



## Swedenborgians Gather in Valparaiso, Indiana, for the 195th Annual Convention

BY HERB ZIEGLER

Swedenborgians from the United States and Canada gathered in fellowship and prayer on the campus of Valparaiso University in Indiana for their 195th Annual Convention. Clergy arrived for their two-day Council of Ministers meeting on June 25; the General Council arrived June 27 for their pre-convention meeting; and delegates, families, and friends arrived June 29 for the four-day convention.

The convention included business sessions, mini-courses, the annual meeting of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, ordination, worship services, a private showing of a newly released film, and many opportunities for socializing with old friends and new.

### Opening Session

The opening session commenced on Saturday evening, June 29, with the procession of banners, a tradition of societies and ministries proudly displaying their creative banners as they marched to the front of the meeting hall.



Rev. President Jane Siebert opens the Word to begin the convention

Rev. Jane Siebert, president of the Swedenborgian Church, opened the Word (the Bible), signifying the start of the convention. She delivered a stirring address, highlighting the theme of the convention as

one that lifts up our home, the planet earth, as a sacred space that we are entrusted to cherish ([page 95](#)).

### Keynote Address

The theme continued with the inspiring keynote address, “Ecojustice and Spirit,” by noted eco-theologian



Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox speaks on faith and environmental activism

Rev. Dr. Matthew Fox, in which he outlined the ways that people of faith can and must step forward and become

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## The Annual Business Meeting

BY KAREN CONGER AND HERB ZIEGLER

The first business session was brought to order after lunch on Sunday, June 30, 2019, by President Rev. Jane Siebert. She introduced the Executive Committee and the General Council, and asked first-timers at an annual convention to stand for a special welcome. She introduced three past presidents who were in attendance, Chris

Laitner, Rev. Dick Tafel, and Rev. Randy Laakko. She thanked the local committee of the LaPorte New Church and the Illinois Association for all their hard work, prompting enthusiastic applause. She gave special recognition to Barb Halle, thanking her for all her tireless work that made the convention a success, including finding reusable insulated cups for everyone, to reduce use of plastic water bottles.

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**The Editor's Desk**



Rev. Randy Laakko and the editor taking a break

**Coming Together**

These are perilous times. Anger, rancor, and incivility dominate our political discourse while existential threats confront us in climate change, nuclear proliferation, and more. At times like this I am grateful for the time and space for love, appreciation, and civil discourse that the Swedenborgian Church annual convention provides.

We easily forget that humankind has always sought truth and goodness

in the face of existential threats. Beginning with tribal warfare, wild animals and threats of starvation, proceeding through the annihilation of populations, the ravages of volcanoes, earthquakes, fire, disease, weather, and, through it all, always the presence of conflict, often ending in war.

I often forget, as well, times of conflict and anger that have erupted over contentious issues at some conventions, reminding me that it takes the effort and good will of every individual in a community to make it work in spite of heartfelt differences.

On page 111, you can read about the work of the committee to develop a Swedenborgian Church Statement of Anti-Discrimination, an example of a thoughtful project to bring the community together on an important social and political issue that affects our church directly. (The statement will appear in the October *Messenger*.)

Our Social Justice Committee announced a revised mission statement and asked the convention to reaffirm

its support of the National Council of Churches statement on gun violence (Page 113).

These forays into the fraught world of culture, society, and politics are examples of how we are able to come together beyond worship.


The loving care that our leaders and members put into the worship services, mini-courses, ordination, and meetings to bring us together should be evident to all participants.

I am grateful and thankful for this time and place of coming together and I look forward to it every year.

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **October 11–14, 2020:** SCYL (ages 13–18) Fall Retreat, Cedar Hill Retreat Center, Duxbury, MA
- **October 25–27, 2020:** SPLATz (ages 10–13) Fall Retreat, Manna House at LaPorte New Church, La Porte, IN
- **November 8–9:** General Council Fall Meeting, Cenacle Retreat Center, Chicago
- **December 27–30, 2020:** SCYL (ages 13–18) Winter Retreat, Almont New Church Assembly, Almont, MI
- **January, 2020:** Palestine and Israel Trip, CSS January term
- **August 28–31, 2020:** Gathering Leaves, Purley Chase, England

the Messenger

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## President Rev. Jane Siebert: Earth Is Speaking to Us

That day I saw beneath dark clouds  
the passing light over the water  
and I heard the voice of the world speak out,  
I knew then, as I had before  
life is no passing memory of what has been  
nor the remaining pages in a great book  
waiting to be read.  
It is the opening of eyes long closed.  
It is the vision of far off things  
seen for the silence they hold.  
It is the heart after years  
of secret conversing

*“I heard the voice of the  
world speak out.”*

**E**arth is Speaking to us. Earth has spoken to us. Earth will always try to speak to us.

Convention 2019 is reserved as a time for us to listen . . . and to act. To listen to the roar of the ocean, to the plea of the Redwood, to the omen of the sky, to the warning from the soil of our earth, the Lord’s Promised Land. I invite you to take time to listen, to learn, to challenge yourself to be the difference; to come together adding our voice to those who hear the Lord calling, “Do not defile the land where you live and where I dwell, for I the Lord dwell among [you].” (Numbers 34:35).

As Swedenborgians, we understand the spiritual connection to our world, for the veil is thin between the natural and the spiritual. And the sacred connections have been laid out by Emanuel Swedenborg as he wrote, “. . . things that happen in the natural world offer us a reflection of things in the spiritual world.” (HH §56)

Everything in nature has its counterpart in the spiritual realm. The correspondences Swedenborg explained can teach us. When we do harm to our world, we are harming God. When we harm our world, we are harming

speaking out loud in the clear air.  
It is Moses in the desert  
fallen to his knees before the lit bush.  
It is the man throwing away his shoes  
as if to enter heaven  
and finding himself astonished,  
opened at last,  
fallen in love with solid ground.

—David Whyte,

“The Opening of Eyes,” from *Songs for Coming Home*  
©1984 Many Rivers Press

ourselves. We open our hearts to feel the harm that is being done to our planet, open our ears to hear what our earth is saying to us, and open our eyes to see what we can change personally and what we can do as individuals, as church communities, and as a denomination.



I recently heard an analogy that Christianity is like a big pot of soup that needs to be stirred up once in a while or it will get stuck on the bottom. I’m afraid that, in many ways,

Christianity is rather stuck. *And* our Swedenborgian theology needs to get stirred up too, because what is stuck, stuck on the bottom, cannot nourish anyone.

We need to look for new ways to speak about what inspires us to be Swedenborgians. We need to challenge one another to remember what it felt like when the truth of Swedenborg’s writings first opened for us and rang true. We stepped back and said, “Yes, that is what I have always believed, but never heard it said or written. Yes, now I can enter into the mysteries of faith with understanding. Yes, science and religion must work together, not against one another. Yes, finally, this makes sense.”

Whether you are a first-timer to an annual convention or you are here for your fiftieth time, whether you are a sixth-generation Swedenborgian or new and just testing the water, there is something or someone that called you to be here, and we are glad you chose to follow that call. Everything is connected and anything unconnected would just disappear, instantly vanish.

Some revelation drew you into a new way of living your faith that made a difference in your life, how you treat others, how you relate to others, how you feel responsible for our planet and

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## Convention Worship Service Sermon

# Rooted and Listening—Now What?

BY REV. KATHY SPEAS

It's so great to be here. Convention is kind of a spiritual family reunion, isn't it? It's so wonderful to remember our spiritual roots (and the nuts on our spiritual family tree!) and listen to the earth as it rejoices with us in the fullness of summer.

So, each year, some lucky minister gets elected by their peers to be convention preacher, which is a major honor, and you get two years to worry about living up to it! Last year, Kit shared his deep faith and reminded us of the powerful connection between our own relationship with God and the creation of the New Jerusalem. The year before that, Susannah invited us all to celebrate the amazing women who inspired, created, nourished, and sustained our churches all over North America. So many of my mentors and role models have stood in this place.

Well, this year, you get the "Death Lady," the minister who spent ten years at people's deathbeds, then went on to minister for four years at the final closing of a 125-year-old public institution for profoundly disabled people. And, I come from the area of the country where Paradise, literally, burned to the ground.

I see an invitation to talk about change and transformation.

Somewhere along the line, I learned some things about what happens after the mountain splitting wind of a terminal diagnosis, after the cultural earthquake that transforms a 125-year-old home, after the fire (literally). About staying rooted when my body is rushing at light speed toward old age, technological innovations come faster and faster and I'm out of passwords, my



Rev. Kathy Speas, 2019 convention minister preaching at the Sunday worship service

town burned down, and American democracy is hanging by a thread. Oh, and then there are the changes in the church that friends of all faiths are witnessing.

When I was a hospice chaplain, people used to ask, "Don't Christians have an easier time dying, because they know they are going to heaven?" No, actually. People have an easier time letting go of this life when they understand themselves to be part of something bigger, when they surrender to something greater, say yes to the bigger mystery. Doesn't matter if it's heaven, or seeing Dad again, or the trees, or descendants' brown eyes and curly hair, or the legacy of any work done well. This is what it means to be rooted in spirit. People who had the hardest time dying were those whose worldview began and ended with themselves—including devoutly religious people whose spiritual worldview began and ended with their mistakes, and who were left with nothing at the end of their lives but a fear of hell. When you are rooted in spirit, you can let go. Think of a time in your life

when you let go of the branch you were clinging to for dear life, and found that something caught you, or that you had learned to fly?

We're letting go every day. Every minute. With each breath, we are letting go. Of what once served us, but now we no longer need (*outbreath*), and then inviting what nourishes us (*inbreath*), and letting go again.

I let go of my hospice chaplaincy when the nursing homes replaced Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller with Motown and Paul Simon. I became a chaplain at a facility that began its life in the 1880s as the "Institution for Care and Training of Feeble-Minded Children." More than a century of how we as a society care for vulnerable people was lived out there. Talk about change and transformation! First, a place envisioned by a couple of mothers who did not want to simply abandon children who were "feeble-minded." Then, a place that understood any limits in ability as medical problems to be fixed by surgeries, dubious procedures, or sterilization. A place to do medical experiments on people who "probably didn't know what was going on anyway." A place to warehouse "defectives." A source of free labor for local farmers. And by the 1970s or 80s, a beloved community, where people with limited abilities were cared for by people who wanted to help each person make the most of their humanity and their spirituality. And finally, it was a place that took too much money from state budgets and separated the people who needed care from the community at large; so it was closed for good last year. All the people were moved to group homes. This

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## Rooted and Listening

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was, as you can imagine, a profoundly devastating change for people who had worked there for twenty, thirty years, in some cases for generations, taking care of people their parents cared for, and bringing their children to work there, too.

