



## Annual Swedenborgian Worship Service at the Festival, Fort Wayne, Indiana

by Marjory Leas and BJ Neuenfeldt

Fort Wayne, Indiana, has hosted an annual two-day Johnny Appleseed festival in September for the past 34 years. It is one of the largest such festivals in the country, with attendance of 300,000 people from Indiana and surrounding states.

The festival celebrates John Chapman—Johnny Appleseed—who died and was buried in Fort Wayne, where his official gravesite is located. Set in the period of the pioneer days of America, the festival hosts vintage entertainment, homespun crafts, farm vendors, children's activities of the frontier days, a Native American village, and food stands where charitable organizations offer pioneer-style food prepared on site in the traditional old-fashioned way. All participants and vendors must wear period clothing, and the food must be prepared on open fires.

As part of the celebration, festival organizers have offered a worship service on Sunday morning of the event to commemorate John Chapman.

When we became aware of this event in 1997, shortly after the Leas move to Fort Wayne, we attended the Sunday worship service with the expectation of hearing about John Chapman's Swedenborgian faith. We were disap-

He was so thrilled to meet some actual Swedenborgians (he did know of Johnny's faith) that he asked us if we would provide the service the following year. Ten years later, on September 21, 2008, we are veterans of the festival

and have a standing invitation from the organizing committee to be the worship celebrants each year.

The worship services that we have devised through research and with the help from time to time of Swedenborgian ministers (The Reverends Eric Allison, Carl Yenetchi, and Kevin Baxter) are meant to provide insight into and information about the life of the real person, John Chapman, as opposed to the legendary figure.

We have used the theme of correspondences to relate the skin, flesh, and seed of the apple to exterior and interior uses and the planting of the Lord's teachings within us. We have told of John Chapman's life of use, and his missionary spirit of love to the neighbor. We have read passages from Swedenborg that speak of angels and living life according to the Golden

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Rev. Bob Leas, BJ Neuenfeldt, and Marjory Leas lead the Sunday service at the Johnny Appleseed Festival in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

pointed to find a service that included costumed characters reading an old-time frontier sermon, but with no reference at all to Johnny or his religion. By chance, that same year, we met the local Presbyterian minister who was in charge of finding people to provide the festival worship service, and we told him of our hope that Swedenborgianism could be somehow represented.

### In This Issue:

"Eric, We Are Dancing!"—Rev. Eric Allison's Journey of Recovery • From George Bush I to D. T. Suzuki: the Possibility of Spiritual Pluralism • Reflections on Sustainability and Denominational Funding for Churches • Practicing Our Presence in the World • What's in a Dream?

## The Editor's Desk



In these perilous times of economic and political upheaval, many of us become apprehensive as we contemplate the future. Young people wonder about their careers and their prospects for achieving a life of comfort and security. Young parents worry about their ability to provide adequately and consistently for their children. The middle aged watch their carefully planned retirement evaporate with their savings, hoping that the paper loss becomes a paper gain again before they need the cash. And retirees begin to look for part-time jobs and ways to cut back to conserve what is left of their savings.

There is nothing like a crisis to focus the mind.

And there is nothing like a crisis to remind us that good and truth do not fluctuate in value as the market turns. I recall

the late Louis Rukeyser opening his TV show, *Wall Street Week*, after the market crash of 1987 with these words, "It's not your life, it's only your money." We do live in the natural world, of course, and so we accommodate the circumstances we confront as best we can.

Institutions, like individuals, are affected by the economic climate, and must assess the impact on their budgets, structures, and services accordingly. Typically, an institution's income decreases on two fronts: giving declines and the market value of investments declines. Budgets can be nibbled at around the edges, but large decreases disrupt and even seriously damage structures and services based on fixed costs, so institutions often eat into their endowments (if they are lucky

enough to have them) to maintain acceptable levels of funding.

We might want to consider our economic circumstances and determine

whether we are able to maintain our level of giving to our churches and church institutions, or, if we are among the fortunate who are less affected by

**News Flash: The Messenger is now online at [www.swedenborgiancommunity.org](http://www.swedenborgiancommunity.org).**

## Letters to the Editor

To the Editor:

I couldn't help but reason my way, using your remarks about political parties, to the basis for the great mass of independent voters that this great republic produces year after year. Then when you add the not-so-unusual situation in which, say, a conservative Democrat is further to the right than a liberal Republican, and an equally not-so-unusual vice versa, you wind up with a political fruit cake that's just about as indigestible as the real thing.

Good stuff.

*Lars Wiberg  
Rockport, Massachusetts*

To the Editor:

I was looking through *The Messenger* for September on the swedenborgian-

community.org website. I took page 104, with all of the photos of participants (by the way that was very good), and enhanced it a bit and ran it off on premium paper and it looks great. Your photos are well selected. Also, I don't want to miss this point that you captured Rev. Sarah Buteux very nicely in the three photos of her.

*Bob Leas  
Fort Wayne, Indiana*

To the Editor:

Just a note to say that I thoroughly enjoyed the October issue of *The Messenger*. The articles by Dave Fekete and George Dole were both outstanding, and the other news items were interesting too.

Congratulations on a fine issue.

*Paul Zacharias,  
Kitchener, Ontario*

## Church Calendar

**November 7-8: General Council**  
Framingham, Massachusetts

**November 14-15: Retirement Committee**

**November 23: Installation of the Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen • Pretty Prairie, Kansas**

**January 30-31, 2009: Wayfarers Board of Managers • Rancho Palos Verdes, California**

the economic downturn, even increase it temporarily to make up for decreases in giving by those more acutely affected.

Take the time to read (next page) a harrowing and inspiring story of the slings and arrows of misfortune and the transcendent response by the affected and their friends. We will get through this. ☛

—Herb Ziegler

## the Messenger

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## "Eric, We Are Dancing!"— Rev. Eric Allison's Journey of Recovery

On July 2, 2008, Rev. Eric Allison suffered a massive stroke while on a camping trip with his wife, Lisa. That event elicited shock and sadness from Eric and Lisa's wide circle of friends and family in the Puget Sound area and beyond; it marked the beginning of a long, challenging journey of recovery and adjustment for Eric and Lisa. After her initial emergency response of getting Eric to a hospital and securing his immediate care, Lisa began a blog to share updates on Eric's condition and progress. This allowed her to keep hundreds of friends updated without being overwhelmed with individual inquiries, and to share her thoughts and feelings on the journey.

Eric is called friend by an enormous number of people, not only in the Seattle area where he is minister of the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound, but also throughout the United States, Canada, and even the world. Before accepting the call to Puget sound, he served as minister of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario and the Swedenborgian Church in the island nation of Maritius in the

Indian Ocean. He served the entire membership of the General Convention as the outreach and growth consultant for several years.

Eric is renowned for his energy, en-



thusiasm, deep caring, sense of humor, and his lifelong quest to learn about and incorporate the truths and practices of other spiritual traditions within his Swedenborgian spirituality and practice. Meeting him, sitting with him, reconnecting with him—these encounters are memorable occurrences for all who experience them. Eric can change the character of a room or gathering by his presence, whether he is leading a discussion, telling a story, offering a prayer, or simply being present.

Following are some excerpts from Lisa's blog (online journal or web log) over the last three months from a site called CaringBridge.

