the Messenger

Published by the Swedenborgian Church of North America Volume 236 • Number 7 • September 2014

Swedenborgians Gather in St. Louis for 190th Annual Convention

By Herb Ziegler

On Wednesday, July 2, 2014, Swedenborgians from across the United States and Canada converged on St. Louis, gathering on the campus of Webster University in the village of Webster Groves. Ministers had already arrived on Sunday evening, meeting all day Monday and Tuesday as the Council of Ministers, and the officers and councilors of the General Council of the Swedenborgian Church had met all day Wednesday (page 114).

Paul Deming welcoming the delegates

The ministers, councilors, and newly arrived delegates and friends joined the members of the St. Louis Church of the Open Word Garden Chapel for the opening service.

After dinner, everyone assembled for the joyful, spirited, and inspiring opening service, led by Garden Chapel president Paul Deming, in worship and in music. The Garden Chapel Singers sang beautifully. A terrific band, composed of Paul Deming on lead guitar,

Opening band: guitars, Paul Deming and Ken Turley; vocals, Laurie Turley; keyboard, Gerry Liebman; bass, Justin Sebelski; drums, Harvey Love

Garden Chapel Singers L to R: Deborah O'Reilly, Emily Harris, Suzy Holper, Carolyn Bower

Gerry Liebman (keyboardist from the Garden Chapel), Ken Turley on guitar, Harvey Love on bass, Justin Sebelski on drums, and Laurie Turley on vocals. Their music was moving and inspiring, rounding out a warm welcoming talk by Paul. Paul introduced the member volunteers from the Garden Chapel and the Illinois Association, who received a heartfelt round of applause from the delegates for all their work to make them feel welcome and comfortable.

Swedenborgian Church president Rev. Ken Turley delivered the keynote address (page 95), setting the tone for both the convention and the direction of the Church. The address was well received and discussed as everyone gathered for the reception sponsored by the Swedenborg Foundation that followed.

The days were bookended by short services, chapel before breakfast, and vespers after evening receptions. For early risers, Rev. Susannah Currie led a program of exercises called Awakening Movement at 6:45 AM, and Ken Turley led a morning session of meditational singing and learning new songs called Morning Sing.

After breakfast on Thursday, the annual Memorial Worship Service was held. Many participants came forward to remember loved ones and friends who have passed fully into the spiritual world, including many who passed over the past year.

The business of the annual conven-

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The Editor's Desk

What to Do?

I was flush with warm feelings from my first experience of St. Louis while attending the annual convention there. Some of us ventured into the city to experience the local culture. We encountered mixed-race audiences and performers at some local blues clubs and on the streets, and the pervasive warmth and friendliness of the people we encountered was striking.

I was shortly thereafter shocked and dismayed to hear and see the news of the brutal, dehumanizing, and unnecessary killing in nearby Ferguson of an unarmed teenager who was guilty of no crime or behavior that would warrant his killing by a police officer.

I condemn neither the police nor black teenagers as a group for their behavior. Our police forces are composed of brave and dedicated men and women who insert themselves into life-threatening situations to protect us. The particulars of this case are in dispute, but something went terribly wrong, whether in the character and acculturation of the police officer involved or the training provided by the police department. I do not speak to the guilt or innocence the involved individuals; Individual responsibility for the tragedy is not my focus, but rather the cultural atmosphere that made it possible—or inevitable.

I cannot ignore the historical roots of this problem, nor can I throw my hands up in despair because the problem appears permanently ingrained in our national culture. Black teenagers are descendents of Africans who were brutally kidnapped and transported to America to be slaves. Their families and community norms were torn asunder. They were denied education or institutions of social order beyond the whip and whim of their owners. Most problems and issues that revolve around race in America cannot be separated from these facts. As an American and a Christian, I have a sacred obligation to do what I can to right these wrongs—but what to do? All that I can manage right now is try to express my views without capitulating to the notion that if you support the victim, you demonize the police, and if you support the police you demonize young black men. I will continue to search my heart for better ways to be of use.

Will we, who follow the teachings of Jesus Christ and affirm justice, charity, and care for the oppressed simply stand by and equivocate, ignore or deny what we see? I humbly suggest prayerful and heart-searching self-reflection as a start.

—Herb Ziegler

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Church Calendar

- Oct 3–4, 2014: SHS Board meeting • Berkeley, CA
- Nov 6–8, 2014: General Council meeting • Framingham, MA
- June 4–7, 2015: Gathering Leaves—A Swedenborgian Women's Retreat Cincinnati, OH

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Published monthly except July and August by the Communications Support Unit of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America), Ken Turley, president.

September 2014

Volume 236, No. 7, Whole Number 5392

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Reproduction: Gnomon Copy, Cambridge, MA

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Subscriptions: free online subscription at www.swedenborg.org. Printed and mailed to US address, $20/year; to Canada address, $30/year; to all other addresses, $35/year; single copies, $2.00, Libraries, prisoners, free. Send check with address to Central Office. Other requests, write Central Office.

Deadline for submissions is six weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

The opinions expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the editor, the Communications Support Unit, or the Swedenborgian Church.

The President's Annual Address

The Keynote Address of the 190th Swedenborgian Annual Convention

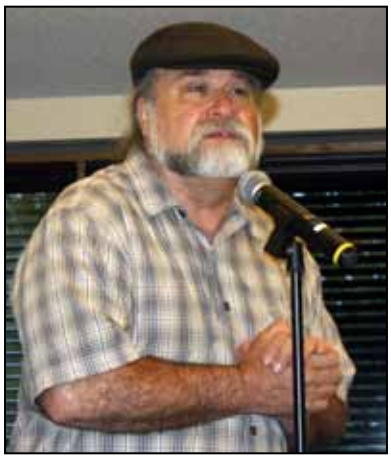
2014: The Year of Providence: Gateway to Providence; The Assurance of Purpose: Being Led by the Lord

2015: The Year of Regeneration: The Way of Change

The General Council 2013 Vision Statement:

As people and a community we are becoming

- Open to the Divine presence and leading in all things
- Authentic and enthusiastic about living our Swedenborgian faith and vibrantly communicating this at all levels
- A living body finding unity within our diversity, inclusive and meeting others where they are
- Inspired by God's love, wisdom, and energy, sharing creativity and resources to facilitate health, interconnectedness, and transformation of people for joyful and excellent service to the world and each other.



When I began as president of the Swedenborgian Church, I said I wasn't sure if I was taking on the job of hospice chaplain or midwife. As is so often the case, being a Swedenborgian, the either/or question was answered with a both/and response. Completing the fourth year of my presidency, if I were to try to conceptualize the tasks of president, it seems more like the job of a gardener.

