

Interview with Nita Holmes About Marriage

In her work for the General Church, Nita is Director of Marriage Programs, but she wants to promote families under that title, too. The marriage/relationship initiative has sponsored five events so far. The first one was a marriage weekend last fall. Bishop Buss was the keynote speaker, followed by Barbara Markey, who gave a presentation and workshop on how to use a relationship inventory, and then a relationship workshop led by John & Lori Odhner that was open to all. The weekend ended with church services on Sunday.

In February we sponsored an evening for the ministers and their wives, and shared information on how to support engaged couples. We also discussed the benefits and challenges of being a couple whose husband's job is serving as a General Church minister.

In the spring another workshop was put on with Bob Merrell showing us how the Ten Commandments can be incorporated into couple work. Peter Rhodes then spent the morning taking the group through a process. He used a 12-step model which included how to do an inventory. The spring even ended with a Playback Theater headed by Richard & Susan Mansbach, and a luncheon.

This fall Nita and Dean Holmes put on a "7 Habits of Highly Effective Families" introductory workshop. The most recent event was a very beneficial weekend led by Frank and Louise Rose which included a doctrinal class, perspectives from Louise on her journey as a wife, the Sons of Art performing a variety of love songs, a morning workshop, a luncheon and church service.

In her work Nita is employed part-time for the General Church, co-coordinates the Senior Project course at ANC with her husband Dean, and has her own private practice of marriage and family therapy.

Nita: The important question is, What are we doing to support people in the community who are getting married? Do they have the information they need and the skill sets that are important?

My hope is that in our church we will support marriages. We have beautiful doctrines but we need help with how they work out in our lives. One thing to look at is if the young man or woman has the natural skill sets needed for marriage, i.e., how well do they communicate with one another, how do they react in a situation, etc. Our church makes marriage important, but often, because of that, if a woman or

man doesn't have the best of relationships, she or he feels excluded and disillusioned. Separated and divorced people also feel excluded, and this makes me sad. The Lord doesn't want any of us to feel left out. He wants us to feel the support of His love and of the men and women in our community.

Through the programs we do, we are working to help people better understand family systems, boundaries, etc., and how males and females work out problems in their lives, even if they're not married. Basically it's about being on a path of regeneration and really it starts with our relationship with the Lord. Because people

are human and have many problems, we need to create a church that takes care of the wounded, too.

An example of this may be providing, in our community, an ongoing 12-step relationship group. There people could find a safe place to discuss what is going on with them while being given some support and tools to deal with their lives more effectively. Another example may be the community getting clearer about what possible interventions could be done to support an individual or couple getting help—if those around feel that lack of skills and support or addictions are significantly getting in the way of the couple or family having the kind of relationship they originally had hoped for. Another one of the challenges, for me, is working with the episcopal form of government and seeing how that system can and does support marriage. But always the bigger picture is honoring the masculine and the feminine.

I think, in general, people spend a ton more time on the logistics side of the wedding ceremony than on preparing for the spiritual side of marriage. One of the things I'm most proud of is the pamphlet we've had printed, *Getting Ready for Marriage*, written by John Odhner. (The passages in this article that are in italics are from his pamphlet.) We have the pamphlet to give young couples now as a way of helping them make spiritual preparation a priority. In my effort to bring better knowledge to young couples, along with John and others, I've attended a Pre-Cana course review that the Catholic Church has for decades required engaged couples to take before their wedding. The course teaches the basic tenets of the Church and also gives core relationship help. The idea could easily be adapted to our Church. In our pamphlet we have chosen two Inventories because they cover subjects

which *Married Love* points to as being key to happiness in marriage. They cover:

- attitudes toward religion and spirituality (ML 238-246)
- upbringing, ways of relating to others, and habits (ML 246)
- attitudes and beliefs about the marriage covenant (ML 247)
- attitudes towards decision making and gender roles (ML 248)
- attitudes towards work (ML 249)
- differences in lifestyle and culture (ML 250)
- attitudes towards money (ML 250)
- mental and physical health (ML 252, 253)
- sexual functioning (ML 254)
- previous relationships (ML 255)

Another booklet we've published is *Preparing Couples for Marriage — Using Your Family Tree*. It is important for a couple to understand their legacy and inheritance as far as their tendencies to marriage are concerned. What are some of the loves? What are some of the evil tendencies? Anything that helps them and us get more conscious of our patterns is useful.

Hereditary evil derives its origin from everyone's parents and parents' parents, or from grandparents and ancestors successively. Every evil which they have acquired by actual life, even so that by frequent use or habit it has become like a nature, is derived into the children, and becomes hereditary to them. AC 4317:4

One thing I'm thinking about this fall is the various kinds of families in our community: traditional, single-parent, etc. What does care and communication look like for them? In the current culture of our church many people are from divorced

homes. Often a young couple getting married, if they are from such a home, question whether they have the skills needed for the relationship. They often go into a higher degree of distress about their ability to have a good marriage. But there is cause for optimism. We are all individuals and don't have to repeat mistakes of the past. Our booklet helps people to see that. It is important to remember that good inclinations can be inherited just as bad ones can be. If we overcome the negative patterns, we can pass better inclinations on to our children.

The good into which we are born we derive from our parents, either father or mother; for all that which parents have contracted by frequent use and habit...is transmitted into their children, and becomes hereditary. If parents have lived in a good pattern...the offspring receive from this an inclination to similar goodness. (AC 3469)

Because we are not in control of what stimulus comes to us during the day, one thing that helps is to pause and use our understanding to think about the things coming at us, and listen to our own feelings about what to do next. Our emotions have a lot to do with influencing our life. Is joy coming up, or jealousy? Are we looking deeper? It's important to remember the Lord gave us our frailties to take us along our path of regeneration, too.

It is important for a person to look at how she or he reacts in times of distress. Does she isolate? Does he go on attack? There are ways she or he can learn to do things differently that allows for a more generous attitude. The Writings say (ML 228) that even areas where the partners are further apart can be resolved in time, especially by the following means:

- doing things the other likes
- helping each other work
- being polite to each other
- avoiding harmful interests (such as flirting, pornography, adultery)
- taking care of the children together
- agreeing on spiritual issues

The Lord wants us all to be happy. The couple also needs to look at how they pray. We've all been taught individually, but how is prayer used in marriage, and what does it look like? Frank and Louise gave a wonderful taste of this in their workshop recently by first challenging us to look at the barriers in our relationship, then to focus on our values (loves). They then led us through a process of prayer for our partner.

I go to 'Smart Marriage' conferences where the most recent research shows up. People who attend these conferences are really interested and have ways to help. I would like to see more support for marriages in distress. We can get people out of their isolation and give them support from the community. Couples can do their part in supporting each other.

The Writings say, Truly conjugal love is nothing else but the linking of love and wisdom. A married couple between whom or in whom that love is shared are models and a visible form of it. (ML 65)

This could include times of trouble, also. Perhaps a mentor couple is going through some pretty heavy things themselves, but can help another couple who are struggling.

Sometimes the aware attention on marriage and the looking to support another couple is just what is needed to become stronger and get through the challenges.

To my mind, marriage is important for the couple themselves, but also it is the

foundation on which family and community rests. Anybody who looks back on what their grandparents did for them will know and remember. Marriage provides security and fulfillment. We're working at trying to create an atmosphere of support for it.

One of the things we are doing in the community is REFOCCUS Marriage Groups. We are currently trying a model of matching mentor couple with an engaged couple. This is just at its very beginning stages. We are also looking at possible support groups because our culture accepts them better. This fall three and a possible fourth REFOCCUS Marriage Group have started for couples who have been married for some time. They meet on a limited basis and use an Inventory that will stimulate discussion between the married partners. The format allows for prayer.