### Lisa's Blog

7/7 You may ask what functions were impaired. Here's the story. His stroke affected his left brain. The physical effect is on his right side. His right hand and foot are "asleep." The right side of his smile is relaxed so he has the

most adorable and charming grin. The mental effect of the stroke has made it difficult for him to speak with words. He is not able to speak upon request.

"Say your name Eric." (nothing). His most amazing communication is through his facial expressions, tone, and intent rather his emotional side. Really amazing: he immediately assesses any visitors energy and responds in kind. I feel a deep appreciation that Eric is so connected in this way. I still feel a sense that he is my husband, my partner, and my love. In the last few days, he has comforted me when he catches me crying by rubbing my back and making sweet sounds. He is very compassionate and loving and I think has been worried about me. My family has assured him I am being taken care of, and they are watching over me. He smiles and nods and seems genuinely comforted.

7/8 Some really special things happened today. During these times, I believe Eric and I both felt the presence of angels and the peace that passes understanding. First, when I arrived this morning, the sun was shining in the window, and Eric's room felt fresh and full of life. I put on a CD from my sister, Louis Armstrong singing "La Vie En Rose"—sweet and charming. I held Eric's left hand and gently swayed to the beat back and forth while we both moved our heads side to side to the beat of the music. It felt like we were dancing, and I even said "Eric, we are dancing!" He smiled that charming half smile and kept the beat with me, pulling his arm back and forth. As he heals, dancing will be a part of the reconnection of his brain, I'm sure.

7/9 One week later. What a ride! Eric's progress is remarkable. Really, all the nurses are coming in to see "Mr. July-Stroke Dude" (he is so cute in his hospital gown). I can't help but think all the love and prayers are making a difference. With God all things ARE

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# From George Bush I to D. T. Suzuki: The Possibility of Spiritual Pluralism

The Annual Swedenborg Lecture was given at Urbana University, March 14, 2008, by Rev. Dr. Inese Radzins, Dorthea Harvey professor of Swedenborgian Studies at the Swedenborgian House of Studies at the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California.

I hope you are wondering what these two characters—D. T. Suzuki and George Bush—have in common. Let me begin with a clarification: The Bush I am talking about is George Bush I (1796-1859), the great grand uncle of our current president. He was a scholar and teacher of Hebrew at New York University. D. T. Suzuki (1870-1966) was a preeminent scholar of Buddhism, often credited for popularizing Zen Buddhism in the United States. What these two men share is an appreciation for not only the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, but more importantly, his insights into spirituality. We will return to Bush, Suzuki, and Swedenborg after taking a few turns.

In our day, talk of spiritual issues often makes people uncomfortable. My intent is not to make you squirm, but rather to help us think through how we might be better able to speak of this spirituality and to speak across and among various spiritualities. I will begin with a discussion of religious pluralism, that is, how can different religions talk to and relate to one another? I will then offer insights about pluralism from various sources, including the Chicago World's Fair, a study by the Pew Center on Religion, and ideas from Swedenborg and some contemporary theorists of religion.

## I. The Current State of American Religion

Many of us increasingly identify America in terms of religious diversity. Dana Jennings, an editor with *The New York Times*, recently wrote a re-

flection on religion, entitled: "Religion is Less a Birthright Than a Good fit." He writes:

I was raised a Protestant in a Rockwellian New Hampshire village that was the proud home to stout, wood-frame churches and Saturday night ham-and-bean suppers. There were four of us kids, and these days my sister and my middle brother are born-again Christians, and my youngest brother is a Catholic. Me? I'm the Jew. As startling as all this sacred change might still be to our parents, my siblings and I haven't been alone in our adult search for new divine teams to pray with. According to a survey of religious affiliation released last week by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, more than a quarter of adult Americans have left the faith of their childhood, either choosing a new one or easing into a life of no faith. When it comes to religion, it seems, Americans prefer a buffet of the spirit.<sup>1</sup>

What might this buffet of the spirit mean? It sounds like a sampling of various spiritualities or religions, taking a little bit of this Christianity, or a piece of that Buddhism, or a slice of that Judaism. I think he is actually getting at the idea that in America, if one is not comfortable with one's religion of birth, one can find other ways of being religious and finding meaningful religious expression.

## II. Scholarship on Pluralism

There is a whole field of scholarship devoted to dealing with how religions speak with and relate to one another referred to as comparative religion, inter-religious dialogue, or theologies of religion. We can identify three models

a religion can use to define its relationship with other religions; I think many of you will recognize these models in terms of your own experience with friends and family.

(Talking about or to other religions is only a problem for religions that do not already include believers of other religions. We know that some religions, like Hinduism, begin by already including everyone).

(1) The first model is **exclusivism**. Let me provide an example of this approach through politics. During this extended primary season, we have witnessed political candidates trying to define themselves; are they conservative or liberal? Are they for the war or against it? Do they support universal health care or not? One thing we can be sure of is that all candidates are trying to convince us that they are right, that they have the right positions on the issues and the right answers to the problems facing America. Our political discourse often boils down to: "I am right and my opponent is wrong." Like our political discourse, religion often speaks of people in terms of "right" or wrong," in terms of "insiders" and "outsiders."

An exclusivist position clearly delineates who is "in" and who is "out," who is included and who is excluded. For example, many Christians believe that only those who hear the gospel and confess Christ are saved. They believe that God sent Jesus Christ to bring salvation into the world and therefore, this salvation can only occur through faith in Christ. Someone who does not believe in Christ is excluded from salvation and from going to heaven. The exclusivist model applies not only to other religions, but also to various sects within a religion. So, for many years,

<sup>1</sup> Jennings Dana "Religion Is Less a Birthright Than a Good Fit" *The New York Times*, March 2, 2008.

and even still for some today, being Protestant involved rejecting Catholicism and being Catholic meant rejecting Protestantism. The question of who is saved and who is not has long occupied Christian discourse. Now, if debates within one religion can occur on who is right, Catholic or Protestant, Sunni or Shiite, conservative or reform, how much more so when an encounter is had by one religion with another.

The exclusivist model is typically fueled by a strong religious passion and an understanding of the world in terms of black and white, or right and wrong. Those who do not follow "my" specific form of Christianity, or religion, are considered wrong.

(2) The next model is **inclusivism**. Inclusivists also define the world in terms of their own religion. However, they acknowledge that persons of other religions may have a place within their faith. This model is rooted in the belief that God is greater than what any individual can know about God. For a Christian, this means that God can act outside of the Christian church. That is, that God can move in mysterious ways.

An example of this inclusivist approach is offered by the Catholic theologian, Karl Rahner. He begins with the assertion that God wants all people to be saved. He then explains that Christ is the cause of this salvation, but also that God's grace may occur in history without the explicit knowledge of God. Rahner asserts that because God wants all people to be saved, God can act through other religions, in history and through an individual's conscience. For Rahner, persons who live according to the principles of the Gospel can be considered "anonymous Christians." That is, they may not explicitly acknowledge the gospel, but because they live according to their conscience, which is a gift from God, and live out of love, they are included

within God's greater plan of salvation. From the Christian perspective, an inclusivist would argue that Christianity is the one right religion, but that it can still offer a "place" for others.

The ethicist Margaret Farley explains that this approach may be helpful in thinking about how other religions approach "outsiders." She would like to know that other faiths have a place for her, that even though she is not a Buddhist, Buddhists could find a place for her, a Christian, within their religion.