I am charged with the responsibility of caring for an array of diverse living things, and there are all kinds of things alive with different needs and in all stages of growth. Some things, having flowered and bloomed and having produced good fruit, are now reaching the end of their useful lives. There are other things just beginning to show life, in some cases seeds just recently planted and barely beginning to show signs of life, and of course there are other living entities in all the various stages of the life cycle: some just budding, some full flowering, some bearing fruit, others just present in the unassuming beauty of their being and even dormancy. My job is to oversee all these things, see to the distribution of the water and fertilizer we have as needed. Mostly this means overseeing the work of others who are carrying water, or removing weeds, or shoveling compost, or transplanting—the metaphors go on and on.

But there is one overriding image that I have been carrying in my mind for months. I used to think of this denomination as a tree with deep roots and many branches covered with leaves for the healing of the nations and bearing fruit for the nourishment of hungry souls. And sincerely, I believe that over the two hundred and forty-some years that it has been in existence, this has been a true correspondence. But now an image has come to mind that has me filled with complex and drastically conflicting thoughts and emotions. For a long time I have believed that this church, and by that I mean the organizational structure we call the General Convention of the New Jerusalem, was the life and future of Swedenborgianism, less presumptuously and more accurately called the Lord's New Church. I believe this function is still true, but to be brutally honest, now I see General Convention more as an acorn. And even more specifically, the shell of the acorn within which the essence of new life has been housed. At this stage, the full and flowering tree is indeed within, but the shell of the acorn which is serving as a secure and rigid structure, with a life and beauty of its own and an essential and useful purpose, is starting to show cracks, and it is starting to come apart in ways that cannot be stopped and which are painful and disturbing and hard to accept. There is the sense of impending loss, the death of that which was once so strong and secure.

We are going through nothing less, and nothing more, than regeneration, the very thing that our church so eloquently teaches as the means to salvation.

But of course you must see, as do I, this metaphorical image not just from the perspective of the acorn's shell, but from the perspective of the living seed within, which is struggling to come into being. The shell of the acorn is falling apart; it is an image of death and destruction and the end of life. But for the seed, it is the new life within the dying structure which is forcing the change and ultimate and inevitable destruction of the containing shell. If you look at this church closely, you will see, even as you cannot avoid seeing the cracked and decaying shell of

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Ordination Sermon: the Rev. Elizabeth Blair

Stepping Into Visibility

Bible reading: Revelation 21

And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.

—Revelation 21:5

First of all I want to thank all of you for being here. Today is the culmination of many years of seeking and preparation, stops, starts, and perseverance, and it is such a blessing to look out and see so many people who have supported Anna and me along the way and who have loved us through doubts and difficult times. Today is a great day, and it means the world to me to have you all here.

And speaking of this journey towards ordination that I've been on, I want to tell you a story from one day of this journey. It was a Monday afternoon two years ago in Berkeley. I was in Inese Radzins' office, and for those of you who haven't gotten to meet her, Inese is a gifted and insightful professor of theology at SHS in the Bay Area. I was in her office, and I hate to admit this, but I was kind of complaining to her. I was complaining to her about having been at dinner with a few of my friends in San Francisco from outside the religious and spiritual community who were talking about this book they had all read. It turns out that each of them had recently read *The God Delusion* by Richard Dawkins, a British evolutionary biologist. *The God Delusion* is a book whose central point is that not only are religious traditions misguided and without any kind of merit, but that they are also dangerous and damaging to human life. So, my friends were saying how great this book was and how it helped them really understand religion for the first time. And it was just kind of funny, you know, each of these friends had known me for several years and knew I was in seminary and had been through chaplaincy training and was hoping to become ordained to be a chaplain, so it was a little strange and uncomfortable to be sitting with them, these individuals I loved, who were wholesale dismissing the subject matter of my whole vocational choice based on one scientist's opinion.

I didn't know what to do. So I just kind of nodded vaguely and eventually the subject shifted. But it bothered me enough that I brought it up with Inese a few days later. As I was telling her the story, I realized that one aspect that really got to me was that here my friends were, turning to Dawkins, a scientist, for consultation on matters of religion when I, a person actually studying religion, and a person with whom they had a relationship, was sitting right there. It made me feel invisible, not valued, overlooked. In response to this story, Inese said something that I don't think I'll ever forget, she said, "We live in the age of the scientist." She then said, "In previous periods of history people went to theologians and spiritual people to help interpret their world, and then at some point people began to turn to philosophers, and now they turn to scientists." And as I let what she said sink in, I realized how true it is.

It is harmful to the soul to close down against change, to lower the gates around our traditions and to refuse to engage.

Many times in popular culture, when there are issues of ultimate concern or ultimate truth at hand, it's scientists or engineers who are looked to for answers. And after eight years in the Bay Area, I'm all too familiar with this happening. We certainly hear the narrative that the technology industry will save the economy, or technology will save the environment, or technology will solve (insert social problem here).

Science and technology are ascendant in our culture in a way they have never been before. To be honest, I have fears about this reality that go beyond my own ego's desire to be listened to by my friends. I fear the implications of a reliance on literal thinking and an emphasis on black and white truths. Like many of you, perhaps, I fear the growing presence of technology in our daily lives. And rightly so, there are significant things to be afraid of.

Recently a journalist local to St. Louis, Sarah Kendzior, wrote a piece about the death of the American shopping mall. In it she actually laments the death of the mall—if you can believe it. She and I are both in our thirties and were raised in mid-sized Midwestern towns. She and I share memories of middle school Saturday afternoons walking around the mall, checking out the CD store, maybe drinking an Orange Julius. Malls were, in some ways, the last ubiquitous, in-person route for buying things for many middle class folks. Shopping has moved online at a harried clip. Hundreds of malls in the US have closed down recently and—this is crazy—half of all malls in the US are predicted to close in the next ten years. And why? Amazon.com has taken over the retail world in a manner few could have predicted just a

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few years ago. And they did it by using math and technology to streamline the entire online consumer experience. Exploiting online search histories and using mathematical algorithms, which determine what pops up as things that you might like to buy when you go to their website, Amazon offers a more efficient route between producer and consumer than, perhaps, the world has ever seen.

Great, right? I'm not so sure. An Amazon warehouse employee, who is expected to collect an order every thirty-three seconds, said of his co-workers and himself, "We are machines, we are robots, we plug our scanner in, we're holding it, but we might as well be plugging it into ourselves. We don't think for ourselves, maybe they don't trust us to think for ourselves as human beings. Maybe we're not human." Listen to that, "Maybe we're not human." This is my greatest fear of the age of the scientist, that the exploitation of science and technology will dehumanize our landscape past a point of no return, and that the experience of being alive will become less robust, less dynamic, less human.