It is exciting to see the evolution of Barbara Markey's workshop a year ago now showing up in groups who are using the inventory to learn more about themselves, and hopefully develop more intimate relationships. My hope is that from these ranks we may develop more mentor couples who are comfortable with the inventory format, and see it as a useful tool in supporting new couples in their journey.

We know people are extremely busy and our agenda has been to put enough thought and effort up front into whatever we are producing or offering that it can potentially help bring balance and a supportive community to the couple's lives. I also hope someday to have a website that people can go to in order to read and copy out things written about marriage.

I believe the Lord wills us all to be in relationships where love and respect are present. I appreciate working with the BA Church staff. I enjoy working with Tom Kline and John Odhner in this important and very useful work. I am also very appreciative of all the logistical and

creative support I get from working with Paul Simonetti. Partly what keeps me going is that Tom Kline holds the vision in front affirming that he would like our church to be known as a *marriage church* — not having walls that separate us from the outside community. How do we invite those into our community or share and exchange our values and skills with the outside world? Our church has a lot to offer and the world certainly has gifts to offer us, too, in the arena of marriage and relationships. There is a lot of work we can do, and we are starting.

A number of resources are available for engaged and also married couples to begin creating a support network for their marriage. Some of these are:

- Talk with your minister about opportunities for support from other couples.
- If you are engaged, find a marriage enrichment group that accepts engaged couples.
- Join or create a group.
- Take a class on *Religion and Marriage* at the Bryn Athyn College, available of video. Contact them at www.newchurch.edu/college/.
- Take a spiritual growth course, such as *Rise Above It* or *Rise In Love*. Contact them at www.touchstoneseminars.com
- Join ACME, the Assoc. of Couples for Marriage Enrichment (www.bettermarriages.org), or PAIRS, Practical Application of Intimate Relationship Skills (www.pairsfoundation.com)
- Use a marriage inventory program like FOCCUS. www.Foccusinc.com or 1-888-874-2684.

- An additional resource for married couples is REFOCCUS. Contact them at www.Refoccus.com.
- Read *Finding the Love You Want* by Harville Hendricks.
- Also, *For Better and For Ever*, a manual by Robert Ruhnke, www.marriagepreparation.org/FB&F E.htm
- Ask your minister about how to start the practice of praying together regularly.
- Find marriage preparation or enrichment sources on the internet at www.smartmarriages.com, marriagepreparation.org or Christianitytoday.com

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The pamphlet "Getting Ready for Marriage" has been produced by the Bryn Athyn Church Pastor's Office, Box 277, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009; 215-947-6225, BrynAthynChurch@aol.com

Influx from angels takes place into what a person knows and believes, not what he does not know and believe; there is nowhere else for it to become firmly established than in something the person knows or believes.
AC 6206:2

Celestial Angels

...Such states of quiet, however, together with many others which are peculiar to the celestials, cannot be perceived by everyone, for they are unknown to the unknowing. Neither can they be expressed in words that are credible. ...if one had a sense of them, even of the least, he would never more desire to be in the body, or in the corporeal or worldly cares. SD 1908

Who They Are

They are in innocence and above all others want to be led by the Lord. HH 280

They are...distanced from their self-centeredness so much that they seem to live in the Lord. HH 280

They appear simple, and before the eyes of the angels of the lower heavens they appear as little children, thus small and also not very wise. HH 280

...[They] are in the inmost degree of peace. HH 288:2

...They are those in whom the will part of the mind can be regenerated or made the Church. AC 5113:2

Where They Live

...[They] dwell as it were in an ethereal atmosphere; spiritual angels...in an airy atmosphere; and natural angels...in a watery atmosphere, which from afar off appears as the sea. AR878:2

...[They] dwell upon mountains. AR 896

...[They have] a clear feeling of the Lord's presence... AC 7058

...[They are] surrounded by flashing and so to speak burning light, for they see the Lord as the Sun, whose radiating light has that appearance because they are so near Him. AC 7058

...The colors of these flowers (in a rainbow in heaven) emanated not from a white light but from a flame-like one. AC 1624

...Everything there is living...in their eyes, for that which comes directly from the Lord is living. Such is the celestial kingdom. AC 3887

What They Know

...They accept into their intention the Divine-True that they hear either directly from the Lord or indirectly through the Word and explanations of it, and so apply it to their lives. This is why they have so much more wisdom than angels of the lower heavens. HH 280

...They know they have nothing of wisdom from themselves, and that to be wise is to acknowledge this. What they know is as nothing in comparison with what they don't know. HH 280

...They are the product of the marriage itself of good and truth... They never make investigations into what the truth may be but have a perception of it from good. AC 3246:2

...For holiness dwells in ignorance that is innocent. With everybody apart from the Lord, holiness is unable to dwell anywhere else than in ignorance... Among the angels themselves, who possess a

supreme light of intelligence and wisdom, holiness still dwells within ignorance, for they know and acknowledge that of themselves they know nothing and that whatever they do know comes from the Lord. They also know and acknowledge that all their knowledge, intelligence and wisdom are as nothing in comparison with the Lord's infinite knowledge, intelligence and wisdom, thus that all of theirs is lack of knowledge. AC 1557

What They Do

...The celestial itself cannot possibly exist without activity. AC 1561

...The Lord preserves order in the hells both immediately from Himself and mediately by means of celestial angels. Sometimes angels are sent there to reduce the disordered things there into order; while there, they are in safety. He with whom what is celestial exists is safe among all the hells. AC 6370e

...Whenever a member of the hellish crew approaches an angel from the Lord's celestial kingdom, he flees from his presence. He cannot stand it, because he cannot stand the sphere of celestial love, which is one of love to the Lord. To him that sphere is like a scorching and torturing fire.

Furthermore, a celestial angel never engages in battle; still less does he have his hand on the neck of his enemies, indeed for his part he has no enemy. Nevertheless it says *his hand will be on their neck* because that is the way things go on in the world. AC 6365

...As long as the evil genii and spirits were there they were under constant watch by angels belonging to a higher

heaven and were restrained from committing evil deeds openly. At the present day too some who are more devious than others, because they mislead people by their pretence of innocence and charity, are under watch by celestial ones, and so long as they are under it, they are held back from their unspeakable tricks.

AC 6914:2

...All good springing from love and charity (is) the essential activity itself.

AC 1561

Worship

...Worship is the prime activity, for this is how the celestial expresses itself, because it finds joy in it.

AC 1561

...Worship itself is nothing else than a particular activity that occurs because of the celestial within.

AC 1561

What They Are Like

...They appear naked, for nakedness corresponds to innocence.

HH 280

...Being in the goods of love from the Lord, they are in a flaming light and are clothed in red.

AR 231

...[They receive] Divine Truth in the will part of their mind.

AC 9810

...Are never loud or harsh.

SD 1108

...They rarely spoke, but still I clearly observed their presence, indeed more clearly than can be expressed. Now also they have spoken with me, but not as the spiritual speak, but inwardly, without sound. It is a speech, if anyone can conceive it, of speech without its sound.

AC 1105

...The heartbeat of the celestial communities flows into that of the spiritual, and in this ratio are emitted and pass into the natural creation. And marvel that it is, the speech of celestial angels is not something spiritual angels hear but something they perceive as a kind of heartbeat, the reason being that the speech of celestial angels is not intelligible to spiritual angels because it is produced through the affections which belong to love.

AC 3886

...Those who are...called celestial are in love, that is to say, in the good and truth of love.

AC 3240

...The reason *food* means celestial good is that angels' food consists in nothing else than forms of the good of love and charity, and these serve to enliven angels and rejuvenate them. Especially when they are expressed in action.

AC 5147:3

...They are reluctant to speak the truth, but ponder it quietly in their hearts.

Walter Orthwein, sermon at the Cathedral 3/4/01

...Celestial delight is beyond their reach. [This is said of evil spirits.]