Nevertheless, some argue that inclusivism still denies other religions by considering one's own religion the most important. That is, instead of seeing others for who they really are, different from you, inclusivists try to make everyone look like them.

(3) The third option, and the one I want to focus on, is **theological pluralism**. This model goes further than the inclusivist model by acknowledging that all religions are valid ways to the one divine reality. In addition, it asserts that Christ was one very particular and important revelation of God, but not the only one. There are many different ways of understanding pluralism; I will focus on two forms, one theological and the other spiritual, or mystical.

John Hick and Paul Knitter, two theorists of religion, in their book, provocatively titled *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, argue that Christianity was never meant to be an exclusivist religion. The idea that Christianity is the one and only religion and that Jesus is the only road to salvation did not come from either the Bible or from early Christianity. They argue that this idea of Christian exclusivity developed as Christianity became dominant and gained power in society.<sup>2</sup>

2 John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Mary-

They assert that the Christian teaching of a God who desires to save all people excludes the exclusivists (and maybe even the inclusivists). In other words, being an exclusivist violates God's love for all persons. It is, they assert "... unchristian to think that God would have ordained that men must be saved in such a way that only a small minority can in fact receive this salvation."<sup>3</sup> The important point for Hick is that human beings move toward God, that they desire to be close to God, whether through Jesus, the Torah, the Koran, or Buddha, to mention just a few paths. What this means for Hick is that our relationships to other religions should be determined by an all-loving God that desires relationship or connection with (salvation of) all people.

The reporter, Dana Jennings, who suggested that Americans prefer a buffet of the spirit, likes the pluralist option as well. He writes,

At its best this cross-pollination breeds interfaith tolerance and understanding, and carries with it an unexpected energy and a broader spiritual palette to all traditions involved. My Reform synagogue, Temple Ner Tamid, in Bloomfield, New Jersey, can reliably be called upon to provide insight into Jesus Christ, Dale Earnhardt and Johnny Cash—and how they might relate to the Torah, the five books of Moses.<sup>4</sup>

### III. The Chicago World's Fair

An example of pluralism can be found in the year 1893 in an event organized around the Chicago World's Fair. The fair was held to highlight and celebrate American achievements in technology and culture. At the time America was in transition. One scholar observed, "The frontier was closing, immigration, technological advances,

knoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).

3 John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths* (London: Fount, 1977), 122.

4 Jennings, "Religion."

# Reflections on Denominational Funding for Member Churches

By Kim Hinrichs

In three years serving on the PUSH Committee (Promoting Usefulness, Sustainability and Health—formerly the Augmentation Fund Committee), I have had the privilege of reviewing scores of grant proposals from a majority of our churches. I've been honored to be able to better understand the details of our local ministries and to celebrate the many accomplishments and successes. I've also been able to better understand the challenges.

I'd like to share some of the perspectives our committee has learned in order to better inform all those working to make churches successful.

## How does denominational funding work?

There are two primary bodies where churches can request grants: MINSU (Ministries Support Unit) and PUSH. MINSU is focusing its guidelines on support for new church plants and initiatives that are in their beginning stages, and also special projects at established churches. PUSH provides grants to support the costs of ministers' salaries in established churches.

## How does local funding work?

This is your key to success. *The best source of income and support for local churches is your own members and friends.* The healthiest model for a church is managing its own stewardship raising money from within. This not only provides income, but also generates emotional commitment from the people who care most about their church to nurture its health and vitality.

## How much money is available to be given out?

MINSU has about \$80,000 a year to grant each year; PUSH has about

\$270,000 each year. Does that sound like a lot of money? It's not. Considering that a full-time minister's salary and benefit package might be \$50K, \$60K, or more, you can see that these committees are not able to provide full support to many churches. The more churches who apply for PUSH grants, the more the "pie" has to be divided into smaller pieces. For the 2009 year we received 18 proposals totaling \$403,000. That's a whole lot of money being requested. We were not able to fund all of it, but we did decide to spend some prior years' unexpended income to help fund the most promising proposals.

## Is it a good thing or a bad thing to get denominational funding?

It is a very mixed bag. It's important to think of money as energy. If a church receives a large grant from the PUSH committee, a funny thing can happen (and this happens with other granting organizations too). When the money comes in, the energy level in the church community drops. There is relief, of course. But there is also a totally natural drop in the urgency people feel to raise their own money from within, to clarify and communicate their message, to identify their audience, to bring in new members who might become donors, to organize fundraisers, and the like. On the other hand, when local churches are raising money from within, there is a natural shared energy, commitment and fusion of goals among the members and friends. There is a natural sense of the church belonging to the people who care about it, which tends to promote creativity and resourcefulness.

## If we get a PUSH grant, will that guarantee the financial security

## of our minister and church for several years?

No. The PUSH committee's goal is to provide short-term funding to help churches become sustainable and healthy. We provide grants of up to three-year terms, with the possibility of renewal. Each year we carefully review proposals and reports to look for signs that the church is working to become sustainable. If there are signs of ineffective leadership, low congregational commitment, or lack of financial management, we are less likely to fund requests. It is important for local churches to know that while there are the best intentions, there simply is no guarantee of continued funding from the denomination.

## What does it take to make a great grant proposal?

Be honest about your church's challenges and successes. Show evidence of regular, effective ministry programs (worship and other programs) that reach out to meet the needs of your surrounding community. Show evidence that your members and friends are invested in the health and future of your church. Show evidence of sound financial management; know how much it costs to run your church's operations and assess whether the current financial decisions are wise. Make sure the size of your budget is in line with the size of your operations. It doesn't make sense to have a full-time minister if you only have six members, for example. Grow your church from the bottom up, and from the inside out. Build an energized core of members whose commitment will radiate outward to a wider circle of members and friends.

## Don't we have a central

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## Reflection

## Practicing Our Presence in the World

by Chris Laitner

About three weeks ago I received a request from Church World Service for information about denominational initiatives we had in the area of environmental issues, particularly in regard to climate change. Church World Service (CWS), founded in 1946, is a cooperative ministry of the 35 Protestant, Orthodox, Anglican, and Peace church denominations who are members of the National Council of Churches (NCCCUSA). We are a member communion of the NCCCUSA, and CWS was gathering information about how the 35 member communions were involved in this work.

We do not have any denominationally-directed programs in place, so I contacted our ministers and other local leaders with an email request for information on any environmental programs in which our local ministries might be involved. I was pleasantly surprised to receive responses from many of our churches, and very impressed by the range of programs and actions on which local congregations reported.

An overview of the responses shows that many of our churches have taken steps to conserve energy by replacing old windows, using compact fluorescent lights, and reducing heating needs. Several of our congregations have covenanted with the National Council of Churches' Eco-Justice Program, and many congregations have partnered with other community organizations to assist with such things as area recycling programs and centers, community clean-ups, projects making clean water available, clean water initiatives on both coasts and in the Great Lakes region, offering their churches as points of distribution for local organic cooperatives, designing wind and

solar-powered housing, teaching communities about sustainable low and no-watering gardening, and lowering carbon emissions.

These varied and numerous responses made me realize that we don't often list and celebrate the involvement of our churches in the lives of their communities and in programs of worldwide significance. We should share more.

