

184th Annual Convention: "Shout with All Your Might"

Tearing Down the Walls: Convention Sermon

Rev. Sarah Buteux

The annual communion service was held Saturday morning, July 5, 2008 at Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Rev. Sarah Buteux was convention minister for the 184th Annual Convention.

"The walls of Jericho" meant the falsities that defended evils.

Secrets of Heaven (AC) 8815

I'd like you all to relax, open your minds, and imagine something with me for a moment. Now, this may be a stretch, but I want us to imagine that we are all part of a small, no scratch that, very small—all right let's be honest, compared to everyone else we're miniscule—I want us to try and imagine that we are all part of a teeny, tiny, and yet vibrant, extremely vibrant, spiritual community. Do you think you can do that with me? Good, then let's continue.

A community with its own unique language and rituals and understanding of God, a community with a long and venerable history, a community with so much to offer the world, and yet a community that could easily disappear into the annals of history if we can't somehow find a way to hold it together and face the seemingly insurmountable challenges ahead of us with absolute courage and unwavering faith—you got it? Are you with me here? Do you feel it? Good.

Then you know exactly how the Is-

raelites felt as they entered the Promised Land. After years of wandering, this tiny little band of chosen people has finally crossed the river Jordan and entered the land of Canaan. And they are ready—ready and willing to receive their divine inheritance and take possession of the land that was promised to their forefather Abraham. Only, there's a slight problem. People already live there: namely the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Hivites, the Perizzites, the Gergashites, the Amorites, and please don't forget the Jebusites, and, well, these people haven't gotten the divine eminent domain memo.

So if the Israelites want this land, they're going to have to take it, and

"But then something happens, something absolutely, unspeakably horrible."

under the leadership of Joshua, this is precisely what they set out to do. They may be small and scrappy, they may have their own peculiar way of doing things and their own peculiar way of talking about the things that they do, but with God on their side there is no battle they cannot win, no people they

cannot conquer, no city they cannot take.

And so the Israelites march right up to the first city, the city of Jericho, the gateway city that stands at the base of the promised land, and set up camp around the great wall. In accordance with the Lord's instruction, they do not attack, but rather they march.

They march around the city every day for six days. The priests carry their trumpets,

the soldiers carry their swords, but no one says a word or makes a sound. Then on the seventh day, the Israelites march around the city seven times, and at the very last moment the priests blow their horns, and the people shout with all their might; the walls of the city come crashing down and Jericho is given like a gift into the hands of the Israelites. It is a complete and utter triumph.

But then something happens, something absolutely, unspeakably horrible. The people rush forward and put every living being—all the king's soldiers and all the king's men, yes, but also all of the civilians, the men, the women, the little children, and the tiny babies, all of the animals, the oxen and the sheep and the donkeys, the horses, the cats,

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The Editor's Desk



Following three days of meetings by the Council of Ministers, delegates and attendees of the 184th Annual Convention arrived throughout the day on Wednesday, July 2 at Bridgewater State College in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. In the midst of joyful greetings and hugs, word that Rev. Eric Allison had suffered a stroke that morning quickly spread. Joy turned to sadness and concern as the gathered awaited more information on Eric's condition. Moving ahead with the business at hand, attendees prayed for Eric and his wife, Lisa Cole, as they faced their journey of healing and recovery.

The ceremony opened that evening with an inspiring parade of banners representing societies and affiliated groups from all over North America. Rev. Kevin Baxter, president of the Massachusetts Association of the New Jerusalem, welcomed the delegates and guests, and president Chris Laitner pursued the convention theme, "Shout with all your might," in her address. Laurie and Rev. Ken Turley and friends, along with the convention choir, provided wonderful and varied music throughout convention.

Over the next three days the usual business of the annual meeting was conducted in good fellowship and with sincere service. Each day began with a worship service: Thursday, a memorial service led by Rev. Eric Hoffman; Friday, a service created and conducted by members of SCYL; and Saturday, the convention communion service at Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, led by Rev. Sarah Buteux.

Evening activities included contra dancing and a town fireworks display on Friday (July 4), and a moving ordination ceremony at Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel, followed by a reception at Harvard Di-

vinity School's Center for World Religions on Saturday.

We traveled by chartered coaches to Cambridge for ordination, and returned by 11:30 PM, but those who did not heed the lesson of Cinderella were shocked to find they could not enter their rooms when they returned to them after midnight. The key cards had been programmed to expire 24 hours too soon! Security personnel assisted the weary revelers.

The Annual Convention brings people to new positions through elections and appointments, but it is also a time when we honor people for their past service. President Laitner recognized the following people for their service:

- Patte LeVan for 19 years with *The Messenger*.
- Rev. John Maine for six years with MINSU and PUSH/AFC.
- Paula Hilbert for her service on MINSU.
- Betsy Lau for six years on FPRSU.
- Carol Lawson for her service to COMSU.
- Rev. Kathy Speas for three years on General Council.
- Rev. Rachel Rivers for 25 years in ministry.
- Rev. Ted LeVan for 25 years in ministry.
- Rev. Susannah Currie for her service on the Retirement Committee, AFC, and the Council of Ministers.
- Pat Tukos for her service on CAM.
- Carla Erickson for six years on the Wayfarers Chapel Board.
- Rev. Kevin Baxter for three years on IMSU.
- Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell for five years on the Nominating Committee
- Larry Conant for seven years on PUSH/AFC and 15 years on General Council, including seven years as treasurer.

The meeting this year in Bridgewater was special for Larry, whose relatives include Marshall Conant, the first principal of the school founded by Horace Mann, Bridgewater Normal School, which became Bridgewater College. Larry shared some of his family history in Bridgewater. His great-great-great grandfather lived in town

near the school. Over the years, his grandfather and great-great grandfather served as ministers at the Bridgewater Church. After sharing this special time with the delegates, Larry received a standing ovation.

As we bade farewell on Sunday, we heard updates on Eric's progress in an intensive care unit, and joined in the hopeful prayers of Lisa, family, and friends for his recovery. As of this writing, Eric has been recovering for six weeks. With the loving care of Lisa, the support of family and friends, and the expert and caring help of doctors, nurses, and therapists, Eric has made remarkable progress. His cognition is excellent, he walks with assistance, shows progress in regaining his speech daily, and is encouraged by, and encourages, all who interact with him.

You can access Lisa Cole's informative and moving daily blog about Eric's progress and recovery at caringbridge.org. Type "ericallison" into the name field. Follow directions to register, and then you can read all her blogs and post messages for Lisa and Eric as well.

—Herb Ziegler

the Messenger

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Church Calendar

October 10–11: SHS Board of Trustees • Berkeley, California
November 7–8: General Council • Boston, Massachusetts

Falling Walls: President's Address to Convention

"The Times, They Are A-changin'." (This song by Bob Dylan was performed by the Turleys and friends to separate the opening ceremony from the president's address.)

That's true for all of us on so many levels. We obtain training, certificates, degrees—and we get work. Then we find change in our work, our professions. We upgrade our skills. We take new jobs. Our children grow up and away. We retire. We find new interests and sometimes even new work. And nearly all of us stop occasionally to look at that person in the mirror and realize that the person we're seeing isn't quite the same person we visualize in our minds.

Paul Sperry, in *Words of Life*, wrote, "Change is essential to improvement." It's true, but often change is confusing, frustrating and difficult.

Churches, denominations throughout North America, have undergone major change over the past while. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life released the first set of findings from its



massive "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" early this year. This survey gleaned information from 30,000 respondents and has provided the basis for a great deal of discussion and some concern since its appearance.

The survey documents the amazing variety of ways that Christians understand and practice their faith. The survey states that the U.S. is still largely Christian, as over 78 percent of the 30,000 respondents identified themselves as being Christian "in some way." The biggest subgroup of American Christianity is Protestantism, at just above 51 percent, still the majority, but just barely so. This is a significant change since the last major survey thirty years ago placed Protestantism at between 60 and 65 percent. One other noteworthy finding in the current survey is that "roughly one-third of all Protestants . . . were either unable or unwilling to describe their specific denominational affiliation."