SD 4270

...The celestial man is one who does not reason from truth or even about truth, since he is able to perceive from good, that is, from the Lord through good whether something is true or not true.

AC 6295

Residing with the celestial man is the good of love to the Lord and the good of love towards the neighbor, the good of love to the Lord forming the internal part of him, the good of love towards the neighbor the external part.

AC 6295:2

Description of Their Heaven

The majority of things that exist there lie beyond the range of human thought and almost beyond that of the angelic spirits who live in the lowest heaven. Everything there is founded on the good which belongs to love and not on the truth which belongs to faith. Those there communicate with one another through forms of the good of love and not through the truths of faith as those in the spiritual heaven.

In the celestial heaven exist realities that are beyond comprehension or description; things which (have) never entered anyone's mind, and which eye has not seen and ear has not heard. AC 9543

Members of the celestial kingdom are governed by the good of love, not by truth that is called the truth of faith, for such truth is so integrated into the good of that kingdom that it cannot be seen in isolation from good. AC 6435

The external of the celestial kingdom is the good of mutual love, and the internal of the spiritual kingdom is the good of charity towards the neighbor. But the good of mutual love is more internal than the good of charity towards the neighbor, because the former springs from the rational, the latter from the natural. AC 6435:2

Their Marriages

...Whereas among those who belong to the Lord's celestial kingdom the reverse applies. There husbands are the ones with affection, and the wives are the ones in the knowledge of good and truth, and this is what the desire for marriage springs from among them. AC 8994:4

Their Regeneration

...The Lord then purifies him from the lusts in the internal man and from the evils themselves in the external. (Though this is said about regeneration in general, it seems it would be especially true of celestial angels.) DP 102:6

Innocence

...More than others they love being led by the Lord like children by their fathers. HH 280

... People who feel it (which happens when a celestial angel draws near), seem to themselves...to be moved by such delight, virtually transported, that all the world's delight is nothing in comparison. HH 282

The Lord's Presence is Closer

The Lord's Divine appears to those who are celestial as being celestial, and to those who are spiritual as being spiritual. AC 3235:2

Towards My faces unceasingly means the Lord's presence thereby with peace and heavenly joy flowing from His mercy. ...It may be recognized that when the word *faces* refers to Jehovah or the Lord, it means those things which are the attributes of Divine Love or of mercy, thus all celestial good. AC 9546

When truth going forth directly from the Lord's Divine is joined to truth that goes forth in an indirect way...then perception is imparted. The two kinds of truth are joined together especially among the angels who are in the third or inmost heaven, those who are called celestial.

They have a keen perception of both, and from that a clear feeling of the Lord's presence. AC 7058:2

In the genuine sense the term *spiritual* is used to mean the light itself of truth which comes from the Lord, just as the term *Celestial* is used to mean the whole flame of good which comes from the Lord. AC 3374

The Divine Celestial with the third or inmost heaven is love to the Lord; the celestial-spiritual in that heaven being charity. The latter, namely charity, is the chief thing in the second or interior heaven where spiritual angels are. AC 3969:10

Those who are governed by true love to the Lord, so much so that they have a

perception of that love, are in the higher degree of good and truth. They are in the inmost or third heaven, thus closer to the Lord, and are called celestial angels.

AC 3691:4

...The lowest heaven, natural spiritual, is in harmony with the total order of things. Above it are angels who focus on love of neighbor but approach spiritual matters rationally. The highest kind of angel has love of the Lord as the main focus of its life. These angels not only know, but also feel what is true and act on it without debate or speculation. These three angelic levels are like steps in the love of God who is love itself. Huston Smith *Intimations of Mortality: Three Case Studies* in the Harvard Divinity Bulletin (in the section about Swedenborg)



Very often I burst into tears, not out of sorrow but of inmost joy at Our Lord's deigning to be so gracious to so unworthy a sinner; for the sum of all I found to be this, that the one thing needful is to cast oneself in all humility on our Lord's grace, to recognize one's own unworthiness, and to thank God...for His grace.

Life & Mission of Emmanuel Swedenborg
by Benj Worcester publ 1883 p. 183

Thoughts About Ordaining Women

by H. Roslyn Taylor

Along with the many people both inside and outside of our denomination who have been debating the issues around ordaining women, I've been grappling with them for several years now in my personal path in ministry. In this article, I'm bringing a summary of some of my recent thinking from a Swedenborgian perspective. I willingly admit that my approach to this subject has largely been shaped in response to the arguments I've heard from General Church clergy in defense of the opinion that women should not be ordained.

BIBLICAL PRECEDENT

Early in *Genesis*, the Lord let us know that both men and women are created in the image and likeness of God. I consider this to be a *face and hands* scripture: although there is a deeper correspondential meaning, there is an obvious literal truth here for us to apply wherever it is relevant. Men and women equally image God, each with our own limitations. As priests who represent God for those who need to see another human being in this role, women and men can equally imperfectly image God.

In later books of the Word, there is a distinction between priest and prophet. Priests primarily were involved in the ritual aspect of religion, and prophets spoke for the Lord. Sometimes one person was in both roles, such as Aaron. The Lord used both women and men as prophets, to bring the word of the Lord to the people, and to be leaders and judges for them. Again, I see both deeper internal meanings, and an obvious statement that the Lord does not consider it inappropriate or damaging to

use women in pastoral and prophetic roles. The priests of the children of Israel were exclusively male, handed down from father to son as were other male occupations. This fact could be an obvious statement about the Lord's preference for men leading ritual worship, except for the earlier teaching about men and women both imaging God. It could be a cultural phenomenon within a patriarchal social system, which could nevertheless tolerate women being chosen by the Lord to be prophets. I have not yet found a satisfactory way to reconcile these pieces of the biblical precedents for ordaining women.

REVELATION

In this dialogue, a shared assumption is that we are turning to the teachings in the Word and the Writings to inform our thinking. In so doing, we have seen a variety of ways to approach these teachings and use them in our decision-making processes. One way is to take every statement literally, without contemplating possible deeper meanings, or cultural or contextual adaptations in what has been written. Another way, as suggested in *SS 75-77* and *AC 8920:2*, is to consider any written revelation to be a statement of divine truth encoded in some way, and adapted to the understanding of the people for whom it is written.

As the human family grows and develops along the lines described in the Word, we change the way we understand and experience both God, and goodness and truth that come from God. We also mature in the way we apply that understanding to human relationships, and to social structures and functions. Applications of the truths in the Word and the Writings that made sense to former generations may not be valid for

us today, since we have been guided by the Lord to a different place.

A literal understanding of the Word, or of the Writings, without taking into account cultural and contextual adaptations of truth and the ongoing development of the human family, is a viewpoint on revelation that has made sense in the past, and continues to do so for some people today. Reading teachings in the Word and the Writings from this stance can lead to the concept that only men should be priests and pastors. A willingness to see literal statements in the Word and Writings as adaptations of greater truth to the limited understanding and experiences of the human family at a particular point in time, can lead to the conclusion that it is now appropriate for both women and men to serve as priests and pastors.

BALANCE

A consistent principle that is present in the Word and developed in the Writings is the balance of good and truth in all human beings, divine and created, and in their functioning. The priesthood is a human function, one of the purposes of which is to represent the Lord to people (AC 136:2, TCR 748:4). All manifestations or representations of God in creation, such as the Great Person of heaven, human beings, animals and plants, incorporate male and female elements in a correspondential expression of the united elements of love and wisdom in the Lord God Jesus Christ. Sometimes this balance is present within one created form, as in the Great Person, and many plants, and some times the male and female elements are separated, as in human beings and most animals. The balance of love and wisdom in the Lord and in creation is represented better by a balance in gender in the priesthood, than

by a single gender priesthood. Each priest can also bring to their work a balance of love and wisdom by the balance of will and understanding within their own mind and life.