But you know what I learned, after a couple of years of the weighty uncertainty of major anticipatory grief, as people waited for the place to close, and said goodbye forever, one by one, to hundreds of people they had essentially grown up with? I can't say this out loud at home: *I'm really glad it closed!* We managed to keep the church service going, and I see the folks who lived there—many of them all my life or longer—and they have never been happier! They are living in homes with two or three other people, not twenty. They get to go out every day.

I'm glad that "Put her away and forget you ever had a child" is no longer conventional wisdom for someone who has a disabled child. I'm glad that we now understand that people with Downs Syndrome live rich, meaningful lives and have a lot to contribute. I'm glad that terms like "idiot" "imbecile" and "moron" now only describe politicians and other drivers, and are no longer used to label people I care about.

Don't get me wrong—the closure was a tremendous loss on a lot of fronts, and the community is still grieving. But it was a loss that needed to happen, so better things could happen for the people who lived there and all the vulnerable people to come.

As Maya Angelou reminds us, we do the best we can and when we know better, we do better. We don't "diss" the truths we have known by changing, we build on what worked, and offer up all the manure we've been through to become ground for future growth.

And, you know why my friends from there are so happy? Because they are in-the-moment people. I think it comes with the territory of not having a well-developed intellect or ego. They don't spend any energy regretting the past or worrying about the future. There's a bit of Shinto wisdom that says, "The Plain of High Heaven is not a specific place localized here or there, but refers rather to a pure state without thought, contemplation, or passions." I've not met people who were more rooted in Spirit than my friends from the Developmental Center.

So, if being Rooted in Spirit can help someone die easily, or carry them through when their home of five or six decades closes and they have to move, what is nature saying to us that might help us stay grounded and faithful after the winds and earthquakes and fires of change have scattered the poorly-fitting elements into chaos but before the Lord has gotten around to re-ordering them into a more divine design? What is in the "sheer silence" that Elijah heard that can be a crucible for creative transformation? Is nature chastising us, like Hosea says, or is there wisdom in there for us?

I turn not to Swedenborg, not to the Bible for answers, but to nature. It is in nature that we see clearly and exactly what it is that empowers us not only to survive, but to thrive, and continue forever. What is Mother Nature's secret to managing change? Being powerful and vanquishing whatever is trying to shake you? Being clever and outwitting the forces impacting you? Being richly resourced to protect yourself from the winds of change?

None of these. Charlie Darwin actually observed and articulated the crucial insight that the life forms that survive are the ones that adapt and dance with the changes, the ones that remain open to imagination and creative transformation.

So—direct to the source. Which of earth's elements speaks to you right now? Earth? Air? Fire? Water? Each offers us timely advice for adapting and changing yet staying rooted in divine spirit when the winds, earthquakes, and fire come to call.

I don't usually seek inspiration from bumper stickers and other pop culture messaging, but I've seen several posters and such that offer "Advice from [various aspects of nature]" and found some wisdom to share. (I see Jim and the CSS scholars cringing. . . .)

Advice from a mountain (corresponds to heaven, heavenly good appearing in obscurity):

- Savor life's peak experiences
- There is beauty as far as the eye can see
- Stand in the strength of your true nature
- Follow the trails of the wise ones
- Protect and preserve timeless beauty, silence, solitude, serenity, flowing rivers, ancient trees
- Rise above it all, and climb beyond your limitations
- Leave no stone unturned
- Never take life for granite
- Get to the point
- Patience, patience, patience
- Life has its ups and downs
- Let your troubles vanish into thin air
- Rock on!

Advice from the sky (corresponds to our state of light, the clarity with which we can receive divine love and wisdom flowing in):

- Expand your horizons
- Breathe deep
- Stay open
- Create a pleasant atmosphere
- Don't cloud up your thoughts
- Cherish clean air
- Keep looking up!

Advice from a lava flow (corresponds to earthly loves which can be

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## The Year of the Lord

# The One God Is Infinitely Human

A recurring seven-year cycle of annual themes of the Swedenborgian Church was established to achieve the following goals:

- Unite local ministries in a common activity and purpose
- Enhance a broader-based sense of belonging and mission
- Educate members and non-members alike in the fundamentals of our faith
- Provide a means for bringing our faith and message to the world
- Build the foundation for denominational renewal and growth

### The Seven Year Cycle

1. The Year of the Lord: the primacy of Spirit
2. The Year of the Spiritual World: —the nature of life
3. The Year of Providence: —the assurance of purpose
4. The Year of Regeneration: the way of change
5. The Year of Spiritual Uses: the call to be a blessing
6. The Year of the Word: the power of holy Scripture
7. The Year of the New Jerusalem: the emergence of a new world

This church year, 2019–2020, begins the cycle anew with *The Year of the Lord*.

In his writings, Swedenborg often repeats the idea that heaven has a human form, a concept that he calls the *Maximus Homo*. This is a Latin term that can be translated “Universal Human,” or, in older translations, “Grand Man.” (It should be noted that in Latin the word *homo* is gender neutral, so when some translations identify this figure as masculine, they’re introducing a bias that didn’t exist in the original.) This concept includes the idea that God can be understood as infinitely human, possessing every human capacity we can imagine. In other words, Swedenborg invites us to think of the Infinite Divine in terms of the human form.

This is where the idea that “we are

made in the image of God” comes from. This well-known biblical concept is, as we shall see, a fundamental way of understanding the universe.

Swedenborg also invites us to think of heaven in this way as well. He tells us that angels in heaven live in communities and that each community performs a function that corresponds to an organ in the human body. Together, the angelic communities form a single unit that is the Universal Human.

### What Does It Mean to Be Human?

To really understand this, it’s important to first understand that when Swedenborg says *human*, he’s not talking about our literal physical form. No one should think that we are human because we have a human face, a human body, a brain, and all the other organs and limbs. We share things like these with brute animals, so they are the things that die and are put in the grave. No, what makes a person human is the ability to think and will as a human and therefore to receive attributes that are divine, or the Lord’s. This is what distinguishes us from animals tame and wild. In the other world, the way we received those attributes and made them our own during bodily life determines the kind of human being we become. (*Secrets of Heaven* §4219)

When Swedenborg talks about a human body, he’s talking about the functions that the body performs: taking things in, keeping what’s useful to sustain our lives, and eliminating the rest. In the same way, the Universal Human is not a literal giant human being made of angels walking around up in the sky, but rather myriad communities working together and performing functions like those that take place in a human body.

By this “human” to whom useful functions relate, I mean not only an individual but also groups of people and smaller and larger communities such as republics and monarchies and empires and even that largest community that comprises the whole world, since all of these are human. So too in the heavens, the whole angelic heaven is like a single individual in the Lord’s sight, and so is each individual community of heaven. This is why each individual angel is human. (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §328)

### Parts of the Universal Human

In his writings, and particularly in *Secrets of Heaven*, Swedenborg goes into detail about what types of people constitute the different “organs” of the Universal Human. A good example of how the system works is the digestive system, which he relates to the process of dying in this world and crossing into the spiritual world.

The mouth, Swedenborg says, is a gateway into the spiritual world. Once people enter, at any time they might be absorbed into the body—that is, taken into heaven. But some people are a bit tougher. (Think about tough food that has to be thoroughly chewed before it can be swallowed and digested.) These kinds of people may have been very self-centered while they were in the world, or focused on material gain; they may have been the type of people who sought out power in order to dominate and manipulate others, and they may even have been very cruel people who enjoyed inflicting pain. These people move down the esophagus into the stomach, where they begin to encounter angels who help them confront who they really are inside.

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## God is Infinitely Human

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People who realize that they have committed evil in the world, repent, and allow the good energy of the Lord to flow into them—that is, people who leave behind the parts of themselves that aren't "nutritious"—will be taken into the body of heaven and carried off to the community where they will live and work. Those who continue to resist will move on to the intestines for further digestion. Angels will keep working with them, but if a person truly loves evil and has no interest in goodness, then that person can't become part of the body of heaven. Eventually, such people enter the "rectum" of the Universal Human, and from there are expelled into hell.

The two most important organs of the body are the heart and lungs and, likewise, the two most important parts of heaven are the angelic communities that correspond to the heart and lungs. The "heart" community corresponds to the celestial heaven, or the heavenly kingdom, the part of heaven that is closest to the Lord. The heart represents love and also the will or volition, that is, the part of our minds that moves us and causes us to take action. The lungs correspond to the spiritual heaven, or spiritual kingdom of heaven, which is slightly farther from the Lord. Lungs (or, more specifically, the air that they circulate) represent the Lord's wisdom, which flows throughout the universe just as his love does. Lungs also correspond to the part of the mind known as discernment (also translated intellect or understanding), which is the part of the mind where we process information, store memories, think, and draw conclusions.

Just as a human body cannot survive without fully functioning heart and lungs, heaven cannot continue to exist without the communities that circulate love and wisdom throughout

the spiritual world and, through the spiritual world, into our world.

Swedenborg describes the correspondence of other organs too. For example, the angels of the nose are people who excel at telling the difference between good and evil; they have, as we might say in idiomatic English, a "nose" for it. When someone says, "I smell trouble," or "Joe has a nose for news," we understand that this means they have a special sensitivity or intuitive ability in these areas.

Similarly, angels who belong to communities that correspond to the function of the ear are ones who hear and obey without thinking too hard about what they've been told; angels who belong to communities that correspond to the function of the eyes are ones who understand the truth and the good things that come from faith. When we say, "I see," we do not always mean that we are seeing a physical object. Often it means, "I understand." Angels who belong to communities that correspond to the function of the hands and arms are the angels who have power because they give credit for everything to God; since they have no obstructing self-importance, there's nothing to stop God's energy from flowing through them and manifesting in the spiritual world.

Just as there are many types of people, there are many types of work that angels can do in heaven, and each different function becomes a useful part of the whole. Here on earth, too, each member of a community has the potential to fulfill a particular role and thereby be useful to others—an important part of spiritual growth. The spiritual lesson of the Universal Human, then, is that we, like the various parts of our own body, should find ways to provide a useful function in human society. At the same time, we can appreciate the many and diverse ways in which other people are playing their role in helping us. When everyone works together

## Rooted and Listening

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useful or destructive):

- Rise to the occasion
- Glow with excitement
- Follow the path of least resistance
- It's okay to be a little fiery
- Take time to cool down
- Have a solid outlook
- Embrace change!

Advice from a river (corresponds to truth, the beginnings and endings and boundaries of truths that serves us):

- Go with the flow
- Slow down and meander
- Be thoughtful of those downstream
- Go around the obstacles
- Immerse yourself in nature
- Roar with excitement, and create your own music
- Stay current
- The beauty is in the journey!