There is a field of people who, even if they identify with mainline Protestantism, don't indicate any specific belief system, and we can add to that another group who took the time to identify themselves as "nothing in particular" regarding any type of affiliation. It is helpful for us to know that as we reach out into the world with our vital doctrine and via church programs there is a statistically large field of seekers "out there" with whom we can connect.

During the first three-year term of my presidency, we collected information about how the Swedenborgian Church could be more helpful and responsive to its constituency.

We used information from a gath-

ering of selected leaders in late winter 2006, from the General Council in the fall of 2006, and from the delegates at the 2007 Annual Convention.

The General Council voted to use this collected information to work on creating a strategic plan with the help of a professional facilitator. In February we held a special meeting dedicated solely to this process. What we came away with was an outline of best response to needs, a set of "ultimate goals" to achieve. I appointed a committee to review the bases of the planning process, what we gleaned from the planning process, and finally, how we might best implement the fundamental concepts created in the planning process in helpful, meaningful, growth-supporting ways.

Our work this past February was an important beginning step in setting up a more easily accessible and knowledgeably responsive organization, because that's what our various hard-working churches and ministries need. So, as we move through this coming year we'll be establishing more clearly-defined processes which we hope will also be helpful and timely. Where does the Swedenborgian Church fit in today's world, today's market, today's needs? What is different now than a decade or so ago? These are ongoing, pivotal questions that are focal points for the work of our Council of Ministers and of our denomination's other leadership bodies.

We feel that strategic planning needs the Lord's leading as we choose our forward paths. Yes, we all need to work the problem, and we all need to bring our most sincerely prayed-for pieces of information, but without hearing the Lord's voice in the process we will fail. Our planning process, the questions we ask—Who are we? What

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SCYL Service and Fun

By Nina Sasser

I had an *amazing* time at this year's convention. So many memories were created, lots of friendships were formed, and I learned how to contra dance! I've been to a lot of retreats, but this was my very first Annual Convention. I'd say it was even better than the retreats, which is saying a lot since retreats are also insanely fun. I guess I liked Convention better because it was less structured, and we were pretty much free to do whatever we wanted. We didn't have to wash any dishes and we didn't even have a bedtime!

Day 1:

The first day of Convention happened to fall on my sixteenth birthday, which made it even more exciting. It was a good birthday. I got to meet new people and see friends I hadn't seen since Memorial Day, and there was a pool table! Holly and I played against Cody and Jake. We also learned about the theme (Shout with all your might!) and started brainstorming for our worship service.

Day 2:

The second day of Convention was pretty much a planning day. It was also the day Janice and I decided to wear our super-exciting matching outfits! We spent most of the day planning what

we were going to do for our worship service. This was a lot more fun than lectures and classes because we got to



SCYL worship service

do the talking, and we could be creative and inventive; we didn't just have to sit there and listen to other people talk the whole time. We also played a lot of pool, ping pong, and Foosball. Oh! We also played a really intense game of Ultimate Frisbee. We lost even



SCYL teens posing with John Harvard

though we had Kurt on our team (who is amazing at Ultimate Frisbee), but it was really close and really fun.

Day 3:

On the third day of Convention we held our worship service in front of everyone! I think it went very well. The best parts were Cassie's depressingly dark scripture reading (Psalm 120), Molly, Kate, and Nemo's skit, Janice, Cody, and MB's amazing performance of Janice's original song, and, of course, Marybeth's incredible solo. I'll admit I got a little teary eyed during that

part. Oh, and, of course, when Cody got everyone to chant, "LIVE YOUR LOVE! LIVE YOUR LOVE!" and we all fell down! I think we exceeded everyone's expectations. Go us!

It was also the Fourth of July, so after the worship service we patriotic ones changed into our red, white, and blue outfits, complete with fireworks shorts. After lunch some of us went to the movies, and others went to see Plymouth Rock. I went with the movie group to go see *Wall-E*. It was surprisingly deep for a computer-animated Disney movie. I enjoyed it quite a bit.

Upon returning, we had a barbecue, tossed around the Frisbee, and a bunch of us learned some crazy contra-dancing moves! That was a definite highlight for me. Then we sat on the top of the hill and watched the fireworks that were

Council of Ministers Meeting Report

Kevin Baxter, secretary

The Council of Ministers of the Swedenborgian Church (COM) met June 29 through July 1, 2008 at Bridgewater State College in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. Participating were 30 members of the Council and seven guests.

The council received visions of ministry from Ms. Gabriella Cahaley and Mr. Cameron Linen.

Chairperson Andy Stinson focused the council's attention on some aspects of leadership through the study of a book titled *A Failure of Nerve*. Mickie

Crimone, from the Center for Family Process on Leadership, facilitated the discussion.

Election results were as follows: Kevin Baxter, secretary; Eric Hoffman, member at large to the executive committee; Carla Friedrich, nominating committee; and John Maine, 2010 convention preacher.

A representative from the Ministers and Missionaries Benefits Board (MMBB), the new benefits program selected by the retirement committee, explained the program and resources. MMBB is a non-profit invest-

ment company that serves religious workers, a resource for both ministers and the churches. It is available for churches that are considering compensation packages, and to help treasurers who have question about clergy compensation.

One of the largest projects of the year has been the creation of the *Ministry Resource Book*, which is a collection of COM recommendations and policies. This resource will eventually be posted on line and is a resource for both ministers and churches.

Based on a request to be severed from the roll of ministers of the Swedenborgian Church in North America, the Council of Ministers recommended to the Swedenborgian Church that the name of Robert McCluskey be removed from the roll of ministers and added to the roll of former ministers.

After 33 years in the ordained ministry, Paul Tremblay (ordained in 1973) entered into the fullness of the spiritual world in 2006. The Council of Ministers recommended to the Swedenborgian Church that his name be removed from the roll of ministers and added to the roll of former ministers by reason of his demise.

After 54 years in the ordained ministry, Erwin Reddekopp (ordained in 1953) entered into the fullness of the spiritual world in 2008. The Council of Ministers recommended to the Swedenborgian Church that his name be removed from the roll of ministers and added to the roll of former ministers by reason of his demise.

At her own request, supported by the approval of her plan of ministry by the Council of Ministers, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommended that Catherine Lauber, whose ordination has been requested by the General Conference of the New Jerusa-

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partially obstructed by trees and buildings, but were still super-exciting. And,

much later that night Holly and I decided to give Cody a makeover. We paraded him around the campus only to find that everyone had gone to bed! It was very upsetting. But then we did it again the next

day when everyone was still awake, and Matt let us give him a makeover too, so it all worked out pretty well.

Day 4:

The fourth day of Convention was definitely the best day. We took the train to Harvard Square in Cambridge. We went shopping and ate dinner at a Tex-Mex restaurant (Border Café) that played country music and served outrageously huge drinks. After dinner we walked around for a bit, and then went to the ordination service at the Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel. Then we went to the ordination reception,

where they served cheese and crackers that actually tasted more like crou-

tons. That was a lot of fun. And the bus ride home was insanely fun! MB, Holly and I sang songs from "Across the Universe" and various Disney classics the

whole time. Since it was the last night, a bunch of us tried to stay up all night, and I believe Sam, Matt, Josh, Nemo, MB, Janice, Holly, and I (sorry if I left anyone out) succeeded.

So, Convention was a blast. I know many of these fond memories will stick with me forever, and I hope that is the case for everyone who came to Convention this year. I would also like to thank Susannah Currie for sponsoring me, Kurt Fekete for supervising us, and everyone else who worked hard to put on this Convention. And I really hope I'll be able to make the next one! ☸



Subway surfing

Ordinand Sermon

Like a Child

Rev. Catherine Lauber

At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

Matthew 18:1-5

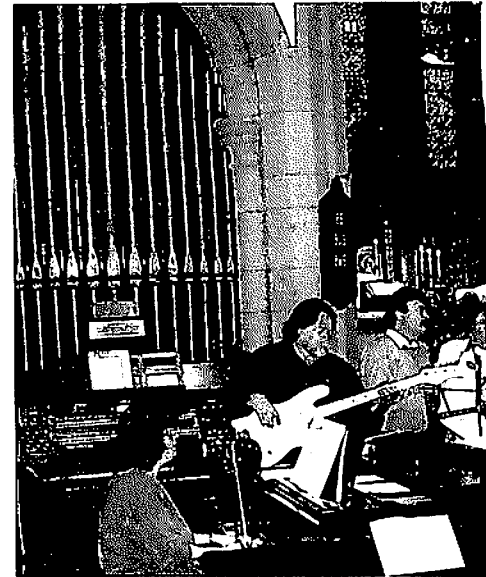
He called a little child and had him stand among them. And he said: "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name welcomes me."

