

THE MESSENGER

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Opening of Convention

Crossing the Jordan

Renée Machiniak

Scripture: Joshua 3

Crossing the Jordan River is our task this week and for the year ahead for all of us. We have come to the river and we see that it is good; we see that the other side holds tremendous promise and opportunity. We are crossing the river together! We are ready as a church to enter a new phase of life and service to the Lord, to each other, and to the larger world. And we have what we need to make the journey. Jesus encouraged us when he said, *Let anyone who is thirsty come to me, and let the one who believes in me drink... Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water.* [John 7:37-38]. Jesus put the river of life right in the human heart! We have what we need to make this journey.

By the time we get to the Jordan, we have already crossed a threshold into loving the Lord and wanting to follow His guidance. We love Him now; there is real trust and we feel His commandments written in our hearts. It's a knowing of the heart, and this marks a huge shift in how we feel about God. All of our half-hearted efforts to be good have



Renée Machiniak

advanced us to this point as individuals and as a church. Our efforts helped us to gain new spiritual ground; we now experience the Lord as a safe sanctuary and an unfailing compass for our lives and for the ministries of our church. The Israelites put their complete trust in Joshua's leadership; an act which was new for them. In the same way, we now put our wholehearted trust in the Lord to guide our church into the future; beyond the river.

We are crossing the river together.

As we continue to grow as a church, our ministries will be led by heart-centered faith. Love leads us now. As a church body, we trust in the Lord's leadership, as we see Joshua teaching us to do. A new Spirit is coming to us, right now. I believe we, as individuals and as a denomination, are ready to move forward and cross over into new territory. And yet I'd like to remind us that we have in us not only the Spirit of the Lord, but also something in us that resists, fears, and blocks the Spirit. Both the Red Sea and the Jordan River seemed

impassable to the Israelites at the time. When God directed Joshua to lead the priests and people across, it seemed impossible because the river banks were overflowing. Yet in that magic and mystical moment, the Lord led them. Now we are standing at the river Jordan, seeking what lies on the other side. No longer will we look with fear at the obstacles that seem insurmountable. No longer will we say: "It can't happen; we're too small; we don't have the resources; we don't have enough to grow."

Even when the next step seems impossible, we will seek the Lord to guide us and we will listen for the best path to follow which leads toward the highest good.

We are beginning to cross over into knowing the truth of this. God is with us, and for us, and protecting His church. We see this in the exciting changes and growth taking place in our seminary at The Swedenborgian House of Studies, and in the authentic sharing within our Council of Ministers this week. We see heaven manifesting in the



Opening worship service

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Wilma Wake

June 24, 2007

I felt a moment of panic as I disembarked at the Grand Rapids airport. I had forgotten to bring the email telling me where to meet the other Swedenborgians needing a ride to our convention site. Thankfully, as I walked into the baggage area, I saw Sandy Coveart smiling at me and waving a big Swedenborgian sign. Not only was the sign readable from a distance, but it had been put together neatly with stick-on let-

ters of matching colors and even placement.

It was the first of many indicators to me that there was something special about this convention: it was probably the first one organized primarily by professional educators. Everything was clean, neat, and tidy; with every detail attended to. God is in the details, and God was present. As I went through the convention week, I was impressed with not only the smooth flow of events, but also with the sense of fun and laughter that was in the air.

I wondered whether others were also having fun at Conven-

tion 2007. To find out, I became a roving reporter, interviewing people at random about their convention experience. When I had permission, I snapped a photo and wrote down a quote. I do not guarantee any journalistic objectivity in my quest, but it did add to my own enjoyment of this year's convention. Most of the interviews are included in this issue so that you, too, can appreciate random snap shots from the roving reporter.

It was a privilege to serve as guest editor this month. I want to thank the *Messenger* and Patte LeVan for their help with the issue. I want particularly to thank Patte LeVan and Steve Koke for the many photos they contributed to this issue.

Wilma Wake, guest editor of September *Messenger*. ☐

Roving Reporter

Question: How is Convention 2007 for you? Are you having fun?

Answers:



From left: Carol Lawson, Chris Laitner, Margie Leas, Betty Jean Neuenfeldt, Dorie Litchfield, Bob Leas
 Marjie: "I'm starting to have fun now that the planning and worrying stopped."

B.J.: "I'm having 700 miles of fun in my capacity as a chauffeur!"

Chris L.: "I am, but I'm also busy since I'm on the planning committee, and president. I see that people are engaged and happy, which makes it fun for me. I love all the creativity I see here."

Dorie Litchfield: "I am having a wonderful time ... I'm spending time with people I knew as a child at Almont and Detroit. Now we are grandparents together!"

Carol L.: "I like all the people - it feels like a family; it feels like I belong. It's very satisfying."



Right to left: Sola Thorballsson, Jake MacTavish, Sam MacTavish, Naomi Anderson, Cody Steinbiser.
 Comments from the youth table: "I'm happy hanging out with friends ... some of our friends we only see once a year ... we get to see different ways of doing things ... I have lots of good friends here, and the staff is really friendly ... Kurt is doing a great of job being with us."

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Opening of Convention

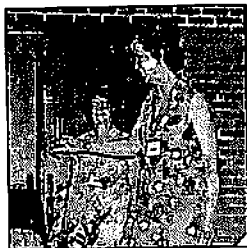
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church when we experience the quality of our youth group and Kurt Fekete's leadership for the youth of our denomination. Our Sunday School Association is being revitalized, and the creative Spirit is bringing music and the arts into our worship more than ever before.

So – we go forward, trusting completely that “With God, all things are possible.”

Will there still be times when we feel afraid? “Yes.” Will we make bumbling mistakes? “Yes.” Will our doubt cause us to hesitate? “Yes.” But – running strong through us all is the river of life, the power of His love, the gentle, yet unstoppable will of life manifesting and evolving for the good of all. The Lord's Providence is kind to us and also challenges us with paradox and parable. Our universe, as Einstein once wrote, is a friendly place. Therefore, during our brief and precious time together, let us celebrate this truth and capture the moment before us...as we cross the river together.

Look around at the people next to you. We are all going through the water together. This is it! So let us meditate on His Word day and night, and let our hearts be open to His leading. And let's have fun by getting our feet wet!



Sharon Billings adds water from Ohio to a large bowl. Everyone was invited to bring water from where they lived and/or worshipped for a mingling of the convention waters.

We're here to celebrate our faith and to listen to God's call of encouragement to each one of us and to our churches. It is the call of Joshua. Can you hear

it? “Be strong and of good courage. I am with you always.” Amen.

Rev. Renée Machiniak is pastor of the Church of the Holy City in Royal Oak, Michigan.

Wet Feet

2007 President's Address to the Annual Convention.

Time flies when you're having fun! It's true. It seems that it was only yesterday that we were in Waterloo, Ontario, and I officially stepped into the position of President of the Swedenborgian Church in North America.

This convention at Hope College in Holland, Michigan, marks the end of the third year of my three-year term as convention president. I am honored by the faith put in me last year when I was elected to a second term, which will commence with the closing of the Word on Sunday, July 1. Tonight I want to share a reflection of the journey of the past three years as well as a glimpse of the next three years.

For several weeks prior to this



convention, a phrase kept bubbling to the surface of my mind: *measuring my life out with coffee spoons* – a line from T. S. Eliot's *The Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock*. On a purely rational basis, I discounted this nudge because – after all – I don't drink coffee. Oh, and it is *Prufrock* and it's full of symbolism, and we're not going to do a presentation on the ramifications of Eliot's symbolism as portrayed in this poem. But that image of coffee spoons as a type of measurement of days kept coming back.

So, OK. If you know this poem, you'll know that J. Alfred Prufrock is not a happy individual. You may also know that many people think of him as a kind of disturbed individual. You might also remember that there are strange images of women “going to and fro” as well as some reference to drowning... but we are *not* going there. What of the coffee spoons?

What is the measure of any set of days?

Over the past three years, I've written several *Messenger* articles that outlined the positives of the life of our church. It's all true, and it continues to happen. I am – we are – bolstered by the ongoing, creative activity in which our various local ministries are involved.