Advice from the Earth (who is, after all, our mother, so we should listen to her and call her more often):

- Be well rounded
- Keep a positive atmosphere
- Have a magnetic personality
- Celebrate diversity
- Think globally
- Be good to your mother, because—  
*There's No Place Like Home.*  
Amen! ☩

in harmony, moved by divine love and guided by divine wisdom, there is an image of God—the *Maximus Homo*, the Universal Human.

Therefore, we might see these interconnecting themes in the Year of the Lord:

The One God Is Infinitely Human →  
The Lord Is the Human Glorified →  
The Spiritual World Is in Human Form →  
We Are Human →

***The One God Is Infinitely Human.*** ☩

This article was adapted by Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence from a short unattributed article on the Swedenborg Foundation website, <https://swedenborg.com>.

## Convention Welcome Message

# Living In Harmony With God's Earth

BY REV. KIT B. BILLINGS

### Scripture

(Psalm 19:1–6)

Genesis 2:15–17

### Insight for Worship

*The Lord is omnipresent; and everywhere He is present, He is present with His entire essence. It is impossible for Him to take out some of His essence and give part of it to one person and another part to another. He gives it all. He also gives us the ability to adopt as much as we wish of it, whether a little or a lot. The Lord says that He has a home with those who do His commandments, and that the faithful are in Him and He is in them. In a word, all things are full of God. We each take our own portion from that fullness. True Christianity §364.3*

“All things are full of God!” Can you grasp even just a fraction of what that spiritual truth from our theology is saying? All things are full of God! This is one of the greatest divine truths in all of our teachings I’m aware of—and if even some of you are conscious of this transformational wisdom, then my friends, you give me hope!

When a spiritually growing, mystically alive, and loving person comes into contact with that delightful sentence, experiencing it as a living truth, it can cause one to drop to one’s knees and weep with deepest joy! Truly, all of nature and the cosmos are full of God, and each substance and thing in nature takes its own portion from God’s fullness, and when a person opens up and inwardly experiences and perceives the wonders of God’s Divine Essence flowing into and reflected in the vast diversity of life on Earth, the simplest things in life become an opportunity to partner with our Grand Maker in putting



the Lord’s love into action.

This morning, I co-led a morning devotion with Pastor Paul Deming at our General Council meeting. It felt so good to worship the Lord together (who is Love-Truth-and-Goodness itself). We

reveled in God’s goodness and wisdom and we celebrated the simple joy of being servants of God able to serve the Lord’s New Church on Earth. After participating in the first hour of our General Council pre-convention meeting, it was time for me to walk on back to my dorm room to get more church work finalized. As I strolled outside, like a young boy might have done, I marveled at the exquisite beauty of nature and Creation! Everything felt alive with divine energy to me.

I looked up at a bright blue sky, with beautiful puffy clouds gently rolling by, smelling the sweet summertime air rich with oxygen. Then as I walked underneath one of the trees on my way, I heard the sweet, high-pitched chirping and singing of my favorite bird—a cardinal! There he was, serendipitously perched on a tree branch, somewhat hidden by the leafy outgrowth of that tree . . . and he was singing his heart out with joy! And his bright-red feathers, his crested crown, and the lilt of his song spoke the very feeling of joy and gladness I felt within . . . because life is *good*. Or as Genesis 1:31 puts it, “[I] saw all that God had made, and it was very good.”

Genesis 2:15 says, “The LORD God took the man and put him in the

Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” From a biblical standpoint (examining its literal and inner depths of love and wisdom), God places us here within a vital covenant or contract, if you will. Our Divine Maker and Sustainer of Life, who made us to be constant receivers of the Lord’s life-force, reveals Herself to us throughout nature and this awesome, diverse biological extravaganza! And the Lord speaks to us in our hearts and in the warmth and beauty of summertime, telling us that when we choose to lovingly and faithfully join with the Lord, life is not only good . . . it is *very good*.

But this ongoing spiritual contract or covenant with God only works if we are willing to be humble, wise, and willing stewards of God’s Earth—yes, to wisely and prudently take great care of this world, which we all are 100% dependent on for clean water, good food, and our clothing and for fresh, oxygen-rich air to fill out lungs and allow life to happen in our bodies.

I understand now that this marvelously beautiful, intricate, ecologically rich world God made and sustains is God’s very own incubator for life in all its diversity, beauty and richness. New Church theology teaches us that the beautiful gardens of life “symbolize everything in a heavenly person.” (AC §122) Furthermore, that “cultivating the garden and guarding it means that such a person is free to enjoy all of those things but not to claim personal possession of them, because they are the Lord’s.”

It is crucial for me to recognize and celebrate that everything in the cosmos and all life and substance and nature on Earth belongs to God, and so I am

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## Living in Harmony

*Continued from page 100*

here as a humble recipient of God's life-force and a caretaker of life here. The Earth is on loan to us, and our loving-wise God expects us to be good stewards and caretakers of this planet, so that many more generations of people may be born here and live within the abundance God provides.

The challenge we now face is that most of our world's overly-expansive human population (now at around eight billion people) has become addicted to using far too much land, too much water, and too many natural resources to sustain an ecologically rich and healthy way of life. We have allowed our selfish inclinations passed down to us from generations past to dupe ourselves into feeling like the Earth is my pearl and it's okay for me to ravage and use it as if my life and my family's life are really all that matter.

A vast number of our world's climatologists, economists, and biologists have been pumping plenty of research ad-nauseam now for twenty-plus years, informing us that our world continues to heat up, causing massive melting of polar ice caps, mostly caused by our overly abundant and lavish lifestyles. In short, one of the biggest challenges we face is that our world as a whole needs to have fewer children, because as more and more millions of people continue to be born at expansive rates, we then must consume more water, cut down more oxygen-producing rain forests, and use too many natural resources to house, clothe, and sustain ourselves with food.

As Stephen Emmott wrote in his 2013 book, *Ten Billion*, "The behavioral changes that are required of us are so fundamental that no one wants to make them. What are they? We need to consume less. A lot less. Less food, less energy, less stuff. Fewer cars, electric cars, cotton T-shirts, laptops,

mobile phone upgrades. Far fewer."

The bottom line for me, as a person who strives to love the Lord my God with all of my heart, mind, soul, and strength and my neighbor as myself (including my neighbors who should be able to live well and abundantly here on Earth seven or more generations from now), is that I am eternally grateful to God for granting me the gift of life. And I do believe that everything in the cosmos and everything in heaven and on Earth belongs to the Lord—and my job (along with yours) is to be a wise, loving and humble caretaker of this Earth, entrusted to us. Our landowner is the almighty God of infinite love and truth itself! Given that that is the truth, my friends, we owe the Lord nothing less than our greatest efforts to protect and safeguard a healthy ecosystem for the diversity of life here to enjoy.

So, what do you say? Shall we pull our proverbial ostrich heads out of the sand, and face the hard and inconvenient truths we humans have created, and make the life-changes we must in order to protect and guard this sacred Earth, this beautiful world that is not only speaking to us but continues to groan and moan and shout to us to stop abusing this great world and using it selfishly. It's high time we stop making excuses and elect leaders who not only grasp the destructive catastrophe that's now building up all around us, but also are willing to make the tough

and painful decisions that must be made that will turn this ship around, allowing Mother Earth to heal and recover as is God's intention since the beginning.

Let us pray: Oh, heavenly-divine Maker of this awesome universe, O fashioner of Your amazing miracle we call home (the Earth), help us to find an ever-deepening humbleness in Your holy presence. It is not enough that we have springtime and summertime for the natural world, we also need them in our hearts too. And so, we bring all that we are deeply, warmly and faithfully into Your presence, and we ask You to help us to throw out of our minds and our intentions that which is evil and selfish, so that we can come before You as receivers of Your goodness. Lead us by Your holy Word of truth and help us to be seriously open to the truths that science is telling us about our climate, about our over-consumption of Earth's resources and much more. Lead us into life's simplest and most abundant resource of joy and delight—which is coming quietly into Your presence within us, where life is still, and peaceful and full of happiness. Only when we are overflowing with You, O God, do we become at peace with making the changes in our way of life that are sustainable for many generations to come. Amen. ☩

Rev. Kit Billings is minister of the La Porte (Indiana) New Church.



2019 Convention SCYL teens: Back row: Jack (Dac), Nathan, Molly, Lauren, Ivy, Elliot, Oliver, Justice. Front row: Jillian, Wyatt, Joey, Julia, Scout, Josh, Aidan. (See page 102)

## Annual Convention Recap

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part of the effort to save the planet, and that the twin evils of “denial and despair” must be vanquished (full address at <https://tinyurl.com/ValpKeynote>).

The hosts, the Illinois Association and the LaPorte New Church, welcomed everyone to the convention. Rev. Kit Billings, minister of the La Porte Church, offered a message and a prayer ([page 100](#)).

### Mini-Courses

Mini-courses were a highlight of the convention, with a variety of thirteen engaging and inspirational courses offered in four sessions.

The first session commenced early in the convention, on Sunday morning after breakfast. The other sessions were interspersed with business sessions and worship services throughout the convention. (Read about the courses in the April and May 2019 *Messengers*.)

### Worship Services

Worship services punctuated daily activities. The Convention Worship Service was held in an intimate recital hall at the university. Rev. Kathy Speas, the convention minister, gave the sermon ([page 96](#)), and she was assisted with the liturgy by Rev. Kit Billings, the Convention Choir, and Marjorie Leas at the piano.

The memorial service, a tradition

to remember departed family, friends, and colleagues, was the first of Monday’s activities after breakfast.

The highlight was the ordination service, in the stunning Chapel of the Resurrection ([page 115](#)). Families of the ordinands and the convention attendees gathered in good fellowship afterwards at a reception that featured a cake honoring the ordinands, Nancy Piorkowski and Ros Taylor, and the inductee, Dan Burchett.

### The SCYL Service

The last activity on Monday before dinner was the Swedenborg Church Youth League (SCYL) worship service, a much-anticipated tradition. SCYL youth director, Kurt



Lauren opens the SCYL teen worship service



Josh plays an Oil CEO with his assistant Molly (left) in the SCYL teen worship service with devil Oliver (right) persuading him to choose evil.



Devils Jillian and Oliver try to influence farmer Julia in the SCYL teen worship service.

Fekete, worked with the teens to create and offer a service through which

they expressed their worship with music and singing, and gave their spiritual message through a powerful and entertaining skit. This year, they depicted the difficulty that everyone confronts in the face of temptations, the need to choose between accepting God’s truth and goodness (loving the neighbor) or turning away from God and pursuing love of self and love of the world (selfishness).

Following the service, Scout Steinhiser, departing SCYL president, and then Lauren Dopple, the 2019 SCYL president, addressed the convention. Kurt Fekete, the youth director, next took the podium and reported on the activities of the SCYL, thanking members for their generous support for the teens in their retreats and other gatherings as they progress on their spiritual journeys.