From the moment I began this journey one of my greatest challenges, and the one which has led to the most fulfilling experiences of my life, has been the challenge of learning how to get out of my own way—learning how to get out of the way and let the Lord lead me, and use me, because it is through the Lord's leading that fullness of life can be experienced, and it is through the Lord's leading that *Thy will be done*; The Lord's will be done.

I have come to know, and to trust, that God has always been in my life, but I could not hear this call to ministry, or even simply hear God's desire for my life, which is to be joyful and fulfilling, until I opened up to make room for God in my life. I could not hear the call until I started getting out of the way, until I stopped charging through life with my head down, pushing forward and telling myself, "*I know what to do*," "*I can take care of myself*," "*I can figure this out on my own*." I had the answers within me, but I forgot who it was that put them there. I had forgotten that all of life is from God and that without God we are nothing, we are simply empty vessels awaiting life.

Jesus said, "*Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven*." Learning to let go, and learning to trust fully in the Lord's leading has been for me a process of changing and becoming more like a child. Little children are completely dependent on their mothers and fathers for their very survival. Parents lovingly, and selflessly, pro-

Ordination Service 2008: Can



vide all of the necessities of life, ensuring that the child's environment is safe and secure, providing boundaries and safe spaces where a child can explore his or her world, and can play, and learn and grow by interacting *freely*, within the safe and nurturing environment that is provided by the parents.

Our Lord is our loving parent, who has installed the child safety locks on the cupboards and doors, and who has fenced and gated the back yard, and who has ensured that we have nourishment and shelter and protection, so that we can freely explore our world, so that we can learn and grow and play and regenerate, acting *as if* from our own, but always being mindful that it is the Lord who gives us life, and that all we are is from the Lord. Humility, and becoming humble like the child is what Jesus reminds us of.

In learning to trust in God like a parent, I have come to embrace

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nbridge Swedenborg Chapel



Ordinand Sermon

PSALM 23

Rev. Judith Vandergriff

Good Evening. With great respect and love, I welcome you with all my heart.

Psalm 23 is the focus of my message tonight, because it is so dear to my heart. My message is an offering of a new way to look at this Psalm.

For those of you that associate the 23rd Psalm with memorial services and the loss of a loved one, this may be the beginning of a new idea and use for you. I used to think that this Psalm, like many others, was about death and sadness—a “downer.”

In 1999 my pastor, and then spiritual director, gave me an assignment to help in my discernment of my call. He said, “Judith, I want you to say the 23rd Psalm to yourself as a mantra. Each time you doubt God’s direction, or you feel doubtful or are afraid about anything around you, say this Psalm.”

“The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want”—boy, is that true! The words remind me who is in charge; the Lord is in charge. And when the Lord, my good shepherd, is in charge, my whole world is perfect and complete. All of my needs and wants are taken care of by his mercy and love.

“He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters. He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.”

These green pastures, denoting new states of spiritual growth, remind me that I have to be willing to be led, to become like a child, and in Swedenborgian terms, to allow a state of innocence—willingness to be led and to remain teachable, and open to the Lord’s influx and guidance.

“Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.” This reminds me that truth comforts and heals me, and keeps me secure and upright on the path.

“Thou preparest a table before me in the pres-

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Convention Sermon

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and the dogs, (people, if there was so much as a hamster in Jericho that day . . .)—every living being, except for one woman and her household, are put to death by the sword.

It is a heartbreaking story, absolutely horrible, and I wish I could say it was an isolated incident within scripture, a bizarre little aberration in an otherwise unsullied narrative of divine love and mercy, but it's not. There are several such stories in the Bible, not just stories of war, but stories of war wherein God commands the complete and utter destruction of every living being in an enemy's territory, no matter how young or weak or vulnerable those beings might be.

But do you want to know what is unusual, what the really crazy thing is about this story in particular? People love it. Pastors lift the Battle of Jericho up in their sermons as a story of God's favor and awesome power. Congregations and choirs sing some great songs about it. (Thank you very much by the way. Can we have a hand for the Convention Choir?) And as if that weren't strange enough, we read it to our kids in Sunday School, in much the same way we read the story of Noah's ark, as if genocide was the most natural thing in the world.

Yeah. It's all a little strange when you really start to think about it, isn't it? Wipe life as we know it off the planet and you have the makings of an epic tragedy, but save just two of every animal and you've got all the material you need for the most popular children's play set of all time. Who knew? But seriously, once you start to look at the finer details of a story like this, it really is disturbing. Scholars and theologians have labored long and hard to try and make sense of this one, and I could tell you a bit about what they say, only I have the strange suspicion that you

would all promptly tune out.

We're Swedenborgians after all, and we already know that there's a spiritual sense imbued within these letters full of a higher, more personal, and surely more useful meaning. Why slum about in the historical realm when you can soar and play in the celestial one? Why torment one's self trying to make sense of the literal when one can revel in the spiritual?

Why? Because real people died that day in Jericho. Real mothers lost real babies, real husbands lost real wives, real people lost their homes, their livelihoods, their very lives in the face of an army that *thought* it was carrying out God's will. And if we dismiss those people as no more than a means to an end, the literal fodder for a great spiritual interpretation, the only difference between us and Joshua's soldiers is not one of kind but of degree.

That is, if we look at this story and somehow convince ourselves that our ability to draw a spiritual meaning from this literal historical event somehow makes the event itself okay, then what we are effectively doing is justifying the slaughter. Furthermore, when we jump right to the correspondences and begin playing with spiritual interpretations, we miss the opportunity to question the event itself, to question what it says about God, and what it says about us, to question whether or not Joshua was even right, whether or not the slaughter was necessary.

And I'm afraid that if we miss that opportunity, then our understanding of Swedenborg's correspondences, however interesting they might be, is bound to become corrupted in the process.

Because, you see, if Joshua was actually wrong on the literal level to cause

such destruction, then simply transferring his methodology up the correspondential ladder, if you will, probably won't yield better or more lasting results for any of us. So let's take a closer look, first, at how this story is traditionally understood on the literal level, and see how a few well placed questions on that end can add nuance to our standard spiritual understanding of this most troubling text. Are you with me? Wonderful. A little nervous? Me too, but here we go.

Traditionally, on the literal level, the genocide that takes place during the Battle of Jericho is understood as an unfortunate but necessary means to an end. When you are as small and as unique as the Israelites were, when you have so much to protect and so little to work with, then when you strike you must strike hard.

They couldn't afford to fail, nor could they afford to be compromised, so when they conquered a people they showed no mercy. They wiped out every last person they could find, every last trace of culture or religion that could possibly lead their people astray. Only then, in their minds, could they truly be safe and prosper in the promised land.

And you know, on the one hand I can see their logic; however, there are still some pretty strange inconsistencies in this story that I'd like to point out to you, the first having to do with the promise itself. You'll remember that a big part of the promise given to Abraham back in Genesis involved the Israelites not just inheriting the land of Canaan but being a—what to the nations? A blessing.

Now, I don't know about you, but I can't quite see how killing first and blessing later is a really good strategy for fulfilling this promise. Does that



seem a little off to you? Me too. And speaking of killing—and this is my second problem with the story—it's one thing to kill those who have the potential to kill you—I mean even the poor, little, innocent babies could theoretically grow up to exact revenge someday—but killing all the animals seems like a needless waste to me. How could the animals have corrupted the Israelites I wonder?