Another function of the priesthood, according to statements in AC 9809, NJHD 315, TCR 422, Life 39 and Charity 135, is to teach the truth and lead from there to a life that exemplifies goodness. There is an intrinsic balance in this priesthood function, in terms of process (truth teaching) and product (goodness in life). Women generally process life, or their reception of good and truth from the Lord, from a perspective of goodness, and men from a perspective of truth. This application of the balance paradigm is found within teachings about marriage, in CL 33, 66, 91, 165, 168, 174, 187, AC 8994 and HH 369. When men and women are working together in the priesthood, their complementary ways of processing life create yet another kind of balance: a synergy within the complementary pieces in this function of the priesthood.

As a social human organization, apart from its usefulness in representing the Lord to people and leading through truth to goodness, the priesthood reflects the principle of good and truth balance better when it consists of both men and women, rather than only men or only women. Some social organizations legitimately function better when they consist of people of only one gender, such as an organization to support women who are breast-feeding their infants, or men with prostate cancer. Human institutions that serve people of both genders usually function better if their membership reflects the balance in those they serve.

"THE WAY MEN DO"

Swedenborg was familiar with a world where men held mercantile, professional, governmental and ecclesiastical positions,

and women occupied positions that impacted domestic life, in keeping with the predominant social theory of separate domains for men and women. He had little or no experience, in either the natural world or the spiritual realm, of people who had lived before or during the eighteenth century, with how women and men might function in what he knew to be the other gender's roles. Although he was clairvoyant about some specific things that were happening at the time, he did not seem to have been granted a detailed vision of how the revelation would impact social functioning in the future, nor of how scientific thinking would progress.

In the development of the human family in the contemporary Western world since Swedenborg's time, women and men tend to share responsibilities and interests both inside and outside of the home, in a way that reflects the balance principle differently than in previous times. Men now perform what Swedenborg referred to as "women's uses", but differently from women because of their inherently different spiritual, relational, emotional, cognitive, and physical make-up. Women likewise participate in "men's uses" differently from men because of their unique composition. It is always true that men cannot enter into the functions formerly socially defined as "women's" the way women do, and women cannot enter into "men's" functions the way men do; it would drive anyone crazy to attempt to function in a way that is not authentic.

Current experience in our Western world demonstrates that men and women function well and are fruitful, without higher rates of mental illness, when they operate in settings previously denied to them. These settings are actually being transformed. I see this trend in changes starting in the latter half of the

twentieth century in justice in law, wholeness in medicine, male role models for elementary school students, technological and advanced practice responsibilities in nursing, concern for the environment in industry, stronger parenting skills and involvement for fathers resulting in closer relationships with their children. The same is true in ministry, including priesthood and pastoral ministry. Female priests and pastors do not have the same focus and *modus operandi* as male priests, but use their God-given, God-imaged gifts and style to use truth to lead to good. Female pastors use their uniquely feminine ability to perceive from love, including their gift of plumbing the depths of love within the truths they have learned. They do this both intellectually and experientially (CL 168) to help people appreciate how those truths will allow them to experience God's goodness in their lives. Male pastors use their ability to perceive from understanding, including the gift of intellectual sight not grounded by their own experience, to share their understanding of truth and so help people to experience more goodness in their lives, doing so in a uniquely masculine way. If female pastors are expected to function the way men do, which is the only way people have experienced pastors until the last few decades, they cannot be as effective in their ministry, and certainly would not be a good fit in pastoral ministry. When both female and male priests contribute to the work of the priesthood, the priesthood itself is transformed into a more balanced endeavor, and men and women can find ways to function authentically within it.

In non-pastoral ministry, the situation is similar. Male and female ministers are successful in their ministry in whatever setting they are operating, whether teaching, counseling, music, church

administration or youth work, when they use their unique human gifts. The gifts they bring to their ministry include those that are associated with their gender, and which then provide balance in their ministry setting.

CULTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

My personal experience has been that, at a time in my life when I unquestioningly took on the cultural expectations about women for myself, I accepted the notion that it was inappropriate to ordain women. My cultural expectations were reinforced by the way theological teachings were

explained to me, as well as to many other Christian women whose traditions included the teachings of Paul. As I have let go of many of those cultural expectations, I see how they influenced my thinking before, and recognize them operating at times in the discussion of this issue. My thinking has been transformed slowly as I allow a new, more just paradigm to inform my thinking and actions: a paradigm that I think that has been influenced in its generation by the new revelation given for a new way of receiving the Lord on earth—a new “church” in Swedenborgian terms.

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Excerpts from *The Church of Christ: Not an Ecclesiasticism*

by Henry James, Sr.

Such of necessity is the character of the church of Christ. It is a spiritual economy, and is therefore identical with all that is humble and tender and easy to be entreated in the soul of man. Heaven is not more distant from earth than is sectarianism, or the desire to separate oneself from others, distant from the mind of the true churchman. Instead of saying to Calvinist or Catholic, to Methodist or Episcopalian, “Stand aside, we possess a holier priesthood than you, and put forth a more acceptable baptism and eucharist than you,” the true churchman taking counsel of the Divine love in his heart, says, “Draw near, my brother, and let us worship together. There is but one priesthood known on high, the priesthood of goodness, and one baptism and communion, that which unites instead of dividing the household of faith. The two outward ordinances which we have received from the Lord’s hand are uniting, not dividing ordinances; they are so

divinely large as to accommodate all heavenly truth, and hence to unite in their equal embrace every true worshipper of God, in every clime, and of every name under heaven.

He consequently who claims that they are adapted to symbolize only the truth he professes, or that they lend themselves more willingly to his worship than to that of other and less instructed men, virtually claims to possess all truth, and in so doing proves that he is himself an alien from the entire spirit of truth. No, my friend, let us worship together, calling upon one and the same blessed Lord and Redeemer. You possibly do not know many of the spiritual things contained within the obscurity of the literal scriptures; but all *saving knowledge is amply contained in the letter of sacred scripture, and is to be drawn exclusively from it;* and you doubtless are as sincerely zealous of the honor of the letter as I can claim to be.

But even if it were otherwise, even if the common doctrine of the church were not deducible from the letter of scripture, but only from what is to be known, that the difference between my knowledge and your ignorance in this respect sinks into absolute naught. And yet, on the other hand, I know so well the magnanimous and Divine spirit of all that truth has contained invisibly to natural sight within the literal page — I know so well the boundless love and charity with which it is all aglow, that I could never think of making any amount of superior information I possessed a ground of glorying over others, or a warrant for expecting a greater complacency on God's part of my worship than yours. On the contrary, the spirit of all truth is goodness, the substance of all faith is charity, and hence the more I feel the spirit of truth, the less I value all merely external and intellectual differences among men, and the more I value all cordial and vital agreement."

Now no one can doubt that this is the attitude of the true churchman. Everyone in whom the church truly exists is a regenerate man, is a form of charity, and nothing can be more intolerable to such a man than the attempt to separate him from others, or give him an ecclesiastical elevation above others. He cannot be persuaded by any amount of sophistry, or any force of clerical domination, long to falsify his fundamental instincts in this particular. He will go on to suffocate and suffer, until at length he throws off the incumbent mass of ecclesiastical pride and dotage, and emerges forever into the lustrous air and warm sunshine of God's boundless love. The true Christian allows others to separate from him as much as they please, as much as their unfortunate narrowness makes it inevitable to them; but

he feels it necessary to separate himself from no one. His mission is one of love, and therefore of fusion and unity, instead of separation or disunity. Hence although he claims the right to worship on Sundays with whomsoever he pleases, and to employ for that purpose any improved form of worship, he yet takes care to deny all ecclesiastical separation on that account from those around him, professing his steadfast allegiance to the same Lord whom they equally profess to obey. He does not attempt to construe his arrangements for an improved social worship into a fact of public significance, nor does he claim for what is purely conventional and transitory that public importance which is due only to what is spiritual and eternal. Hence he remains in ecclesiastical unity with the people around him, being content to enjoy unimpaired his spiritual freedom, and the freedom of external worship with whomsoever and wheresoever he pleases.