What are my coffee spoons? A growing familiarity with airports. A growing prayer life, particularly supported by the image of luggage carousels going round and round without the presence of my small brown suitcase on them. Memorizing the connections of major airports with the regional airport near my home in Midland, Michigan. Learning to read a map while driving, and discovering that Mapquest has a sense of humor. Hosting the cabinet meeting in Midland. Enjoying the special events that occur during the meetings of the Wayfarers Board of Managers, and experiencing the unique setting of

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Opening of Convention

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the Santa Sabina Conference center with the Swedenborgian House of Studies Board of Trustees. The complete and welcoming hospitality of the Kansas Association at Camp Mennoscah. The beauty of the Paulhaven Camp setting. Meeting Buttercup, Tinkerbelle and Shamoo somewhere in Fort Myers Beach. Being the guest of wonderful people across the continent. My continuing gratitude to people who carefully prepare potlucks for the "president who is allergic to peppers of all kinds." The wonderful aura and sense of worship in all of our churches – even when there is no congregation present. The willingness to explore new forms of outreach that our local groups have, and the great people I've met through those processes. The Singing Bowls in LaPorte. Live chats and personal connections on <http://www.swedenborgiancommunity.org/>. The joy that comes from spending a few days with members of boards, committees and councils as they perform good use.

Conventions that are carefully planned and carried out by talented and caring local groups and are full of new and renewed connections. The new growth of youth groups and the great creativity of our young adults.

So, I have my own symbolic representation of this term of office, and I also have unending gratitude to all of the folks who have given so much to it.

In my first talk, after being consecrated into this office in July, 2004, I referred to a book title: *Here Am I; Send Aaron* – the thought voiced by Moses who felt that he couldn't adequately perform the task asked of him by the Lord, so he thought that perhaps Aaron would be better – or at least be a helper. In my talk, I concluded that it wasn't Aaron who would help me

in this new role, but all of you – the members and friends of the church. And you have.

A milestone in my own personal life was reached this past March 1st when I had my sixtieth birthday. Sixty! Somehow that's just not what I see when I look in the mirror. I have to admit that this has made an impact on me. A few weeks later a friend asked me if I had had a "crowning" in celebration of that birthday. I had a moment of panic. After some consideration, though, I realized that sixty, as well as the positive aspects of crone-

We're here today with our toes in the water of the Jordan River, and *together*, over the next few days, we'll cross into a place to do new things: *supported* by all that has gone before, *encouraged* by all that is current, and *led* by the Lord.

hood, probably represent an arrival at a state of life where wisdom assumes a more forward position. So, my prayer is that Wisdom will support my next three years of service to our church.

Over the past three years, I've witnessed and reported on the good programs, the new endeavors, and the vitality that I've found in travels for the church. In consultation with leaders of the denomination, we've set up some better ways to respond to local ministry needs, and we've paid better attention to surrounding our work and members with a culture of hope and possibility. Over the past eight months, members of the general council have written short articles about various aspects of the denomination for *The Messenger* to increase awareness of our work. Our denominational funding bodies have taken fresh views of the process of granting, trying to be as helpful and supportive as possible to the health and sustainability of our ministries. We've seen the development, birth, and significant growth of an online outreach ministry, and, here

in Michigan, we welcomed a brand new church, the Lansing Swedenborgian Church, into Association membership last fall. We have solid involvement with the National Council of Churches. Many of our individual ministries are finding new ways to reach out, to serve, and to welcome. The Swedenborgian House of Studies, the Wayfarers Chapel, the national church in Washington, DC, are all engaged in varieties of strategic planning and review which is reinvigorating or enlarging each of their programs.

We may be a loosely-knit, spread-out organization, and we may have areas in which we are struggling, but we are vital, invigorated, and taking responsibility for continued forward motion.

This year's convention theme, "Crossing the Jordan," refers to a time when – finally – the children of Israel followed the Lord's leading to reach the Promised Land. We understand that this kind of regenerative step is taken many times in our development, but the power of this story is in the choices that are made: the choice to trust in and to follow the Lord's leading, the choice to move forward over a constraining boundary into something new, and the choice to acknowledge the Lord's help in our lives -- personally and collectively through prayer and action.

The Rev. Paul Sperry tells us that "change is essential to improvement." Change is not always easy. Change is a process of learning from the past, living in the present, and of working together with the Lord. Change is a necessity for our continuance as a church in love and service to the neighbor. We're here today with our toes in the water of the Jordan River, and *together*, over the next few days, we'll cross into a place to do new things: *supported* by all that has gone before, *encouraged* by all that is current, and *led* by the Lord.

There is more. *Infinitely more!* ☩

Ordinations

Building Churches

Jennifer Tafel

(John 15: 1-5, 8-12, 16-17)



I would like to acknowledge that this morning began with the teen worship service and that I was with the ladies of the Women's Alliance this afternoon celebrating a wonderful lunch meeting. Both of these groups in the church have been significant parts of my formation process.

I chose the Bible passage that I did because I heard it twice during a couple of church services the summer that I answered the call to ministry. I made a mental note that there was a significant reason why I heard this particular message from the Bible twice, and at that particular time in my life.

It was at seminary that I learned the Swedenborgian interpretation of the text: [that] *nothing unconnected ever occurs because anything unconnected shall perish*. Then it hit me—there have been significant connections throughout my journey to ministry. The first connection I thought of was that the Cambridge Church uses the phrase, *nothing unconnected ever occurs* for their mission for their church. My father was minister there for a number of years and was there when this quote was first used by this congregation. This was only one of many connections I found, and I realized that nothing unconnected ever occurs—really! Then I started searching out more connections and this meant I had to be open to receive the messages and to see the signs.

As I saw signs, I reflected and reflected and I wondered, "What

was happening to me?" Being open to God meant that I was changing. I was changing from the inside out. My foundation was crumbling. To be theological—I would say that the new things God had in store for me couldn't fit into my old patterns...or new wine in old wineskins.

I went back to the Bible and re-read the text. I came to realize that God was finding ways to get rid of what no longer serves in order that I will be able to serve God. Since

What if each one of you is a church as our theology teaches? What are you using to keep the bricks together? How's your foundation?

God is the one who formed me in the womb, God is continuing to form me. This concept of formation is to be present tense, not the past tense. It's an ongoing process to be formed.

Our theology talks a lot about churches. We are the Church of the New Jerusalem and many congregations use "New Church" in the name of their society. There's the Church Universal, which according to Rev. Dr. William Woofenden, "The Church Universal also known as the Universal Church is referring to the church as it exists everywhere, transcending church organization. A truly ecumenical concept, referring to all sincere people of faith of every world religion."* There are a lot of churches that are part of the old order which must make room for the New Jerusalem. Many of you know that I've helped in the process of the Lansing Swedenborgian Church becoming an official church within the de-

nomination. I could talk about that church, for a good while. However, I'm interested in talking about *this* church: the church specific, you and me.

In the text I chose, Jesus tells his disciples that he considers them friends because of the information from God that he's shared with them about what's in the next realm. God continues to share the message with these people that heaven is possible. The only conditions (if you want to call them that), are that they have to be in relationship with God and to love one another. *Is that all?! That should be easy, right?! I mean, Jesus is telling the disciples that in order for them to attain heaven, they just have to do these two things! Consider again what Jesus was asking of them: to be in relationship with God and to love each other as he loved each of them. Is that really easy?*

God must have known I was writing this sermon because I recently heard that the Vatican just put out the "Ten Commandments of the Road." The group in Lansing will tell you that my driving has been an illustration for my monthly messages more than once! That is, if they were listening! For those of you who don't know; I learned how to drive in Boston during the summers with my Dad and then I would go back to my Mom's in L.A. to practice what I learned. Maybe now you know why my driving is an illustration for my messages.

One of the articles reporting the "Ten Commandments of the Road" summarized the document by saying that people should pray that they make it to where they're going when they get into the car. Shoot, my family and friends have been doing that for years! Who knew

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Ordinations

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that when my step-Dad made the sign of the cross when he was in the passenger seat that one day he'd be following an edict from Rome?!

Back to my point: driving is just one of the many aspects of my life where I have to be disciplined in focusing on my relationship with God and monitor my thoughts.