Likewise, destroying the city itself with all its temples and art and literature seems a good plan if you don't want the people to get seduced or tainted by falsities, but it's exceedingly ironic, in my humble opinion, that in their mad dash to purge the city of all corrupting influences, be they animal, vegetable, or mineral, that the one person they do save is—anyone remember her name?—Rahab, yes. And what did Rahab do for a living? She was a harlot. Rahab and all the members of her "household" were spared because she had helped the Israelite spies escape, a household that included her father and mother and brothers, I'm sure, but a household that in all likelihood probably included an unusually large number of "sisters" as well, if you catch my drift.

And finally, there is the issue of God's part in this whole debacle, our God who we understand to be all loving and all wise. I have a really hard time understanding how our God could ever approve of genocide, and, truth be told, I see a number of little signs that indicate that, at least in this story, the all-out slaughter wasn't really God's idea at all. For one thing, when God says he will give the city to Joshua, he does so, but he brings down the walls with music rather than warfare. Victory is achieved without one drop of blood being spilt.

For another, although God does command the Israelites in other parts of the Bible to wipe out entire cities,

in this particular passage, if you read it closely, he never once tells Joshua to kill all of the living creatures inside of Jericho. God says, "See, I have given Jericho into your hand, with its king and valiant warriors," but it is not God who commands that the Israelites put all of Jericho to death, it is Joshua.

All of which sends me back to reconsider that strange little exchange Joshua engages in with an angel days before the battle even begins. Joshua asks the angel, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" And the angel says, "No," which is kind of a strange answer to an "either/or" question. "Rather, I indeed come now as captain of the host of the Lord," says the angel. That is, "I'm on God's side, human, not theirs, but not yours either." Joshua wanted to know if God was on their side, but what he should have been asking each



step of the way is not whether God was on their side, but whether or not they were on God's.

Now, I bring all of these little quirks to your attention because I think it is extremely important for us to question scripture, to have enough respect for the literal sense of the word to wrestle with it and not accept it as simply a text for imitation or as a spring board we can utilize uncritically to reach a more interesting spiritual interpretation.

The Bible isn't always showing us who we ought to be. Sometimes it is only showing us who we already are. And in those instances, our job is not to meekly accept the charge, but to wrestle with the image before us and, God

willing, strain for something higher.

Unfortunately, most of the Swedenborgian literature that deals with this passage in particular fails to question whether or not Joshua was even right. It plows right ahead and concludes that if Joshua dealt with the evils of Jericho in this way, then we ought to deal with the evils in our own lives this way as well. But what if Joshua went overboard?

Now please understand, I'm not calling the correspondences themselves into question, but I'm questioning what we ultimately do with them. I think the correspondences Swedenborg outlines actually stand up very well. In *Secrets of Heaven* (8815) he explains that the walls of Jericho represent the lies, half truths, and rationalizations we use to justify our own evil actions, and it is clear that those walls really do need to come down if we are going to live our lives to the fullest as God intended.

If we truly want to overcome our evils, then we must, with the help of God, examine the defensive strategies we have built up around them to keep them safe, just as the spies appraised the defenses of Jericho. We need to be patient and obedient to what we know is good even when it doesn't feel right yet, just as the Israelites did when they walked about the city each day for six days wondering what the heck they were doing. And finally, we need to trust not in our own power, but in the power of God to bring the walls down on our behalf.

These correspondences are powerful and exceedingly useful. Indeed Swedenborgians, and Grant Schnarr in particular in his very helpful little book, *Return to the Promised Land*, have put them to good use, especially around issues of addiction and spiritual recovery. How many of you have benefited from his work? I'm not surprised.

He makes it clear in his book that
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Convention Sermon

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if you're caught up in a web of sin or addiction, the only way to break the chains that bind you to destructive behaviors is with the truth. With the help of God you can tear down the walls of lies that keep you going back to the bottle for solace or drugs for happiness or pornography for love, just to name a few examples.

But I think we get into trouble when we follow Joshua down the road of believing we can not only rid ourselves of all the lies that give evil power over us, but succumb to the belief that with enough determination we can actually rid ourselves of evil itself once and for all. It would be nice if we could, but I don't think evil works that way anymore than God does.

At the end of Grant Schnarr's chapter on Jericho he writes:

After the walls fell down Israel wiped out the enemy so as not to be perverted by their immoral spiritual practices. Spiritually, the lesson is one that cannot be overstated: we must wipe out that hideous evil completely. Once we expose the defect, we must show no leniency. When the walls of illusion crumble, it's time to destroy those defects before they can re-arm and destroy us. Knock them out with the sword of truth and annihilate them. Not until then will there be peace. (pp.165-166)

Well, that sounds really good, and I can see a lot of usefulness in what Rev. Schnarr is saying, except for one small but pesky detail: war never leads to peace, at least not the true, just, lasting peace that we all long for.

In my experience you can make war on drugs, you can make war on terror, you can make war on poverty, you can make war on most anything that is harmful, but war is, at best, only a temporary solution. Peace is not what you get when you finally destroy every-

thing or everyone who could potentially harm you because that battle never ends. Peace only comes from the hard work of making peace.

Add to this the fact that, as it says in *Divine Providence*, the Lord does not annihilate the evils in our lives when we repent of them, but simply removes them to a place where they have no power over us, and you start to wonder, "Hey, if God doesn't destroy evil, who are we to think that we should or even could, if we wanted to?"

So perhaps the story of Jericho is here to tell us that ultimately Joshua was wrong, as are we if we think that the best way to combat evil is to obliterate it rather than neutralize it. War did not eternally secure the Promised Land for the Israelites back then, anymore than war is securing it for them right now. Maybe the most powerful spiritual lesson to be found in this passage is the knowledge that our job is not to wipe out evil, because evil doesn't work that way, and when we go after evil, too often what we really end up going after is each other. No, our job is not to fight evil with force but to join with God in peacefully dismantling the lies that give evil power over us and over others. "Peace," in the words of Friedrich Beuchner, "is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of love."

And believe it or not, there is actually a little bit of love in this story, a modicum of mercy, if you will, an exception made in the midst of Joshua's headlong rush to obliterate a people he feared would corrupt his own, and it is in her that we find redemption, not just for Joshua but for all the world. Remember Rahab, who we mentioned before, Rahab the harlot?

If there was a top ten list of people most likely to corrupt the purity of the Israelites, Rahab and her "household" would have been in the top five. But Joshua made a curious exception for Rahab and showed her mercy. He com-

promised to save a person of dubious character, and it was this very compromise that ultimately led to the greatest in-breaking of the divine upon our world.

For you see, Rahab was taken in by the Israelites, and, in time, she had a son named Boaz who grew up and married another compromised gentile girl by the name of Ruth, whose great grandson was none other than King David, whose line eventually culminated in the birth of a tiny baby boy in a little town called Bethlehem by the name of Jesus. Because Rahab the prostitute was allowed to live, Jesus the messiah was able to be born.

Coincidence? I think not.

Providence? You better believe it.

So maybe the battle of Jericho is not a story that glorifies war after all, but a story that lifts up the true blessing that comes from showing mercy and making peace.

My friends, preserving one's identity as a small people and protecting one's integrity as a people set apart for God is a high calling. As such we are called to dismantle the walls of lies that protect and nurture all that is evil and corrupt in this world. But when we do so at the expense of one another, when, in our headlong rush to destroy evil we destroy one another, then we have lost our way.

For our highest calling is not the tearing down but the building up of a new city. Not a new Jericho, but a new Jerusalem, a city built not with bricks and mortar, but with hands reaching out to one another, especially those who are other, hands that build up with love and reach out with mercy, and hands that make room, no matter what the cost, for God's love and God's light to break in upon our world. This is our calling. Amen and Amen. ☸

Rev. Sarah Buteux is pastor of the First Congregational Church of Hadley, Massachusetts.