And at precisely this same moment people are turning less and less to spiritual or religious traditions for comfort, sustenance, or guidance in their daily lives. That Amazon employee I just quoted probably doesn't go to church. For those of us who travel in religious or spiritual circles, it feels like this is all people have been talking about for years, isn't it? This cataclysmic shift in religious culture. It can feel overwhelming, can't it? And tiring, and scary. And I know that it makes me want to retreat. I want to take comfort in the company of those of us who remain here, within religious traditions, even as these spaces of comfort shrink. I love being around like-minded people who I can talk theology with, who have a similar mental framework for understanding the world. And there is a deep need for these spaces for those of us who remain in them. We do need to continue to cultivate our spiritual understanding of the world, and it's really helpful to do that with other people who share a spiritual shorthand.

My fear, however, is that as the church shrinks I will retreat more and more, engaging less and less with the world that changes, and shifts, and moves around us as it always has, but faster this time, and with deeper consequences.

As I think back on that meal I had with my friends who were all reading Dawkins, I wonder now how I could have responded. I did not need to make myself invisible by not responding at all, and I did not need to expect that they would automatically see me as a person with authority because of my vocation. And I know that for many of them, the kind of critique *The God Delusion* offers of religion is a soothing balm for wounds incurred while being raised in spiritually harmful churches, and on top of that I recognize that Dawkins has, even to my thinking, some very legitimate things to say.

Given all of this, what I needed to embody in that moment was not invisibility; I didn't need to erase myself. Likewise, I didn't need to challenge them in their own personal processes of spiritual formation. What I needed to embody was loving engagement.

Sounds easy enough, right? Loving engagement sounds innocuous even. But I think that for any of us who have risked vulnerability and have been hurt, which is likely all of the people in this room, we know that it's not. This is risky business—risky business in an uncertain time. Engaging with the world, stepping into visibility as religious people with other people who are running away from previously upheld traditions that we find value in, can be painful. We risk rejection, we risk misunderstanding, we risk the uncomfortable feeling of being different. But the only thing more detrimental to risking these things is strengthening our defenses against them. It is harmful to the soul to close down against change, to lower the gates around our traditions and to refuse to engage. As readers of Swedenborg, we know that what we believe needs to be lived, or it becomes an empty container. We know that when we make movements to live in alignment with our deepest loves, to live who we are in the full light of day, we become more fully human, and more fully alive, even when we experience pain.

So, my friends, I wanted to frame this sermon with Revelation 21 because it's a passage that I've gone back to over and over in my own spiritual journey. Even before I found Swedenborg who allowed me a deeper and more meaningful interpretation than what I was given as a child. "Behold, I am making all things new" has always felt to me like this wonderful promise from God. It will all be made new, over and over.

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Ordination Sermon: the Rev. Anna Woofenden

Here I Am, Send Me

Bible reading: Matthew 25:31-40

For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.

—Matthew 25:35-36

God created us in such a way that our inner self is in the spiritual world and our outer self is in the physical world. This is so that the spiritual part of us, which belongs to heaven, can be planted in the physical part the way a seed is planted in the ground.

—Emmanuel Swedenborg

When the ocean and I meet, we have a ritual. I walk to that salty shore and I bend down, right at the edge of the waves. I take a deep breath and breathe a prayer to God as I look out on the vast ocean. And then I take the water, and with my fingers I make the sign of the cross on my forehead and on my chest, tracing the mark that was placed there so many years ago in my baptism. Something happens when flesh meets water—when my fingers meet that salt. In this act, the internal, that which belongs to heaven, meets the physical reality of the natural world, of my body. In this physical act, I experience and can name the presence of God with me, the revelation, the incarnation of God in the world.

Swedenborgian theology illuminates this idea that the natural world is infused with spiritual reality. That we, at our core, are spiritual beings, created for heaven, and as we're living in this natural world we have the opportunity to increase our awareness and receptivity of God's influx, infusion, and infilling in all things. In this framework we find an invitation not to reject or to conquer the physical but instead to be conscious, aware, and appreciative of the world around us, as it is the conduit for the spiritual, the celestial, the heavenly—that the physical world around us and our very bodies are the skin that God's love and wisdom can come together in to act in useful service.

> For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, naked and you clothed me, I was a stranger and you welcomed me in, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me. For whatever you do for the least of these, who are members of my family, you do this for me.

. . . the Lord's table to be open to all, not only must it be available to all to receive, it also must be open for all who are called to be trained, gifted, and ordained to serve—to serve.

These words of Jesus invite us into the incarnational reality that the Lord embodied while walking on earth, when the One God of heaven and earth chose to come on earth not as a mere concept, as a set of rules to follow, or merely as an ethereal presence, but to come on earth as a human being—feet, and dust, hands, and healing—demonstrating what the kingdom of heaven looks like, mustard seeds and loaves of bread, bending down and washing feet, feeding and being fed. We may not know the ins and outs of the arguments of who God is and who we are. But we can know this: that God is in all things and created us for a life of love and service; that in a hand reaching out to another God is with us; that when we bend down and wash the feet of one whom we hesitate to even touch, Divinity is incarnate; that when we take the bread and the wine, the water, God is incarnate with us—cooking supper, writing poetry, wiping noses, digging in the dirt—love in action. As my late grandfather, the Rev. Dr. Bill Woofenden, put it, "Love, by its very nature must be doing something."

In doing these acts, love is revealed. Love is revealed as the truth of all people being created and seen as beloved children of God is named. When you do this to the least of these, you do it for me.

My calling to ministry has been revealed to me through my body, through the spiritual reality of who God created me to be, pressing and yearning to be manifest in the world around me.

For many years I had the honor of serving a church congregation that I love, a church that was born into an organization that will not ordain me because of my gender, my body. I have much gratitude for this church and this organization, and I hold them in great love and respect. And it was in that messy mixed bag of delight in service and the limits and prescribed roles of how I could serve that my calling to ordained ministry became clear. In our congregation, we had an annual family camp. And every year on Saturday evening we would have a Holy Supper; Communion; service.