**... those communities of faith that wish to become more vital congregations, can do so by beginning to focus on various essential ways to being intentional communities of practice.**

Not too many days after sending the positive report of our members' involvement to the CWS, I received an email from a member of the denomination who asked what "good things" were happening in the Church. I've become aware over many years that because we are situated far from one another we often really don't know what "good things" are happening throughout our North American ministries. *The Messenger* offers us some very good information, but unless one has weekly communication with all of our congregations, all of our ministers, the members of our denominational committees, and with our Central Office, we really don't know what is happening and that a lot of it is good.

The great thing is that the answer to the question, "Are there any good things going on?" is "Yes, there are many." All of the activities mentioned in the CWS report are "good things." Regular Sunday morning church services in 38 ministries is another good

thing, as is having a professionally educated clergy serving as ministers in settled churches, serving as church planters and serving as certified hospital and hospice chaplains. A vital, growing denominational Youth League system that is assisting in the growth of local and regional teen programs is cause for celebration, and so is the presence of at least ten students in our Swedenborgian House of Studies' ordination program. SHS's web-based lay education program is finding good support, and our denominational online, connectional ministry, [www.swedenborgiancommunity.org](http://www.swedenborgiancommunity.org), continues to grow its membership and opportunities for involvement.

The day after sending a response to the questioner about good things, I received my weekly Alban Institute electronic newsletter. The Alban Institute is an independent center of learning and leadership development for congregations and their leaders. We carry a membership in the Alban Institute, and we have, for several years, been professionally assisted by a variety of Institute consultants and programs.

This week's article, written by Wayne Whitson Floyd, discussed the measures of vitality (perhaps "revitalization" is a better word) that Diana Butler Bass found in her study of mainline churches over a multi-year period. Butler-Bass identified a congregation's decision to concentrate on some type(s) of intentional practice as central to revitalizing the congregation. The areas of practice that she identified were hospitality, discernment, healing, contemplation, testimony, diversity, justice, worship, reflection, and beauty. Wayne Whitson Floyd, in his work with churches and leaders as a church consultant, has found that those communities of faith that wish to become more vital congregations, can do so by beginning to focus on various essential ways to being intentional communities of practice.

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## "Eric, We Are Dancing"

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possible.

7/10 Eric and I had a conversation today about his new chance to share at a deeper level once he regains his speech. I reminded him what a good storyteller he is and what amazing stories he'll have about life on the "right" side of reality. The look that is often on his face tells me he is with the spiritual world purely and without judgement or mental processing. A new life awaits him.

7/18 Eric is totally showing up for therapy. He watches the clock, and looks at his schedule board to see when the next therapy begins. There is some indication he is **READING!!!** Can you imagine, he can hardly speak or understand language but he can possibly read? I asked the docs this, and these functions sit in different little pockets of the brain. WOW, the brain is so fabulous.

7/19 Some progress updates: every day Eric adds words to his list; they are

small words, more like responses but still the list is getting longer. Prayers are powerful rejuvenators of body and spirit. Please keep them coming! Please send light to his right side. His right shoulder has lifted (YES!), and muscle tone in his right leg and arm is getting better. Eric is learning to steer his wheelchair and propel it himself. The challenge is **HE GOES TOO FAST** (go figure)!

7/23 His progress is absolutely amazing. In all areas of his therapy, he is making record strides compared to stroke victims who sustain similar brain damage. His physical therapist can't say enough about his progress. She even said she has never seen this kind of progress in a stroke patient in her 28 years. She attributes it to the prayers! I think she helped too! The speech therapist also has amazing things to report. Today he put together puzzles and circled words to describe Soleil. In occupational therapy he shaved neatly, semi dressed himself, and brushed his own teeth. These are tremendous milestones for only one-week in inpatient rehab.

Thank you GOD! We are visited daily by miracles—and Angels are surely with us.

7/28 My **BIGGEST** prayers (please join me) are directed toward his brain connection to speech/language. I am certain he will walk—with lots of work—but the language challenge is quite huge—God thank-you for all of your blessings; we ask that you bless Eric with the miracle of comprehension and speech once again so that he

## A Swedenborgian Credo

I believe in God,  
infinite, joyful Creator Spirit,  
known by many names  
and in many ways;  
life within and beyond this life,  
Spirit calling to my spirit;  
revealed for me in Jesus:  
perfect love with a gentle face,  
guide and friend to me.

I believe in God's wisdom,  
my true path revealed  
within the literal Word:  
in Jesus' victory, my freedom  
to choose for him each day,  
contesting the hells  
in the power of his Spirit,  
my life a journey of re-birth,  
an angel form emerging.

I believe in God's love,  
for myself and all others,  
the world in one embrace.

I believe in God's promise,  
the present Coming of the  
Lord:

Love's new beginning  
revealed in many ways;  
the unity of the human family  
in justice, and joy eternal  
of the New Jerusalem.  
Amen.

*Rev. J. Maine*

Rev. John Maine is pastor of the Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario.

## Johnny Appleseed

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Rule. While not overtly evangelizing, we have witnessed to a faith that was Johnny's and is ours today. We provide a printed bulletin and have also distributed a bookmark printed with basic information about Emanuel Swedenborg and a three-fold brochure (created by Rev. Eric Allison) entitled "The Faith of Johnny Appleseed". In place of the usual church offering, we pass out fresh apples to each attendee, in the spirit of John Chapman. There are 60–100 people in attendance each year at our festival service. We have spoken with the attendees, many of whom are now faithful "repeaters," who tell us how they appreciate knowing about Johnny's religion, find the words and passages we use to be very meaning-

ful, and even ask us if there is a Swedenborgian church in Fort Wayne they could attend, and finding there is not, have asked us if we would start one! We provide information in each bulletin on how to find out more about the Swedenborgian church (website, online community, list of churches in Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, and Illinois).

The Urbana University Johnny Appleseed Museum has a booth at the festival, and several members of the Urbana Church come to work. They have also joined us for worship.

We hope that a seed or two has been planted over the years, and with a little sun and rain (or love and wisdom) maybe a new Swedenborgian will be formed. ☸

Marjory Leas and BJ Neuenfeldt are members of the Michigan Association.



can share his insights with the world. We know it will take time and we are here for helping. Please God, hear our prayer!

**8/3 A NEW Day!** This morning, Eric was emotional on the way across the floating bridge on the way to church. Lem and I could tell he just was feeling all those feelings that would be natural for him to feel right now. As he grows in understanding, it will be very important for all of us to imagine ourselves in his shoes and be there for his emotional processing. The deeper the sorrow, the deeper the joy on the other side, eh?

Tonight Eric was watching *Evan Almighty* in his room with Jeannette and Marshall, and Jeannette thought the character in the movie was Moses. Eric corrected her and said, "It's Noah." WOW!!! This is a verbal breakthrough!

Ah, see it happening—the words flow like wine!

I think the miracles of late have been how LOVE has transformed SO many hearts—because of the love that Eric poured into his community of friends and neighbors that is all pouring back to him. Just like a magic penny. Love is something when you give it away, you end up having more. Thanks to all for the LOVE you are now sharing with us. I hope you feel it coming back atcha 10X!

Namaste and blessings, Lisa

**8/9** On the way home from UW and the blood test (a perfect score of 2.7), Eric and I were singing what is our theme song for this summer, "I Have a Dream" from *Mamma Mia*.