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Outgoing SCYL president, Scout Steinhiser



SCYL President Lauren Dopple



Youth Director Kurt Fekete



The Convention Worship Service



Elliot plays an astronaut in the SCYL teen worship service

# CSS Annual Meeting

The New Church Theological School (the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union (CSS)) held its annual meeting on Sunday evening, June 30, opened by Board of Trustees chair, Rev. Jenny Caughman.

Professor Dr. Devin Zuber addressed the attendees, emphasizing the place of CSS within the academic world and the impact it has there and in the wider world. He spoke, for instance, about an introductory class on Swedenborg he taught that was taken by four non-Swedenborgians, all of whom were eager learners.

Professor Dr. Rebecca Esterson announced the January Term trip to Palestine and Israel, which includes



Dr. Devin Zuber



Terrie Crenshaw

guided tours with visits to Palestinian and Israeli families and trips to sites of Christian pilgrimage. A limited number of spaces are reserved for members, who will join students, professors, and alumni on the trip.

CSS treasurer, Jennifer Lindsay, thanked members for their support, with special mention of the Cleveland Church, which donated \$35,000. She explained that the school has operated with a small structural deficit for the past two years, which the Board of Trustees has taken steps to eliminate.

Board member Terrie Crenshaw came forward to ask for continued support for CSS. She spoke of her appreciation of and gratitude for the people who commit to study and work to be spiritual leaders within and beyond the Swedenborgian community. She informed the members that the board will be unveiling some new initiatives in the fall to find new areas of support.

meditation training for Sunday school teachers.

### The Picnic Outing

The business sessions, mini-courses, CSS meeting, and ordinations were

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(Top to Bottom) Rev. Jenny Caughman gives certificates of completion to Rev. Dan Burchett, Nancy Piorkowski, Ros Taylor (with Rev. Jim Lawrence), and Lorraine Kardash

Dean of CSS, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, in recognition of their completion of the requirements for academic preparation for Swedenborgian ministry, gave Rev. Dan A. Burchett, Nancy A. Piorkowski and Roslyn Taylor the Certificate of Swedenborgian Ministry Studies. In recognition of the requirements for academic preparation for Swedenborgian ministry, Rev. Lawrence gave Lorraine Kardash the Licensed Pastor Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies. He recognized Tassy Farwell for her completion of the licensed pastor requirements. Being absent, she will receive her certificate in Berkeley. Licensed pastor Helen Barler received an academic Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies.

Terrie Crenshaw was elected for another term on the Board of Trustees in the at-large class.

After a reception, Marcia Kimpton introduced her film *Bardo Blues*, a Swedenborg-informed film (<https://www.bardoblues.com>). 🎬



Marcia Kimpton introduces her film *Bardo Blues*.

## Annual Convention Recap

*Continued from page 102*

### Sunday School Association

The Swedenborgian Church Children's Ministries (SCCM) held its annual meeting on Sunday afternoon. The SCCM president, Rev. Kit Billings detailed the progress and plans for providing more resources for Sunday schools, with particular interest in online resources and exploration of



SCCM treasurer Debbie Dolley

## Ordination Message: Nancy Piorkowski

# Samuel's Calling and Prophetic Activity

1 Now the boy Samuel was ministering to the LORD under Eli. The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread. 2 At that time Eli, whose eyesight had begun to grow dim so that he could not see, was lying down in his room; 3 the lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was.

4 Then the LORD called, "Samuel! Samuel!" and he said, "Here I am!" 5 and ran to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call; lie down again." So he went and lay down. 6 The LORD called again, "Samuel!" Samuel got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." But he said, "I did not call, my son; lie down again." 7 Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD, and the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him. 8 The LORD called Samuel again, a third time. And he got up and went to Eli, and said, "Here I am, for you called me." Then Eli perceived that the LORD was calling the boy. 9 Therefore Eli said to Samuel, "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

10 Now the LORD came and stood there, calling as before, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for your servant is listening." 11 Then the LORD said to Samuel, "See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make both ears of anyone who hears of it tingle. 12 On that day I will fulfill against Eli all that I have spoken concerning his house, from beginning to end. 13 For I have told him that I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because his sons were blaspheming God, and he did not restrain them.

19 As Samuel grew up, the LORD was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground. 20 And all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the LORD. 21 The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, for the LORD revealed himself to Samuel at Shiloh by the word of the LORD. (1 Samuel 3: 1-13, 19-21)

This Bible passage has moved me and kept me going throughout this journey in which I have been called to serve. I have sung the verses of the hymn we just sang, "Here I am, Lord," on my long drives



Rev. Nancy Piorkowski with her nephew at her reception celebrating her ordination

back and forth to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I attended seminary for the past three years. I used that time in the car for my own discernment. Just as Samuel was called in the darkness of the night, I was called out of my own personal challenges, some of which had clouded my vision. The call of the Lord has given me new resolve to work through what at times seemed to be endless darkness lasting long into the night.

My dear brother Richard died suddenly just as I was applying for seminary, and it was months before I could sleep. . . . I lay awake listening for the familiar footsteps which were forever silent. You see, my brother lived with me from the time our parents died when we were both in our twenties. My brother was born developmentally disabled, and I became his caregiver after our parents died—both very young.

When I had decided that I would attend seminary after I retired, and broke the news to my baby sister, Judy, she looked at me with the most incredulous look and said, "Nancy, are you telling me that you have worked hard for forty years as a special education teacher and, now, you are going to work even harder? Couldn't you just open a doggie day care?" Again, two years later, as I was preparing for the seminary's required cross cultural trip to Mexico, she asked again out of love

and concern for me, "Nancy, are you sure that the Lord is calling you to do this?"

Well, the Lord did indeed call me, and I answered. My motto throughout my experience of preparing for ministry became, "just keep going!" And keep going is what I did. So I find myself standing before all of you with the promise in my heart and soul to keep going. My desire is to serve the Lord in all things, and especially with people who long to hear a voice calling out to them in the night, in their own darkness. As a chaplain, I have had the sacred privilege of answering calls in the night to be a presence in times of great sorrow.

The significance of Samuel being called in the night is that although he didn't know at first that it was God calling him, he kept on going back to Eli, ready to serve. And then, when he discovered it was the Lord calling him, he knew how to answer. That is dedication: the willingness to go and serve whatever situation you are faced with and to do that serving out of love for the Lord and neighbor for the sake of your beliefs and convictions. I feel that my entire life up to now has prepared me for this call to serve the Lord in this new and challenging way. My dear friend of many years, Ian Gordy, put it very succinctly, when she said, "You know, when the Lord calls you, you have to answer!"

In closing, I would like to thank my family, my church family, and my friends who have supported and loved me throughout my discernment. The faculties at both Lancaster Theological Seminary and the Center for Swedenborgian Studies have guided

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## Ordination Message: Roslyn Taylor

# Hope and Prosperity

11 For I know what I have planned for you,' says the LORD. 'I have plans to prosper you, not to harm you. I have plans to give you a future filled with hope. 12 When you call out to me and come to me in prayer, I will hear your prayers. 13 When you seek me in prayer and worship, you will find me available to you. If you seek me with all your heart and soul, 14 I will make myself available to you,' says the LORD. (Jeremiah 29: 11-4)



Rev. Ros Taylor and her grandson celebrate following her ordination.

I love the reassurance given in this scripture, that despite what it may look like, the Divine is intending wonderful outcomes of prosperity and hope. At the time when this promise was given, some of the Jewish people were exiled in Babylon, far away from their home and their loved ones, and feeling that the Divine was punishing

### Samuel's Calling

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my education and been there to stretch me in ways I could not have imagined. My sister has been there to help by adding the much needed laughter to lighten what at times seemed too big a task for me to complete. The members of CAM shored me up and, at the same time, challenged me to live fully into my potential.

I feel that the Lord truly called me out of my own challenges of darkness to live fully in the God's light with God's wisdom and love ever holding me close as I begin this new direction in which I've been led to serve. ☩

Rev. Dan Burshett's induction message will appear in the October *Messenger*

them. Then they were given this message of hope.

Jeremiah 29:11 is a Bible passage that has sustained me through many of the challenges and disappointments and heart-

breaks in my life—when I managed to remember it. In the moment, it can be hard to remember the truths that the Divine has given us to help us through life. But when I was able to bring it to mind, it sustained me.

It is also a passage that has come to mind as confirmation when things were going well, when I was feeling joy and appreciation—this is exactly what the Divine has planned, all along. It is much easier to remember reassuring passages with appreciation when all is going well!

That reassurance is reflected in a Swedenborgian teaching in *AC* §8478:4.

It should be recognized that Divine providence is overall, that is, it is present within the smallest details of all, and that people in the stream of providence are being carried along constantly towards happier things, whatever appearance the means may present. Those in the stream of providence are people who trust in the Divine and ascribe everything to the Divine. . . . It should be recognized also that to the extent that anyone is in the stream of providence they are in a state of peace.

This stream of Providence teaching has been especially true for me in the long and circuitous ministry journey that has brought me here with you this evening.

Many of you know some or all of the details of that journey—and I'm happy to share them with you if you're curious—but suffice it to say that although the Divine was planning prosperity and hope for my ministry, I often felt the weight of exile and longing that the Jewish people were feeling when these comforting words were given to them.

Just like the Jewish people praying for help in their exile, I would often pray for guidance in those times, just as in other dark times in my life. Just as promised to the Jewish people when in exile, the Divine heard my prayers and was available to me.

The answer I almost always got was "Just keep on going." No vision of what was to come, no miraculous words of hope and encouragement, no cryptic messages about counter-intuitive actions. Just simply a directive to keep on going, to keep on going forward toward the realization of the Divine plans for prosperity and hope for me.

And here is one result of "just keep on going"—today, I stand here with three other ministers, ready to serve this community and communities beyond this one, appreciating your willingness to consecrate our calling and our ministry.

And this is only one result! There have already been, and will continue to be, blessed and prosperous opportunities for me to serve as a minister and facilitator for the plans that the Divine has for other people and other communities.

For this promise, given through Jeremiah, goes way beyond what the Divine has planned for a personal hopeful future and prosperity in everyday

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# An Epistle from the Holy City in Washington, DC

BY REV. RICH TAFEL

Like most urban Christian churches in America, the Washington church (Swedenborgian National Church of the Holy City) has had some rough times. There has been no minister since 2008. The congregation on Sundays dropped to about five, and the average age was late seventies.

The church faced the crisis of maintaining a building launched in 1894 in the middle of a city where each year fewer people go to church on a street with a church on every block.

The local group raised funds by renting to an Ethiopian congregation. An Anglican preacher from Virginia and a General Church pastor kindly often preached at Sunday worship services.

As some may recall, there had been some tension between the church and the denomination. The church has a complicated lease, where the denomination owns the building. Both sides were getting frustrated.