So what does all of this have to do with building a church? What if each one of you is a church as our theology teaches? What are you using to keep the bricks together? How's your foundation? I know I've got a lot to do, and I know I have to keep the project simple. I can't let *this* church get locked into steering committees, maintenance committees, or letting others be the board of trustees. That would be dealing with the external, and I'm talking about the internal. It's a matter between God and me and letting love be used to hold this church together.

*William Woofenden, *Swedenborg Explorer's Guidebook: A Research Manual*, "Swedenborg Studies #12" (W. Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation Publishers, 2001.)

Jennifer Tafel has been a worship leader at the Lansing Swedenborgian Church since September, 2005. She is currently serving as their minister.

Listening for Compassion

Sky Paradise

Reading: Isaiah 30:
18-21

The desire people have for wisdom about their relationship with the Creator God is always shaped, in some measure, by our own social location, science, history,



and beliefs about theology and the cosmos.

But the answers to these questions about our relationship with the Creator lay way beyond scholarly concerns and intellectual learning. It is an act of listening to the God of Isaiah 30.

I remember an event which taught me this lesson, and which took me on this path to this place. I was in rural Jamaica working with a group of college students. We were in Manchioneal, Portland, repairing and cleaning cottages for the very poorest of Jamaica's poor.

In a one-room cottage with no electricity or plumbing, an old woman came to the door. She had been permanently disabled and unable to see for over fifty years. She held a copy of the scriptures in her hand and asked me if I would read to her. There were two marked sections, one of which was the passage in Isaiah 30.

As we sat on the steps of her place in the world and I read, there was a lull in the work. I looked up and everyone in the village had come to listen. Then I saw tears in her eyes. This woman, I thought, knows her intimate relationship with God in a deep and amazing way. To this day, I carry her photograph in my Bible. I so admire this angel, who could not see physically, yet saw everything spiritually with great clarity. I never forgot that day or her. In that moment, I saw what I had been looking for my whole life: God's promise to her and to me and everyone here.

Today we will speak about three things: the passage in Isaiah 30, what it means to listen with the

heart, and listening to the narratives that we create in an emergent conversation.

The message contained in the Isaiah reading today points us in the direction to know God not intellectually, but spiritually -- as a loving and wise teacher.

The Creator calls on us to serve. Service is my ruling love, the place where I find my closest connection to the Divine. I think that perhaps many of you have also felt this call.

Through helping others, through listening, through prayer, through traditions and rituals, we re-connect with our spiritual selves in the narratives of the regenerative souls we attend to and pray for. Spiritual

narratives and the search for meaning through compassionate service are the poetry of our lives and the framework for a closer relationship with God and

Here is what I think about us, you and me, as a sacred people. We must listen to each other with heart. These are troubling times in the world and we want so much to know our inner sense but don't always know how to access it.

finding out who we really are.

Here is what I think about us, you and me, as a sacred people. We must listen to each other with heart. These are troubling times in the world and we want so much to know our inner sense but don't always know how to access it.

Much as the woman in Manchioneal, Portland, was listening so compassionately with her heart; we also listen.

Listening with the heart can be a "tough number." It requires a listening for God in the soul of the storyteller and the narrative.

It challenges us to listen and pray for that person to a God who knows all, even through our own limited understanding. It represents the sacred as manifest in the

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and times of our ongoing created lives. We must not do it only for our own members, but for everyone.

Listening in these ways allows us to hear the ever-emerging and changing conversations of all people as they struggle to translate their worldly experiences within their spiritual needs.

In a sense, it is the future of the world as we know it. This denomination will listen to the emergent conversations people are having about how they feel about us as Swedenborgians, their own lives and what they need. It is an emergent conversation about how we can shape the world into a better place, a place where people like the woman from Manichion, Portland, can have a decent place to live; and the people of Segundo Barrio will not be disenfranchised.

Listen to the last words in Isaiah 30:

When you turn to the right or you turn to the left, your ears shall hear a word behind you saying "This is the way; walk in it."

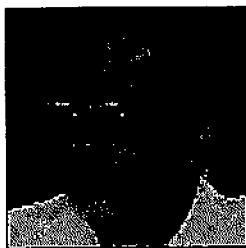
Listen! The sound you hear is the beating of your heart.

Rev. Sky Paradise is now ministering to an emerging congregation in the Southwest Desert.

Only a Staff for the Journey

Jim Lawrence

Mark's gospel tells us that after a time of preparation, Jesus sent out the disciples to do ministry, and that "he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits." These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no



bread, no bag, no money in your belts...Then they went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them." [Mark 6: 7-8, 12]

When you packed for this trip to come here, you had to think about this journey and all that you would need. What was the weather going to be like? Which reading material will I most wish to have? For what special situations will I need to have the right things? Will I get to be in the dorm with the Starbucks coffee, and if not, what should I bring to deal with that [an inside joke for convention-goers]? And probably you didn't end up bringing absolutely everything you have ended up wishing you had with you.

How much more challenging it is to prepare for an open-ended journey, one which would take us to places unbeknownst to us. Then our whole strategy for packing becomes a challenge on a different order altogether. We would have to think about all kinds of contingency situations, and prioritize based on how much we would feel we could possibly manage to lug around with us.

The Lord is sending you on such a trip and is telling you exactly what you need to pack for such a long-term, open-ended expedition. A staff: that's it. Now, when the Lord says take a staff, he doesn't mean an entourage of personal assistants! He means a walking stick that is well-made and ergonomically fitted to your height and grip. I want you to think about how useful and pleasing it can be to have a good walking stick in your hand when on a long hike—the reassurance it sends through your hand and arm constantly, the quiet joy it conveys in its strength. A good walking staff becomes a surprisingly versatile implement in a number of ways: it can push things, drag things, open

doors, and protect you. Its primary purpose is to support you and stabilize your step as you navigate your way. Through your hand and arm, the staff will support your whole body. The hands and arms correspond to *power* from the Word. As it is primarily through our hands and arms that we are able to interact with our environment to achieve what we need to get done, just so will it be your ability to use your staff. It will be your ability to draw upon God's wisdom in all those challenging interactions with the world in which you are seeking to do the work of the Lord's ministry that you will be most ably supported and empowered.

Continue to become familiar with your staff and to love holding it—to enjoy the feel of it in your palm, to let it become an extension of your being. That staff in your hand can be thought of as the Lord's constant presence with you in your work. And the power from the Word will be most especially with you as you understand the truths from God's Word. As Swedenborgian ministers, that can only mean the revealed divine teachings of the writings. This is the staff you are to take with you.

Take the message of the writings to the world anew. People still need to know of God's abiding divine love and wisdom in their life and in the unfolding course of this world. People still need to know that the conditions of life in which they find themselves are ripe for the journey of regeneration. People still need to know that their life will never come to an end but will always be, in fact, a journey.

But though your staff is to be your grounding in the power of God's Word through the revealed divine teachings in the writings, always remember that the goal is to support the spiritual well-being of

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souls. People are the most important thing in the world. Above all, love people. If you will use your wisdom to love people with passion, your ministry will prosper. In fact, within decades after those first disciples went out, the Christian church had spread far and wide, yet various Caesars began persecuting and often executing Christians for their faith. St. Laurence was among those martyred. The Roman authorities knew about his control of the church's resources and ordered him

under threat of death to produce the church's riches. He asked for some time to pull it all together, and then after having devised ways of entrusting the material assets of the church into safekeeping, he spent a few days assembling the poor, the sick and destitute who depended on the church for survival. When his period of grace had expired, he approached the authorities surrounded by this huddled crowd and declared to the magistrate that these were the treasures of the church.

Very expert use of his staff.

Sky and Jenn, there is no magic in being ordained, but through the office of the clergy, the Lord will direct all the power that you can stand into your heads, hearts, and hands. All the power of the Word and of heaven shall be yours if you shall manifest your preparation by now stepping out onto the journey of your ministry, your staff grasped firmly in your hand.

Rev. Dr. James Lawrence is Dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion. ☩



The ordination service. From left: Jennifer Tafel, Christine Laitner, Rev. Eric Allison and Sky Paradise



Newly-ordained Jennifer Tafel stands between her parents, Rev. F. Bob Tafel and Mareta Tafel



Newly ordained Rev. Sky Paradise with her partner, Dr. Yolanda Chavez Leyva.



