

VIKING VISTA

December 2015

San Diego, California

Words from Incoming President Ingrid Englund

A new Board arrives with new ideas for the coming year. We plan to address the need for more inclusive programs, more fun, entertaining information and interesting events for the entire family.

We would like to bridge the generation gap with “self-stories” -- a “Swede of the month” sharing his or her story. We would also like to bring students from the Swedish School and their parents to participate in our events. Maybe we can resurrect the Swedish language classes.

A Pippi Långstrump day, an Easter egg hunt in Balboa Park and other suggestions come to mind when thinking about our future. We invite and encourage members to write articles for our *Viking Vista* newsletter -- be it about travel, delicious recipes, cultural events, history, news from Sweden, member birthdays, royalty news, Swedish-American Chamber of Commerce, Swedish Women’s Educational Association and words from kyrkoherden Staffan Eklund, the pastor of Svenska Kyrka in San Pedro.

The success of the House of Sweden has always depended upon its members, their generosity and volunteerism. By joining together we can make the cottage flourish and expand.

Literary Corner

Contributed by Ingrid Englund (below right)

Midvinternattens köld är hård
Stjärnorna gnistra och glimma.
Alla sova i enslig gård
Djupt under midnattstimma.
Månen vandrar sin tysta ban,
Snön lyser vit på fur och gran,
Snön lyser vit på taken,
Endast tomten är vaken.

Viktor Rydberg



Church Chat with Pastor Staffan Eklund

Months before House of Sweden members planned cultural activities for the week preceding the 2015 Midsummer celebration, Pastor Staffan Eklund offered to help in some way.

Based at Svenska Kyrka (Church of Sweden) in San Pedro, Pastor Eklund expressed concern that he was obligated to participate in the Los Angeles Midsummer event. He was also committed to visiting the faithful in “the valley” just north of Los Angeles during Midsummer week.

The nature of Pastor Eklund’s old-fashioned, “traveling-preacher” work life and his awareness of the House of Sweden in San Diego emerged in early 2015, when *Viking Vista* began communicating with him to learn about Scandinavian organizations in southern California.

Ultimately, Pastor Eklund agreed to visit the House of Sweden the Wednesday before Midsummer. Rather than give a lecture, sermon or formal presentation, he wanted to interact with whoever showed up and respond to any questions that emerged. Consequently, the editor of *Viking Vista* dubbed his appearance on Wednesday June 17 “Church Chat.”

(Svenska Kyrka in San Pedro is pictured on the right.)



In publicizing the House of Sweden’s Midsummer week of educational outreach, *Viking Vista* stated Pastor Eklund would talk about matters material as well as spiritual. The history of Christianity in Scandinavia and the development of the Lutheran Church in the United States were possible topics of conversation.

As people dropped by the House of Sweden, either with specific purpose or by accident, Pastor Eklund and his wife Maj-Lena Eklund (also known as “Maja”) were perfect ambassadors greeting everyone and engaging them in conversation. While Mrs. Eklund tackled the following question from some Southwestern Community College students -- “Why is Sweden a rich country?” -- Pastor Eklund described the programs of Svenska Kyrka in San Pedro to a Swede who now belongs to another Protestant denomination.

Church Chat continued

The “hands-on” and “be-in-the moment” style of the preacher and his wife livened up the educational theme of theology planned for the Wednesday before Midsummer.

The editor of *Viking Vista* was eager to know why it took the Vikings so long to convert to Christianity. This question was never asked, however, because it soon became apparent that the spiritual calling of Pastor and Mrs. Eklund was more interesting than Swedish religious history.

During the late 1970s and early 1980s while Pastor Eklund worked in a hospital, he went to church regularly and sang in the youth choir. Friends encouraged him to attend Bible school and the seminary.