This song hits the nail on the head. "I have a dream, a song to sing, to help me cope with anything / I believe in angels, something good in everything I see!" We were singing at the top of our lungs and crossing over the I-520 bridge, with a view of Lake Washington, Mt. Rainier, the Cascade moun-



Eric and Lisa Allison (front) with (L to R) Ray Morea, Gary Povick, and Steve Mason at the wedding of Jeanette Bonaker and Marshall Partington.

tains, etc. It was a beautiful day—the music touched that place in Eric, a place he hadn't found, the place of his awareness of his injury and what it means. He cried out "can't do . . . I can't do," and he breathlessly gestured as if to say there is so much I can't do and I'm not the same as I was—how did this happen? It was a moment I'll never forget. It was the first time he really expressed realization about what has happened—healing in its intensity. I believe as he and I "talked" it out he reached a new level of healing and acceptance. As you can imagine, my response was spiritual, factual, encouraging, real, and hopeful—all at the same time. He WILL get better every day and he WILL do things again, maybe not in the same way. By the time we

## Nominate yourself to the Nominating Committee

The Nominating Committee needs another member immediately. If you are up in Canada, out on the Left Coast or maybe down Michigan way, we sure could use your input. If you're interested, contact Deane Currie.

email: deanecurrie@msn.com

tel: 610.696.8145

fax: 610.696.7335

Openings for all positions up for election at the 2009 Annual Convention will be listed in the January issue of *The Messenger*, accompanied by specifications of the talents and skills needed for each position. You can help guide and care for our denomination by applying to be nominated for an open position.

—Deane Currie,

were home he had settled in to his lovely sense of humor and playful banter. I feel really positive that to move forward he has to be completely present with his experience. God lives in the present moment. And God and angels are moving him through this—the essence of this love shows up in every entry here at CaringBridge—A spiral of love and healing from our community. We are blessed!

**8/21** If you were wondering why I haven't posted—yikes—trying to keep up with Eric is, well, in a word NUTS! From sunup to sundown, he is on the GO. And I mean that literally!

**8/29** "Go ahead!" Today Eric has spontaneously said several cool phrases, like "go ahead" after interrupting Lovisa. Like "I said NO" after I sort of interfered with his train of thought, and a VERY clear "YES!" just out of the blue. We've been trying to get him to say "yes" in speech therapy, and today it spontaneously happened, and SO clearly. The first YES in eight weeks!

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## Funding

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### denominational office that's in charge of local churches?

No. We have a congregational system of government in our denomination, which means that each church is in charge of itself. The PUSH Committee administers the Augmentation Fund, a historic fund that was set up to help the growth of Swedenborgian ministries. The PUSH Committee is not controlled by General Council or any other denominational governing body. It is an independent agent. The members are beholden to the intentions of the original donors to the fund. It's also important to remember that the members of PUSH usually rotate off in three-year terms. So while we're doing our best to adopt long-term policies, there is no guarantee that future members of the committee will make the same decisions as those in the past.

### What are the challenges facing our churches?

Many of our churches are doing very well. There is so much effective ministry going on in so many places, and there are so many hard-working, good-hearted people. At the same time, there is no denying that it's challenging to have a vibrant Swedenborgian church in today's world. Our churches face a variety of challenges, including aging buildings, declining memberships, lack of volunteers, difficulty con-

PUSH Grant Recipients for 2009	
Grant Recipient	Amount
Calgary New Church Society (Alberta)	\$31,000.00
Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem (Massachusetts)	\$20,000.00
Edmonton Church of the Holy City (Alberta)	\$25,000.00
Korean New Church (New York)	\$20,000.00
Lansing Swedenborgian Church (Michigan)	\$12,000.00
Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church (Kansas)	\$18,000.00
Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound (Washington)	\$22,000.00
Swedenborgian House of Studies—Outreach (California)	\$23,000.00
The New Church of the Southwest Desert (New Mexico)	\$21,472.00
The New Church of Southwest Florida	\$34,000.00
Subtotal	\$226,472.00
Previously Committed Grants	
Cleveland Swedenborg Chapel (Ohio)	\$25,000.00
El Cerrito Hillside Community Church (California)	\$35,000.00
Portland New Church (Maine)	\$13,973.00
Royal Oak Church of the Holy City (Michigan)	\$11,000.00
Swedenborgian Church of San Diego (California)	\$29,500.00
Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church St. Paul (Minnesota)	\$25,000.00
Subtotal	\$139,473.00
Total Grant Awards	\$365,945.00

necting with the interests and needs of their surrounding neighborhoods, and, of course, difficulty meeting their budgets and raising money. The PUSH Committee holds all of these challenges in our prayerful awareness while we do what we can to help our churches succeed.

### What is the best way to secure my church's long-term future?

Build a strong, creative, committed group of people who love your church and who are invested in its future. Im-

plement effective stewardship campaigns—raise money from your members and friends for your annual operating budget. Raise money from special programs and fundraisers. Start a planned giving campaign to request estate gifts from your longest-term members. An energized local group will naturally attract more people to the ministry, growing it in membership and in financial support.

### 2009 PUSH Grant Recipients

The committee received grant proposals totaling over \$403,000 for 2009. The committee was not able to fully fund all proposals, but it is pleased to announce the recipients of grants for 2009 (see table above).

Grant proposals for 2010 will be due August 1, 2009. For more information, contact [kimberly.hinrichs@gmail.com](mailto:kimberly.hinrichs@gmail.com).

Kim Hinrichs is chair of the PUSH Committee.

## Our Strengths And The Occupations That Use Them

WIST is a unique career assessment tool designed by Lars-Eric Wiberg, a member of the Cambridge Swedenborgian Church, that incorporates Swedenborgian and Jungian concepts.

For a limited time readers of *The Messenger* can receive free a user name and password to take a WIST® at: [http://my-](http://my-career-wist.com)

[my-career-wist.com](http://my-career-wist.com). Send your: name, address, email address, and phone number to [lewiberg@alum.mit.edu](mailto:lewiberg@alum.mit.edu)

You may wish to assign your identification to someone else. That's up to you. You will receive a user name and password which, when used at the end of your WIST Adjective Selection, will produce your personal profile as well as valuable ancillary materials at no charge.

## "Eric, We Are Dancing"

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9/1 We played some music together, and it was amazing: Eric on native drum (keeping a fabulously steady beat) and me on native flute. Then he sang "his song" in native style while I drummed for him. After reading Oliver Sacks book, *Musicophilia*, and the chapter on apraxia and music therapy, I am particularly determined to make music more a part of this phase of his healing.

9/4 As happy as these blogs seem, there has been a particular sadness for me this week. With every new group of therapists, the healing curve is more clearly defined and I realize again what this path is about. Hard work for both Eric and I and a decision every day to be joyful even when there is deep sadness and sense of loss. On some days, tears from me flow unbidden—and often. Reading your posts gives me strength. I read them to Eric too, and he seems to understand them and who they are from. Through all of this, there is hope and there is reality. I guess again it points to just "being in the now."

9/11 ERIC AND HIS PASSION Eric has been in the studio every morning and evening (too hot during the day) and seems deeply happy because of it. I also see a new layer of cognitive development this week. Not so much language, but more understanding. Hmmmm! Who knows what rewiring is happening because of his love of clay, affection for the artform, and the physical effort to shape the clay

9/23 It's almost been three months since the old Eric went to sleep on a starry night in Winthrop—and the new Eric emerged—and I sometimes forget how brilliant he was, how intellectually and verbally stimulating it was to be around him. It's been seven weeks since he has been home and the progress has been steady. In speech he has well over 50 words that he can say from the cards

with more every day. Speech Therapist Jill is still seeing improvement and feeling like Eric's potential for healing is evolving. YEA!