Rev. Jennifer Tafel takes a bow after ordination.



Laying-on-of-hands



The new ministers receive their stoles, books, and certificates. From left: Revs. Rich Tafel, F. Bob Tafel (Jenn's father), Mareta Tafel (Jenn's mother), the Revs. Harvey Tafel, Jennifer Tafel, Dick Tafel, Eric Allison, Convention President Christine Laitner, Revs. Sky Paradise, Sage Serene Currie

Convention Videos

Unofficial videos in DVD-R format of main events at this year's Convention session are now available from F. Bob's Videos. Order information from: bobtafel@mac.com, or, 29 Fisher, Needham MA 02492.

(Further information at: <http://homepage.mac.com/bobtafel/>) Cost is \$15 per DVD (including shipping and handling) of Convention package for \$45 plus shipping that will include all of the main

worship services + "DVD extras." Proceeds will benefit Church of the Open Word in Newtonville. Please note this is a personal ministry "Sharing the Convention Experience" not funded by any constituent body of Convention. ☩

Twelve Stones out of the Middle of the Jordan

Eric Hoffman

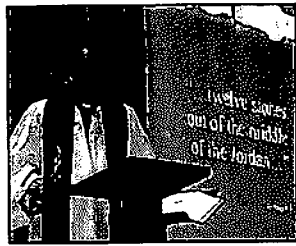
Scripture Readings:

Numbers 13:1-2;
13:17-14:1
John 17:20-26

This week, we have celebrated the crossing of the Jordan River as it has come to us in the biblical narrative, in our experience as a denomination, and as a turning point in our own individual journeys. It is a powerful moment, made even more so when we consider the event in context. I want to take a moment and review a part of the story that leads up to the crossing and see if you can spot the pattern that points to this morning's message.

In Exodus chapter 15, the Israelites crossed the Red Sea, led by Moses and ending a long period of slavery in Egypt. Almost immediately, in chapter 16, the Israelites began to complain to Moses, wondering where their food was going to come from in this desert. The Lord brought them manna to eat. In chapter 17, the people complained about a lack of water, and the Lord brought water from the very rocks. At Mount Sinai, while Moses was on the mountain receiving the law from God, the people complained that they didn't know where he was or what he had been doing for so long. They built a golden calf to be a visible focus for their worship, and the Lord rebuked them in no uncertain terms. The people complained again in the 11th chapter of Numbers after they received the law and the tabernacle. They complained about still being in this wilderness. Even Aaron and Miriam complained in Numbers 12. Moses pleaded with the Lord to forgive them, but the people still suffered plagues.

This brings us to the story from



Eric Hoffman using slides for his convention sermon.

our reading, when we learn that they are so close to the border of the Promised Land that Moses sends in twelve spies to bring reassurance to the people. The spies bring back reports of a land of great bounty, but also a land with

fortified cities and giants. Again the people complain, wailing at the top of their voices about how they had been brought to certain defeat. The Lord asks Moses, "When are these people going to get with the program? What do I have to do to convince them that I am supporting them on their journey? When are

The New Church is comprised of the community of spirits who are not afraid to get deep into the loving presence of another human — a community who walks that path of growth consciously, deliberately and with joy.

they going to get it?" Only two of the twelve spies, Joshua and Caleb, believe that they can have success if they enter the Promised Land, but the people are so full of fear in the face of such terrifying appearances that they threaten to kill the two. The people do come to their senses eventually and prepare to enter the Promised Land, but the damage has been done. Their hearts have been revealed. They go up against the Canaanites and are defeated in Numbers 14.

As you may have guessed, the complaining doesn't end there. A man named Korah challenges Moses' leadership in Numbers 16, and is swallowed up by the earth for his troubles. In chapter 20, they are in the wilderness of Zin, complain-

ing once again that there wasn't any water, and once again the Lord provides for their needs at Meribah. Finally, getting the knack of this "obedience to the Lord" thing, they meet and defeat the Amorites, Bashan, and Moab.

You may remember the story of the Moabite king asking a man named Balaam to curse the Israelites, and, after discussing the matter with his donkey, he discovers that he can only bless them. Feeling a new sense of confidence, Israel intermarries with the Moabites and are once again summarily rebuked, which gets them centered in the Lord once more and allows for them to finally defeat the Midianites (including poor Balaam. Sadly, Scripture doesn't record what happened to the donkey. I like to think that the donkey who saw the angel in the road, was taken in by the Israelites and crossed the Jordan alongside them). By the time we reach the end of Deuteronomy, Moses has ascended Mount Nebo in Moab, in sight of Jericho, and dies, leaving Israel under the leadership of Joshua. This brings us to the shore of the Jordan River.

Did you notice the pattern? It can be very subtle in scripture, but it's always there in some form. The people consistently experience success against the obstacles to their journey when they do not complain. To complain is to doubt the wisdom and the power of the Lord in one's life—to believe that, somehow, the Lord is getting the journey wrong. The wilderness was full of complaint, but it is noteworthy that in the last struggles before the Israelites cross the river, there was no complaint. The people followed the Lord's guidance. It is as if, upon hearing a lack of doubt in the people, the Lord then considered them finally ready to enter into

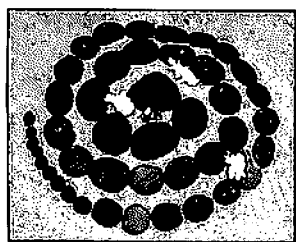
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Twelve Stones out of the Middle of the Jordan

(Continued from previous page)

a new phase of their growth. Only when they allowed themselves to trust in the Lord's guidance could they cross the Jordan and settle in the Promised Land.

Of course, as Swedenborgians, we know that the biblical story is *our* story. We are repeatedly gifted with visions of the Promised Land as the Lord shows us a better, deeper, more meaningful life. We were born to live there. As humans, we need to experience the struggles



An altar of stones

that are the natural result of our fears until such time as we trust enough to believe that God knows

what God is doing in our lives. So you can see why crossing the Jordan is such a profound turning point in our growth, as individuals and as a community—as a church. It is a turning point worth appreciating and worth remembering.

In the fourth chapter of Joshua, at the command of the Lord, Joshua tells the people to build an altar of stones at the place where they crossed the river as a reminder of this turning point.

When your children ask their parents in times to come, "what do these stones mean?" then you shall let your children know, "Israel crossed over the Jordan here on dry ground." For the Lord dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you crossed over...so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, and so that you may acknowledge the Lord your God forever. [Joshua 4:21-23]

Swedenborg tells us that stones correspond to truths. The stones of an altar are the truths upon which we build our doctrine; truths that we need to remember for the sake

of our continued journey. As our church crosses the Jordan, what are those valuable truths? I have a few suggestions for us to consider.

I imagine that one stone will be inscribed with a word that addresses all the complaints and doubts of the past: *humility*. Swedenborg tells us that without humility, our egos can make us insane with the belief that our lot is completely up to us; that we alone create our successes.

Do you know what shuttle pilots are doing during launch? Not much. They're watching the displays. The launch is all automated. You might say that the job of the one in the driver's seat is to pay attention to what's going on, but that person doesn't actually drive the vehicle. They know that someone else is doing that. Our job as pilots of our churches, so to speak, is to pay attention, push a button here and there if it is needed, and know that someone else is the power behind the progress. That's humility.

I imagine that another stone in our altar is inscribed with the truth, *you have been here before*.

Spiritual growth, says Swedenborg, is cyclical. We travel from Genesis to the Holy City not just once, but many times in the various aspects of our lives. We have stood on the shore of the Jordan River before, especially as a denomination. Here's a pop quiz for you: do you know what the convention theme was in 1973? "What is General Convention?" 1973 was

one of those years in which we were asked to reflect on the questions, "Who are we? What are we supposed to be doing? Where do we go from here?" In the convention sermon that year, Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven spoke to these questions and the importance of humility as a church. He said,

We don't know what to do to teach mankind and save the world; we cannot even build up the visible

church, or restore the power of inner life. But for the Lord, who can do all things, that is too easy. [The Messenger, July-August, 1973, 154-6.]