“I didn’t want to be a pastor. I tried to escape,” Pastor Eklund said, noting that he was seriously considering becoming a doctor or possibly a surgeon. A life of service in medicine gradually shifted to the background as the call to serve God gained volume. “Inside it grew,” he said. “It was a call from the Lord and through people, of course.”

One of those people was the future Mrs. Eklund whom Pastor Eklund met at the youth choir while he was studying at a Bible school in Uppsala. At the time Mrs. Eklund’s father was serving as pastor of Gamma Uppsala’s historic church. **(The Eklunds are pictured to the left.)**

“When you’re part of a minister’s family, so many people have ideas about who you are and what you should do,” Mrs. Eklund recalled. “As the daughter of a pastor, I didn’t want to marry a pastor.” But as the young couple’s mutual attraction grew, what they each hoped to avoid they came to accept.

Staffan became a pastor, and Maj-Lena married him. She likes to joke that he is married to the church; and consequently, so is she.

In Sweden, he worked as youth minister in Norrköping and Umeå, associate pastor at Harnosand’s cathedral parish and chaplain of the Strängnäs diocese. Before his transfer to Svenska Kyrka (Church of Sweden) in Los Angeles in 2013, Staffan served as senior pastor of Stockholm’s Ekero parish, which includes Adelsö-Munso and Lovo.

Church Chat continued

While serving in Ekero in 2005, Eklund was asked to become a royal court pastor. He attributes this assignment to the proximity of Ekero parish to Drottningholm Castle, where King Carl XII Gustaf lives with his family. “You don’t say ‘no’ to the King. It’s an honor to be appointed royal court pastor.”

Although the Church of Sweden has 25 royal court pastors, Eklund has conducted the Christmas Day service six times. As a result, the Eklunds have eaten Christmas lunch with Sweden’s royal family five times. “I think that our king prefers continuity.”

A variety of reasons prompted Eklund to apply to be a pastor abroad, that is, outside of Sweden. For one, he wanted to continue working as a pastor and with parishioners rather than be given administrative work, a typical career step for experienced and mature pastors of his generation.

Eklund also wanted the experience of working in a different country with a different culture and in his particular case, to get to know the West Coast of the United States. “I like the United States. I think it’s nice that people say hello to you here. In Sweden people don’t say hello to one another.”

He also welcomed the opportunity to work with Maj-Lena. “In Sweden, it’s not common to work as a couple,” he noted.

Carl Englund, a former president of the House of Sweden, said he was impressed by the teamwork of Staffan and Maj-Lena when he first met them in 2014. At the time the Eklunds conducted a “celebration of life” service at the House of Sweden for members who had died. Staffan led the prayers, and Maj-Lena played the piano. “Those who attended were pleased by the simple but elegant beauty of the ceremony,” Englund said.

Echoing other members of the House of Sweden, Englund said he is most impressed by the Eklunds’ genuine desire to help and serve. “They minister to the needs of others while balancing challenging schedules and family life. They are a living example of what is good about people. Somehow they have managed to blend and present a wholesome, spiritual existence in a world divided and confused.”

News from the Scandinavian Center

The year 2017 marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Europe, but some scholars are already revisiting how this movement changed Christianity.

The Scandinavian American Cultural and Historical Foundation is organizing an in-depth discussion and study of how Martin Luther’s ideas spread from Germany to Denmark and beyond. To provide a comprehensive presentation, SACHF, also known as the Scandinavian Center, is devoting two of its annual Nordic Spirit Symposiums to this history.

Scandinavian Center News continued

Scheduled for February 12 and 13 at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, the first symposium will focus on Denmark, Norway and Iceland. The second symposium, to occur a year later, in 2017, will concentrate on Sweden and Finland. “Power, Politics and Belief in Reformation Scandinavia” is the title of the two-part Nordic Spirit Symposium.