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You may very properly say to the world, if you please, that you are about establishing, or have already established, external Christian worship in such a place on an improved basis, or with a spirit modified by new church light. But to say that any amount of such worship gives you the slightest claim to the world's recognition as the *New Jerusalem*, as the grand end and achievement of all Divine promise and prophecy — gives you the slightest right to arrogate to yourselves one particle of the consideration which belongs to that Divine and immaculate economy — is to say what only a complete ignorance of the spirit of that economy prompts. The new church in man is a regenerate life.

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How New Age Disciplines Can Be Used For Spiritual Work

Ruth Cranch Wyland

For those of us who find much value in many New Age disciplines, there are wonderful ways to use them to forward our spiritual work. Rev. E. E. Sandstrom's recent series in *New Church Life* has attempted to show that is not the case. Because Mr. Sandstrom finds much to criticize in these disciplines, it is not surprising that he finds them not useful for his own spiritual work. When he makes the blanket statement that "... New Age activities...just make you feel better apart from regeneration," that is Mr. Sandstrom's opinion.

In his conclusion that work with disciplines other than the Writings can only work on natural rather than spiritual temptations, Mr. Sandstrom is making a leap into a conclusion. If we decide to accept Mr. Sandstrom's interpretation of what the numbers he cites mean, we might follow his lead, but his text of excited exclamation points are not conclusions I would reach from what he has presented.

Over the years I have done careful reading in esoteric subjects. At times I found myself puzzled that I could read two articles written from opposite points of view and could find reasons to defend both positions. Then a mentor pointed out to me the simple ploy of discovering a crucial conclusion and then backtracking to discover what background information it was based on. That enabled me to do a better job of analysis. I found telling phrases which would trigger me to search what went before them. Among these were, "It is clear", "It follows", "thus", and the crucial

remark "and therefore". Within Mr. Sandstrom's presentation (in three segments) there were many of these phrases. Each time I found a phrase, I could track back to a supposition or conclusion which was not true for me.

Mr. Sandstrom states, "Our evils can be seen only in private." (NCL July p. 286) It is not my aim to refute each individual assumption he puts forth, but this one I found to be erroneous over many years of my life. When I attempted to find and shun the evils in my life privately, I failed miserably. It was only when I began attending spiritual growth groups which provided tasks for me to work on and allowed me to share and hear how others worked on their evils, that I began to see how I could work on my own evils. Sharing with warm, loving friends in a group is not close to the 'public confession' Mr. Sandstrom decries in his article.

The references Mr. Sandstrom makes to Alcoholics Anonymous where he states that AA is "more like a physical healing" shows me that he does not understand the addictive process. Addictions show themselves in physical manifestations that are most firmly rooted in spiritual problems. By working the steps, addicts certainly find spiritual healing.

My firm belief is that when we work on our spiritual progress, it is assuredly a most private process, but I believe also that it can be both lightened and deepened by sharing with others who care.

*For to believe what another says is servile, but to believe what one himself thinks
from the Word is freedom. AE 195:14*

Don't Stop Til You Are An Angel

by Helen Kennedy

A while ago I had a very good day. In the afternoon it worked out so I could attend a College Colloquium. I went with a good friend, Lisa, and while there met up with another good friend, Dorrie. During the talk I sat between them and was feeling happy. When the speaker was finished but before the questions, Lisa said she had to go because she had to make supper. Right after, she was going to singing practice, visit her father-in-law in the hospital, then give a Latin lesson to someone. Right away I started searching in my mind for more social things to do, but didn't have any. I had no one else to see the entire evening. Immediately I started feeling lonely, though I was in the midst of people and still sitting next to Dorrie, who hadn't deserted me.

All the while talking to Dorrie, my inner mind was racing through lists of names and seemingly fun things to do so I would have an evening full of social things. But I couldn't settle on anything to do or anyone to see. Meanwhile, the emotional part of my mind started berating me, telling me my life was dull and uninteresting, even that I was worthless because I didn't have anyone else to spend the evening with. And the only things I could think of doing (writing) was of no value because nobody was ever going to be interested anyway (I hope not).

As time went on the voice berating me became louder and harsher. Any thought of writing, or anything else I could come up with was becoming even more uninteresting and worthless because it was not a social thing to do with a friend. For two hours I tried fighting this off, feeling more and more lonely and that my life was useless. I tried to think but couldn't get any thoughts that would let me feel better. Slowly, from deep within, I got a warm feeling and then this word popped forward — Addiction! Could this be an addiction?

"Yes!" I started to think. "It has all the hallmarks of one for me including a strong persuasive feeling with no thoughts allowed to come through. I already had what it wanted — a social time, but it wanted more and more and more; tomorrow it wanted more, too. And even though I had what it already wanted, I didn't feel good. I was dissatisfied with the little I already had and wanted more and more and more.

This was hell.

The recognition of this pushed the bad feelings aside and I started to feel warm and good and have my own thoughts back again. And my life became interesting to me again. A few days later I was reading in the Spiritual Diary about angelic spirits and friendship, and if what it says is true, then we can't stop until we actually are citizens of heaven. Following this are some of the passages I was reading, and they are re-translated by guess who? Lisa!

When they moved in over my head, I read them something of what is written in Genesis. As soon as I did, all pleasure and therefore all energy was sucked out of me, so that what I was left with had hardly any life in it but instead a grim kind of inertia. As a result, less-than-virtuous spirits — and evil spirits too — seized the chance to distort much of what was there. So I ended up not only not enjoying it but even seeing it as ugly. So the words irked me as having absolutely no importance and making no sense, so that I almost developed a disgust for them.

...But as soon as they sense any hint of pleasure, they pounce on it and enjoy it among themselves. They started apologizing — they were virtuous — but in talking with them I learned that although in their social clubs they were sincere enough with each other, they did not love others more than themselves, as angels do.

...The pleasures in us that are innocent, you see, form the outer boundary of the angels' pleasures.

So when angelic spirits focus on themselves and care more for themselves than for others, they siphon off our pleasures for themselves. I talked with them about this, and they admitted it...

Continuing my conversation with them, I said that they were then picking up the full meaning of the passages I read, while I was understanding hardly anything. So their perception of the inner meaning of what was written grew as mine shrank...

But I was allowed to tell them that it would be best if people also had the light. Then they could join forces, and everything would be complete and orderly...

But things are different with angelic spirits who love their neighbor more than themselves, because it is only self-love — which they don't know they have — that has this impact and creates this effect [of making them steal our pleasure for themselves].

SD 4243-9

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Do It With Class

by Wendy Hoo

One spiritual principle that works is to practice behaviors you want from others. If you want others to treat you with respect, show respect to someone you don't agree with. If you want appreciation, show it to someone you have been ignoring. If you want equal opportunities, find someone you are discriminating against and include them.

Women are not the only ones receiving less than equal treatment from church organizations. There are many voices and faces that we rarely are aware of, because they have been so systematically excluded geographically, culturally, and economically. Do we wonder why so few people show up for Tuesday morning discussion groups, or do we realize we are excluding nine to five workers in our plans? Are we disappointed that only upper class people attend our seminars, or do we reconsider our fee policies that may be keeping working class people out? Do we shrug our shoulders and say, "I guess they're not interested in our doctrines", when few blacks attend worship, or do we

stop to consider what obstacles we are putting in the way of their participation? Is there a reason that one of the most prevalent issues of our modern society, gay rights, somehow doesn't come up much in our gatherings?