Now, every year I would prepare for this. Being the lead on the camp, I gathered together the staff, prepared the program, set the theme, and so on. And then when the evening arrived, I always took great joy in setting that sa-

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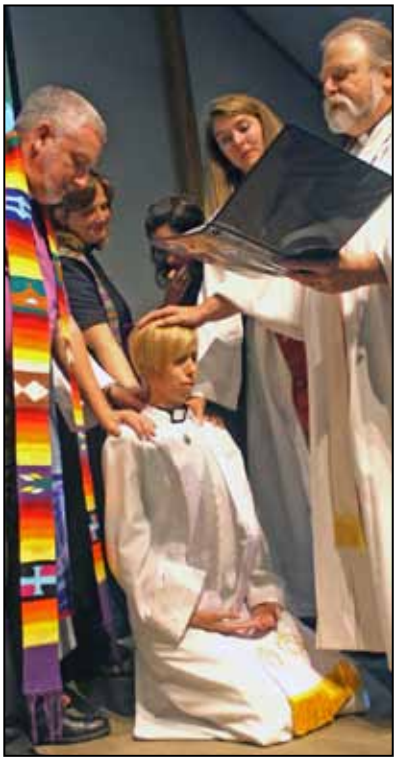
cred table: spreading the white linens, creating the shape and space of the service, sprinkling candles and flowers, silk and stones, and setting out the bread and wine—preparing a table for our community to gather around.

I loved this worship and looked forward to the profound moments I witnessed in the lives of our congregation during this yearly ritual. But after a few years, another tradition developed: I would cry—before, after, sometimes during, the service. And I'm not talking a few tears, a tissue, and an "oh, isn't it beautiful when the Spirit moves us" kind of crying.



No. These tears exploded out of me, taking over my body and catching even me, especially me, off guard.

The inevitable trigger: when it came time to start the service and I could not stand beside my colleague, the minister of our congregation, to serve Communion to our community. There was something about the elements of the sacrament—the bread, the wine handed, received—that transcended the rational arguments of why I could not be an ordained minister and exposed to me the truth of my calling.

I needed to be presiding over this meal alongside my colleague, serving our community together as we did throughout the year. My whole being ached to be breaking the bread and pouring the wine, telling the story of the Lord's feast with us, offering spiritual food and drink and blessing these people I held so dear.

Afterwards, I would find myself curled up with close friends, crying and going back over the evening. Picking apart the trigger phrases and being sure I was over-reacting to unintentional words and actions of exclusion and ignorance. We were all ignorant. I was ignorant of how the fibers of my being were shouting out my call, my call to serve at the table. My friends were ignorant, comforting the pain in the specific situation, but not knowing, not seeing and naming the question of what God was stirring inside me.

The next year my body didn't wait and contain itself until after the service. I found myself pounding up the hill to the bathrooms after setting up the space. I scared myself as I slammed stall doors, stomped my heavy boot-clad feet. This anger that was pressing out of my body was not something I was used to—or comfortable with. I assumed since it was so strong, intense, it must be something bad

I can see and ask the question now: was it God? Was it God letting every fiber of my being know that there is something powerful, deep, and sacred about sharing the bread and cup, and that not only was I called to do it but that I'm called to stand for an opening of the sacred table, that for the Lord's table to be open to all, not only must it be available to all to receive, it also must be open for all who are called to be trained, gifted, and ordained to serve . . . to serve.

Whether I like it or not, I know what it's like in the very fiber of my being to be told—be it in words or systems, cultural norms, or well intentioned theories—that I am not hearing the Lord properly, that I am inadequate and unlovable, that I am fundamentally flawed. I know what it feels like to question whether I am wholly created in the image of God, whether I am loved and okay. I know this wholly human experience of questioning who we are in relation to God and the world.

It is out of these times of struggle and doubt, pain, and darkness that we can find the clarity, truth, love, and light of the Lord and claim who we are in God. It is the sacred charge that I stand here today, to claim for myself and to claim for others whose call may be different but who are also called to do and be incarnations of God's love in the world. All of us are whole. All of us are loved and all of us are created in the scared image of God. And God created us to embody love and wisdom, and made us to be changed and transformed.

And I stand here before you because you have seen me, and claimed me, and given me a home to serve from. I stand here today with a grateful, passionate, and peaceful heart as I step forward to serve from this denomination and tradition that is embodying love in action, seeing the Lord at work in the beauty of creation, the variety of humanity, and is committed to the work of being receptors of heaven here on earth.

This is what propels me forward in my future ministry to re-imagine church, to facilitate and serve a church that is attuned to the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of our community. I am stepping forward as an ordained minister to plant a church,

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Convention Sermon: the Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen

You Come from a Blessed Place

It is such a blessing and a privilege to be here with you this afternoon, in this hour of worship. It has been a beautiful week of gathering together, a powerful reminder that we are a part of something so much larger than ourselves. I am reminded of this daily at home; I serve our New Church in Fryeburg, Maine, and I have the privilege there of living in our parsonage, a place where I find daily reminders of the past. Just last week, we were working on the patio, and as I pulled back some overgrown grass, there written in the cement was "Rienstra 1985." [Rev. David Rienstra is a former minister for Fryebug.]

If I go to the attic, I find papers and books and sermons belonging to the very first minister of the Fryeburg New Church, Rev. Baman Stone. Among the papers is his resignation letter to the Congregational Church, a bold move that led to the building of a Swedenborgian presence in Fryeburg. I cherish this history and inheritance of ours; I love hearing the stories of our past, particularly those seemingly golden moments of opportunity to share the faith with others. Here is a prime example I recently came across—it is 1857, six miles out of Portland, and the thermometer reads below zero. "Today we are in the midst of the severities of a Maine winter . . . . No cars pass on the railway and there is no means of getting into town. Notwithstanding the severity of the cold, a respectable audience assembled to hear the Swedenborgian missionary." Any guesses about the size of that "respectable audience?" Three hundred people!

I love that past . . . , and I have been very grateful to be reminded this week that we are also called to look forward. We are in a unique period, a time when church statisticians tell us that more than eighty percent of Americans are finding more fulfilling things than choosing church to do on Sundays.

And yet, while the desire for the traditional worship hour and church life as we know it appears to be in a state of flux, I think we can safely assume that while we may be unsure of the way, we as human beings still long for connection, healing, and transformation. I recently read a definition of *transform* that I liked: to be transformed is to exist in a way that we have never existed before.

From our reading in Matthew, we find Jesus calling each disciple to exist in a way that he had never existed before—to be a partner in healing.

> Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

This new calling for the disciples to be agents of the healing process seems to have come out of recognition that the people were lost, like sheep without a shepherd. Indeed, Jesus describes the crowds as "harassed and helpless" [Matthew 9:36], and in an act of mercy, He invites the disciples to become part of that healing process, to be laborers of the harvest. What a moment!

As a denomination, this last year we looked to "Divine Providence" as a theme that could unite our churches and ministries. Simply put, Divine Providence is the way the Lord looks after us. The goal of Divine Providence is that "what has been broken apart should be made whole"[*Divine Providence* §4].

In our tradition, we have a particular way of understanding just what has broken apart—it is the Love and Wisdom united in God that has been broken apart in us. This is why I can love what is false or not care for what is truly good; I feel it in moments when I lack discernment or lack compassion; I experience this brokenness when I place myself above others.