His sermon encouraged us to remember that, above all, the church needs to be a servant of the Lord. We stood on the shore of the Jordan and asked, "Who are we going to be?"

We stood there again in 1987. Do you realize that this year is the twentieth anniversary of the support units? Convention adopted a new structure twenty years ago to form an organization that would be "...more responsive, more accountable, more accessible to all the people." [The Messenger, August 1987, 168-71.]

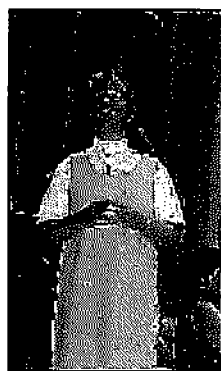
In 1987 we asked, "What are we supposed to be doing?" and we crossed the river into a new organization.

Two years later, Rev. Paul Zacharias spoke to the question, "Where do we go from here?" when he wrote,

The Good news needs to be publicly proclaimed; appropriate publications for distribution to interested readers are essential; good leadership is necessary. There is a vital place for the New Church in the world today. [The Messenger, February 1989, 29-30.]

The same thoughts can be found expressed in convention documents from the 1920s. "Who are we? Where do we go from here?" These ques-

tions were probably on the agenda at the first meetings in London, in Great East Cheap, in 1789. The point being, we return to the edge of the promised land from time to time and renew our commitment to living in it. My hunch is that if you flip this particular stone over, you will find the words: *and you will come to this place again*.



Renée Machiniak singing with convention choir.

(Continued on following page)

Twelve Stones out of the Middle of the Jordan

(Continued from previous page)

Another important stone will undoubtedly have this hearty Swedenborgian word: *vastation*. As a church, we need to be aware of the reality of a church's tendency toward vastation. We have a group of people in St. Paul who get together once a week. We're reading the *Arcana Coelestia* together (and currently we're nearing the end of the eighth volume). This is a wonderful book; if you haven't read it. Swedenborg writes in several different contexts about the vastation of the church; the process by which a church becomes useless. If we find in our church that more time and effort is being spent on externals—budgets and buildings and such—and we find that we are paying less attention to building loving relationships with people, then the vastation of the church is in full swing and we need to do some serious reevaluation.

This leads me to the next stone: *regeneration*. Without people actively and joyfully engaged in the process of regeneration and growth, the church ceases to be. Gone are the days when we can have a church by getting together for the occasional potluck, holding one or two fundraisers a year, laying some new carpet in the sanctuary and balancing the budget. The New Church is comprised of the community of spirits who are not afraid to get deep into the loving presence of another human—a community of people who walk that path of growth consciously, deliberately and with joy.

The altar I imagine also has *community* as one of its largest stones. I have found it to be true that nothing nourishes and sustains us like

the love and support of our friends and families; nowhere else does the Lord's love reach us in such a

tangible, palpable way.

I feel no need to inscribe something on each of the twelve stones.

As loving

members of this church, I know that you have received your own memorable truths in the course of the work you have done. By these truths, the Lord continues to establish us in this promised land on the other side of the river. My friends, take a look around you. This is *your* church, striving to become, by the grace of God, the Lord's New Church in the natural. We may have hopes and wishes, but we must be led into the future by goodness and truth, inspired by the highest and deepest heaven that we can perceive.

I ask myself, "What is the point of all this? What is the most important thing that we need to be doing?" In the tenth chapter of Deuteronomy, the Lord responds, *So now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you? Only to acknowledge the Lord your God, to walk in all God's ways, to love and serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord your God and the decrees that I am commanding you today, for your own well-being.* [Deuteronomy 10:12-13.]

Simply be loving, growing children of God. That is the most important thing. As you do this, the Lord will be in you and you will be in the Lord, and the Lord will take care of all the rest. Amen.

Rev. Eric Hoffman is minister of the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church in St. Paul. ☒



Convention choir.

Church Calendar 2007-2008

September 7-9, 2007
Augmentation Fund
Committee Meeting
Central Office, Newton, MA

September 21-22, 2007
Wayfarers Board Meeting
Wayfarers Chapel

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 Your 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

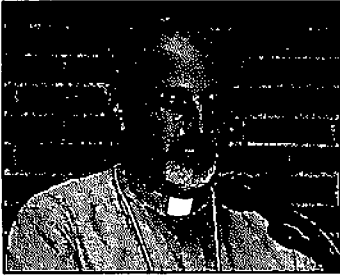
January 31 - February 1, 2008
Wayfarers Board • Wayfarers

May 28-29, 2008
Memorial Day • Central Office Closed

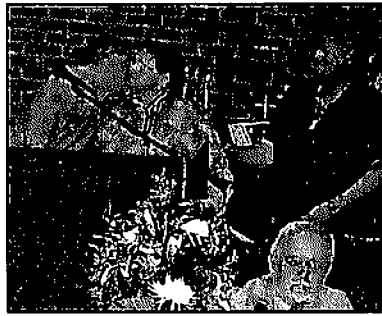
June 29 - July 6, 2008
Convention 2008 • Eastern Massachusetts

July 11 - 14, 2008
Gathering Leaves UK • Purley Chase UK

SHS Meeting and Graduation



Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence gives Dean's report. He noted that during the past several years at PSR, seminarians from Presbyterian, Baptist, Methodist, Disciples, Catholic, Episcopalian, Unitarian, MCC, and Congregationalist traditions have converted to the Swedenborgian path, whereas no Swedenborgian student has left the SHS program for another.

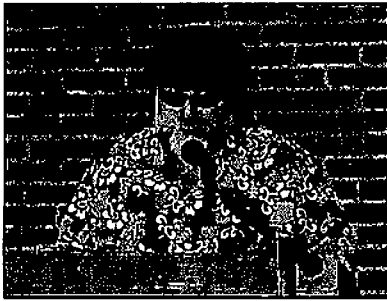


Sky Paradise receives her certificate from Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence as Rev. Jane Siebert looks on. Bob Leas sits in front.



SHS Board of Trustees. From left: Bob Leas, Revs. Jane Siebert, Jim Lawrence; Lorraine Cuthbertson, Rev. Young-Min Kim, Convention President Christine Laitner, Herb Ziegler, and Rev. Andy Stinson.

Business Meetings and Mini Courses



Cool beatnik shows up to read by-laws. Some say he sounded a lot like Rev. Ken Turley.



Eric Allison honors the presidency of Chris Laitner.



Marjie Leas, saying "The word for today is chill. Everyone has a right to one convention bag, but only one. Everything is going well, but some of you are 'high maintenance.' You know who you are."



Swedenborgian Church Youth League report. Left to right - Alison Putnam, Shawn Greenwood, Erika Penabaker, Reece Billings, Melissa Anderson, Jake MacTavish, Naomi Anderson, Gabrielle Lawson, Sam MacTavish, Brandon Anderson, Sola Thorhallsson, Cody Steinhiser, Jesse Billings (not pictured - Ethan Turley)



Karen Feil talks about the Burnham Project in Chicago.



Rev. Eric Allison [far right] is honored as the outgoing chair of the Council of Ministers.



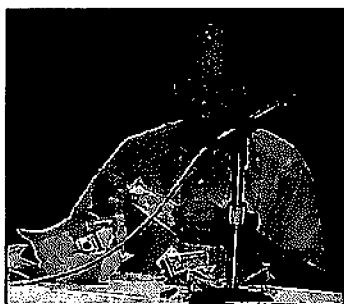
Rev. John Maine speaks at mini-course on grant applications. (Continued on following page)

Business Meetings and Mini Courses

(Continued from previous page)



The host committee is honored. L to R: Marjie Leas, Betty Jean Neuenfeldt, Sandy Coveart, Dorie Litchfield, Barbara Boxwell, Barbara Tourangeau, the Revs. Renée Machiniak, and Jenn Tafel.



Convention treasurer Larry Conant counts collection money from convention. The grand total was a record-breaking \$2106.83.



Rev. Dr. Jonathan Rose has greetings from the Swedenborg Foundation.



Jeanette Hille is honored as outgoing President of Wayfarers Chapel Board.

