellenberg, Epp, McKendry - Teralyn Bond, Lisa Brassington, Michael Brassington, Michelle Brassington, Alexa Csuk-Schellenberg and Cameron Epp received the sacrament of baptism into the Christian Church at Paulhaven Camp on July 21, 2007. Keegan McKendry received the sacrament of baptism on July 15, 2007, also at Paulhaven. The Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete officiated.

Hill, Howard - Zoe Augusta Hill, Finn Russell Hill and Jackson Alexander Howard were baptized into the New Church at the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego on July 29, 2007, the Rev. Carla Friedrich, their grandmother, officiating.

Confirmations

Cunningham - Christine Mary Cunningham was confirmed into the faith of the New Church on Sunday, July 29, 2007 at Almont Summer School, the Rev. Jennifer Tafel officiating. Christine is a member of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church.

Penabaker, Trimble - Erika Lynn Penabaker and Jennifer Trimble were confirmed into faith of the New Church on Sunday, July, 29, 2007 at Almont Summer School, the Rev. Kevin Baxter officiating.

Bond, Brassington, Sawatzky, Sawchuck, Watters - Teralyn Bond, Lisa Brassington, Mitchell Sawatzky, Christopher Sawchuck, and Amanda Watters, having completed a class in New Church teachings to which they gave considered assent, were confirmed with joy into the New Church at Paulhaven Camp on July 21, 2007, the Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete officiating.

ficiating. Stephanie is the daughter of Susan LaPointe.

Anniversary

Dole - The Rev. George and Mrs. Lois Dole celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary on September 1, 2007 at a festive gathering with friends and family at their summer home in Wayne, Maine.

Memorial Service

Young - Betsy Young passed into the spiritual world on July 8, 2007. A memorial for her is being held at the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego on Sunday, October 28th at 1:00pm. Rev. Harvey Tafel and Eldon Smith will officiate. The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be sent to the Fisher Center for Alzheimer's Research Foundation (www.alzinfo.org) or the Alzheimer's Association (www.alz.org). An obituary for Betsy was published in the September issue of *The Messenger*.

CHAPLAINS IN THE MAKING



Swedenborgian House of Studies students Gabriella Cahaley (middle row, left) and Judith Vandergrift (bottom row, right) celebrate the beginning of their Clinical Pastoral Education internship this summer at Veteran's Administration Palo Alto Health Care System in California. Their supervisor was Rev. Susan Turley (bottom row, left).

Hill - Ellen Madara Mason Hill was confirmed into the New Church at the Swedenborgian Church of San Diego on July 29, 2007, the Rev. Carla Friedrich officiating.

Marriages

LaPointe and Hartman - Stephanie Marie LaPointe and David Hartman were united in marriage at the Fryeburg Church, Fryeburg, Maine, July 7, 2007, the Rev. Ken Turley of-

Deaths

Cressman - Dr. Richard Cressman, church member and longtime organist for the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos, died unexpectedly August 19th at his home. He had recently retired from his dental practice of over 40 years. He is survived by a son, two daughters, two granddaughters and two sisters. A memorial service is planned for September 9th at the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos, the Rev. Susannah Currie to preside. ☩

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.

a tradition of
boldness



PACIFIC SCHOOL of RELIGION

Ministry as Vocation



SWEDENBORGIAN
HOUSE OF STUDIES
at Pacific School of Religion

The Swedenborgian House of Studies, in partnership with Pacific School of Religion, is the seminary of the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches, offering theological education to women and men training for careers in ministry, teaching, counseling, chaplaincy and other helping professions

The Swedenborgian House of Studies invites those considering a call to ministry to attend the Ministry as Vocation conference this fall:

November 9-11, 2007
Pacific School of Religion, Berkeley, California

Come to explore your questions about ministry and theological education, meet faculty, students and staff from PSR and SHS, learn about the academic programs and seminary life, and experience creative workshop together

If you are interested in attending the conference, please contact either Francesca McCrossan at fmccrossan@shs.psr.edu or Jim Lawrence, Dean, Swedenborgian House of Studies at jlawrence@shs.psr.edu. For more information please see www.psr.edu. ☩

Know Your Church History!

The New Church in the New World by Maguerite Block is a sympathetic yet objective account of the life of Swedenborg, the teachings of the New Church and the growth and wide-spread influence of the New Church in North America from the late 1700's through the 1930's. It is an excellent resource as an introduction for newcomers to the church, as a text for confirmation classes, and to deepen the awareness and appreciation of anyone who has interest and affection for our church. It might also serve as a useful tool in educating those critical of our church and theology based on questionable information. Upon request, we will send boxes of 18 copies at no cost save the expense of shipping. Requests for less than one box will incur a \$5.00 handling fee as well as postage. Order by phone (207) 935-3413 or email pastor@fryeburgnewchurch.org. ☩

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