The denomination offered the church an opportunity to make it all work out. The church would hire a Swedenborgian pastor and grow to, at least, ten members or we'd all have to figure out how to sell the building.

Members of the group had asked for help, and I had been involved, so I knew the players. During Advent of 2015, I took on the role of minister in a part-time capacity.

I requested in my announcement that we position ourselves as a spiritual entrepreneur incubator.

Our immediate challenge was to get ten members to even be a real society. Then we had an under-capitalized building to begin to repair. With my coming on as pastor, there was an immediate strain on the finances.

The transition for me to be a pastor, something I hadn't done professionally



Rev. Rich Tafel and Annabel Park present the Spiritual Entrepreneur Center

since 1991, was challenging for all involved. A few of those attending stopped coming. But others emerged. I was struck in particular by two African-American sisters living in southern Virginia who came to Washington to meet me and followed the church as distance members. They read Swedenborg every Sunday in their home. Our email explaining that we must find ten members or dissolve was, as they said, the clarion call to Lot at Sodom: if you can find just ten good people. They signed up. By the summer of 2016, we had our ten members.

The election of 2016 brought its own unique challenges, as many churches became politically polarized, leaving no space for dialogue. I'm proud to say we held onto our space where we worship God, not political parties. The election of 2016 swept through Washington like a wave for the ninety-six percent who voted for the losing candidate. By inauguration, the church had protesters in pink hats and men supporting the president in suits.

There's no ignoring politics in Washington, and our brand as being a safe place for all people has made us unusual. Most churches state they cannot abide a discussion of politics. We think that's the wrong approach and foster a place where all political viewpoints are respected and heard.

In addition to the challenge of growing an urban church in a polarized

time, when most people see no value in church, we faced a crumbling infrastructure. Our building was literally falling apart. We lack proper bathroom space and handicap accessibility, and our tower risks falling apart. We have no air conditioning, and so we can't rent or worship in Washington's ninety-degree summer heat.

We hosted numerous events. For example, a spiritual entrepreneur gathering, only to be faced by extreme heat, and we hosted winter events where the cold forced everyone to wear jackets.

The National Trustees of the Church no longer had funds to contribute, so upkeep fell to the small group remaining and a small endowment. We needed a creative solution because we couldn't apply for loans locally, as we didn't own the building. We began a series of negotiations with the denomination and landed on the idea of a large loan from the building fund.

I needed help preparing the request, and a former client who lives in, of all places, Urbana, Ohio, agreed to help me. The next Sunday, a twenty-five-year-old man came jogging into the church during worship and said that something told him to go in. He was Niki Ahmadi, who was born in Iran and raised in Ohio and had just moved to Washington. He had a finance background and agreed to help prepare a case for getting a loan and repaying it.

In the spring of 2018, after long deliberations with General Council, the loan was agreed to. As we prepared our plan to engage contractors and builders, we were debating where to start. That's when, in August of 2018, the ceiling of the basement collapsed when no one was there. Moisture, leaks, and mold destroyed the space. God had decided where we would start.

Each week another fascinating

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## Epistle from the Holy City

*Continued from page 108*

person finds us in Sunday worship. We joke that no one comes to the Holy City by accident.

A young Jewish scholar from South Africa who was a scholar in numerous languages and an expert on Swedenborg walked in. His day job was union activism, but he was a cantor and asked to chant in Hebrew in our service. He did. We loved it.

Maria, a young woman on her way to Minneapolis, attended a free concert, then church, and decided to stay in Washington and join our merry group. Gloria, a physician from Chile, attended a concert and stayed for church and keeps coming. Bob, the leader in one of the nation's premiere social venture organizations, started coming and stayed. Skyler, a DJ from Miami, came each week. Sydney, a woman who did a volunteer trip in support of Nepal, started coming.

Annabel, a leading activist in the progressive movement and documentarian, started coming and took pictures of worship. Annabel is now a pillar of our church and is writing a grant to start a civil society and faith podcast. She came to Convention 2019 to videotape ordination.

We desperately needed someone with financial wherewithal, and in walked a man whose name is a correspondence. George Economy, yes Economy, saw the spiritual entrepreneur work on our site and decided to check it out as he moved from Washington state to Washington, DC, to retire with his wife. Today, he's our president.

All of these people have joined the church officially.

Our Sunday service evolved as well. A pastor in the General Church who often ministered to the congregation and preached at the church met with me and told me how he liked our

church but found the service order too traditional and even stiff. When you get this critique from the General Church, it's a sign.

We changed worship. We couldn't justify paying our pianist, so we use Gregorian chant music to begin each service. We invite everyone to read Scripture and Swedenborg. The variety of voices and accents are quite beautiful. I preach a shorter sermon but open it to a facilitated discussion. This is followed by a prayer time where everyone prays aloud, we all say "Lord hear our prayers," and I light a candle followed by the benediction, and everyone saying, "The Peace of the Lord be with you." The social hour often goes on for over an hour.

In our tiny group of ten to twelve on Sundays, we have immigrants from five countries. We have an all political viewpoints. We have an equal mix of male and female. We also have a wide range of ages. Our average age in 2015 was close to eighty. Today our average age dropped to fifty-five, with a twenty-five-year-old treasurer. Our reading group has gone through five books with a variety of attendees, not all members of the church. We are often blessed to have the Rev. Joseph Smith, a well-known African American minister who worked at the Center for Faith and Policy, join us and sing in his amazing voice.

Maybe what's most amazing is that the five pillars of our church who have been there since the eighties, Helen Sirois, Malcolm Peck, James Cox, Adrian Black, and Elfa Halloway remain the pillars today. This past spring, we elected new officers, with George Economy as president, Niki Ahmadi as treasurer, Malcolm Peck as secretary, and Helen Sirois as vice-president.

The basement renovation is now complete, and Rev. Jane Siebert, the denomination president, came to bless the space in recent months. We are on track paying off the loan from the

Building Fund. We continue to host hundreds of activities.

We are engaging a new generation of leaders who seek to develop both their inner and business lives. We hope to be charging for office space soon. We are fulfilling our dream of a Spiritual Entrepreneur Center.

The Lord is continuing to support us in interesting ways that keep us going when it is easier to quit. One day, a check for \$17,000 arrived from a will. The person involved had been associated with our church in the 1920s. She was the daughter of the Cable family in southern Virginia. The name struck a chord with me, and, after researching it, I discovered that my great-grandfather Rev. Louis Tafel had been the family tutor in Swedenborg's writings at the outbreak of the Civil War. With those funds, after repeated break-ins, we were finally able to install a security system.

We learned that our tower is at great risk of collapse, so we applied but lost out on numerous grant applications. But recently, we learned our church was chosen to receive a grant for \$50,000 from the DC Preservation League to commence work on our tower. The effort to get this grant came through our new President, George Economy, who spent hours on the grant proposal. This is our first grant!

But it is not about just money and members. It's about souls.

Before the service last November, a guest arrived from out of town. She explained that she ran a nonprofit that professionally photographed children with terminal diseases, so their families could have a special memory. She'd heard of our views of life after death and had many questions. Raised in the South, she was curious to learn of our inclusive approach to gays.

One Sunday, we were celebrating Skyler's birthday after church—our custom. We had a cake with no

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## Annual Business Meeting

*Continued from page 93*

**Officer Reports:** The officers gave their reports. Vice-President Tom Neuenfeldt reported that he traveled to the Chrysalis Fellowship in Deland, Florida, which is working to revitalize their society. He participated in the consecration of Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts at the Kitchener



Vice-President  
Tom Neuenfeldt

Church of the Open Word in Ontario. Tom noted that after over thirty years of dedicated service, Chris Laitner recently stepped down as Chair of the Board of Trustees of the National Church, in Washington, DC. Karen Conger became a trustee and was elected chair.

Recording Secretary Karen Conger spoke briefly of her gratitude at having been elected a trustee and then chair of the National Church's board, especially since she is the third generation in her family to have been a part of the life of the National Church. Karen shared that she had had the opportunity to travel to Massachusetts in April to be a part of what has become known as the Collaboration Group, originally formed by President Siebert early in 2019 to bring together the efforts of the Standing Committee for Information and Communication, the Standing Committee for Education and Resources for Spiritual Community, the Swedenborg Online Community, *Our Daily Bread*, *the Messenger* and the denomination's website.



Recording Secretary  
Karen Conger



Treasurer  
Jennifer Lindsay

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay began her report by reminding all that the Iungerich Fund is now under the direct supervision of the Standing Committee for Financial Accountability. The grant process has been revised, using a single, New Directions, application for Iungerich, AFC, and Mission funds. This process involved the able talents of BJ Neuenfeldt, Marjie Leas, and Rev. Lisa Solwold. Grant requests were due into the Central Office by August 15, 2019.

The denomination had the blessing of being the recipient of \$230,000 in gifts in 2018, including a bequest from the Esther Knierin estate of \$100K and a generous gift from the Cleveland Church of \$35,000. Jennifer recognized Gina's Perracchi's fifteen years of service as the financial manager with high praise—"A treasure." (A round of applause!)

**Ordination:** Rev. Shada Sullivan moved the ordination recommendations of the Council of Ministers, that the following candidates be ordained into the ministry and that their names, after ordination, to be placed on the Roll of



Rev. Shada Sullivan



Rev. Jane Siebert and ordination candidate Ros Taylor



Rev. Jane Siebert and induction candidate Rev. Daniel Burchett



Rev. Jane Siebert and ordination candidate Nancy Piorkowski

Ministers: Roslyn Taylor (seconded by Page Morahan), Nancy Piorkowski, (seconded by Rev. Randy Laakko), and (inducted into the ministry) Rev. Dan Burchett (seconded by Rev. Dave Brown).

**Affirmation of Licensed Pastors:** Lorraine Kardash, having met the requirements, was affirmed by the delegates as licensed pastor of the Portland



Lorraine Kardash receives her Certificate of Licensed Pastor from Rev. Jane Siebert

(Maine,) New Church.

Tassey Farwell, having met the requirements, was affirmed by the delegates as licensed pastor of the Hillside Community Church in El Cerrito, California.

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## Annual Business Meeting

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Tassey Farwell Skyped in for her Certificate of Licensed Pastor, with Rev. Thom Muller

**Elections:** Bill Coffman, chair pro tem of the Standing Committee on Nominations, delivered the nomination report.

### General Council:

- Tom Neuenfeldt, vice president
- Karen Conger, secretary
- Betsy Coffman (2nd term)
- Susan Hulcher (1st term)
- Carl Helm (2nd term)
- Rev. Thom Muller (unexpired term)

### Standing Committee for Financial Responsibility

- Stan Conger

### Standing Committee for Nominations

- BJ Neuenfeldt

### Committee on Admission into the Ministry

- Rev. Sage Cole

### Center For Swedenborgian Studies, (at Large)

- Lewis Shaw
- Robert Carr

The slate of nominees was elected at a subsequent session.