Other Worship Services



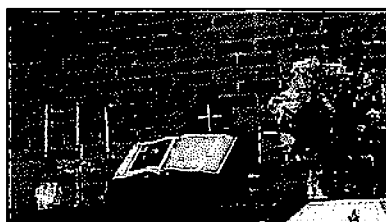
Convention liturgical dancers



Convention Choir

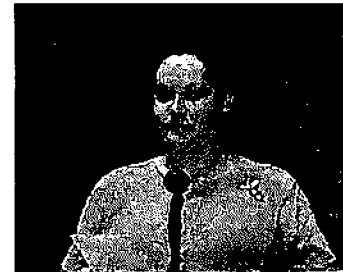


Rev. Freeman Schrock leads closing worship service.



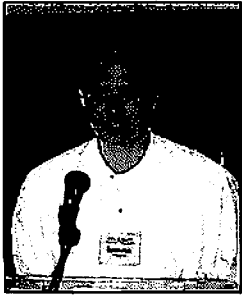
Altar. Jenn Tafel tells about the stones that were on the altar. "These stones were present during all of convention and were placed at the bottom of the fountain (which represented the river Jordan). I created the stones for the worship services from cement and river rocks. ... I "engraved" the abbreviations of the 12 Convention Associations which (to me) represented the 12 tribes of Israel present during the crossing of the Jordan.

Since neither the Royal Oak society nor the Lansing society have church buildings, the 12 stones are at Almont New Church Assembly and Retreat Center. They are in the garden in front of Heritage Hall. They symbolize to me the memorial of the experience of crossing the Jordan.



Jenn Tafel shares a special story during the Memorial Communion Service. "At last year's Convention in Urbana, Ohio, there was a gathering to spread the ashes of Mrs. Corinne Tafel. As I was standing there I felt that there was a wall of angels standing behind the gathering. From this "wall," Rev. Richard H. Tafel, Sr. stepped forward and in front of him, Corinne appeared. They were able to be present during this ceremony...as we would think possible. I was able to see that they were there. After the ceremony I cried for several minutes because of the beauty and mystical nature of this event. This event and similar experiences in my life leads me to believe that the angels are here this morning."

Symposium

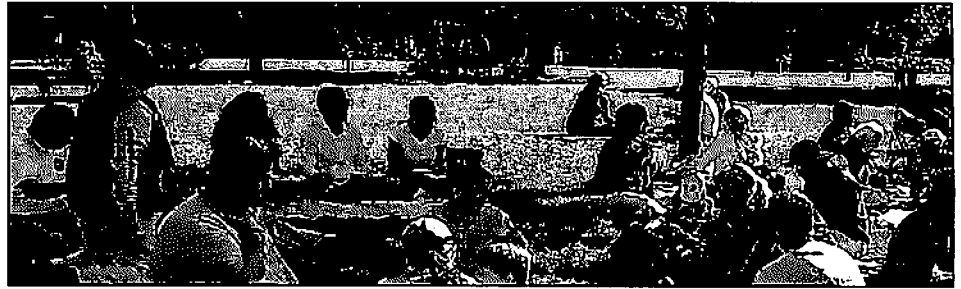


Andrew Dole speaks at a symposium honoring his father, Rev. Dr. George Dole. A book honoring George's contributions to Swedenborgian scholarship - a festschrift -- will be published soon. Watch for more information in *The Messenger*.

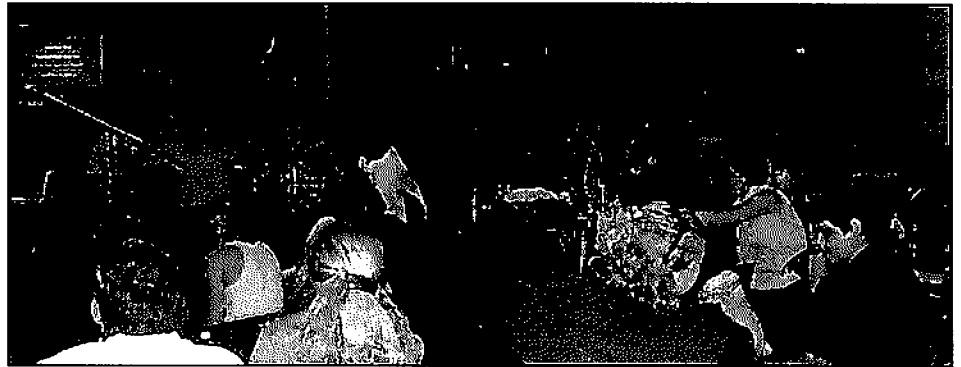


Rev. Dr. George Dole greeting guests at reception.

Picnic & Party



Picnic



Party

Roving Reporter

(Continued from page 98)

Question: How is Convention 2007 for you? Are you having fun?

Answers:



Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell, Wayfarers Chapel, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA: "I enjoy reconnecting with people; that's a lot of fun for me."



Yolanda Chavez Leyva: "Convention is really informative. I'm learning so much about Swedenborg. Everyone is warm and friendly."



Ann Weldy, Virginia St. Church, St. Paul
"Convention is a very spiritual experience for me."



David and Julie Viges [first time attenders from the new Lansing, Michigan, church]; "Everyone is open and helpful; warm and friendly. We're getting new ideas. We love the family connections."



Rev. Rita Russell, British Conference: "I'm having a wonderful time. Everyone is so friendly and welcoming. You have so much fun at your convention; like the way you read the by-laws, and the jokes. I like your informality. You do have more days of business than we do. We have a lot of exciting, new things happening in Conference. I hope many of your women can come to Gathering Leaves in 2008."



Eiryn Hoffman, daughter of Rev. Eric and Norma Hoffman from the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church in Minneapolis: "aerroe-grh". Loosely translated as: "I've really had fun pretending that I can catch and squash creepy spiders." Biologist Mom, Norma, had no comment on the matter. It should be noted that we saw no evidence of actual spiders at convention.

CONVENTION REPORTS

Council of Ministers

The Council of Ministers met from Sunday, June 24th, through Tuesday, June 26th. The following are the highlights of our meeting:

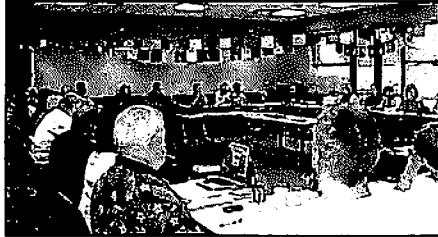
- A workshop was held with Vaishali on the theme:

You are what you give your attention to.

- Rev. Rita Russell from the British Conference addressed the Council and

gave highlights of what is happening in the British Conference.

- We discussed the purpose of the Placement Committee and considered ways to improve its functioning for ministers and congregations.
- Rev. Jim Lawrence gave an update on the Swedenborgian House of Studies and discussed the develop-



The ministers are gathered around large tables as they move through their agenda.

ment of courses and a certificate in spirituality.

- We accepted visions of ministry from Sherrie Connelly, Cathy Lauber, Allison Longstaff, Jeff Munnis, and Judith Vandergrift. We accepted the plans of ministry for Sky Paradise and Jennifer Tafel.

• We unanimously recommended the ordinations of Jennifer Tafel and Sky Paradise. This was the first time in history that any woman has been unanimously recommended for ordination! We were pleased that we had *two* woman recommended unanimously this year. Of course, Jenn is our first female Tafel clergy person in General Convention.

- Kurt Fekete talked about the projects being done by the youth.



Ministers show their gold medals, awarded for sharing flyers and newsletters from their parishes.

- We shared materials from our churches with each other. Every entry was given a gold medal!
- Our election results are:
COM chair: Andy Stinson
Secretary: Kevin Baxter
Exec Com: Lana Sandahl
Nom. Com: Harvey Tafel
Preacher, 08: Sarah Buteux
Preacher 09: Junchol Lee
- Our closing communion service was led by Jennifer Tafel.

Submitted by Skuli Thorhallsson ☩

General Council Pre-Convention Meeting June 27, 2007 • Hope College • Holland, Michigan

General Council met for its pre-convention meeting from 8:45 A.M. until 4:45 P.M. on Wednesday, June 27th. Rev. Kathy Speas provided an opening prayer

followed by a song of thanksgiving. The roll was taken and all council members were present with the exception of Sandy Degi whose major airport delays only got her as far as Texas.