When my thoughts return to the story of the Lord calling the twelve to be healers, it strikes me as most noteworthy that when we hear of the twelve who were called to Jesus for just this purpose, there were in fact twelve. No one is left out on account of not being "good enough." Who is always the last to be included and yet is in fact included? Judas! And what do we always hear upon reading his name? He is "the one who betrayed him." Does this betrayal keep him from being invited to share God's love? Not in the least.

Just as Jesus was working to heal the afflicted during His physical life, the Divine Human One is still working within and among us towards our spiritual health now—and at the same time, we can also be servants in this purpose.

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How can we be of service? Is there something specific I can be more aware of? Jesus shares some very detailed instructions about how we are to go about this journey [see Matthew 10]. Interestingly, he includes a list of items we are *not* to take. (He must have known we would want them!)

From Matthew 10:9–10, we read these words, "Take no gold, or silver, or copper in your belts, no bag for your journey, or two tunics, or sandals, or a staff; for laborers deserve their food."

My mind begins to imagine how full my arms would be carrying these items; I can imagine I might be so busy managing these items that I might just have trouble knocking on someone's door, or taking a hand. If I've got my money with me, I can imagine that I'm allowing myself to formulate a "plan B"—maybe I won't have to depend on the hospitality of a stranger; I can figure out my own way. To be honest, maybe I'm a little anxious to truly engage the world, meeting the other just as I am. Perhaps I worry that if I don't have anything that I am not anything. Imagine how the disciples were feeling in that moment as the Lord called them to be present to the people, a vessel for the Lord's healing love—and they weren't to take these most wished for travel items. The Lord is surely calling us, too, to let go in some important way—in our churches, our lives, our relationships—so that we might engage our neighbors more deeply. It may be actual things—or it very well may be our own understandings, our own loves, our sense of control.

I am reminded that it is undeniably easy to go through the day and not be fully present to those around us. Even in a conversation with a loved one, how easy it is to be formulating my own response before the other has finished speaking! This is not the Lord's way, who created the universe for the sake of being with others in heaven. As *Divine Providence* relates, ". . . spiritual love wants to share what it has with others, and to the extent that it can do so, it is totally present," [§27].

As I go home I will continue to ponder this—how I might be more attentive to those within our church's wall and without, so that I might be a better servant of the Lord. In a report given here at this annual convention by Kurt Fekete, our youth director, he stated that many of the teens didn't find traditional worship meaningful. What do I do with that? Will I be attentive to that?

As I come to a close, I want to share one more thought. It was a thought that came into my mind while I was in our Fryeburg Church not long before arriving here, and I want to share it because it felt very clear that it wasn't from me. The thought was this: "You come from a blessed place." At first, I took that as just for me. "Thank you, Lord," I thought to myself, "I needed that." (I was a little nervous about today!) And then I realized what it was about and so much more. The disciples literally came from a blessed place. And now, we too, gathered here together, come from a blessed place. The Lord has blessed each one of you; and you can serve as a vessel of God's Love and Wisdom just as you are. You are enough just as you are. May the Lord help us not to only see the healing in our life, but to work and support health and wholeness in those around us, and may we be truly attentive to the life around us.

Iungerich Fund Call for Proposals

Established in 1874, the Louis C. Iungerich Fund ("The Iungerich Fund") makes grants at its trustees' discretion for the publication or printing and gratuitous distribution of the theological writings given by Emanuel Swedenborg among the Protestant clergy of the United States and Canada, including theological students and professors of theology. As time and technology have moved forward, the trustees of the Iungerich Fund, using the discretionary powers given to them by the terms of Mr. Iungerich's directions, allow grants that include electronic creation, printing, posting, and dissemination as well as "traditional" methods and have broadened the use of the Fund to include explications and summaries of Swedenborg's writings.

Awards are made by the trustees following this general order:

- Projects of the General Convention and General Convention constituents
- Projects of the Swedenborg Foundation
- Other projects that fall within the guidelines of the trust's use and that have a benefit to the General Convention
- Remaining projects that meet the purpose of the Iungerich Fund

Send a letter of application to Central Office (manager@swedenborg.org) or to chris.laitner@gmail.com no later than October 15, 2014, for consideration for a 2015 grant. The letter should contain a clear explanation of the project, how it fits the use of purpose of the fund, and how many (what audience) will be impacted by the project.

Grant determinations will be sent out to applicants between the end of November and December 10, 2014.

Questions should be addressed to the chair, chris.laitner@gmail.com.

SCYL Teens Converge on St. Louis

The teens with adult leaders on a field trip to the unique and fascinating City Museum

BY MARIEL TISHMA

The 2014 Annual Convention was held in St. Louis; this is also my hometown. Consequentially, this convention was my first and my last as a member of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL). [Mariel is eighteen years old and thus aging out of the SCYL.] I am sure that I am not the first person to have had an annual convention held in her hometown, but it was a new experience for me. Watching all my friends from around the country come flooding into the place I knew as home was overwhelmingly joyful. I felt honored for them to choose my city to explore (even if they really had little choice in the matter). I tried to be the "gracious host" to those in the SCYL who had never had the St. Louis experience. There was much partaking of "traditional" St. Louis food, and endless Arch jokes. Regardless, I hope that they felt as comfortable here as I do every day. I think they did, as the SCYL led a worship service that granted insight into their personal lives in a way that can only be done among those seen as family.

Invitation to East Coast Swedenborgian Retreat

The Massachusetts New Church Union is hosting a gathering for members and friends of the Maine, Massachusetts, New York, Middle Atlantic and Southeast Associations at Rolling Ridge Retreat Center, 660 Great Pond Rd, North Andover, Massachusetts (www.rollingridge.org), on October 17–19, 2014, Friday dinner to Sunday breakfast. The cost is $50 per person (subsidized by the Massachusetts New Church Union).

Rev. Catherine Lauber will lead sessions titled Biblical Graffiti: Revealing the Ancient Symbols of the Book of Revelation, an experiential study of the correspondences found in the Book of Revelation using art, journaling, individual activities, and small group discussion to connect with a personal meaning from the images and the scripture passages.

The schedule is Friday, 7–9 PM, informal fellowship gathering and games; Saturday, 10 AM–4 PM, retreat sessions; Saturday, 5–6 PM, association meetings; Sunday 9 AM, devotional service. Saturday evening will be sharing time. We will view some "Swedenborg Minute" videos; if you have something you'd like to offer, please contact Rev. Susannah Currie, pastor@bridgewaternewchurch.org"

Go to: http://eepurl.com/VQTez to register. Let's share what's meaningful to us about living our theology!

