

Church News

THE GENERAL CHURCH OF THE NEW JERUSALEM IN CANADA

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Executive Vice President

It has been some time since an article appeared in these pages about the General Church in Canada (GCIC), and a lot of things have changed. Here is an update.

First some background. The GCIC was incorporated in December, 1971—that’s about 35 years ago—to provide the legal and financial services and the government recognition needed by the General Church in order to function outside of its three particular congregations in this country. Without this the church could not operate as a registered charity, could not receive tax-deductible contributions, could not safely hold financial or other real assets, and would have no legally recognized mechanism for making material decisions. Since we are incorporated, however, we can do all these things, all of which look to the growth and development of the spiritual church in Canada.

In fact, the GCIC currently owns investments worth roughly 10 million dollars (much of that in the form of a mortgage held for a land developer in Kitchener), and operates an annual budget of approximately \$250,000. Where did all that money come from and where does it all go?

The largest portion of it came from a private donation of some 380 acres of land in Kitchener, Ontario, prior to the incorporation of the GCIC. Originally held in trust by a legal entity in Kitchener called “Chalon Estates,” title to the land was transferred to the GCIC in 1977 on the condition that it (or the income realized from it as an investment) be used exclusively for the support of the church in Kitchener and for New Church

secondary school education in Canada. Since most of that land was sold to a developer in late 2004, the church at least *appeared* to become quite wealthy “overnight.” However we must bear in mind that the largest portion of all GCIC assets is in these restricted funds, and, without the regular contributions of ordinary members the income available from unrestricted funds would by no means cover the cost of our operations.

So What Does the GCIC DO?

It pays all or part of the salaries and benefits for four employees (two ministers, the Director of Information Swedenborg Inc. (ISI), and the editors of this newsletter), it supports office, travel, and other expenses for the pastors as well as the cost of this newsletter (*The New Church Canadian*), sponsors the annual Maple Leaf Academy summer camp for teens, and provides scholarship grants for students attending New Church schools. In addition, it subsidizes the costs of local church operations as needed: In the past the GCIC gave tremendous aid annually to the Kitchener Society, then more recently to the Calgary Project, and now to the Dawson Creek Society in British Columbia.

We should perhaps take special note of ISI, for although this organization is not run by the church, its board of directors is made up of church members, and its purposes are closely linked to those of the church. In effect, it takes the main responsibility for evangelization, promoting and publicizing the life and works of Swedenborg throughout Canada, and, because of certain restrictions on the specific promotion of religion in public facilities (such as universities), it is able to do what the GCIC alone could not do. Over the years our support of ISI has therefore grown to include a significant portion of the church budget, and in return it serves the church in significant ways (see below).

By these means and through the regular participation of the

fifteen plus members of its Board of Directors, the GCIC represents the interests of the General Church throughout this vast country. It provides for a wide variety of ministries including worship services, home visits and evangelization from Montreal to Victoria, rites and sacraments such as baptisms, weddings and memorial services, and lately, distance-learning opportunities via the internet and teleconferencing. It also sponsors and hosts occasional church assemblies and, as just mentioned, heavily supports the operation of Information Swedenborg which last year took on the full responsibility for the management of the Swedenborg Book Centre in Toronto (in addition to its other work, including a major website, newsletter, occasional lectures, book fairs, advertising, and more). The GCIC and ISI also co-operated last year in our support of the production and advertising of a new documentary film about Swedenborg and the New Church in western Canada (*Swedenborg, Mystical Cowboy*, produced and directed by Frame 30 Productions out of Edmonton, owned and operated by church member, Michael Hamm: see www.Frame30.com or <http://swedenborgmysticalcowboy.com>). This has aired several times already on Canadian national television (Vision TV) with very positive results.

In addition, I have regular and frequent personal contact (representing the GCIC) with church families and contacts all over Canada. Constant co-ordination with the Bishop's office and supervision of all society pastoral work is provided through the office of the Vice President, as is the management, in general, of several Canadian scholarship funds for students attending New Church schools.

And What Are the Active Issues Now?

As indicated above, the GCIC provides a wide range of services for members and contacts of the New Church throughout Canada. Even as I write this a special effort is being

mounted in Vancouver, where a new contact, Mr. H. M. (Jay) James has taken the initiative to gather a small group for occasional meetings looking to the establishment of regular church services there in the near future. The GCIC is supporting this effort with literature, communication, promotion, and pastoral visits. At the same time another “new” individual, Mr. George Richardson, has come forward in Edmonton seeking support for his work to promote the reading and discussion of the Writings throughout the Prairie Provinces, and we will be supporting that work through Information Swedenborg this fall.

In Dawson Creek presently consideration is being given to a major district assembly — invitations to be issued world-wide — in commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the dedication of its church building by Bishop George deCharms on August 4th, 1957. (You may want to begin planning for this event, which will be held over the weekend of August 3-5, 2007, a holiday weekend in Canada.) And in Kitchener there is a dynamic movement currently underway to realize (finally) a long held dream of establishing New Church secondary school education in Canada, a movement that the GCIC will strongly support.

With respect to this latter initiative, preliminary studies and enrollment projections for the next 10 years already have been completed, and the building additions at the Carmel New Church School that were completed four years ago provide the space needed to add high school classrooms, so the project is rapidly moving toward implementation. If all goes according to plan, Pastor Bradley Heinrichs expects the new school to open in September, 2007, making it the first such addition to the General Church system in many years. He and his congregation are to be congratulated on their hard work and dedication in bringing this dream to reality, especially now that the costs of education at the Academy have begun to soar and parents generally are more reluctant than ever to send their children away from home during the high school years.

Meanwhile the routine work of the GCIC continues, and members or inquirers from all provinces in Canada are invited—no, really encouraged!—to communicate especially with the Chairman of the Board, Mr. Gordon Jorgenson, with any of the General Church pastors in Canada, and with our newsletter editors at any time about any issues or concerns, needs or requests that they may have in regard to church work or the doctrines themselves. Just ask! All the information about that is available on every issue of the GCIC newsletter, *The New Church Canadian*, which is available on request from the editors, Denis and Sandy Kuhl at kuhls@rogers.com. We are ready and eager to help, keen to do all that we can to promote the life and culture, and especially the beautiful new teachings of the New Church in Canada.

(This report originally was published in *The New Church Canadian*, September 2006, and has been adapted by the author for the readers of *New Church Life*. It is our hope to publish similar reports of other General Church bodies throughout the world in future issues. Ed.)

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