**Credentials Report:** The Credentials Committee report was delivered by BJ Neuenfeldt and Amy Little (after leading the convention in “O, Canada!” in recognition of Canada Day); seventy-one delegates registered.

**Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center:** Rev. Sage Cole, minister of the Cambridge Church of the New Jerusalem (Massachusetts) and church

member and architect Mark Careaga presented the plan for the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center, envisioned as a ministry of the Cambridge Swedenborgian Church. It will be a place for gatherings, programs, research, and education about Helen Keller, disability, spirituality, Swedenborgian theology, and the causes of justice and peace that Helen supported. Mark showed architectural plans to remove the existing annex and replace it with a structure worthy of the 1901 neo-Gothic chapel.

**Spiritual Entrepreneur:** Rev. Rich Tafel, minister of the Washington Church of the Holy City, reported on the Spiritual Entrepreneur Center being created at the Church, envisioned as the intersection between spirituality and business (page 108). Rev. Tafel elaborated on seven elements necessary for a church to incubate spiritual entrepreneurs: 1) a theology of integration, 2) inclusive sacred space, 3) a welcoming attitude to local community, 4) a curious and caring congregation, 5) a commitment to “I-Thou” dialogue, 6) provide business expertise, and 7) offer investment potential. Rich also announced that the National Church has received a \$50,000 grant from the D.C. Preservation League toward the restoration of the tower, work that has been long deferred.

Rev. Robert McCluskey and Dr. Page Morahan spoke for the Social Justice Committee (SJC) to explain that the 2017 Annual Convention voted to endorse the National Council of Churches Resolution and Call to Action on Gun Violence (April 2019 *Messenger*, page 56), but that the vote was not recorded in the minutes. He moved the resolution, and it was unanimously



Rev. Sage Cole talks about Helen Keller



Dr. Paige Morahan and Rev. Robert McCluskey talk about the Social Justice Committee

endorsed. Rev. McCluskey spoke about the future work of the Committee (sidebar, page 113).

**Statement of Anti-Discrimination:** Dr. Rebecca Esterson and Terrie Crenshaw moved adoption of the finalized Statement of Anti-Discrimination. Last year, a volunteer committee was formed for online review and discussion of the draft statement approved at last year’s annual convention. They explained that aspects of our Swedenborgian sacred texts and traditions have been used by a few to harm or hurt people. The Swedenborgian Church needs to make it clear to the world that our pluralistic view of heaven and the world is who we are. This document is not meant to censor anyone or advocate a particular way of interpretation; there are some interpretations, however, that do not speak for all of us, and this is a most important distinction. This document has been re-



Rebecca Esterson and Terrie Crenshaw present the Statement of Anti-Discrimination

viewed and endorsed by the Council of Ministers and the General Council. The Statement of Anti-Discrimination passed as Standing Resolution 14. (The statement will appear in the October 2019 *Messenger*.)

Continues on page 112

## Annual Business Meeting

*Continued from page 111*

**Building Fund:** Tom Neuenfeldt read Article XIX from the Bylaws, explaining that the relationship between the Building Fund and the General Council lacks effective communication. The proposed Bylaws change (proposed by General Council) requires a minimum of two people from the General Council, including the treasurer, be on the Fund. Three levels of approval are required for loans, based on the amounts requested, with fixed limits. There is provision for exceptions to those limits. The motion passed. Standing Resolution 10, governing use of the Fund was not in compliance with federal law. A compliance amendment passed.

**Good Practices:** The Good Practices Working Group, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Julie Conaran, Pastor Paul Deming, Rev. Susannah Currie, Rev. Ros Taylor, Dr. Page Morahan, Tom Neuenfeldt, Barb Halle, and Rev. Rich Tafel, presented a delightful skit involving “The Church of Nowhere Specific,” illustrating varieties of the proposed good practices for individual



*Julie Conaron and Jim Lawrence search for good practices at “The Church of Nowhere Specific.”*

churches (February 2019 *Messenger*). Rev. Lawrence emphasized that these are not legal documents and moved their adoption. The motion passed.

**Children’s Presentation:** The children gathered to tell us about the craft activities they engaged in, including making suncatchers. Then, they held a raffle in which lots of handmade



*Shada Sullivan draws for her prize while Kai holds the bag and Jane Siebert looks on.*



*Riley Tishma announces the drawing while the children get ready.*

goodies were given away (amid much hilarity). Riley Tishma received appreciation for her care and teaching of the children during the convention.



*Rev. Jane Siebert thanks Barb Boxwell, Chris Laitner, Debbie Dolley, Millie Laakko, and Sage Cole for their service to the Church*



*Tom Neuenfeldt thanks BJ Neuenfeldt (with a kiss) and Jennifer Lindsay thanks Dick Tafel*



*Karen Conger thanks Gard Perry, and Linda Tafel is thanked by Betsy Coffman*

**Appreciations:** President Siebert called forward all those who were leaving office to receive certificates of appreciation for their service to the Church, and she expressed thanks to those who led mini-courses, and to Jim Lawrence, who did the lion’s share in pulling it all together. She recognized the Convention Planning Committee members, Barb Halle, Rev. Kit Billings and many others. She recognized members of the Illinois Association and the LaPorte New Church for their hard work during the past several days and past several months.

Samantha Johanson, operations



*Operations and Web Manager Samantha Johanson and President Rev. Jane Siebert*

and web manager of the Swedenborgian Church, received a much deserved appreciation for all her skill and hard work to make sure everything went smoothly at this convention—much applause!

**Gifts to the Denomination:** Over \$1500 was given for the collection taken at the convention. Rev. Siebert accepted \$5000 from Wayfarers Chapel and \$1420 from LaPorte New Church. The Massachusetts New Church Union gave \$5K.

**Installation:** President Siebert called office holders and committee members of the Church to come forward and led a prayer of blessing.

**Three Arches Award:** Rev. Betsy Coffman called forward Bev and John Titus, who have been awarded Urbana University’s Three Arches

*Continues on page 113*

## Epistle from the Holy City

Continued from page 109

candles. We scrambled to find some. Elfa found nine and placed them on the cake. We sang “Happy Birthday.”

Our nonprofit guest had witnessed the entire celebration and looked to be on the verge of tears. I assumed she liked the community she saw. Then, with her eyes filled with tears she said, “Remember my nonprofit? Well, the reason I created it was that I lost my daughter to a terminal disease. My

daughter’s name is Skylar. Today is her ninth birthday. I came to church to pray for her today. You all just sang happy birthday to her, and look at the cake.” She pointed to the nine candles. “I cannot thank you enough for being here today.”

God works in mysterious ways. The message is we must show up. We must be there. We must show up for those ways to manifest.

I close with this story because we don’t really know why we are showing up. We don’t know why we fight for church. This is the reason. There are forces of good beyond us working through angels. We just need to do our part.

This story of rebirth is only possible because of local members fighting

for sacred space in Washington and the support of many in the Swedenborgian Church. Chris Laitner spent years as chair of the National Church trustees. Tom Neuenfeldt visited numerous times. The Building Fund Committee and General Council spent hours discussing our church, searching for ways to help.

If you have in some way contributed to support the DC church, by meeting, preaching, visiting, or in any way have been engaged with the church, thank you. We, and many who have passed on to the spiritual world, have done this hard work together.

This is a story of us all.

If you want to stay in touch, get our weekly newsletter by emailing [RevTafel@holycitydc.org](mailto:RevTafel@holycitydc.org).

## Annual Business Meeting

Continued from page 112



John and Bev Titus (left) are recognized by Betsy and Bill Coffman for the Three Arches Award.

Award, which recognizes outstanding achievements in a chosen career field and outstanding commitment and service to the community. Bev and John have established the Alicia Titus Fund (<https://tinyurl.com/AliciaT>), which honors their daughter Alicia, who was killed in the 9/11 attack, and have travelled widely to promote peace education and conflict resolution.

**Next Year:** On behalf of the Massachusetts New Church Union and the Bridgewater New Church, Rev. Susannah Currie invited everyone to the 2020 Annual Convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

President Siebert adjourned the 2019 meeting and closed the Word on July 3 at 12:05 PM, signifying the end of the 195th Convention of the Swedenborgian Church.



## Social Justice Committee Update

Prior to Convention 2019, General Council approved three changes to the Social Concerns Committee: new name, description, and mission statement.

**New name:** Social Justice Committee (SJC)

**New description:** The Social Justice Committee is an ad hoc committee created by General Council as a forum to address social concerns for the purpose of bringing information to the body of Convention through the Messenger and other vehicles, and to offer resources for ways to be involved.

**New mission statement:** The Social Justice Committee believes that bringing awareness and action to humanitarian issues is essential in carrying out our Lord’s commission to us as stewards of all peoples. The prophets of Scripture, our teachings of the larger neighbor, and our own By-Laws, challenge the church to fulfill its prophetic role. With this as our foundation, the Social Justice Committee will seek to express a spiritual perspective on contemporary issues, voice its convictions on ethical and moral issues in our nation and our world, and provide relevant Swedenborgian thought for use by individuals and churches. We will periodically update Convention through its website and *the Messenger*.

At Convention 2019, the SJC presented a resolution from the National Council of Churches (NCC) on Gun Violence for endorsement. It was unanimously endorsed.

The National Council of Churches recently concluded a five year focus on climate change. It just began a new five year focus on the issue of racism in the United States. This issue has always been before the Council, but has recently taken on a new urgency. In this spirit, the SJC will be focusing our efforts in the coming year on this theme as well. Swedenborgian centers by now have received a copy of “United against Racism: Churches for Change,” a recent publication from the NCC. It is an excellent resource to help individuals and congregations engage the issue of racism and explore ways to respond that are positive and effective. The committee will be in touch in the coming months to assist the Church in moving forward on this issue.

The Social Justice Committee is Rev. Robert McCluskey, chair, Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts, Lori Gayheart, Beki Greenwood, Dr. Page Morahan, and Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake. Committee consultants are Barb Boxwell, Scout Steinhiser, and Dr. Devin Zuber.

## Building Spiritual Family: Introducing Children to Annual Convention

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

Any time I get to spend with my “Spiritual Family” is time well spent that I look forward to all year long. I’ve always had something church related to look forward to: Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA), Camp Blairhaven, SCYL Columbus Day and Memorial Day Retreats, FNCA Work Weekends, and, now, annual conventions. Looking forward to these events keeps me going. Having just recently returned from Convention 2019, my next internal countdown was to FNCA summer camp just a few weeks later.