- As is traditional with Council, all members spoke for a minute or so updating everyone what has gone on in their lives since the last meeting.
- The president's report was included in the Advance Reports



General Council hard at work on Wednesday afternoon. It was unclear whether the panda was an elected member or a guest.

which had already been read by the members. There was additional discussion on the roll of the General Council within the denomination and there was an examina-

tion of whether or not General Council was a body that should "lead". It was felt by all that the discussion led to a new level of understanding of not only General Council but the interactive workings of our church.

- The vice president spoke about some of the wonderful changes taking place at the St. Paul Church as they relate to our denomination as a whole.

- The Treasurer discussed the recent audit. There were several recommendations made for new methods and operations and these were being implemented.



Susan Wood-Ashton, Convention secretary, taking minutes.

- Central Office – the Central Office has been extremely busy recently, more so than usual with the change of banks. Combine this with getting ready for Conven-

tion and the amount of work was nearing a critical level. At this time there is no Central Office Assistant and efforts to hire a new person for this position are in progress.

(Continued on following page)

General Council Post Convention Meeting Summary for the *Messenger*

- The General Council came together after the close of convention with a lunch meeting held at Hope College in Holland, Michigan.
- Updates were received on happenings at some of the churches within the denomination.
- The president welcomed Rev. Renée Machiniak, Barbara Cullen and Matthew Fleming to their newly elected terms on General Council.
- Rev. Andy Stinson, the newly elected Chair of the Council of Ministers, was welcomed to his first meeting in his new capacity.
- Council voted to confirm the election of Young Min Kim and Andy Stinson as representative class members of the SHS Board of Trustees.
- Council reviewed job description updates on the President of Convention and the manager of the Central Office. This work is in progress and there will be a final report presented at the November meeting.
- Jim Erickson reported that there will be ongoing email reports to Council members beginning in September on the progress being made on appointing new members to the National Church Board of Trustees.
- *Messenger* articles submitted by members of General Council will continue, and Barbara Cullen will be making her final report on this project at the November meeting.

- Susan reported that the Cyber Ministry has lost one of its members due to personal time constraints and the steering committee needs a replacement. None was found during convention, but this will be an ongoing task, with emphasis directed to finding someone who has some technical expertise.
- Presidential Appointments – [see Journal for these names].
- Council planned on reviewing the results of the “break up sessions” during convention, along with similar sessions at the last summit meeting. The final documents will be shared via email and there will be ongoing discussion via the Swedenborgian Community Discussion Forum prior to the November meeting.
- The treasurer reported that convention has received a copy of a new mineral lease from the new owner of the property in Texas. This pays \$2,500 over five years and will be reviewed prior to signing.
- The next meeting of the General Council will be hosted by the Kansas Association at Camp Mennoscah in Kansas. Council members are to begin seeking good airfares into the Wichita airport for arrival on Thursday, November 1st and departure after church on Sunday, November 4th.

Susan Wood-Ashton ☩

General Council Pre-Convention Meeting

(Continued from previous page)

- National Church Trustees – the vice president serves as the GC rep for the National Church and Jim made a report on the progress being made to revamp the Board of Trustees and bring it back to the way it was before General Council took over as trustees.
- There was discussion about creating a formal job description for the office of president and Donna Keane, Matthew Fleming and Chris

Laitner would continue to work on this project.

- As a cost savings measure, this year’s journal will be sent out as a mini-journal and include a post card that members or organizations can return if additional information is required. Other options were discussed, including emailing files and CD’s with Journal information.
- Council voted to create a new denomination-compensated position of Worship and Music Coordinator to take effect with the 2008 Convention.



2007 Swedenborgian Church Election Results

Vice President [1-year term]:

Jim Erickson

Recording Secretary [1-year term]:

Susan Wood-Ashton

Treasurer [1-year term]:

Lawrence Conant

General Council (Layperson) [3-year term; 2 to be elected]:

Barbara Cullen, Matthew Fleming

General Council (Minister) [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Renée Machiniak

Communications Support Unit [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Carla Friedrich

Education Support Unit [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Steve Thomas

Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Lana Sandahl

Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit [2-year unexpired term; 1 to be elected]:

Bruce Hemmerich

Information Management Support Unit [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Dave Brown

Ministries Support Unit [3-year term; 2 to be elected]:

Pete Brakman, Rev. Doug Moss

Ministries Support Unit [1-year unexpired term; 1 to be elected]:

Gloria Toot

Committee on Admission into the Ministry (Minister) [3-year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Ken Turley

Nominee to Board of Trustees Swedenborgian House of Studies (SSR/SHS) [3-year term; 2 to be elected]:

Rev. Young Min Kim,

Rev. Andy Stinson

Nominating Committee [5 year term; 1 to be elected]:

Rev. Alison Lane (KS Assoc.) ☩

Women's Alliance Report



Norma Hoffman [right] and other women at Women's Alliance Luncheon

The following slate was elected for the coming year:

President: Katie Shelley, PA

1st Vice President:

Thelma Hawkins, MA

2nd Vice President:

Beth Harvie, OH

Secretary: Barb Tourangeau, MI

Treasurer: Jeanette Hille, MN

Mite Box Chair: Barb Boxwell, MI

Religious Chair:

Rev. Sage Currie, PC/MI

Round Robin Chair:

Polly Baxter, MI/OH

Publications Chair:

Rev. Jennifer Tafel, MI

2012 Nominating Committee chair:

Rev. Leah Goodwin, MA

The rest of the Nominating Committee are Betsy Coffman (2008), Nancy Freestone (2009), and Denyce Daurat (2010)

This year's mite box goes to the Lansing Church for their young, growing ministry. Additional contributions can be sent to:

Jeannette Hille

4240 Larch Place N.

Plymouth, MN 55442

Katie Shelley, President ☒

Summary of Report on British Conference



The Rev. Rita Russell from the British Conference.

Rita Russell

Conferences

• 1789: First Conference. There were 70-80 attendees at the first

meeting in Great East Cheap, London

- 1807: There were 5 ministers and about 100 friends
- 1927: 141 representatives in North Manchester
- 2007: 135 people attending, including 18 children and 90 representatives in Derbyshire

Our 200th Conference (2007)

- Families coming for the first time
- Visits by famous Swedenborgians from the past [*a fun little play!*]
- Spiritual Day (including Senior Minister's keynote speech)
- Bible Study
- Musical extravaganza
- Family Day – all age activities
- One day of business
- Vision for the future

Church attendance

- 10% of the population attends church in England
- 20% decrease in church attendance in six years
- More people attend mosques than the Church of England

The state of the New Church in the UK

Societies

- 25 congregations
- 8 Groups
- Total membership of Conference: 1038

Average attendances

- 7 churches with less than 10
- Largest – Derby with 44
- Smallest – Bristol with 5

Ministers

1st April 2007

- 10 altogether in active service
- 3 are women
- 3 altogether are part-time
- Average age 59 years

1st April 2008

- 7 on active service
- 2 part-time
- 1 on unpaid leave

Lay Worship Leaders

- 46 recognized worship leaders who write their own services and sermons
- 16 accredited worship leaders who read others' sermons
www.generalconference.org.uk
www.new-church-lifeline.org.uk – has copies of our 'monthly' magazine

Purley Chase Centre

Just re-opened after extension and improvements with 19 en-suite bedrooms – with wonderful new facilities-www.purleychasecentre.org.uk

Swedenborg Open Learning Centre

Distance learning students

- 1 current ordination student
- 20 lay students
- 10 tutors
- Tutorials – email, face-to-face, telephone
- 26 modules on the web
- 19 different modules being studied 2006-2007
- 3 new ordination students starting in September 2007
www.swedenborg-openlearning.org.uk

Outreach initiatives

www.spiritualwisdom.org.uk

- Workshops based on the labyrinth
- New workshop due to be planned on Correspondences.

Rev. Rita Russell is a minister in the British Conference. She was a special guest at Convention 2007, sponsored by the Women's Alliance. ☒

Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit

Matthew Fleming

Many of us are aware of the string of support units (known as sue's) that make up our denomination. But what exactly each one is intended to do can sometimes elude the most diligent students of General Convention's organizational structure.