For those of you who protest and say, "Don't we have enough to worry about without dragging in everyone else's problems?" I offer the question of the negative vs. the positive approach. Which would you respond to first, someone who criticizes and attacks your lifestyle, pointing out all the things you could do to make her life easier, or someone who demonstrates that higher living practices are effective, and make the world work better? I usually go for the role models, the heroes and heroines who inspire me by showing the way.

By focusing on the power we have over others, we automatically feel more powerful. From there we can become bullies or mentors, our choice. We can experience inclusion by including, identify the roadblocks we are participating in, and through this, learn to sympathize with our own oppressors. As a good teacher learns to be a better one by being a student in some area of her life, so too, an outsider learns lessons by focusing on what it means to be

an insider.

As marketing people making millions know, there is no such thing as a neutral message. Everything we do has a color, a shape, a taste and sound that either attracts or repels participation. Where we locate our activities, whether it be a major decision like where to build a building, or where to hold a discussion group, gives a message to those around. You like quiet little out of the way country settings? Is there public transportation to this place and are you placing ads in the inner-city newspapers about it? If not, you have consciously or unconsciously excluded most of the population. You write a book or pamphlet. Have you considered publishing it in Spanish? How often do you put a deaf translator into your budget for community events? What about wheelchair accessibility?

Yes, it's a big mountain to climb. You can feel overwhelmed with all the people you could consider. What matters is the direction we are pointed. Do we have it in our hearts that we want as many people as possible to feel part of our worlds, or at least give them a chance to find out what the worlds are, and choose them if it's right for them?

...I realized I, too, am a neighbor. I force my habits and problems on other human beings.

Christi Lenzi Newseek 9/2/02 p. 16

Voice encourages letters, articles, poems, editorials, etc. Without various, and at times differing, points of view, life becomes monotone and colorless.

All this mental and physical work is part of what our oppressors are also worried about. What will happen to their dearly held beliefs and places if different ideas are allowed to enter in? Will customs be watered down, trampled on, converted into unrecognizable apparitions? Isn't it easier to just let everyone have their own groups, and leave the established ones alone? Wouldn't it be more comfortable if women, blacks, gays, the indigent, and immigrants had their own schools, churches and countries?

Realizing we actually don't control our institutions is part of the transformation process. Tornadoes destroy buildings, stock markets crash, old leaders die, criminals infiltrate. God controls this and every other part of the evolution of our civilization. What we have to offer to the mix is the ability to practice true Christianity as Jesus did on earth. Acknowledging our powerlessness, and offering ourselves as tools to the establishment of the true Church on earth by practicing the golden rule, is the surest, (as well as most narrow) path to peaceful coexistence.

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...They who want to exercise command over others despise others in comparison with themselves. AC 8678

Sacred Sexuality: Prelude

by Linda Simonetti Odhner

I find that sacred sexuality is too big a topic to cover in a single, short article, especially since general statements and principles are not enough. People, both married and single, are looking for specific ways to offer their sexuality in service to God, to incorporate it into their spiritual practice, to use it as a tool for spiritual growth. The Christian tradition that glorifies celibacy and labels sex as sinful, or at best a concession to weakness of the flesh, makes it harder for men and women to own their sacred sexuality. But the book *Conjugal Love, or Married Love*, counters that false message by restoring true marriage, and the sexual union in marriage, to their proper place in the scheme of creation. To flesh out the teachings there, it might work well to combine the Western emphasis on monogamy with Eastern concepts about sex as spiritual discipline, to achieve a balance and completeness not present in either system of thought by itself.

In her book *Promiscuities: The Secret Struggle for Womanhood* (1997), Naomi Wolf investigates some of the ancient Eastern writings on sexuality in a chapter titled *Cheap or Precious?* She suggests that the attitude expressed in these documents can serve as a much-needed antidote to the way female sexuality and desire are denigrated in our culture. I'd like to offer some quotes from this wonderful chapter, and a few thoughts in response to them.

One way the ancient Chinese conveyed sound sexual techniques was through erotic scrolls, novels, and pictures. These were studied by young women as part of their

education in finding the erotic ambience that would best release their own beneficial yin. This use of what we in the modern West might call pornography—imagery that in our world has become a debased and degrading male-centered genre—often can be seen in the context of ancient Chinese texts as having been helpful to young women on their own terms. From this material, the inexperienced bride could learn various erotic patterns and scenarios that best expressed her own personal longings, but without taking the social and physical risks entailed by promiscuity (p. 181).

(And, one might add, the spiritual risks!)

In this literature, the awakening of girls to erotic fulfillment is not a trashy and titillating cliché of material aimed at objectifying women for the consumption of thoughtless men, but a poignant tale of female coming of age that, if negotiated successfully, brings well-being to all. In the Han Dynasty of ancient China...female desire was not treated with fear, nor with contempt and ridicule. It was regarded as a powerful elemental force, a force that, properly directed, would bestow health and well-being on men as well as women. Female desire was studied with the care that we now focus on the ecosystems that keep us alive and well (Ibid).

(Wolf goes on to explain that an important goal of sexual union was a harmonious balancing of the yin and yang forces.)

If we consider the slang terms that [now] describe female sexual anatomy, the veil of ugliness through which our culture sees women's sexuality is all too obvious. Many have noted that the words tend to connote, at their worst, wounds; at best, receptacles. Not one slang sexual term — or formal term, for

that matter — about women that we girls

heard encoded the idea of value or preciousness.

Consequently, when I read, as an adult, the ancient Chinese erotic texts in translation, I felt oddly embarrassed. The terms the Taoists used to describe women's genitals were metaphors of beauty, sweetness, artistry, rareness, and fragrance. In ancient China, the poetic synonyms for the woman's sexual parts included "the Open Peony Blossom," "the Golden Lotus," "the Receptive Vase," "the Cinnabar (or Vermilion) Gate," and "the Golden Cleft."... To my ears, so accustomed to the dirtying of women's sexuality, the Han Dynasty affection for women's genitals seemed, at first reading, hilarious, but also enchanting — like a life-enhancing comedy.... Just imagine how differently a young girl today might feel about her developing womanhood if every routine slang description she heard of female genitalia used metaphors of preciousness and beauty... . (182-183)

These passages make it clear to me that the way we think, talk, and write about sex and sexuality can transform our experience of these things before we ever get into bed with a partner. How we hold sex in our minds is paramount in determining what we get out of our sexual relations. The attitudes we reveal in our discussion of sexual issues have far-reaching consequences; we have a tremendous opportunity to support healthy sexual development simply through what we say about it.

The question has been asked, how do we educate young people and yet preserve the

sense of mystery, exploration and discovery we want them to bring to their marriage bed? We might emphasize that the physical aspect is only a part of the experience. Their uniqueness as people and couples gives their union a unique and precious meaning. We can remind them that their sexuality is part of something bigger, a universal principle in creation. But more than this is needed.

In the New Church, particularly in educational settings, anything to do with sex has traditionally been approached with reverence and idealism; yet that attitude shows little in common with the reverence and idealism expressed in the erotic writing of the East, where sex, and especially the female response, are regarded as important and therefore worthy of study. Much of my schooling left me with the impression that sex is too private to talk about or even think about, not only because it is precious, but also because of the danger of being smutty. Not to mention slutty. If we got too much detail about how good it could be, we might be tempted to go out and try it. It was far too serious ever to be a joking matter, so serious that we had the Word read to us before we studied the anatomy of the reproductive system.