Gathering Leaves 2008: The Tree of Life

by Philippa Peacock and Rita Russell

Purley Chase Centre in England was the venue for the third Gathering Leaves—a gathering of Swedenborgian women from the different branches of the New Church that took place July 11–14. The event had taken well over a year's planning and preparation. Cold weather didn't detract from the warmth of the welcome we received from Anne and David Gaffney and their team, and the warmth and fellowship of the group of 43 women from the United States, Canada, and the UK representing the General Church (North American and British), General Convention and General Conference. (*Overheard: "I can't think of anything to improve it—I enjoyed every single minute."*)

The large group meetings were held in a square marquee (a tent with windows) which enabled us all to sit in a circle. It was wonderfully arranged with four displays from the Labyrinth and Soul Symbols workshops. There were also two trees in pots representing the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, and a colourful floral display. During the opening plenary a representative from each branch was asked to speak on what these Biblical trees meant to them in their lives and beliefs. Tryn Clark, Chris Laitner, Jody Morris, and Helen Brown spoke movingly.

After a tea break we reassembled into small groups, mixing the women as much as possible. We introduced ourselves and then shared, at a personal level, a quotation from the Word or the writings about life that we had chosen at random from a small branch of a tree.

During Gathering Leaves there were slots for four workshops with a choice of four options each time. They were varied, with sessions on movement and art, exploring spirituality, Biblical themes, and doctrinal aspects. The choices were "Let's get together and create," "Happiness—a spiritual perspective," "Female disciples of Jesus" (this needed to be repeated because of the numbers who chose it), "The purple bracelet," "Finding comfort and joy in the book of Revelation," "In company with angels," "At sea with God," "Speak, Lord, your servant is listening," "Legend or prophecy?," "Walking the labyrinth—pathway to wholeness," "The Tree of Life sacred dance," "Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Swedenborg," "Soul collage: exploring our view of

The Americans were fascinated by the old buildings and the stories connected with them. The history was brought alive by enactors, dressed in the costumes of Shakespeare's time and answering questions. Everybody was given a ticket to Shakespeare's birthplace and a £5 note to buy a cream tea. Most people visited the birthplace; some walked by the river and visited Holy Trinity Church, where Shakespeare was buried; others shopped for gifts, wandered round the town, and bought ice-creams. (*Overheard: "Aren't the flowers beautiful and isn't the countryside awesome?"*)

We returned to Purley, and after some free time, a traditional "church social" party with fun and games was enjoyed by all. We did barn dances;

in teams we portrayed animals, drew objects connected to our trip to Stratford, and created amazing hats out of newspaper, crepe paper, feathers, and other craft things, and played "stations" with names of churches from around the world. Anne and her team created a lovely buffet meal, which was

laid out in the hall. Before the party started, people said that they weren't hungry, but when they saw what a feast was provided, their appetites returned! (*Overheard: "It's surprising how they got us to do things we didn't want to do and had such good fun doing them."*)

One of the highlights of the whole gathering was the Sunday morning communion. A large table was placed at one side of the marquee with thirteen women sitting on three sides of it. Alison Longstaff, SHS ordination-path student, gave the address about the

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God," "How might we worship?," and "How do we reach out and engage with seekers?" Leaders represented various branches. (*Overheard: "I wish I could have done all sixteen workshops."*)

Uplifting worship began and ended every day in either the Beech Room or the marquee. Each was led by a group representing one of the branches. Wonderful singing accompanied by guitar was a regular feature.

On Saturday, we went out for the day by coach to Stratford-upon-Avon. We visited Mary Arden's house and farm, and Anne Hathaway's cottage.



Gathering Leaves

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leaves of the tree for the healing of the nations. Then twelve women assumed roles as followers of Jesus such as Mary of Magdala, the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears, and Martha and Mary. Many felt blessed by this affirming and imaginative depiction of these women. After Jane Siebert had blessed the bread and wine, the same women brought groups up to the table to share the elements with them. (*Overheard: "The highlight of the whole weekend was the Sunday morning worship."*)

In the afternoon there was free time—some walked by the canal and the golf course, some learnt to do watercolours, some walked around the Purley grounds finding the different Swedenborg quotations on the trees, and others slept.

In the evening we admired the artwork that had been produced; we divided into four groups to portray the

poem "i carry your heart with me" by e cummings in music, dance, words, or art. The groups then performed their productions. Community circle dance was enjoyed by many and the whole evening finished with worship. (*Overheard: "I loved all the dancing."*)

Our final morning arrived with sunshine. After our last workshop we gathered for the closing plenary where we shared the blessings/gifts we had gained during the event, a common one being the strong feeling of oneness we had experienced with each other and the Lord. We were led on a guided meditation as we entered the Holy City. Thanks were expressed to Rita and the steering group of seven British women who organized the event: Helen Brown and Hilda Johnson for the workshops; Mary Duckworth for the plenaries and opening and closing worship; Helen Newton for the bookshop, welcome pack, and the technology; Margaret Presland for answering travel questions; Gwendolen Rowe for

the artwork; Judith Wilson for the party and programmes; and Rita Russell for the marquee, the Stratford day trip, and chairing the group. Zoe Brooks (UK) and Lisa Hyatt Cooper (USA) coordinated the money affairs. (*Overheard: "It's been very well organised and all our needs have been met."*)

We then left the marquee, walked to the flowering cherry tree which had symbolised the Tree of Life, and four young women planted it. We danced around it, sang to it and blessed it. We trust that it will flourish and be a lasting symbol of the fellowship, the fun, the spirituality, the deep sharing, and the friendship and love felt amongst us. (*Overheard: "It was incredible, warm and wonderful." "Purley had beautiful facilities, great food and clean." "It was the best ever."*) ☿

Philippa Peacock is a member of the Greenhill New Church in North London. Rev. Rita Russell is a minister acting as *pastoral locum* in Bournemouth. She has attended all three Gathering Leaves.

Like a Child

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the mantra, "Thy will be done!" as a reminder that we are here to do the Lord's work, and that it is the Lord's will that is done. Whenever I start to push ahead and start trying to control what's going on—and I can feel it when it happens because things start to get sluggish, and the hard work doesn't seem to produce rewards that are as fulfilling, and it feels like I have stepped out of the stream of Divine Providence—so when I recognize that I have transferred my faith from God, to myself, the mantra "Thy will be done" works to help keep me humbly focused on where the Lord is leading me.

In the *Arcana* we learn that, "In the heavens the inmost or third heaven consists of those who are in innocence, for they are in love to the Lord; and

because the Lord is innocence itself, therefore they who are there, being in love to the Lord, are in innocence. These, although they are the wisest of all in the heavens, yet appear to others like little children." AC 5608.

Working to become like a little child has meant putting my complete faith in God, putting my life in God's hands. When I trust in the Lord, amazing and miraculous things happen. The Lord's Divine Providence led me to find the Swedenborgian Church, and it is through the love and support of this community that I found the courage to follow the Lord's call to ordained ministry. Trusting in the Lord's protection and care allowed me to walk through a war zone, witnessing to the life of faith of the people Uganda. The Lord's call for my life is now taking me across the ocean to serve our brothers and sisters in England, and having faith in the

Lord will continue to bring blessings beyond imagining.

As we grow and take our place as adults in this world, it is sometimes easy to forget that we are still children of God. For a time I forgot, but the Lord never left me and never gave up on me—he will not give up on you. Our Lord is always there, ready to provide all that we need to live useful, joyful lives. As I embark on this path to service to the Lord, I enter in with joy and with trembling, learning to let go and trust in God, not knowing what the future will bring, and yet loving the possibility of that unknown future. I ask, as I do every day, for the Lord's continued presence and leading in my life. I am grateful for this presence which has brought me here today and which will lead me, as a humble child guided by a loving parent, into the glorious future. Amen. ☿

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has God called us to do? Who is our neighbor?—all of it asks that we pause, that we vision and re-vision, and that we make room for our process to include discerning the Lord's leading. Our search for our future is holy. We have huge truths, a wonderful message, and a great faith. We do not go into the future alone; we go with the Lord.

There will be distractions. There will be problems that try to usurp the focus of our work. Reliance on prayer and spiritual practice will help us keep moving forward, following the path that is best for the denomination without being pulled to the sides by smaller issues.

This year's convention theme is one of those "listen to discern" moments.