The highlight of my year, in 2018, was finally being able to fully attend an annual convention, in San Jose. I went to one as a kid in the early nineties and have been able to pop into conventions in Bridgewater over the past decade. Many factors prevented me from being able to attend before this, the most obvious being able to get the time off from work. With a new, flexible work schedule, I was finally able to make it. San Jose was life-changing for me. I met many people, reconnected with old friends, and started a countdown to Valparaiso, thinking maybe I should bring my kids to the next one . . . . Looking in on the children’s program in between convention activities and seeing how much fun the children were having, I knew my kids would love it too.

The SCYL teens have such strong bonds, and seeing them together over the last year (many of them made it to FNCA last year also) I was ready to have my oldest, eight-year-old Serena, start to get involved with the children from far and wide. (My son, Nate, is six, and I wasn’t ready to travel with



*One last suitemate selfie before we leave to catch our flights!*

both of them quite yet.) She looks up to the Leaguers, and being around that kind of love and friendship can only benefit any kid, and will have them strive to grow into SCYL, full of acceptance, love, and kindness.

She was so excited. At first it was just because she was going to get to fly on a plane for the first time (and her brother was not). Then she realized we would be seeing many people she knew: Ivy and Scout were two of the teens she was most excited to see. Then she was interested in who else would be there. Every day there were new questions, and our countdown continued.

We arrived at the convention with our friend Ben and his teenage daughter Jillian and quickly settled in. We were fortunate to be housed in a suite with the Brown family, which included two of the kids Serena would be spending much time with. Serena has a true gift for making friends quickly, and this time was no exception. Mikayla (age twelve) and Kai (age nine) became her fast friends. They had already been there for a few days (father Rev. Dave Brown attended COM meetings) and were happy to show us around. All

three were looking forward to participating in the children’s program together.

Throughout the next few days, we continued to see all the young kids together as a pack: Mikayla, Kai, Serena, Charlie (age eight) and Theo (age five), led by the amazing Riley Tishma. They worked on projects together, played games outside, and put together a presentation for us that I don’t think any of us will soon forget.

The children’s “Inspirational Quote Raffle” was sure a highlight for all who were in attendance. From their thoughtful artwork and crafts to the quirky, surprising method of numbering, they made us all smile and laugh.

One of the most important experiences of younger kids at conventions is seeing and absorbing what the teens are doing. Seeing friendships that span North America, friendships that often last a lifetime, is a seminal experience for the younger generation. Serena loved watching the SCYL worship service. (Jillian told me that putting together the worship service was one of her favorite activities in the SCYL at convention, as well as being able to spend time with her friends and eating pizza in the basement.) She got to sit with them and enjoy their presence. Listening to teens talk about Almont, Fryeburg, retreats, and all the other awesome events the teens get to participate in sparks interest and desire in the younger generation to someday join in these events. They look forward to getting old enough to travel to all of them. Serena has already bonded with some of the teenagers, who will no doubt remain her friends for the rest of her life. It will not matter the age difference or whether she sees them annually or

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# The Ordination Service



Ordination is always a highlight of annual conventions. Celebrating the consecration of the sacred spiritual trust bestowed on ordinands is moving and rewarding for the ordinands, their families, and the members present.

Ordination is a sacred ceremony performed within a worship service in whatever space is available, dependent on the venue of convention. This year, the grand Chapel of the Resurrection at Valparaiso University afforded a dramatic sacred space, especially as the

late afternoon sun, filtered through soaring stained-glass windows, slowly faded into the night.

There were two ordinands, Nancy Anne Piorkowski and Roslyn Taylor and an inductee, Daniel A. Burchett.

The service began with the opening of the Holy Word and the call to worship by Rev. Jane Siebert.

The Convention Choir, directed by Rev. Kathy Speas, accompanied by Marjorie Leas, sang “Servant Song.”



The laying on of hands: (kneeling, L to R) Ros Taylor, Dan Burchett, and Nancy Piorkowski



The Convention Choir



Rev. Jane Siebert and ordinands Ros Taylor, Dan Burchett, and Nancy Piorkowski

## Building Spiritual Family

*Continued from page 114*

every five years. The bonds formed at these events will remain strong.

As all spiritual community events go, time flew by quickly. All of a sudden it was time to pack everything and say goodbye. We made the rounds, and Serena was saying to everyone “See you next year at Bridgewater, near where I live!” She was already looking forward to the next convention after only four days together.

Doing everything we can to promote participation by the younger children at regional and national events will not only strengthen our community at large, but will set up the kids

for lifelong friendships in the greater Church. The never-ending love and support I receive from my spiritual family has truly shaped who I am. I want my children to have the same kind of support throughout their lives, and bringing them to conventions is one way to achieve that.

We are deeply appreciative of the financial support General Convention continues to offer for kids to attend annual conventions. I hope you will consider bringing your children to Bridgewater for Annual Convention 2020, helping them expand their lifelong spiritual family, too. ☩

Beki Greenwood is a member of the Bridgewater (Massachusetts) New Church and registrar of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly.

The candidates each delivered a message (pages 104 and 105). Ordination and induction followed, the service read by Rev. Siebert, and ministers chosen by each ordinand laid on hands as they were ordained and knelt in prayer, a Swedenborgian Church tradition.

Following communion performed by the newly ordained ministers, a closing prayer, benediction, and musical postlude completed the service. ☩

# General Council Meetings

BY KAREN CONGER & HERB ZIEGLER

## Pre-Convention Meeting

The General Council of the Swedenborgian Church held its pre-convention meeting in Valparaiso, Indiana, on Saturday, June 29, 2019.

Present were Rev. Jane Siebert, president; Tom Neuenfeldt, vice-president; Karen Conger, recording secretary; Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer; council members Lon Elmer, Rev. Thom Muller, Barb Halle, Debbie Dolley, Carl Helm, Rev. Betsy Coffman, Stan Conger, Rev. Jenny Caughman; and Rev. Dr. F. Gard Perry, chair of the Council of Ministers (COM). Rob Lawson was absent.

The Rev. Kit Billings, chair of the Committee on Admission to the Ministry (CAM), reported that the licensed pastor process includes a site assessment (to verify it is an appropriate site for a prospective licensed pastor) to be conducted by the Council's Executive Committee. He recommended to the General Council that the its Executive Committee assume this responsibility. The Council voted to accept this responsibility. The change will go back to the Council of Ministers for its approval.

The dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, reported that the Obed Mooki Swedenborgian group in Soweto, South Africa, contacted him about exploring a relationship with the General Convention. Together with its college, the group has arranged to hire Rev. Lee Woofenden to join their staff in multiple capacities. Also, Ghanaan and Nigerian Swedenborgian groups

have contacted him about forming a relationship with General Convention. The Council directed the president to appoint an ad hoc committee, composed of herself, Jennifer Lindsay, Page Morahan, Tom Neuenfeldt, Rev. Jim Lawrence and Rev. Shada Sullivan, to explore the question of a relationship with African New Church groups that seek a deeper connection with General Convention.

Rev. Robert McCluskey, on behalf of the Social Justice Committee (formerly the Social Concerns Commit-

tee), presented a new mission statement (page 113). The Council voted to endorse the Committee's work, including the new mission statement, with enthusiasm and thanks.

year of this initiative, and discussion for improvements and continuing efforts ensued.

Council of Ministers chair, Rev. Dr. Gard Perry, reported on the two-day COM meeting (page 117).

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay presented an overview on the timing and accomplishment of the annual audit (this year, a review). General Convention auditors do not engage until after the tax season, so it is not possible to present the full-year treasurer's report until later in the year.

Change in general accepted reporting standards establish two categories of funds: those with and those without donor restrictions (whether temporary or permanent). Institutions must footnote liquidity of funds as follows: 1) Amount of assets that may be spent and 2) underwater funds (funds whose donor had restrictions and whose amount is now less than the original amount).

Due to the decline in financial markets at the end of 2018, the denomination saw a loss, but this has been earned back. Expenses/receipts were ultimately approximately balanced, however, at the end of 2018.

The Council endorsed the Good Practices Committee recommendations: the Congregational Covenant for Ministries, the Good Practices Guidelines for Ministries, and the Covenantal Spirituality for the Swedenborgian Church of North America (February 2019 *Messenger*).

## Post-Convention Meeting

General Council confirmed the following presidential appointments:

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*General Council, (Top, L-R): Thom Muller, Stan Conger, Lon Elmer, Betsy Coffman, Tom Neuenfeldt, Jennifer Lindsay (Bottom L-R): Karen Conger, Carl Helm, Barb Halle, Jane Siebert, Debbie Dolley, Gard Perry, Jenny Caughman*

In addition, Robert presented a letter to the Council addressing current social justice issues. The issues will be more fully discussed by the Council at its fall meeting.

General Council members each reported on their contacts as liaisons with ministries. There was a variety of responses and interactions. Some contacts did not respond, some were appreciative but did not want to have a conversation at that time, and some conversed extensively. This was the first



## Annual Convention Recap

Continued from page 103



The LaPorte New Church

over, and the convention hosts had arranged an outing to visit the LaPorte New Church and Manna House and enjoy a picnic dinner at Stone Lake.

LaPorte New Church is a lovely little church, lovingly cared for by its congregation. Members of the congregation greeted conventioners, showing them the church and its garden and Manna House, the next-door parish house that hosts local activities and SCYL retreats, explaining their history.

On to the busses again for a short drive to Stone Lake. It was a hot day, so some opted for the lake and some sought refuge in the air-conditioned shelter. Most relaxed on the expansive deck while they enjoyed their meal and

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## General Council Meetings

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- Bill Coffman, Standing Committee for Financial Accountability
- Holly Gottschalk, Investment Committee
- Herb Ziegler, Investment Committee (unexpired term)
- Polly Baxter, Committee on Documents and Library
- Debbie Dolley, Trustees of the Building Fund
- John McIntosh, Retirement Committee

# Council of Ministers Meeting

Rev. Dr. Gard Perry, chair of the Council of Ministers (COM), reported on the two-day COM meeting to the General Council. COM reviewed the new committee structure of General Convention.

The Good Practices documents were received and endorsed by the COM in advance of a vote by the General Council and on the floor of the convention.

Election results for the Council Executive Committee are as follows: Rev. Susannah Currie, chair; Rev. Dagmar Bollinger, secretary (unexpired one-year term); and Rev. Shada Sullivan, member-at-large.

The question of adopting “Guidelines for Membership in Constituent Bodies of the Swedenborgian Church,” a request originally made by the General Council to the COM, was discussed. The COM voted to adopt those guidelines. The COM Executive Committee will initiate a process to implement the guidelines at its fall meeting.

### Proposed Guidelines for Membership in Constituent Bodies of The Swedenborgian Church

1) That members of the Council of Ministers are accountable to operating in accord with the purpose of the Swedenborgian Church. That purpose is stated in Article 1, Section 2, of the Constitution of The Swedenborgian Church:

The Swedenborgian Church exists to help people be open to the Lord’s presence and leading, especially by fostering personal and ordained ministries which facilitate the spiritual well-being of people, and which have in common a working for the Lord in bringing in the New Age, the descent of the Holy City, New Jerusalem.