So we've been getting one kind of innuendo from the media, and another kind from the organized church, but not much straight talk. In contrast, Eastern erotic writings give us a model for talking about sex in informative detail, yet with respect for its transcendent qualities. I hope we can integrate these insights into a dialogue about sexuality that fosters the human potential for joyful and faithful intimacy. ❖

Love of the married partner does not result from the sexual embrace, as with adulterers, but the sexual embrace from the love of the partner; so that the love of the partner does not depend on the fire of that organ, but the reverse. The love of the partner is full of delights, irrespective of sexual intercourse, and is a delightful dwelling together.
SD 6110:44

Safe Space

Ruth Cranch Wyland

Truth is a two-edged sword. It can clarify but it can also cut and wound. In our church we have individuals who hold extreme views as to where the truth lies. Within the General Church we need to have at least one publication where controversial issues can be aired (with an assurance of being heard with some degree of safety.) We need forums where issues can also be discussed openly. (A prime example of this would be an open discussion led by priests concerning how the counsel of laymen and laywomen could be included in the process of choosing a bishop.) If a safe space were provided for open forums and truth-telling publications, this would allow for compromises to be reached by groups with opposite views. At present it seems that the groups vehemently oppose each other rather than seeking compromise on issues of common interest.

Do you remember Rodney King's plea after so many extreme responses to his beating by the policemen? He said, "Why can't we all get along?" This seems an uncommonly compassionate view for a victim to take. This is what we need to do in so many situations where diversity (e.g., liberal vs. conservative) brings unwelcome polarity. We need to find the common thread of our humanity and picture ourselves at the opposite extreme of the continuum than where we find ourselves, and then perhaps we could move to a compromise acceptable to all.

Translating these racial events into similar disagreements concerning women's rights could move us to a consideration of possible compromises on how we feel women should act in given situations. Taking a narrow look at the women in the church, we can remember two articles by (Vera) Dyck and (Eva) Lexie in *New Church Life*. I wrote pointing out that each party wanted to convince the other party to "become like him or her". What would seem to be more healing would be to look for an acceptance of the basic differences between "liberals" and "conservatives" and then move on to form a network for women with both extremes within it.

The emotional profile of the women within the church runs the gamut from extreme status quo conservatism to portrayals of where we need radical changes. Within the dynamics of the power structure, women are often attempting dynamic action individually because of this disparate profile. We women need to band together to present a united front as to our vision for the future of the church. If we continue to criticize each other instead of providing the vision of what must be changed, we weaken our power to produce these changes. We need a newsletter or carefully repeated forum where our different opinions can be voiced and discussed and so that our united women's voice can be found. Is a united voice for these disparate views of women an impossibility? I hope not.

...The internal has thousands of plans, from which the external selects only those which can be of use.
TCR 154:5

Entrance

By Irene Odhner

Me, myself and I
Look out from behind the curtain.
We look out and sigh,
Nothing there is ever certain.
Here there's who am I,
But out there it's something different.
I can't tell them why
All my acting's inconsistent.

Convention — General Church

(The following letter was originally posted on the Caritas discussion list)

Dear Friends,

I just spent five days at Convention's annual convention, where I got to renew ties with old friends and create new ties with people who so far had been simply names to me. My main purpose in going was to gain a better appreciation for both Convention and the General Church, and I can say my goal was met and then some. It was wonderful. I want to mention three specific items from my time there, although they may not be news to some of you.

One is that their theological school — the Swedenborgian House of Studies at the Pacific School of Religion — looks on paper and video like a dynamite kind of place. PSR is a coalition of various seminaries, of which SHS is one. Two particular details pleased me a lot. One is the strong commitment on the part of both SHS and PSR to SHS's maintaining its Swedenborgian identity. The other was the high level of interest shown by large numbers of PSR faculty in Swedenborg — unprecedented, according to the president of PSR, who attended and spoke at Convention one evening. I have the catalog for SHS, if you're interested in

looking at it. Kim Hinrichs (not Heinrichs!), program director for SHS, expressed an interest in maintaining the ties she and I started to form there.

In fact, almost everyone I spoke to there sounded as interested as I was in lowering the barriers between Convention and the GC, which leads me to my second point. The president of SHS, Jane Siebert, told me she had been discussing with the president of Convention (Ron Brugler) the possibility of holding a women's convention of some kind involving both Convention and the GC. This sounds like an excellent opportunity to me, if it does come to pass.

The third thing was that I picked up a brochure put out by Wilma Wake (I think she told me she was a member of the Caritas listserve, though I don't remember clearly) listing various programs that she will make available as Convention's new Spiritual Ministries Consultant. This was another point at which I thought we might make contact, and perhaps a starting point for women in the GC who would like to take up a ministry of some kind without ordination.

Since I'm not a member of the listserve, I'm not sure where the body of Caritas is in its spiritual journey at the moment, so this may not hook in your interests. But if anyone is interested, I'd be happy to try to answer questions or obtain addresses or make introductions. There's a strong energy there, and I'd love to see it capitalized on.

Lisa Hyatt Cooper

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going. I do not see the road ahead of me. I cannot know for certain where it will end. Nor do I really know myself, and the fact that I think that I am following Your Will does not mean that I am actually doing so. But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You. And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing...

Thomas Merton

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Notes from the Meeting to Start Planning the Gathering

Lynne Smith

On September 5th, the following attended a meeting at Jody Hyatt's house in Bryn Athyn to start planning for the gathering of women from all branches of the New Church. Lisa Hyatt Cooper was the facilitator. In attendance were:

Jody Hyatt	Lisa Hyatt Cooper
Donnette Alfelt	Star Silverman
Dawn Potts	Julie Rankin
Siri Hurst	Roslyn Taylor
Janie Lemole	Lynne H. Smith
Sylvia Cooper	Sonia Werner
Helen Kennedy	Rachel Longstaff
Gail Steiner	Linda Simonetti
	Odhner

As Lisa opened the meeting, she explained that the idea for such a conference came from a conversation she had with Jane Siebert at Fryeburg. The two things needing to be accomplished were:

- 1) to discuss what we see as the purpose of such a gathering
- 2) to make a list of volunteers willing to work with Jane Siebert in planning the gathering. Ideally, there would be two volunteers from each of the branches of

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the New Church: Convention, the Lord's New Church, and the General Church. In addition, women from the Conference in Britain and in Australia would be included, if any volunteered, and they could participate by e-mail and/or conference call.

Goals discussed during the meeting were:

- 1) To rise above what has gone before.
- 2) To establish a connection between the branches of the Swedenborgian Churches, starting at grassroots levels.
- 3) To reach out to all Swedenborgian women throughout the world.
- 4) To make connections and relate as individuals.

Possible topics for the gathering were discussed. These included:

- 1) Marriage
- 2) Conjugal Love — the book
- 3) Leadership
- 4) Spiritual Practice
- 5) Sexuality

Possible locations talked about were:

- 1) Temenos
- 2) Kitchener

The participants of the meeting emphasized they did not want the gathering to be like the assemblies that the men put

on. Rather, it needs to be according to the way women like to do things, i.e., fashioned on the best elements of relationship building. This would create a very different experience. And one model discussed was that of a family reunion (for it really is the reunion of a family).

Also agreed upon was that we need to pay attention to the main trunk of the New Church and stop focusing on all the branches and leaves. By paying too much attention to them, we forget about the very trunk that sustains us all.

It was left undecided whether the gathering should be called a Conference, Gathering, Retreat, or Reunion.

The following women have agreed to be on the Planning Committee:

- Convention: Jane Siebert, Wilma Wake, and Susannah Currie
- the Lord's New Church: Dawn Potts
- General Church: Janie Lemole, Jody Hyatt, and Liz Heinrichs from Kitchener.

(As of the first conference phone call, the gathering is being planned for Oct. 2003 or April 2004.)