Are you one of those people who tends to see a misspelled, misplaced or misused word in printed material, and says, "Wait. There's something not right about that." And then you go back and look carefully to find what your "mental eye" saw? If you are, then you'll understand that I could be caught by two words in the Biblical passages that have been chosen as the basis for this year's convention theme. The words that caught me are "flat" and "straight." So, I did a little research using three different Bible translations:

In the Revised King James version, in verse 5 of the sixth chapter of Joshua, the Lord says to Joshua, "... then the wall of the city will fall down flat. And the people shall go up every man straight before him." The NRSV Oxford Study Bible states "... and the wall of the city will fall down flat, and all the people shall charge straight ahead." My third choice, the Good News Bible, put it this way: "... and the city walls will collapse. Then the whole army will go straight into the city."

All of the translations agree that after the seven circuits of the city of

Cruise the Alaska Coast and Glacier Bay

Cabins are still available for the post-convention Norwegian Cruise Lines Alaska/Glacier Bay Cruise round trip from Seattle, June 28–July 6, 2009.

For prices, payment schedule, and reservations, email Nancy Apple (ncapple@yahoo.com). Please indicate "Alaska Cruise '09" in the subject field.

For details about the cruise, ship, and cabins, go to <http://www.ncl.com> and look up the ship, Norwegian Pearl.

A refundable deposit of \$100 per person will hold a cabin for you. Send a check payable to Puget Sound Swedenborgian Church, c/o Nancy Apple, 5607-D 204th St. SW, Lynnwood, WA 98036

Please include names of all passengers and contact information—phone numbers & email. Indicate the type of cabin preferred—inside, outside, or balcony. All Aboard!

Jericho on the seventh day, and upon the blowing of the trumpets (or ram's horns) and the shouting of the people, the walls of the city will fall down. Two translations tell us that they will fall down *flat*. All three tell us that the people will be able to go "*straight* into the city."

The word "straight" appears several times in the Bible.

The fortieth chapter of Isaiah has two easily recognized passages: "Prepare ye the way of the Lord; make straight in the desert a highway for our God." And "Every valley shall be exalted and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall be made straight and the rough places plain."

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John all refer to the passage from Isaiah in reference to making the Lord's path (the Lord's "way") straight.

The psalmist asks the Lord to "Make thy way straight before my face."

The passages from Joshua, Chapter 6 that we've used as the theme for this year's Annual Convention offer the direction that after the walls around Jericho fall, "... the people shall ascend up every (person) straight before him." Later, in Chapter 20, we find that all has been accomplished as planned and the passage ends with, "... the people went up into the city, every (one) straight before him, and they took the city."

Let's also consider that other word of interest, "flat." According to the text from Joshua, that's how the walls of Jericho would fall. In the spiritual, "Joshua 'Fit' the Battle of Jericho," the walls "come a-tumblin' down." That's the picture we see, chunks of falling debris. Think about imploding buildings or the collapse of large concrete things. There are piles and piles of pieces, some very large, that are created and one must do careful climbing to get over the mounds and mountains of broken material to get to the other side. That was *not* how the walls of Jericho fell. That wasn't the promise, and it wasn't the reality. The walls fell flat, creating an easy way for the people to go straight into the city.

The important piece of this story is obedience to the Lord's leading. As the children of Israel entered the Promised Land, they committed themselves to voluntary cooperation with the Lord.

This whole Jericho story is full of marvelous correspondential connections that indicate the Lord's presence and the choice of the Israelites to follow the Lord's leading. The ark, the trumpets of ram's horn and the shouts of the people are obedience to the commandments, the Lord speaking with the power of unselfish love, and the voice of the people indicating consent and confirmation.

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General Council Meetings at Convention

Susan Wood-Ashton,
recording secretary

Pre-Convention Meeting

The pre-convention meeting of General Council was held on Wednesday, July 1, 2008. During that session the following items were presented and discussed:

- The treasurer's report, presented by Larry Conant, including updates from the Investment Committee on the status of the Common Fund.
- A report on the Council of Ministers meeting by Rev. Andy Stinson, Chair (see page 97).
- Discussion of a replacement for Martha Bauer, office manager, who will be retiring in October, 2009.
- Discussion of the reorganization of the administrative structure of General Convention and its volunteer structure.
- A report on the final payment from Urbana University on the mortgage held by General Convention.
- A report from the Swedenborgian Community.org.
- An update on the status of the deed to the St. Louis Church. Larry Conant noted that the matter was still being researched and prepared for final action.
- Discussion of the position of convention worship and music coordinator.
- Information about the new president of Urbana University (see article in the June, 2008 Messenger).
- Discussion of legal issues surrounding the Wesley Gray Fund.
- Discussions about the National Church in Washington, DC.

Corporate Resolutions were signed for the new MMBB benefits plan, and a termination document was signed for the old plan.

Post-Convention Meeting

The post-convention meeting of General Council was held Sunday, July 6, 2008. New members Rev. Susannah Currie and Rev. Randy Laakko were welcomed to the Council.

Appointments Council affirmed the following appointments to boards and committees:

- Investment Committee: Larry Conant, Rev. Susannah Currie, Dan Dyer, John C. Perry, Peter D. Toot, and Chris Laitner, ex-officio as president. Appointments are for one year.
- Wayfarers Chapel Board of Trustees: Robert Carr for this second term and Grace Sudden for her first term. Both terms are for three years, expiring in 2011.
- Retirement Committee: No appointment was made. Appointment will be affirmed at a later conference call meeting.

Wayfarers Chapel The auditor's report was distributed; it was noted that the suggestions in the management letter had already been implemented.

National Council Of Churches General Council voted to appoint Mary Ann Fischer and Rev. Doug Moss as representatives, along with Chris Laitner, who will act as head of commu-

nion. Further discussion included having the chair of the Council of Ministers serve as ecumenical officer to act as spokesperson for theological issues. Further discussion and action was scheduled for the November meeting of General Council.

Wesley Gray Fund General Council voted not to respond to the complaint by the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem to remove General Council and the Standing Committee of the Massachusetts New Church Union from the Wesley Gray bequest.

Authorized Signers Council approved the new signers on all convention bank accounts to be Martha Bauer, Christine Laitner, Susannah Currie, Susan Wood-Ashton, Gina Peracchi and Rene Hellenbrecht. (All checks must be countersigned.)

New Church Of The Southwest Desert Council received a request to provide a means of funding the purchase of Swedenborgian books for a library and free distribution for the New Church of the Southwest Desert. The Council suggested it contact the Philadelphia Book Room Fund for assistance.

Support Units The president will provide written information to members of General Council appointed to contact support units to begin their review of purpose. ☸

Annual Corporation Meeting of the New Church Theological School

(Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion)

Lorraine Cuthbertson, clerk

Chair's Report

Rev. Jane Siebert, Chair of the Board of Trustees, was unable to attend the meeting and provided this report to Rev. Bob Leas to present:

I regret that I am not with you this

year. I was unable to get time off for both the Annual Convention in Boston and Gathering Leaves in Britain. I have had a lifelong goal to see England and Scotland, and so I have to miss Convention in Boston. This in no way discounts the work of Convention and

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President's Address

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The backstory of this incident identifies Jericho as a city inhabited by a selfish, idolatrous people who had taken a place of inherent goodness and profaned it. We need to eradicate this worship of things and move back to the spiritual center of being in worship.

We all have some Jericho moments. But this story tells us that we can, through coming into conjunction with the Lord, cause the walls to fall flat so that we can move forward, straight, and unimpeded into the city to rid it (and ourselves) of evils. Marching around Jericho once each day for six days, and then seven times on the seventh day is a process of regeneration. We practice, and then we reach the place where we fully enter into a new state, where we have completed a process and have moved forward to a next place.

It is necessary to take the time to pause, to pray for guidance, to listen for the voice of the Lord's leading. Two very different examples will help to illustrate the spiritual benefits of

pausing.

Dr. Livingston was traveling into the interior of Africa and had several native bearers who were accompanying him to carry the variety of goods he was bringing to his work. The native bearers were more than able to maintain the pace that Livingston set, but it became apparent that over the course of the journey, the bearers would just sit down—not move forward—and, no matter what the recriminations were, they would just “wait.” After some period of time, they would stand up and continue on the journey. Upon questioning as to why this was occurring, the answer came.