9/27 This guy has energy that won't quit. And drive—a sacred determination. We have laughed more this week about many things. And there have been SO many visitors who came to be with Eric—to simply offer company. He is really enjoying being read to now. And there is always the clay studio which is his love; with the weather cooler now, he can be out there any time of day. His work is impressive too. As others work with him, he guides them to make better pieces, showing them techniques. Very cool.

9/30 The love of Soleil is faithful and unwavering. She is the quiet presence, always nearby, always waiting for Eric to land so she can be near him. In the new photo she lays her head on his affected foot. Truly, she is an angel in furry form. I know many of you feel the same about your furry friends. Swedenborg says that pets represent affection. You can say THAT again! She is asleep on our bed with Eric right now!

10/3 Eric's spirit is SO strong right now! He is full of expression, understandings, new repeated words, etc. A delight and a mystery to observe.

10/6 Friends, loved ones, family—this is the "hokey pokey"—it IS what it is all about. My heart is full as I think of all the love that is pouring our way, and from us to all of you. Eric and I continue to be blessed: soups, visits, blessings, prayers. And a few of our good friends need the same. Marshall and Jeannette, Kelly and Tim, to name a few. Every once in a while, I look at the headlines and realize there is A LOT going on; yet, after all is said and done, voted up or down, in or out, it is the quality of the love in your life that stays long after anything else. Eric's injury helps us be real—remember what matters. And how beautifully we have been sur-

rounded by all of your love these last three months. Healing is real and slow and powerful. Eric got out the vacuum yesterday and vacuumed his room without even a word. He wants to be involved in everything. His will is so incredible. He helps with all dishes and other household chores.

10/7 In uncertain times, we reach out, sometimes just for another hand, sometimes for something we can't even define—just hope, a feeling of being held, the arms of love. Your posts do this for me—and for Eric. Thanks for being there for us—for each other.

*Love, Lisa*

To continue reading Lisa Allison's journal, and to read the entire journal to date, go to [caringbridge.com](http://caringbridge.com). You must register, and then type in ericalison to access Lisa and Eric's home page. From there you can click on "My Story" to read Lisa's story of the onset of Eric's stroke and her response, or "My Journal" to read all her journal entries. You can also leave messages and read messages left by others.

Messenger readers who want to help Lisa and Eric defray the cost of therapy that is not covered by insurance can contribute to the "Eric and Lisa Angel Fund." Email Len Putnam, [lemputnam@comcast.net](mailto:lemputnam@comcast.net), for information.

## Mite Box for 2008–2009

The Women's Alliance Mite Box recipient this year is the New Church of the Southwest Desert, newly planted in Silver City, New Mexico, and led by Rev. Dr. Sky Paradise. This church is 16 members strong and growing.

As a new church it is in need of funds to sustain and expand its ministry. The proceeds from the Mite Box will help it grow.

Please make out your check to The Women's Alliance, indicate it is for the Mite Box, and send to:

Jeannette Hille  
4240 Larch Place N  
Plymouth, MN 55442

## From Bush to Suzuki

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and the railroads had changed the face of the country, and suddenly "Americanness" was more and more difficult to define. Americans were at once confused, excited, and overwhelmed"<sup>5</sup>

Sounds a lot like our current situation—economic turmoil, technological advances, rising fuel prices, immigration concerns, and questions of what it means to be an American.

Leading up to the World's Fair, a prominent Chicago lawyer, Charles Bonney, decided that it would be important to highlight not only humanity's cultural and technological achievements, but also the spiritual basis behind them. He wanted to showcase humanity's religious achievements, so in conjunction with the fair, he organized the first Congress of World Religions (which is active still today, and is now called the Parliament of the World's Religions).

Organizing this event—the first ever such meeting of the major world religions—was quite a feat. Although certain exclusivist religious leaders refused to participate, claiming it would violate their faith to dialogue with other religions, many more did attend from all over the world; participants included various Christian denominations from America and other places, Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Shintoists, Zoroastrians and followers of Confucius.

The task that Bonney faced was in some ways a logistical nightmare. How was he to structure such a first-ever meeting: dialogue, debate, argument, or information session? The challenge was getting people of different religious communities talking. His vision for the

Congress came from his own religious tradition, Swedenborgianism.

Many of you already know that Emanuel Swedenborg, for whom the Urbana University library was named, was a scientist and Christian theologian, visionary, and mystic who lived in the eighteenth century in Stockholm and often London. He had unique insights into Christianity and argued that the organizing principle, the main import of Christianity, came in recognizing that all persons have been given a gift of God's love and wisdom. We are each uniquely created by God and have a connection with God, and thus also a responsibility to live charitably. Swedenborg himself was not so much interested in the church as he was in the individual's spirituality.

Drawing on Swedenborg's writings and on the Bible, both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament, Bonney decided to organize the Congress around two key principles.

(1) The first was historical, even social and political. Reflecting upon his situation, Bonney observed that religion had often been the cause of conflicts, wars, and persecutions. Echoing an idea that many still assert today, Bonney argued, "The religious faiths of the world have most seriously misunderstood and misjudged each other."<sup>6</sup> This misunderstanding occurred because religions thought too much about what differentiated them and separated them. Instead, Bonney wanted to highlight what he believed united religions. Following Swedenborg, he proposed that what united the religions was "the love and worship of God and the love and service of mankind."<sup>7</sup> This was the common cause of all religions.

(2) The second principle was more theological—the idea of "absolute re-

spect." He explained this idea writing,

We believe the Scripture that 'of a truth god is no respecter of persons, but in every nation he that feareth God and worketh righteousness is accepted of him. We come together in mutual confidence and respect, without the least surrender or compromise of anything which we respectively believe to be truth or duty, with the hope that mutual acquaintance and a free and sincere interchange of views on the great questions of eternal life and human conduct will be mutually beneficial.<sup>8</sup>

Let me highlight three points that Bonney makes about pluralism:

(1) First, he begins by stressing that all religions involve the love and worship of God and the love and service of others. Here again he again relies on Swedenborg, citing a passage from *Divine Providence*, "It is provided by the Lord that every one who acknowledges a God, and abstains from evil because it is against God, has a place in heaven" (*DP* 326).<sup>9</sup> For Swedenborg, each nation had been given a religion by God, and it was up to individuals to live according to that religion. At the same time, it is important to note that Swedenborg believed that Christianity was the fullest revelation of God. Therefore, although Swedenborg might be considered more of an inclusivist, Bonney uses his insights to develop a fully pluralistic approach.

(2) Second, Bonney explains that in this meeting, religions need not compromise anything of their beliefs. Each religion stands on its own, as it is, and

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Emanuel Swedenborg, *Angelic Wisdom about Divine Providence*, trans. George F. Dole (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003). Originally published in 1764, Swedenborg's *Divine Providence* is a classic published in many versions and translations. Its organization into sections serves as helpful references across time, and as such, the section numbers will be cited within the text.