Rev. R. Guy Erwin, of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, will introduce the topic. Erwin, a former professor of California Lutheran University, is bishop of the ELCA’s Southwest California Synod. He is expected to talk about the beginnings of Martin Luther, who dramatically nailed 95 theses to a church door in Wittenberg, Germany, in October 1517. Luther’s writings and sermons, which rejected certain practices and dogma of the Catholic Church, led to the development of Protestant churches. **(Luther is depicted above right.)**



Other Nordic Spirit Symposium speakers include religious leaders, professors, theologians and experts from England, Denmark, Norway and Iceland. Lectures will take place at California Lutheran University’s Samuelson Chapel **(pictured below left)**. Friday’s program is scheduled from 5:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Saturday’s hours span 8:15 a.m. and 5:15 p.m.

The cost depends on whether people attend all lectures both days and/or whether they choose to pay for meals and receptions. A “no frills” package of lectures only costs \$60 for both days. Early registration deadline is January 20. Details are available from Howard Rockstad, director of Nordic Spirit Symposium, who can be reached at hrockstad@gmail.com or 805-497-3717.

Although SACHF has a Web site, which is www.scandinaviancenter.org, it won’t show information about the 2016 and 2017 Nordic Spirit Symposiums until early or mid-January. Rockstad serves on SACHF’s board of directors.



California Lutheran University and SACHF collaborate on various educational events highlighting Scandinavia, with “Scanfest” as the most famous. Despite the popularity of the annual two-day medieval-style fair for the past 41 years, it will not be held in 2016. SACHF’s board of directors decided that new leaders and volunteers are needed to maintain the festival’s high quality and to strengthen future programs.

Bob Swanson's Contribution: Iran, Sweden and the Clintons

Sweden has for many years been an active trading partner with Iran. The principal participants in this trade have been Volvo, ABB and Ericsson. Volvo is the leading supplier of heavy trucks to Iran, ABB provides power transmission as well as industrial automation and controls, and Ericsson is the second-largest maker of cell-phone systems in Iran. Besides providing GPS as part of its cell-phone infrastructure, Ericsson has discussed a tracking system for the Iranian security services.

During the last decade, Sweden has been subjected to increasing pressure to apply financial and trade sanctions against Iran. Secret cables from the U.S. Embassy in Stockholm to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, published by *WikiLeaks*, describe the situation.

“Although our Swedish interlocutors continue to tell us that Europe’s overall trade with Iran is falling, the statements and information found on Swedish and English websites show that Sweden’s trade with Iran is growing. Swedish Sanctions Coordinator Per Saland told us that Sweden does not support implementing tighter financial sanctions on Iran and that more stringent financial standards could hurt Swedish exports.”

Eventually, Swedish Foreign Affairs Minister Carl Bildt, Mrs. Clinton’s equal on the diplomatic stage, delivered the message personally to top State Department officials, who described him as “skeptical” about expanded Iran sanctions. “Overall, I’m not a fan of sanctions because they are more a demonstration of our inability than our ability,” Mr. Bildt was quoted as telling State Department officials in a cable marked “secret”.

Mrs. Clinton’s State Department issued two orders identifying lists of companies newly sanctioned in 2011 and 2012 for doing business with Iran, but neither listed any Swedish entities.

Meanwhile, the Swedish Riksdag (parliament) engaged in a flurry of legislative activity which enabled the Swedish Postcode Lottery and the Nationale Postcode Loterji to allow certain foundations to register and operate in Sweden and receive money from the national lotteries for distribution to suitable charities. There were also new tax deductions for individuals and companies for donations to these foundations. One of these new Swedish foundations was the Clinton Foundation Insamlingsstiftelse (Fundraising Foundation), with a Board of Directors including Mr. Clinton’s former law partner. It has raised about \$26 million since 2011, mostly from the Swedish lotteries. Mr. Clinton has received \$750,000 from Ericsson for participating in a two-day convention in Singapore.

More details regarding the content of this page can be found in *Aftenposten* (Dec. 15, 2009) and *The Washington Times* (June 2, 2015).