SHS Report to the Annual Meeting

By Jane Siebert & Jim Lawrence

The Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) at Pacific School of Religion (PSR) has three primary objectives that are central in the current vision of the school and board's work: 1) developing a flexible educational program that can serve a broadly dispersed student body; 2) finding new ways to develop community in that largely distance-based student body; and 3) building the cutting edge in Swedenborgian scholarship.

The seminary has just completed its thirteenth year in Berkeley, California, in the academic and institutional model of a house of studies at a major multi-denominational seminary (Pacific School of Religion). The move to affiliate with PSR has given SHS renewed visibility as we are now part of the largest theological consortium in North America, the Graduate Theological Union (GTU).

We are pleased that the current model that has produced twenty-eight ordained ministers for the church, with seven students in various stages of the educational program. Three waves, or general phases of recruitment patterns, are clearly visible for this productivity: a first wave that stemmed from the new visibility at PSR and the GTU, which inspired a number of "campus converts" from other traditions; a second wave landed when we permitted distance-student journeys; and a current third wave that is possible due to the second wave which makes SHS an increasingly popular vocational option for those connected to the General Church of the New Jerusalem (New Church).

As we are always looking for the best model for theological education to meet our unique and ever-changing needs, the board spent the whole of this past year in a serious study and analysis of our current model. As beneficial as a house of studies within another seminary has been, we have been increasingly aware of pinch points as both institutions have evolved in specific ways. The most important pinch point is the large amount of faculty and institutional time given to running that seminary in our role as a major component of PSR. Since we introduced a distance learning option, the majority of our students are at other seminaries, and we need to be able to better support them. Other factors include the increasing importance of Swedenborgian scholarship as a world philosophy now that we are in a high-visibility academic environment. Scholarship takes a great deal of time. And finally, a new important factor is our recently developed non-ordained Licensed Pastor Ministry path, which will require some training and which engages the seminary for some of it. This study has brought us to a moment of possibly redefining how we are situated as an institution within GTU.

Jane Siebert Receiving the Wilson Van Dusen Reader *from Jim Lawrence*

This year we have two graduates and ordinands, Anna Woofenden and Elizabeth Blair; seven current students, Lisa Solwold, Joy Barnitz, Thom Muller, Shada Sullivan, Gordon Meyer, Julie Conaron, and Terry Schnarr; four faculty members, Devin Zuber, Inese Radzins, George Dole (adjunct) and Jim Lawrence; and scholar-in-training Rebecca Esterson.

We thank several board members who are concluding their tenures on the board: Carla Friedrich, Sage Cole, Bill Coffman, Kathy Speas, Jennifer Lindsay, and Jane Siebert. In special recognition for her long tenure in two stints as board chair that included the move from Boston to Berkeley, Rev. Jane Siebert was presented with a special *Wilson Van Dusen Reader*, comprised of articles in the Wilson Van Dusen archives, which she had been instrumental in securing as a bequest to the seminary.

Financial issues at SHS include the following: 1) for two years we fought the wrongful accusation by the IRS that we were in non-compliance, which resolved with complete exoneration and refund of a small portion of our costs; 2) during this period we were not comfortable with running our annual campaign, so we imposed budgetary restraints to get us through it; 3) we benefited from a significant growth of our endowment thanks to the performance of the Common Fund; 4) we were able to finish the fiscal year (July 2013–June 2014) modestly in the black. We thank the many people, churches, and associations that donated to SHS. The school belongs to all of us, and its work is vital to the future of our ministries.

The Rev. Jane Siebert served as chair of the Board of Trustees for twelve years. The Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is dean of SHS.

An article about Rev. Anna Woofenden's church planting in San Pedro, California, appears in the June 17 issue of *Christian Century*:

www.christiancentury.org/article/2014-06/new-soil-new-planters

(Access to the full article requires a minimum $2.95 subscription.)

View more photos at
https://2014swedenborgianconvention.shutterfly.com/4

Graduation Address from the Chair of SHS

Ten years ago I was sitting where you are, Anna and Elizabeth, and receiving my Certificate in Swedenborgian Studies with the first graduating class of the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS) and looking forward to ordination. At that time it was the graduates who gave short commencement messages about our call to ministry. Truthfully, I couldn't remember what I talked about so I looked back in my old computer files and found this quote from the eighth chapter of John [31–32]: "Jesus spoke to the Jews who had believed him. 'If you obey my teaching,' he said, 'you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth. And the truth will set you free.'"

I shared how finding the inner sense of the scripture through Swedenborg's writings some twenty years prior had set me free—free from the baggage of an exclusionary Christian perspective in which I had grown up, thinking I had to believe a certain way and say certain things, and only the elect Christians were going to heaven when they died; free from a view of the Old Testament as only historical stories with ruthless killing and an angry, judgmental God who ordered the death of all the men, women, children, and animals when they didn't obey; free from the religious doctrine that, like the children of Israel, I did not even realize was enslaving me. "They answered him, 'We are Abraham's children. We have never been slaves of anyone. So how can you say that we will be set free?'" [John 8:33]

Sometimes, one of the hardest things is to see what enslaves us or how we might be enslaving another. Swedenborg reminds us: it is only when we can see what enslaves us or how we might be enslaving others that we can do anything about it. Finding my way into the Swedenborgian Church through marriage (and lots of study and questions in the Pretty Prairie Church) opened my eyes to what Swedenborg called True Christianity, for me a Christianity of freedom: freedom to ask the difficult questions and leave the answers open for continual seeking and finding; freedom to serve as a chaplain and accept the wide variety of spiritual paths of those I am serving without feeling like I have to squeeze them into my way of thinking or "save" them; freedom to continue to find truth in all religions. I am forever grateful!

I was ordained with Rev. Kathy Speas, Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen, Rev. Kevin Baxter, and Rev. Rich Tafel, quite an austere group. Wonderful memories flood back of that annual convention in Kitchener, Ontario. I asked two women to lay hands on me. Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey was an inspiration to me and many others as the first woman to be ordained in the Swedenborgian Church, and I was honored to be blessed by her presence and the gift of her hands on my head during ordination.

The other woman I asked was not well known in General Convention circles, Emily Jane Lemole. I had gotten to know her through our work on the first Gathering Leaves retreat of Swedenborgian women from all branches of the Church. Emily Jane is a member of the General Church, a church she loves, the church of her parents, family, and ancestors. She had shared with me her long-held desire to be ordained as a Swedenborgian minister, but she had been told as a girl by the bishop of the General Church that this path was not open to women. She said it was like she faced a big, heavy locked door, a door that was locked by the interpretation of Swedenborg's writings about the differences between male and female, a door she saw no way around, a door that blocked her hope, her vision, and her desire to be a minister. I could not understand this interpretation of the writings I had come to love the writings that had freed me were being used to enslave her. It did not make sense.