The light in which we seek to walk shines from the Lord Jesus Christ in His second coming,

The denomination’s investment strategies involve more real estate transactions than in the past; Council voted to give the treasurer legal authority to buy and sell property.

Council voted to publish minutes of the annual business meeting of convention in the annual *Swedenborgian Church Journal* as “reviewed by the General Council.”

available to us through the divine presence in our hearts and minds, and through revelation in the Holy Scripture and in the life and teaching of the Lord’s servant, Emanuel Swedenborg.

2) That local spiritual communities (constituent bodies) have a purpose statement that is compatible with the purpose of General Convention.

3) That there be a series of educational sessions available for individuals who wish to become a member of the society to be eligible to serve as a delegate at the Annual Session of the Swedenborgian Church. An example of topics to be covered includes the following: 1) What is the purpose of the Swedenborgian Church? 2) What are the basics of its governance structure? 3) Who was Swedenborg? 4) What are the essential teachings of the Church with respect to the following: the Bible; the life of charity; the divinity of the Lord; and life after death? 5) What are the rights and responsibilities of membership in the local society?

Upon conclusion of said series, and upon an affirmative vote of the society, said individual shall be received into membership in a rite of confirmation.

## The President's Address

*Continued from page 95*

want to do something to care for it. Christ draws us into this New Christianity that is not an exclusive, do-it-this-one-way Christianity, but rather an inclusive spirituality that welcomes all, accepts all, ordains all who are prepared to be ministers, and honors our land and feels a connection to it that touches our very soul when it is abused.

I am proud to be a Swedenborgian. I am invigorated to be your president. I am excited about what I see going on in our churches, camps, and retreat centers. You are living new ways to “be church,” like envisioning a Helen Keller Center for Spiritual Life in Harvard Square; creating an Oasis for Community on main street in Silver City, New Mexico, offering worship, coffee, poetry, and comradeship; feeding people spiritually and physically in the San Pedro Garden Church; encouraging collaboration in politically divided Washington DC within the Spiritual Entrepreneur Epicenter; or opening up your sanctuaries to the whole community for musical presentations, dance, karate, and community prayer and silence in our hectic world. Being church is also welcoming children, teens, and families to experience camps and retreats in an accepting way that draws them back year after year.

When we know, we are called to speak out, to defend, to care.

When revelation dawns in your life,  
You can never hide your voice again.  
You become impelled to speak the truth  
revealed.

—David Whyte

Yes, I hope we can stir the pot of Swedenborgian soup while we are here together. Some of the good stuff has sunk to the bottom and it is rather diluted on top. Some old stuff is stuck to the bottom and needs to be removed. It is good nourishing soup for all, and we need to share it. We must speak the

truth revealed. We cannot hide our voice.

For what pollutes the land pollutes our spirit. What happens in the natural world is felt in the spiritual world, and I wonder what effect caging refugees is having. Again, from our friend Swedenborg, “The evil acts that we consider allowable, although we do not do them, become a part of us.” DP §81

It is easy to sit back and think science or government are the only avenues to fix our problems. Maybe it is a super huge air filter that will take all this carbon out of the air and put it back in the earth. Maybe it is an enormous tube that collects all the plastic we have dumped in our oceans. Maybe it is creating hydroponic or aeroponic plant systems or cultured meat alternatives using cellular agriculture to feed the world. To this I must say, “No, no, no.” Science cannot completely undo what we have done, because we continue to pollute, to over-use, to over-medicate.

We are in denial. And it is not

denial from not knowing. More facts aren't going to change our lifestyles. It is hard to see a difference from what we, as one person or one family, do. We are comfortable in our lives. But something has to change. Something has to work with science, to wake up the need for changes in people, in us. We need to get “woke.”

Swedenborg was a scientist before he became a theologian. He did not put away his scientific mind when he explored heaven and hell; he incorporated it. He tells us, “Now it is permitted to enter the mysteries of faith with our intelligence.” We don't have to set the facts of science aside. The facts that science produces help us to understand what we are up against. It is remembering that the Lord God, from the beginning, instructed us to work and take care of the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the living creatures, and all the variety of the vegetation of the earth, *AND ONE ANOTHER.*

May it be so . . . .

—Rev. Jane Siebert

## Hope and Prosperity

*Continued from page 105*

life for you and me. It goes outward to all the people around us, for whom we can be agents of hope and prosperity.

Sometimes we are blessed with knowing that the Divine has been able to work through us. We can see the immediate benefits and good results that the Divine has intended for other people. Sometimes our efforts backfire. Sometimes we might question why the Divine has brought us into such complicated situations where there are no clear answers. Sometimes we're not sure we can continue dealing with these difficult people. Despite all of that, we find that as we open ourselves to cooperating with divine plans for hope and prosperity for the people around us, we are eventually blessed

with hope and prosperity in our lives in return.

This promise goes outward to the people and communities around us, but it also goes inward, into the depths of our spiritual selves. The Divine has wonderful plans for our spiritual lives, despite how unredeemable our more self-serving impulses may look. The Divine has wonderful plans to bring us into alignment with divine love and light so that we can be lifted up into states of hope and joy and spiritual prosperity.

In our times of spiritual struggle, we might sometimes question whether the Divine can actually redeem us. Sometimes we might rail against the Divine for making us face such difficult choices. Sometimes we might feel that the Divine has abandoned us

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## Passages

### Births



With loving joy we welcome **Dossett Ford Siebert**, born June 11, 2019, to Casana and Emily Siebert of Bloomington,

Indiana. Dossett is the grandson of Rev. Jane Siebert and Ray Siebert and great grandson of the late Cecil and Mary Ford Siebert.

### Deaths

**Burton (Burt) L. Chaplin**, 81, of Fryeburg, Maine, died June 23, 2019,

### Hope and Prosperity

*Continued from page 118*

altogether, and we are alone fighting our demons. Yet the ancient promise comes to us over the centuries: “I have plans to prosper you and give you a future filled with hope. In those states of spiritual consolation and peace that I have promised, you will know the joy of alignment with the Divine.”

That alignment may be fleeting, it may be sustained, it may be a constant backdrop to spiritual ups and downs, but there will always be a reassurance that despite what it may look like, the Divine is intending wonderful outcomes of hope and prosperity, of trust and peace.

It is to those intended outcomes of hope and prosperity that I am very much looking forward, as I start this new phase of ministry, as an ordained minister serving this Swedenborgian community in the USA and Canada, and the Swedenborgian community in Australia. It is my prayer that I might be able to be witness to the prosperity and hope-filled future that the Divine intends for you as well. ☪

After being diagnosed with cancer three years ago Burt never complained; it was just a bump in the road, and he took it one step at a time, giving strength to his family.



He was very involved in the community, giving his time selflessly as chair of the Trustees at the Fryeburg Church, president of the Fryeburg Academy Alumni Association, and a member of the Fryeburg Budget Committee, Parks and Rec Commission, Fire Department, and Planning Board, as well as Past Master of Pythagorean Lodge No. 11 Ancient Free and Accepted Masons. He was the electrician for the FNCA for many decades. He would often “forget” to send them a bill for several years.

Born in Bridgton, Maine, son of Gertrude and Alton Chaplin, he graduated from Fryeburg Academy in 1956. In 1957, he married his high school sweetheart, Renie. From 1957 to 1961, he served in the Navy.



Burt ran his own electrical business for over forty years. He had a strong work ethic, loved to help people, and

considered everyone to be a friend.

After retiring, Renie and Burt enjoyed traveling across the country in their camper. They loved spending winters in Florida and

being members of The Holiday Rambler Group of Maine.

Burt will be remembered as a soft-spoken, easy going friend who was always there to help anyone in need. His sons remember going camping and going along on electrical jobs, crawling through tight spaces, and everything he taught them. Friends and family remember how he loved to tease them and his gentle laugh with a big smile.

He is survived by his wife, Renie; their sons, Michael (Cathy) and Jeff (Diane); his granddaughters, Alyssa Chaplin Davidson, Julia, Erica, Daria, and Elizabeth Chaplin; his brothers Robert and Kenneth Chaplin; and many nieces and nephews. He was predeceased by his brothers Shirley, John, Earl, Charlie, and Lawrence.

A memorial service was held at The Fryeburg New Church on July 6, 2019.

Gifts may be made in his memory to The Fryeburg New Church ([fryeburgnewchurch.org](http://fryeburgnewchurch.org)) and The American Cancer Society ([cancer.org](http://cancer.org)). ☪

### Annual Convention Recap

*Continued from page 117*

relaxed conversation. The picnic was a fitting wind-down for a busy week and gave everyone a chance to talk with old friends and new without checking their watches!

Following the camaraderie of the bus ride back to the university, people began packing and saying good-bye. Some tired children, and adults, too, probably, no

doubt slept some on the way home, contemplating good work, good times, and all they had experienced and learned. And they were probably contemplating their attendance at the Annual Convention next year in Bridgewater, Massachusetts. ☪



*An enjoyable after-dinner conversation at the picnic*

### About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death. American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questioning and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

## Dispatch from the 2019 Swedenborgian Convention

BY ANNABEL PARK

I'm having quite an eventful summer and it's going by too quickly! One thing that really stands out for me is that I was able to attend the Annual Swedenborgian Convention June 29–July 3 in Valparaiso, Indiana. I didn't know what to expect but I'm so glad that I decided to go. It was a transformative experience for me.

At the convention, I was inspired by the keynote speech by Matthew Fox. Swedenborgian theology was woven into his call for action on climate change. There were plenty of discussions about climate change throughout the convention.

Another recurring theme was concern among the participants about the challenge of making their churches financially viable. Rev. Rich Tafel's presentation about our plans for the Center for Spiritual Entrepreneurship became the talk of the convention. Many people expressed interest in coming to visit us in DC to see us in action.

I really enjoyed the beautiful services, the presence of children, the moving ordination ceremony, which I live streamed for the convention, and just being in the company of really lovely and thoughtful people. I so admire how Rev. Jane Siebert leads the community with her passion and kindness.

Since I am new to the Swedenborgian Church, I learned a lot about Swedenborg and the Swedenborgian community.

I also learned that Rev. Tafel has a wicked sense of humor, and we had quite a few belly laughs during our time in Indiana. There was also intensely good pizza in Valparaiso! It might be the best I've ever had, and I lived in New York for six years.

I encourage our members to go to the annual convention next year near Boston. It is great for us to meet other Swedenborgians and for them to learn about our church. ☩

Annabel Park is a member of the Church of the Holy City in Washington, DC.



Annabel Park and  
Rev. Rich Tafel