5 Julie K. Rose, "The World's Colombian Exposition: Idea, Experience, Aftermath" (master's thesis, University of Virginia, 1996), Introduction, <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~ma96/WCE/introduction.html>.

6 Charles Carroll Bonney, "The Genesis of the World's Religious Congresses of 1893," *The New-Church Review* 1 (January 1984): 97.

7 Bonney, 96.

need not adapt for the sake of others. The goal of the Congress was to explain faith from the believer's point of view. This meant that both exclusivism and inclusivism were excluded as options.

(3) Third, and most important for Bonney, is the idea of "absolute respect." For Bonney, interactions with all persons, religious or otherwise, should be guided by the respect that we expect of others. He explains the Christian relationship with Judaism:

... of all the precious liberties which free men enjoy, the highest is the freedom to worship God according to the dictates of conscience; and this great liberty is the right, not of some men only, but of all—not Christians merely, but of Jews and Gentiles as well. I desire from all men respect for my religious convictions, and claim for myself and mine the right to enjoy them without molestation; and my Master has commanded me that whatsoever I would have another do to me, I should also do to him. What, therefore, I ask for myself, a Christian, I must give to you as Jews. Our differences of opinion and belief are between ourselves and God, the Judge and Father of us all.<sup>10</sup>

Bonney decided to organize the Congress around the notion of absolute respect. This involved respectful listening, giving your attention to someone who is very different, and sometimes even perhaps, your polar opposite. Imagine what might happen if we all really listened? For Bonney, the stakes were very high. He believed that if the world's religions focused on what unites them, rather than what divides them, they could tackle the problems facing humanity. Now unfortunately, we know that the last 100 years have not necessarily played out Bonney's hopes for a more tolerant and peaceful world led by humanity's religious ideals. Nevertheless, we can see that over

the last century human beings, as a result of globalization, have had to deal with other peoples and cultures more closely. And here, I think Bonney's insights remain important.

#### IV. Spirituality

How do Bonney's insights play out in our very real world today? I do not want to say that all religions are the same, or even that they point to the same things. Rather, I want to emphasize the idea that each religion offers a particular way of loving God, of relating the mystery that is the divine. I follow Bonney in noting and respecting difference and in emphasizing the love of God and the service to neighbor.

For the first part, the love of God, I will take Swedenborg as my guide. "There is a universal influx from God into the souls of men, teaching them that there is a God" (*TCR* 8).<sup>11</sup> For Swedenborg, all humans are shaped by what they receive from God and how they respond to this gift. In more contemporary terms, Dana Jennings writes, "Our lives begin in mystery . . . and end in mystery. In between, we try to explain ourselves to ourselves, all 6.5 billion of us who are wedged onto this improbable planet—6.5 billion potential paths toward the holy."<sup>12</sup>

Following Bonney's lead, how might we connect with other religions? I suggest that we do so by recognizing what is at the heart of religion: a desire to relate to a divine being or something that is beyond our human comprehension. This is often referred to as the contemplative, or mystical tradition. This connection could occur through what we today call spirituality. Let me offer an example.

A couple of weeks ago, I received a call from a woman in Southern California. She informed me that she had found my name on the SHS website as

someone who knew about Swedenborg. Her concern was not so much with him, but rather with a particular recent experience. She explained that she was about 40 years old, worked as an engineer, had a family, and was somewhat of a Catholic. Sounds fairly normal? Except she had recently been having surprising experiences: she felt compelled to write down certain words; she felt as if someone were speaking with her and telling her to write. So, she wrote. But she did not know how to handle this experience. Was she going crazy? Did she need more sleep, or perhaps medication? She went to her priest, who suggested that she was fortunate enough to be hearing God's voice. He noted that throughout Christian history, many people, often called mystics, had had similar experiences. But, in our world, in the twenty-first century modern, or postmodern, technologically savvy universe of an engineer (of all people), this did not seem to make sense. We have all sorts of specified language for our various and expanding forms of knowledge (nanotechnology, information management, business ethics). What we don't normally have are the words to make sense of these "odd" experiences; we have lost a way to make sense of spiritual reality. Is this because the spiritual reality does not make sense to us? We cannot explain it, so we choose not to deal with it?

Already at the Congress of Religions in 1893, one of the participants, Vivekananda, a Hindu from India, traveled through America and concluded that the country was spiritually empty. He believed it should be the task of Hindus to bring spirituality back to the West. He believed it imperative that spirituality be reawakened, not just in his homeland, but wherever it had died out.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Diana L. Eck, *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1993), 151-152.

<sup>10</sup> Bonney, 93.

<sup>11</sup> Emmanuel Swedenborg, *True Christian Religion*, 1771.

<sup>12</sup> Jennings, "Religion."

## From Bush to Suzuki

continued from page 141

Bonney's insights into the Congress of World Religions were to move past the dogmas or doctrines of religions to what might be considered their heart, or their core, which he would describe as a relationship with the divine. "The love and worship of God and the love and service of man."<sup>14</sup> This woman who called me a few weeks ago referred to it as spirituality, hearing, or perhaps better yet, discerning a voice, a call, that did not come from any realm that she could clearly describe. It was something spiritual—that is, it was an inspiration; it had to do with her being inspired by something—a voice, a vision, a prayer, a book. Bonney wanted to suggest that it was this very real form of inspiration that grounded all religions.

### V. Bush and Spirituality in Other Religions

I will make my final turn by returning to the beginning of my talk, and to two important figures, George Bush I and D. T. Suzuki. This first George Bush, also a Swedenborgian, was inspired by the Swedish theologian's understanding of other religions. Bush explored other religions and appreciated what was of value in them. He took a specific interest in Islam and wrote the first English language biography of Mohammed in 1831.<sup>15</sup> Although he is not always positive about Islam, or about any religion for that matter, Bush was fascinated by Mohammad and referred to him as a remarkable man. What interested him about Mohammad was his powerful vision of, and relationship to, the divine. So already in 1831, we

have someone assessing the importance of Islam—a task many have only undertaken after 9/11. In offering a biography of Mohammad, George Bush I was paving the way for a connection to other religions on the basis of spirituality. He recognized God's inspiration, activity, elsewhere than in his own religion and tried to respect it for what it was.

### VI. Openness for Heaven, for Another Reality

Our other character, D. T. Suzuki, comes at pluralism from a different angle. He was a scholar of Buddhism. What he found interesting in Swedenborg was a stress on the relationship between this world and the next: the way in which God and humanity are already connected. Suzuki emphasized the fact that our true self is shaped by something we don't see, call it love, call it divine, spirit, or way. Acknowledging the connection with another reality allows us to see that other persons may likewise have this type of connection—not the same as mine, but very real, nevertheless. Drawing these connections allowed him to be open to Christianity, to learn from it and yet remain a Buddhist. (One friend of Suzuki was the Catholic monk, Thomas Merton. It was Merton who worked out exchanges between Catholic and Buddhist monks)

### VII. Service to the Neighbor

Finally, I want us to turn from spirituality, or the love of God, to the other key ingredient of religions, service to the neighbor; how is this spirituality lived out?