I asked Emily Jane to lay hands on me at my ordination as a way to affirm her call to ministry and encourage her not to give up hope. Swedenborg reminds us that rationality and freedom are what make us human, and if our freedom is blocked, our rationality is blocked and our humanity is blocked.

Emily Jane Lemole told me she caught a glimpse of another way when she attended the convention and ordination that year. She said the door at least had a handle on it that she could use to open it. She did not give up hope. She went on to be ordained two years ago into the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

And tonight we have two more women that did not give up hope, each with her own story, each with her own struggles, each with her own journey to this graduation tonight and ordination tomorrow, on July 4th, the day that signals freedom, honors freedom, and rings out freedom. "And you shall know the truth and the truth shall set you free."

Interestingly, these two women are almost on opposite ends of the spectrum of Swedenborgian immersion. Elizabeth Blair is relatively new to our Swedenborgian family, and I hope you get the chance to meet her, encourage

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her, and get to know her. She felt the call to ministry in 2005 and set out to the Pacific School of Religion to follow this call. She found as she was studying in seminary that the mainline Protestant church she grew up in, the church of her family and her grounding, did not fit her anymore. She said, "It just didn't feel right and I didn't know where to turn." She left seminary temporarily with the goal of finding clarity, understanding herself, and drawing near to God for help. During this pause, Elizabeth decided to do a residency in Clinical Pastoral Education (CPE) and learn more about chaplaincy. Enter Rev. Susan Turley, a Swedenborgian minister, who was her CPE supervisor [see page 116]—Divine Providence; I believe so. Elizabeth was introduced to Swedenborg, and she said, "It just clicked. It made sense. Finding Swedenborgian theology allowed me to take the final leap into ministry, knowing this is for me. This is me." And I would add, it set her free.

Elizabeth Blair receives her Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies

And graduating tonight we have Anna Woofenden, steeped in Swedenborgian thought through generations, a name familiar in both the General Convention and the General Church. Anna grew up in a General Church family in Washington state. I remember Anna coming to the ministers' meetings at the annual convention in 2009 to speak about the Journey Program that she had helped develop in the General Church. As I listened to this young, vibrant woman share and

Rev. Anna Woofenden

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the Garden Church in San Pedro, California—a church that is founded on the principles of interconnection, embodied theology, and seeing all people as whole and precious creations of God. I am stepping forward to take the charge, to feed those who are hungry, visit those in prison, clothe those who are naked, as the incarnational charge that it is—finding the incarnate God as we bend down and look in the eyes of the withered woman huddled on the street corner, finding the incarnate God as we watch the toddler pulling a carrot out of the dirt, finding the incarnate God as we work together, worship together, and eat together. Naming the dance between the spiritual reality of heaven and the physical alignment and unalignment of earth as we claim people—each person—as an expression of God's presence in the world. Whatever you do to the least of these, you do to me.

In a few minutes, hands will be laid on, words will be spoken, and a mantle will be taken on. It is with deep gratitude and humility that Elizabeth and I thank this gathered body and church for seeing us and seeing the Lord's call on our lives and for providing the container for our inner selves to be fully expressed in the world as we step into the role of ordained ministry.

We stand here today, called, prepared, and ready to commit to the life of serving the Holy One and the holy humanity—dually broken, wholly healed, prepared, and nurtured, called, and ready for this holy work. Here is my body, here is my mind, and here is my spirit. Wise, loving, and useful, here I am, send me.

teach and answer questions, I thought, what wonderful gifts for ministry she has. I wonder if she has thought about ministry as a vocation? Well, yes, of course, but once again the door had been closed for her. She entered seminary and SHS in January, 2011.

Tonight the door is wide open and welcoming, and with graduation from the Swedenborgian House of Studies, the last hurdle is bounded. And tomorrow Anna and Elizabeth, on July 4th, will be ordained as ministers in the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. Let freedom ring!

Anna Woofenden receives her Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies

—Jane Siebert

Rev. Elizabeth Blair

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God is recreating the universe to be more perfect all the time. But as I step into the visibility of a calling to ministry, I am understanding this passage as both a promise and a challenge. God is telling us that yes, it will all be made new in wonderful and glorious ways. But I also see God as one of my sarcastic, urbanite, Dawkins-loving friends from San Francisco who sits across the table from me at dinner and says, "I am making all things new, so, like, are you coming?"

We cannot fight the age of the scientist. We cannot run from it. But we can choose how we greet it. We can address lovingly its deficiencies and appreciate its strengths. Most importantly, we can continue to be visibly who we are, even when we feel threatened or scared, knowing very well everything good we have to offer. Thank you.

A Letter from Urbana University

Dear members of the Swedenborgian Church,

Greetings from Urbana University!

Thank you for your faithful support of Urbana University. For more than 164 years you have stood with us. Without your belief, ongoing influence, enduring leadership, and faithful financial support from the very beginning, we would not be here today to celebrate a bright new chapter in the history of our beloved university.

It is with great excitement that I share with you the renaissance occurring at Urbana, a rebirth of energy, ideas, and opportunities. The past two months of the relationship between Urbana University and Franklin University has resulted in tremendous advancements on many fronts, all of which will enrich the education we provide our aspiring students. Following is a summary of some of the accomplishments to date:

- In mid-June a group of eight members of the Swedenborg Church (Linda and Bruce Stevenson, John and Bev Titus, Betsy and Bill Coffman, Barb Mackey and Frank Doyle) met with Advancement leadership to share ideas on ways to honor Dorothea Harvey and share recommendations on advancing the relationship with the Swedenborg Church.
- Thanks to a $70,000 gift from an anonymous donor, improvements are being planned for the interior and exterior of the Swedenborg Memorial Library. Groundbreaking and additional details will be announced later this summer.
- An anonymous $30,000 gift will create an interactive exhibit detailing the impact of John Chapman. This traveling exhibit will open tentatively in September, 2015, at the Boonshoft Museum of Discovery in Springfield, Ohio. The exhibit will travel the country, and the exhibit's rental will contribute to sustaining the Johnny Appleseed Educational Center and Museum at Urbana.
- Technology: new computers have been ordered for faculty and staff. They will be installed by the end of July. In addition, we continue to make progress in providing wi-fi access in the residence halls, classrooms and shared spaces across campus.
- A charitable gift from twenty individuals and foundations will remove all dead trees and stumps on campus.
- South and East Residence Halls will be reopening once needed repairs and upgrades are completed.
- This fall we will be launching the new Agribusiness Management program which has been developed with valuable input from the regional agribusiness community.
- Our current fleet of vehicles is being replaced with safe, efficient, and dependable alternatives as the result of new relationships with rental and charter companies. This will ensure that our student-athletes, coaches, and other Urbana students, faculty, and staff will arrive at their destinations safely. Only the safest means of transportations for our Blue Knights!