The support unit that often causes the most confusion is the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit. It is abbreviated FPRSU and affectionately pronounced *fipper-sue*. It is made up of three elected members plus the treasurer of convention. They are the money people. More formally, according to our bylaws, FPRSU is primarily responsible for, "the wise use and development of such resources as are directly under the Swedenborgian Church's control." Their responsibilities include preparing a preliminary budget, appointing the Augmentation Fund Committee and working with the denomination's Investment Committee.

For the past several years FPRSU has made up the bulk of the Augmentation Fund Committee. In this role, with the help of many others, they have renovated the application

and funding process. The Augmentation Fund now operates like a granting agency, making decisions based on established criteria and set objectives. This is a great step forward for our denomination, and it happened because FPRSU approached the problem with energy and a vision.

The support unit is very concerned about continued annual deficit spending. Yet, they also realize that any further cuts would severely impact our ability to function at current levels. FPRSU's suggestion is to increase our income. The money people noticed that our annual deficit is only \$100 per member. That's barely more than a quarter per person per day.

Have you considered making a small donation directly to General Convention? There is an envelope in this *Messenger* for exactly that purpose. Put it with your other bills so you won't forget. An extra little something from each one of us will make a big difference in the church as a whole, and the good people of FPRSU will sleep a little more soundly at night.

Matthew Fleming is a member of General Council. ☩

Know Your MINSU Liaison!

John Maine

Rich Tafel wrote about MINSU in the June issue of *The Messenger*. He provided many details on the *Missions Funding* and *New Directions Funding*. I want to add that we can offer consulting – through the ministry of Rev. Rich Tafel. Workshops and seminars are available to you for getting (or keeping) your ministry on track with regard to its effectiveness, its mission, its health, and plans for growth. Since the article in the June *Messenger*, two new members have been voted on to MINSU. Here are the new liaisons and the churches they serve:

Rev. Doug Moss - Liaison
rev.doug.moss@earthlink.net (650) 355-3203

Serving: Deland, Pretty Prairie, St. Louis, St. Paul, Pawnee Rock, Wilmington

Pete Brakman - Liaison
brakmanpete@yahoo.com (610) 942-9446

Serving: LaPorte, SW Florida, Bridgewater, Elmwood, Fryeburg, Newtonville, San Diego

Rev. John Maine is minister at the Church of the Good Shepherd, Ontario, and Chair of MINSU ☩

Wayfarers Chapel Raises Funds

The Wayfarers Chapel will hold a food and wine tasting event on the beautiful grounds of Trump National Golf Club. The event will take place on Sunday, October 28, 2007 from 4 to 7 PM.

The purpose is raise funds for renovation of the Tower at Wayfarers Chapel, a Lloyd Wright struc-

ture, listed on the National Registry of Historic Places. Guest of honor is Eric Lloyd Wright, son of Lloyd Wright, who will be signing the Wayfarers Chapel coffee table book, *The Beauty of Holiness, Story of the Wayfarers Chapel*.

For further information, contact:

Mary M. Sabol
Consultant
Wayfarers Chapel
310 701-4299
www.wayfarerschapel.org. ☩

Confirmations

Bailey, Carr, Danz, Gray, Harren, Harren, Morucci, Rice, Salazar-Mulrooney, Scharffenberger - Aislinn Elisabeth Bailey, Rose Marie Carr, Eileen Marie Danz, Ariana Janeen Gray, Anna Katarina Angvert Harren, Maja Elizabeth Angvert Harren, Monica Rose Morucci, Alan Cummings Rice, Anastasia Michelle Salazar-Mulrooney, William Scott Scharffenberger were confirmed on Sunday, May 6th, at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church. Rev. Kim Hinrichs & Rev. Rachel Rivers were officiating.

Cooley, Jessen, McDaniel, Pike, Steinhiser-Roger Cooley, Kathy Jessen, Sandra McDaniel, Larry Pike, and Cody Steinhiser were confirmed into the Swedenborgian faith at LaPorte New Church on October 29, 2006, with Rev. Freeman Schrock officiating.

Baptism

Cooley, Jessen-Roger Cooley and Kathy Jessen were baptized into the Christian faith at LaPorte New Church on October 29, 2006, with Rev. Freeman Schrock officiating.

Death

Cooley-Roger Cooley, 38, a member of LaPorte New Church, passed peacefully into the spiritual world on March 27, 2007, after a brave battle with lung cancer. A memorial celebration, overflowing with family and friends, was held March

30 at LaPorte New Church, with Rev. Freeman Schrock officiating. All who knew Roger, knew a true friend.

Jordan - James Weaver Jordan [Jay] passed into the spiritual world on August 8, 2007. He was 57 years old and died from cancer. He had been an active member of the Portland New Church for many years, and was the historian for the congregation. There was a graveside service on August 14 with Rev. Wilma Wake officiating. There was a memorial service on August 19 at the church with Rev. Ken Turley and Rev. Wilma Wake officiating.

Young - Betsy Young, 89, passed away on July 8th. Betsy was the youngest daughter of Elizabeth Schellenberg who envisioned the Wayfarers Chapel. She married Rev. Robert L. Young of the Young family from Boston. Bob was minister in San Diego and then the Wayfarers Chapel from 1962 to his death in June 1971. Betsy was an elementary teacher on the Palos Verdes Peninsula and loved children and education. She loved the Chapel, sang in the choir, played the autoharp for Advent services and served on the Board of Managers. She served on numerous Convention boards and committees, serving as Vice President of Convention for a number of years. Bob and Betsy have three grown children, Loring, Sewall and Blair.

Installation Ceremony

Schrock-Rev. Freeman Schrock was formally installed as Pastor of

LaPorte New Church by Christine Laitner, General Convention President, on October 1, 2006. The membership rejoiced and welcomed him as their pastor and the Sunday School children honored him in their own special way. Rev. Schrock successfully completed two years' distance education with SHS and was inducted into the Ministry of the Swedenborgian Church at the 2006 convention in Urbana, Ohio. Freeman is a generous and lively soul and brings a faith-filled spirit of hope, comfort and peace to our congregation.

Ordination

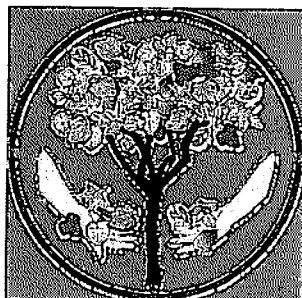
Lemole - On June 2, 2007, Emily Jane A. Lemole graduated from the Circle of Miracles School of Ministry in Wycombe, Pennsylvania as an Ordained Interfaith Minister. Emily Jane serves as a Board member of the Swedenborgian House of Studies. ☩

Just Released

Kirven's Overview of Swedenborg's Theology

A small supply of this important book, which has been held on reserve for Swedenborgian theological students, has just been released for sale. Appropriate for Swedenborgian study groups, it is a concise, must-have, outline of Swedenborg's theology for the general reader. \$19 per copy + \$5 shipping. Order from Central Office: 617-969-4240 ☩

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.



Gathering Leaves UK

A Swedenborgian Women's Retreat

Purley Chase Centre, UK

11 - 14 July 2008

The 3rd Gathering Leaves Retreat will take place next year in the newly refurbished Purley Chase Retreat Centre, Atherstone, Warwickshire, England.



We aim to welcome New Church women from around the world and provide opportunities to share ideas and experiences and to create new energy and harmony in our work for the Lord.



We are hoping to include a visit to a local historical site such as Warwick Castle or Shakespeare's Stratford.



To express interest please contact Rita Russell on 01332 606551 or email

rita.russell@generalconference.org.uk

Please note the date and start saving. More details later.

The Mission Statement for the Gathering:

We are gathering to promote harmony among women who are associated with the various Swedenborgian organizations around the world. We are coming together to acknowledge our common beliefs, explore our differences, develop a respect for one another's contributions, create an atmosphere for healing, and celebrate our spiritual sisterhood. It is our intention to promote a sense of charity and goodwill so that we might say, "No matter what form her doctrine and her external form of worship take, this is my sister; I observe that she worships the Lord and is a good woman."

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