The final example comes from Mother Teresa, whom most of us know of. She was a Catholic nun from Albania who spent her life in India, ministering to the sick and dying. She shows us how this spirituality takes the form of loving one's neighbor. That is, as Swedenborg asserts, loving God is only

known by living charitably. Mother Teresa started an order, the Sisters of Charity, in Calcutta, that was dedicated to literally picking up poor and destitute persons who were living in the streets, often sick, often on the verge of death. From letters that have been published recently, we know that Mother Teresa often struggled with her spirituality, yet she continued to live by serving others. When asked about her ministry in a predominantly Hindu setting, she replied that her concern was not with making people Christians but rather helping "... a Hindu become a better Hindu, a Muslim become a better Muslim, a Catholic become a better Catholic."<sup>16</sup>

Mother Teresa's conviction was that she, living out her love for God in service to others as a Christian, offered a spiritual awareness for others. She saw no need to exclude or even include the Muslims and Hindus she served. Rather, she saw a need to lovingly respect that their spirituality somehow connected with her own and her service.

However, I do not think that we need to be Mother Teresa. Every day we have conversations with persons whose spirituality differs from our own. Every day interfaith couples work together to raise their children. On college campuses around the country, student groups—Jewish, Christian, Buddhist, or Muslim—organize discussions and come together in service of their communities.

Let me conclude by suggesting that although the world may not have changed that much since the 1893 Chicago World's Fair, Bonney's call to respectful attention for other religions remains an important approach in an increasingly pluralistic America and globalized world. ☪

<sup>16</sup> Mother Teresa of Calcutta, "Her Words: Quotes of Mother Teresa," Global Catholic Network – Eternal Word Television Network website, <http://www.ewtn.com/motherteresa/words.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> Bonney, 96.

<sup>15</sup> Francesca McCrossan and James F. Lawrence, "The First George Bush: Philosopher, Minister, and Swedenborgian Ancestor of American Presidents," Swedenborgian House of Studies, [http://www.shs.psr.edu/library/Bush\\_article.asp](http://www.shs.psr.edu/library/Bush_article.asp).

## Passages

### Births

**Ryan Nicholas Helm** arrived August 14, 2008. He is the son of Tonia and Travis Helm, and grandson of Connie and Carl Helm, members of the Pawnee Rock Church of the New Jerusalem in Kansas.

Catherine and Tom Novosel of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, announce the arrival of their son, **Lucas Milan Novosel** on August 14, 2008.

John and Michelle (Huffman) Vincent welcomed their first child on July 19, 2008; **John Michael August Vincent** weighed 7lbs 3 oz. Michelle is a long time member of the Almont New Church Assembly and was secretary of EdSU for seven years.

### Baptism

Elizabeth and Darren Nass' son, **Kohen Edward Andrew Nass** was baptized into the Christian faith on September 8, 2008 by Rev. Dr. David Fekete at the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta.

### Marriages

On September 6, 2008, **Jeanette Bonaker and Marshall Partington** were wed on a bridge that crosses Bear Creek on the drive to their home. Rev. Paul Martin, former minister of the Puget Sound Swedenborg Church, presided, and a special, silent blessing was delivered by Rev. Eric Allison. There were tears of joy at Eric's being able to take part in the ceremony (see photo, page 137). Lisa Grace Allison, Ray Moreau and Gary Povick sang "Love is a Bridge" and "Somewhere over the Rainbow." A song written specifically for the couple by Steve Mason entitled "Hope is the Bridge of Life," was also performed. Dinner, dancing, and huge smiles continued late into the evening, including Marshall serenading Jeanette with James Taylor's "You

Are My Only One." A joyous reception with the church congregation was held the following weekend with reprises of the musical selections.

**Katie Shelley and Julius Brown** were united in marriage on July 19, 2008, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. With a seventeenth-century Quaker meeting house as the setting, the couple embraced spiritual traditions from each



### Practicing Presence

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Sometimes I think that we see ourselves—our individual congregations and our denomination—as too small to make a difference in our communities. In the chapter titled "A Serving Church" from the book *Sorting Things Out*, George Dole addresses the idea that size is not the definer; that we have many opportunities to join with others in cooperative efforts. In so doing, we represent our belief that useful service is the embodiment of the life of religion. It is clearly evident that we are engaged in various forms of intentional practice in our congregations and in our church life. We are vital.

"Love and wisdom, apart from use, are only imaginary things. That is, they do not become real unless they are used." (AR 875)

Thank you all for being the living presence of our church in the world!

Chris Laitner is president of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

of their families as well as the ideals that influence their own faith journey together.

### Deaths

**Rena Rolfson** made her final journey to the spiritual world on June 25, 2008. While battling cancer, she planned her memorial service, which was held on June 28 at the Church of the Holy City in Edmonton, Alberta. Linda Reed officiated. Rena is survived by her children, Rob and Ruth, and her brothers, sisters, and grandchildren.

**Margaret Spreckler** passed away on June 28, 2008. A member of the Rosethorn, British Columbia society, she is survived by Her husband, Jim, and her children, Bernice and Russell.

### What's in a Dream?

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is continually trying to reach us, even in our sleep. In thinking about this notion of God reaching out to us in the night, concerned about our wellbeing a verse in Ecclesiastes comes to mind, "... a dream comes when there are many cares..." (5:3)

Thinking about my own dream, I didn't have to be an expert at interpretation to realize that the wonderful feeling of happiness I felt at knowing I was the minister was not something to take lightly. I could make sense of that four-year-old child I had let out of my sight as representing the declined opportunity to serve the Pretty Prairie church four years ago—the timing had not been right. Now, having accepted the call to ministry at the church, here I am—absolutely excited to start and ready to build something new on an already solid foundation with a wonderful group of people. It's a dream come true! ❀

Rev. Allison Lane-Olsen is pastor of the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church in Kansas.



## About the Swedenborgian Church

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.

American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian churches. As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questionings and insights, we as a church 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 said, "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.

## reflection

### What's in a Dream?

by Alison Lane-Olsen

This last spring, I awoke one morning feeling like I had received a gift from above; I had dreamed one of those dreams that served as a powerful reminder of our connection with the divine in that place where "people fly and water runs uphill" (as one of my professors used to say). Two parts of this dream stood out in my mind and remained with me. The Kansas Association was hosting the Annual Convention (don't worry—it was only a dream!).

In the first part, I found myself in the Pretty Prairie church filled with the greatest happiness as I welcomed visitors and introduced myself as the minister. We were getting ready to begin the meeting, and my other had a speech to give. To her chagrin, just as she was beginning her report, a long trail of bulldozers and other very large, very loud construction vehicles made their way down a path on the north side of the building. The windows were open, and poor Mom couldn't be heard.

The second part of the dream that stayed with me involved my young son, Monroe. As I stood in the back of the

church, someone brought Monroe to me. I wondered, "How did I forget about you?" Later, outside the church, again someone brought me my child. Again, I felt terrible about my neglectfulness and wondered to myself, "How did I forget you? Who'd been taking care of you?" This time the child did not look like Monroe, but rather like a four-year-old girl, though I took her as my own. I reached for her, and she jumped into my arms and embraced me.



At the time of this dream, my husband Adam and I were trying to decide whether or not to move to Kansas to serve the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church; was it the right move for our family? Dreams are funny things. In our waking life, we work to exercise a great deal of control over the environment.

But in our moments of rest, we become open to promptings of the spirit that we do not initiate. Images that might first appear only as a mishmash of recent events can hold important, hidden truths just waiting to create new possibilities in our thinking and in our lives. Our church's theology teaches that it is the spirit that sees, not the eye. Perhaps it only makes sense then, that the Lord

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