“We are traveling far from our homes. We are in a strange place. It is important that we stop every so often in order to let our souls catch up, so that we can again be whole.”

I have a book called *From Crescendos to Diminuendos* (by Jack Coleman) that identifies musical “tempo and feeling” words to describe moments that are spiritual. A fermata is a marking that indicates a pause. It's indicated by a sign placed over or under the note, rest, or chord. The use of this pause is a performer's choice. The pause can be taken or not, and can be as long as he or she decides. This pause is a very useful tool for musicians in that it offers a variation in movement and intensity. Spiritually, this affirms the reality that we must allow God to speak to us in a state of receptiveness and calm. The result—the time *after* the fermata—will be new energies, new beginnings, and new experience.

Over the next twelve to eighteen months, we will be establishing more accessible and quickly responsive agencies to assist our denominational members. We are researching the best way to identify and keep a solid base of trained volunteers in order to assure timely responsiveness. Because we are

a small denomination that does not have within its ranks experts in all areas of church management, leadership, and process, we often call upon professional church facilitation and information organizations such as the Alban Institute.

It is noteworthy that this organization, after nearly thirty years of professional leadership service to all types of churches, has concluded that program and technical-specific training will not solve most of the issues that local churches face. It now recognizes that active, vital, growing congregational life must be based on a combination of spiritual practices including prayer, theological reflection, generosity, shaping community, hospitality, and leadership. Simply establishing a new program will not support new growth and strength in a church. Living those spiritual practices out into the community will. We *must* do that!

When I became the president of our church four years ago, someone said to me that the only thing that seemed to be left to do was to “rearrange the deck chairs on the *Titanic*.” Obviously we were sinking and dying as a church. Thankfully, I have learned from a variety of professional readings and conferences that we are not the only denomination feeling this way. It's not “about us” specifically; it's a paradigm shift for nearly all of the churches of our time. We are not dying, but we do need to look at ways to renew and revive our use as a church in this century. Our Swedenborgian House of Studies and our Council of Ministers are doing this, and the denomination as a kind of loosely-knit, overarching structure is beginning the process. We are at a threshold.

Continuing to follow the metaphor of the *Titanic*—a ship that we all know sank in 1912 with a great loss of life—I'll share an idea from Diana Butler-Bass, who has researched and writ-

Position Search Announcement Executive Editor of the Swedenborg Foundation

The Executive Editor is the chief operations officer who, under the direction of the board, supervises and coordinates a small professional staff in carrying out the programs of the Swedenborg Foundation.

The search is currently underway and will continue until the position is filled.

Interested parties should contact the chairperson of the search committee, James Lawrence, at jlawrence@psr.edu or 510-849-8232.

ten about the revitalization of mainline churches over the past several years. She asks that rather than use the *Titanic* metaphor, we recast the story using the *Mayflower*.

All who were aboard the *Titanic* knew that she was sinking, so the work was to make certain that some people were able to get to lifeboats, to pay some attention to the ship to see whether it could be made seaworthy, to contact ships that might come to pick up survivors, but primarily it was a work to save a few—knowing that the rest would perish. There was a sense of urgency, confusion, and fear.

There was also a sense of urgency, confusion, and fear on the *Mayflower*. It had been blown off course in a storm, a huge percentage of its passengers and crew had died, and it was headed into totally unknown, uncharted areas with winter coming. The leaders of the ship chose to plan for landfall—unknown land that it was—by preparing documents to order life and to figure out how to create a community in whatever land they found themselves.

One group tried to patch the holes but recognized the inevitable loss, while the other group, pretty much awaiting death, planned for the future of its group in an entirely new, unknown setting.

Current thinking indicates that we should always look to our past—tell our stories—in order to have a firm grounding for moving forward. We need to remember, to celebrate, and to learn from our history in order to see our future. We need to pause—much as the Children of Israel paused at Gilgal between crossing the Jordan River and arriving at Jericho to create their altar and affirm their allegiance to the Lord's leading. We need to ask the Lord's help as we outline our future. Yes, there are some things that we ourselves can do to make the organization run more smoothly and responsively,

but, as a church, as a denomination, we need to take the time to prayerfully seek guidance as to our next steps in the world.

Brian McLaren has spoken about the rings of a felled tree. Each new ring encompasses every ring that has gone before. Without that which has preceded it, there is no new thing. Daniel Boorstin, an historian, who has stated that amnesia is as detrimental to society as to an individual, goes on to say that, "Trying to plan for the future without a sense of the past is like trying to plant cut flowers."

As members of the Swedenborgian Church, we know that the process of regeneration is ongoing. I firmly believe that that principle applies to our work as a church in the world. We are changing. We are not gone; we are alive and of interest to people in this century. We all, whether individuals, local churches, other ministries, denominational boards, or committees, ministers, or elected officials—we *all* must continue to promote who we are

and what we offer in the world today. We must know, promote and love our church!

The book that is a kind of definitive history of our church, *The New Church in the New World*, by Marguerite Block, ends in the 1930s. The Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven wrote an "epilogue" to bring the book into the 1980s. At the end of Dr. Kirven's epilogue we find this statement regarding our own General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches: "... the shape and future of Convention remains a process of formation."

The process of formation is what we're all about; it's what we believe in. We know that change is essential to improvement. We know that regeneration is a principle of life.

And so, let us move forward on the straight path given to us by the Lord who causes walls to fall down flat. Prayerfully, joyfully, and with solid purpose, let's move forward, walking in the light of God.

—Christine Laitner

SHS Annual Meeting

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the importance of the Corporation meeting, and thank you to those who are here.

My thanks to Bob Leas for his willingness to chair the meeting and deliver this report to you.

First, I applaud the work of the trustees in their visioning and continued dedication to their work. We have a fine team.

Second, we are blessed to have Jim Lawrence at the helm of this ever changing institution. He epitomizes what it means to be the dean of the Swedenborgian House of Studies. When I googled "dean," the definition was, "one who manages the whole institution or a department, faculty, or group of students." Jim's is not an ei-

ther/or job, but rather a both/and job. He does it all, and he manages to do it all well.

Third, when Kim Hinrichs came back to serve SHS, we all rejoiced. And now she has been accepted into the doctoral program at the Graduate Theological Union. With this addition to the staff, I can truly say, "All is well at SHS—*your* institution dedicated to train the leaders of our denomination and *your* institution to turn to for your own training and exploration of your spirituality."

Fourth, thanks to many of you here who are our financial supporters. This has been a banner year for our fund raising. Your support shows your confidence in what we are doing and the direction in which we are headed. Thank you.

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Communion

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be prepared to speak as that female disciple while we shared communion. Every woman chose a different disciple.

As we gathered around the table with the communion elements, the women put scarves around their necks or over their heads. A hush came over the rest of the 30 plus women gathered from the New Church Conference in England and the General Church in the US and England. Each disciple participant spoke from her heart about what Jesus meant to her and why she chose to follow him. Tears flowed. Eyes were opened. Hearts were full.

I shared communion with the 12 women gathered around the table, and then each disciple went out and brought two or three to the table and offered them communion.

It is hard to explain just what happened that Sunday morning at Purley Chase in England, and why it touched all of us so deeply. Some said, "I have come to love Jesus as never before." Others said, "I feel whole, complete, and so loved by Jesus." One woman told me, "I will take this image to my grave." And another, "This is the most significant thing that has happened."