POEMS

by Irene Odhner

Dream

Angel, Dreamer, be beside me
Hide me from the deeper dark
The shadowed hole
Where lives the monster, flaring nostrils
Pointed chin and wrinkled skin
Breathing sharp and acrid smoke
Let me not fall in its clutches
Let me save and keep my hope.

Take Me

Take me to a place where I can see
infinity from
Take me to a time when I will not mind
what I've left behind
Take me out of my mind.

I Grow

As I grow more normal,
I do not become less strange.
As I grow more talkative,
I do not become less silent.
As I grow more happy,
I do not become less sad.
As I grow more active,
I do not become less still.
As I grow more confident,
I do not become less self-effacing.
As I grow more aware,
I do not become less absorbed.
As I grow more wise,
I do not become less confused.

This World Cannot Hold My Heart

(This is a song Irene wrote.)

What's up with the sky today
It's so gray
The clouds are too cool for me
They won't play
There's nothing in this world for me
There's nothing in this world I can see
That's as happy as I am right now inside of me

This world cannot hold my heart.

My heart, it is floating,
Floating
As I'm sitting thinking
On the swing
There's nothing in this world I can do
To tell how I feel to you
'Cause oh, this world, this world, it is so blue.

This world cannot hold my heart

I look deep inside of you
And I see
Much more than I ever knew
Could be
There's nothing in this world I can feel
That seems to me half as real
As what I know is inside you, but I can't feel.

This world cannot hold my heart.

This world is a barrier
I can't touch
So how did you learn to feel
So much
There's nothing in this world I can make
That time will not come and take
'Cause everything here has its time,
Its time to break.

Loving Arms Mission

by Kent Rogers

Before I begin, I would like to thank Helen for inviting me to write about the Loving Arms Mission in **Voice**. Loving Arms Mission was born by a powerful conviction among its members that one vital aspect of a living faith and devotion to the Lord Jesus Christ is reaching out to help those who need it the most. In the course of time we have seen that hundreds if not thousands share with us in this conviction, testified by their very generous support in time, money and words of encouragement. We thank all of you for making a vision become reality.

We have been working in Nepal for just over three years now and things have come together beautifully and even miraculously despite the intense challenges we have faced ranging from governmental red-tape, and deceitful officials and "friends," to cultural and language barriers, to illness, to the challenges of operating and managing an organization, to the most important: caring for hurting children. But the most difficult of all the challenges has been facing inner weaknesses and failures. Outside of a supportive community one is forced to face new realities of the self. Yet these too are the doors through which we can admit our weakness and put our lives in the Lord's hands in a deeper way. So out of muddy challenges of life, we are seeing some very beautiful flowers bloom.

Our ten children come from different places and have different stories with one thread in common—they needed somebody to take them in and love them as their own, and this is what we have done to the best of our ability. The kids are flourishing. When I visit other orphanages and childrens' homes, usually half a dozen kids come running up to me, a complete stranger, embrace me and start talking all at once. These kids are fed but are starving for

something so vital — love and attention. Along with a New Church education, the family-like atmosphere in which our children have come to know they belong and are loved makes our project, in my opinion, so useful and valuable.

There are still so many children on the streets that sometimes limiting our number to just ten children seems wrong. Besides homeless children, there are many other problems in Nepal. One of the most atrocious and devastating crimes against humanity and God is that thousands and thousands of girls are trafficked from Nepal into India to work as slaves in brothels. When they are too ill to work they are kicked out to fend for themselves. Returning home, most of the girls find that no one, not even family, will take them in, care for them or respect them.

With such problems all around it is tempting to forget to trust in the Lord. Yet, if we dare let our trust slide, we will lose our one strength that enables us to work to make things better. We want to do more and we can do more. The potential is endless. We could open a second home for ten more children and place them in the care of three loving staff, two of whom could be a married couple — Mom and Dad. We could create a shelter for these despised women sent back from Bombay and Delhi in which they would be taught a simple craft or trade to help support themselves and with which they could find some dignity, usefulness and community.

The success of our initial project encourages us to strive to do more. We put our trust and hope in the Lord Jesus and will do whatever we can to spread the truth of His hope and love to those around us. We thank all of you for helping.

If you wish to help with funding, please send checks to Loving Arms Mission, PO Box 213, Bryn Athyn PA, 19009.

If you wish to help in any other capacity, please contact me at lamkent@wlink.com.np

12-Step Spiritual Growth Meeting

by Jody Hyatt

Sunday evenings 7 - 8:15 PM at Kevin Roth's office - 2567 Huntingdon Pike, Huntingdon Valley, PA. Questions? Please call Jody Hyatt at 215-947-3209.

The 12-Step Spiritual Growth Meeting has been gathering regularly now for over three months. Recently we moved from my house to Kevin Roth's office, which is very comfortable. We thank him for the use of it.

Each meeting averages between 6 and 12 people. The atmosphere of our meetings is friendly and supportive.

The focus of the meeting has been working the 12 Steps. When we reached Step 4, which involves taking a fearless and searching moral inventory of our lives, we decided to take more time than we had been allotting to the other steps because most of us couldn't accomplish the work needed in two weeks. Eventually we decided to get back on task and move onward to Step 5, realizing that all these steps are important, and we'll actually never be finished with any of them.

In Swedenborg's Writings, the Lord explains what regeneration is, and how important it is in our lives, but he doesn't give us tangible, easily applicable directions there. I believe that those who formulated the 12 steps have found a practical way to let the Lord regenerate us. Since regeneration is a life-long process, so must be the 12 Steps.

We encourage anyone who is interested to come to our meetings. We welcome anyone who is committed to spiritual growth. Our mission is as follows:

This meeting is a fellowship of individuals who through their shared experience, strength, and hope are supporting each other in growing spiritually.

...Finally, we begin to see that all people, including ourselves, are to some extent emotionally ill as well as frequently wrong. It will become more and more evident as we go forward that it is pointless to become angry, or to get hurt by people who, like us, are suffering from the pains of growing up.

Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions p. 92

New Book from Fountain Publishing: **Grandmothers and Grandfathers,** written by Helen Kennedy

Karin Childs: A few years ago, we were fascinated with Helen's intriguing, self-published novel. We have worked with her to publish a new edition, and we hope it will bring enjoyment to lots of old and new readers alike!

The back cover description reads:
They came from the past... Irish grandmothers and grandfathers, bringing blessings to young William, the newest in the family line... and bringing stories to his mother, Angie.

As Angie struggles with decisions in her own twenty-first century life, ancestors from many different eras in Irish history tell of their own struggles and decisions; their own loves and losses, joys and sorrows; their own journeys, both on earth, and in the life after death.

Helen Kennedy's remarkable and unique novel will pull you into the Irish condition of years past, and into the human condition that transcends time.

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Available at the General Church Book Center, The Cathedral Book Room, at Amazon.com, or e-mail us at www.Fountainpublishing.com. The phone is 877-736-8598. We now take Visa or Mastercard. \$14.00, 375 pages, paperback.

With so much of our spiritual life depending upon the free flow of ideas, this newsletter is intended to be a forum for people to explore their affections and thoughts. Disagree with anything? Letters to the editor are encouraged. Since this is our fourth issue and we have not received any yet, yours will be the first one.

Subscriptions and Contributions

The estimated cost of the Voice is \$3.00 per issue. To get the next issue, please contact Peggy Mergen or send a check to Lynne Smith. A year's subscription costs \$6.00. When sending us money, please indicate the amount you intend for subscription, and the amount (if any) towards a contribution.

We are grateful for the support we have received in the form of articles, feedback and contributions. If you are interested in supporting this effort, we would appreciate contributions of any amount. We welcome all comments and suggestions.

Caritas Newsletter

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Terror is waking up one morning and finding out your high school class is running the country.

Modern Maturity

CARITAS NEWSLETTER

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TO:

The universe exists because it is an activity of God.

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