As I have reflected on the scene, I believe that the image that I carry of communion was made whole. Swedenborg teaches us that we have all the 12 disciples within each of us. We have

Election Report 2008

- Vice-president (one year term): **Jim Erickson**
- Recording secretary (one year term): **Susan Wood-Ashton**
- Treasurer (one year term): **Rev. Susannah Currie**
- General Council lay member (3 year term): **Deane Currie, Herb Ziegler**
- General Council clergy member (3 year term): **Rev. Randy Laakko**
- Communication Support Unit (3 year term): **Rev. Sage Currie**
- Education Support Unit (3 year term): **Rev. John Maine**
- Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit (3 year term): **Barbara Halle**
- Information Management Support Unit (3 year term): **Dagmar Bollinger**
- Ministries Support Unit (3 year term): **Deb Smith, Gloria Toot**
- Ministries Support Unit (1 year unexpired term): **Rev. Jun-chol Lee**
- Committee on Admission into the Ministry lay member (3 year term): **Mareta Tafel**
- Board of Trustees of the Swedenborgian House of Studies (1-year term): **Lisa Oz;** (2-year term): **Thomas Neuenfeldt;** (3 year term): **Bill Coffman, Jennifer Lindsay, Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Kathy Speas**
- Nominating Committee (5 year term): **Mary Ann Fischer**

the boldness of Peter, the love of John, the doubting of Thomas, and even the betrayal of Judas. Now I know there is more. I also have the business of Martha, the devotion of Mary, the adoration of the woman that bathed Jesus' feet with her tears, and the generosity of the poor widow that gave all she had.

And I know in my heart Jesus would not have left the women out of this momentous occasion. They may have been written out of the scripture, but they could not be written out of Jesus' heart. ☞

Rev. Jane Siebert is a chaplain living in Pretty Prairie, Kansas.

and dispersed learning in ways that are rich and effective. Many more students are training for ways of working other than primarily a parish setting, especially chaplaincy ministry.

The mission statement of SHS comprises two objectives in addition to preparing consecrated leaders for ordained ministry: developing and engaging new scholarship on Swedenborg and Swedenborgian thought and spirituality, and sharing its resources with the church and world. These are both exciting and a demanding objectives, but these are exciting times for Swedenborgian scholarship. The major areas of focus are in historical studies, theology, and spirituality. The last objective of sharing resources with the world is the aim of the newest initiative at the school, the Outreach Program, where the new director of outreach, Rev. Kim Hinrichs, has made much progress. Thanks to the staff, faculty, board, donors, churches and camps who work with the students, and the students.

Financial Report

In the treasurer's absence, Herb Ziegler presented the June 30, 2007

SHS Annual Meeting

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Dean's Report

After a seven-year cycle of the SHS program in Berkeley, the school had, in one sense, come full circle. Whereas, when the school moved from Boston to Berkeley in 2001 there were no students continuing in the program, the same is true again—there will be no continuing students this fall semester

in Berkeley. But there's a big difference: there are still going to be ten students; it is just that they live in ten different parts of the country.

Counting this year's two graduates, SHS has produced 19 trained professionals for work in the world since coming to Berkeley, and the harvest should continue in new ways. The school and faculty are now striving to find new ways to provide distance

Passages

Baptism

Jackson Earl McBernie, son of Joan and Brian McBernie and grandson of Jean Cressy, was baptized into the Christian faith at Fryeburg New Church in Fryeburg, Maine on June 1, 2008, Rev. Dr. Bob Bossdorf officiating.

Deaths

Rev. Reynalds E. Bécherel passed into the spiritual world on May 17, 2008 in Ottawa, Ontario at age 95. He was minister of the Toronto New Church Society in the late 1940s and 1950s, and later was a translator for the Canadian federal government. Reynalds was an active member of the Ottawa New Church group (General Church). Reynalds was born in Mauritius, in the Indian Ocean, the son of Rev. Cornelius Bécherel and his wife, Félicie Germain. He leaves behind his wife Mary,

his daughter Jennifer, and his granddaughter Marisa.

Michael Lee Cowen, age 30, died May 17, 2008 after a courageous struggle with life-long health issues. Born August 11, 1977, he was the beloved son of Albert and Karen Cowen, brother of Johnny, Chris, and Naomi Cowen and Uncle of Destini, DeAndre, and Alicia Nicole Cowen. He was also the Godson of John and Bev Titus. The Cowens are long-time members of the Urbana Swedenborgian Church. Rev. Renee Machiniak led a memorial service in celebration of Michael's life on May 24, 2008 in Urbana, Ohio. Although Michael's life was short, he was a published author of poetry, did acting and modeling (see RealmKomiks.com), and was one term away from graduating with a degree in health information technology.

Marguerite "Margie" Heath Osgood passed away on June 1, 2008 at the

Fryeburg Health Care Center in Fryeburg, Maine. Interment was at Pine Grove Cemetery in Fryeburg, Rev. Ken Turley officiating. She was predeceased by her husband, Bub Osgood, and granddaughter, Rachel Osgood. She is survived by her children, Debbie Urgese, Paula Sirna, and Timothy Osgood, and nine grandchildren.

Council of Ministers

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lem of the United Kingdom, and who has completed a full course of study at the Swedenborgian House of Studies, be ordained into our ministry, and that her name, after ordination, to be placed on our roll of ministers.

At her own request, supported by the approval of her plan of ministry by the Council of Ministers, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, the Council of Ministers recommended that M. Judith Vandergrift, whose ordination has been requested by The New Jerusalem Church in Pawnee Rock, Kansas and who has completed a full course of study at the Swedenborgian House of Studies, be ordained into our ministry, and that her name, after ordination, to be placed on our Roll of Ministers. ☪

audited financial report. After discussion, it was approved.

Nominating Committee Report

The chair presented the following slate of candidates for the Board of Trustees:

- Lisa Oz (1-year unexpired term)
- Thomas Neuenfeldt (2-year unexpired term)
- Rev. Kathy Speas
- Jennifer Lindsay

There being no nominations from the floor, the members voted to direct the clerk to cast a single ballot for the nominees to be elected members of the Board of Trustees.

Commencement

Inese Radzins delivered a commencement speech to the members. The dean and chair conferred SHS Certificates to the graduates, Catherine Lauber and Judith Vandergrift. ☪

Psalm 23

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ence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over."

To walk through the valley of the shadow of death with only a rod or staff is, to me, like facing the unknown. To face the unknown makes me faint-hearted, and that is what it feels like to let go of our own direction, negative concepts, and ideas. Those enemies are within and without. We trust in the Lord to lead us and to protect us, and then to turn everything over to him and to trust in the fullness of his love. The 23rd Psalm releases us from the fear and anguish of those black places and egoistic things are let go.

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever." Now, I have all I want and need. I do and I will, free to do his will.

Now, I think of the 23rd Psalm as an affirmation and regeneration mantra. For me, the message of this Psalm is the opposite of grief. Instead, it is a song of increasing trust, hope, comfort, peace, and more than anything, *faith*.

The Psalm is the source of my strength and my comfort that my good shepherd is looking after me and my needs and protecting me from the negative within and without as long as I stay surrendered to is will.

May the Lord be praised. Thanks be to God. ☪

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

A Different Image of Communion

by Jane Siebert

When I was asked to lead communion for Gathering Leaves 2008 in England, I wanted to offer something special for the 45 women gathered to honor our Swedenborgian tradition. A picture came to mind that hangs in the basement of our church in Pretty Prairie. It is the traditional picture that you see where Jesus shares The Last Supper with his disciples. The interesting thing about this picture is that a couple of the disciples look more like women than men. And, one might ponder, maybe they were.



In Matthew, concerning the Lord's Supper it says, "Jesus was reclining at the table with the Twelve." Mark mentions the 12 disciples and Luke refers to Jesus and his apostles. The correspondence of 12 is all things of faith, the most complete number. Historically, we have the image of Jesus and 12 men at The Last Supper. However, we know that Jesus had many female disciples, and I can't imagine Jesus inviting only the men to share in that most impor-

tant of all meals.

So I took a little liberty and thought about focusing on the female disciples for our communion at Gathering Leaves. I researched a bit about those listed in the scripture as disciples and others that many agree were Jesus' disciples, and came up with a list of 12; there were many more, but I wanted to stay with twelve due to its correspondent significance.

My list included Mary of Magdala, Mary and Martha, Susannah, Joanna, Salome (mother of James and John), the widow of Nain, the woman bent double, the woman taken in adultery,

the woman who anointed Jesus' feet, the widow that gave two coins, and the woman at the well in Samaria. I sent the list out to the 11 women I knew were coming from General Convention and our host Rita Russell. (Three more women ended up coming from Convention at the last moment.) I asked each woman to select one of the disciples with whom she resonated and to

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