Urbana University representation at the annual convention: back row (L–R): Rev. Kevin Baxter ('00, former UU chaplain and faculty); Rev. Jennifer Tafel ('00); John Titus ('77, former UU dean of students and UU trustee); middle row (L–R): Bill Coffman (retired UU faculty); Rev. David Fekete ('80); Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen ('01); Mike West (J. Appleseed Educational Center and Museum volunteer); Rev. Dick Tafel (former UU trustee); Jan Hillman (UU VP of advancement); front row (L–R): Rev. Betsy Coffman ('65 & '71, UU chaplain & trustee); Bev Titus (alumna)

On behalf of our faculty, staff, students, and alumni, thank you again for your commitment and continued dedication to Urbana University. As I am getting to know and work with everyone associated with Urbana University and the community, it has been heartwarming to experience the deep commitment to the University and the principles established nearly 164 years ago by the Swedenborgian Church. Our future is so bright! Yet to realize it, we need advocates like you to pray for us, to share the Urbana story, and to continue supporting us.

As I lead Urbana University, I pledge to keep you informed as more exciting developments occur. Please accept my personal invitation to visit campus, meet with me, and witness the positive, transformational changes underway.

—Sincerely, Pamela K. Shay, PhD, senior vice-president for academic and student affairs at Urbana University, vice-president for accreditation and institutional effectiveness at Franklin University

Bringing Wayfarers Chapel to the World

Wayfarers Chapel is excited to share the gift of our in-house production studio! The inspiration for this comes from a ministerial need, and it transcends traditional ministerial boundaries in scope. In essence, we hope to soon share what makes Wayfarers Chapel a sacred and special space with more people.

The ministerial need that helped to inspire our recent technology upgrades comes from observations surrounding Celebration of Life services (memorials). We observed two things about these services: not all guest speakers could be heard and not all guests were able to attend.

Most people are not trained to be public speakers, especially when it comes to standing up in front of family and friends to talk about a loved one who has recently departed from this physical realm to be fully embraced in the spiritual world. Most people understandably speak softly about things close to their hearts, thus many guests may not be able to hear the speaker.

With an aging population, there are many people who are not able to attend a memorial service. They may be in a hospital, assisted living facility, or even at home but have limited mobility or do not have access to transportation. These are often the people who are very invested in the Celebration of Life ceremony.

These limitations have provided an opportunity to be creative in this arena, and we have solved both problems by implementing a state-of-the-art sound system, fully integrated with a multiple-camera, high-definition video system for online participation. This is exciting news, not only for our Celebration of Life ceremonies but also for weddings and our upcoming speaker series.

You can check out a demonstration of our new video offerings at our website: http://www.wayfarerschapel.org/weddings/videography/. Wedding couples can now leave the chapel grounds with the ability to view highlights of their wedding day on a smart phone or tablet while on their way to their reception. People can tune in from any computer connected to the internet to view a live-streamed ceremony from inside the chapel.

Our new in-house production studio also creates an educational opportunity for clergy who would like to brush-up on their professional skills. We are piloting a residency program similar to what is offered in the medical model, where any clergy who would like some further training in ceremony or presentation can do so here at Wayfarer Chapel. With our new capabilities to capture high definition audio and video, there is a learning opportunity to enhance professional skill sets including memorials, weddings, baptisms, preaching, and presenting workshops. A digital recording can be captured for educational purposes.

Speaker Series

Wayfarers Chapel's vision statement reads, "Wayfarers Chapel will be an incubator for education and global awareness of opportunities and experiences for spiritual transformation."

This powerful statement has inspired people to think about ways to realize this vision, and one of the more exciting ways developed was the live-streaming of an inspirational speaker series from the Chapel. Please join us. On September 21, from noon to 1 PM, when Rich Tafel, founder and president of Public Squared, will speak on "Bringing Heaven to Earth: How Spiritual Entrepreneurs Must Lead Social Change." (http://sundaystreams.com/go/wayfarerschapelspeakerseries)

Read more about our speakers at http://wayfarerschapelfundforthefuture.org/category/news/.

Please feel free to contact us if you might know of a speaker for our series, or if you'd like more information on how to support Wayfarers Chapel. (jamesm@wayfarerschapel.org)

—Blessings, James Morgan
operations manager

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for chapel designed by Lloyd Wright. The service concluded with joyous and energetic dancing by the congregation as the convention band played them out. Conversation and snacks with the Garden Chapel congregation followed. Busses for the airport-bound and cars for the highway-bound departed as conventioneers reluctantly bid farewell to old friends and new.

And thus the Year of Providence came to a close and the Year of Regeneration commenced.

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tion was gaveled to order following the order of business prescribed in the by-laws: meeting rules were read, appoint-

Officers Susannah Currie, Ken Turley, Betsy Coffman, and Polly Baxter

ments were announced, and reports were received from the officers, General Council, support units, the Nominating Committee and associated and auxiliary bodies.

Thursday afternoon was devoted to mini-courses, a favorite activity of convention delegates, who could attend courses in two sessions.

The first session offered "Apocalypse Above! Swedenborg's Unpredictable Reading of the Book of Revelation's Predictions," Rev. Jim Law-

Mini- course with Rev. Carla Friederich

rence; "Move to the Music!," Rev. Susannah Currie; "The Presence of Spirits in Madness and in Sanity," Julie Conaron; "Purpose, Providence & Legacy," Rev. Sherrie Connelly; "How to Read the General Convention Financial Statements," treasurer Polly Baxter; and "Preparing and Leading Worship," Rev. Kevin Baxter

The second session offered "Treasurer's PowWow," Polly Baxter; "Does America Have a Culture that Denies Death? How Can We Make End of Life More Quality Oriented," Julie Conaron; "Awake and Aware," Rev. Carla Friedrich; "Choosing Music for Worship," Paul Deming; "Let's Get Real! Using Small Groups to Bring Doctrine into Life," Burgandy Alden Smith; and "Social Media and Branding," Rev. Kevin Baxter.

The Corporation of the New Church Theological School (dba Swedenborgian House of Studies [SHS]) held its annual meeting and graduation ceremony on Thursday evening (page 106). Elizabeth Blair and Anna Woofenden received their Certificates of Swedenborgian Studies. Congratulations to the graduates accompanied the lively and pleasant conversations at the reception following.

Business meetings on Friday included a report on the Online Swedenborgian Community by Rev. Wilma Wake and Chris Laitner, the report of the Credentials Committee, and the treasurer's pledge appeal. Treasurer Polly Baxter offered thanks for their generosity to the Bridgewater and Chicago Societies; the Church of Naples; the Illinois, Michigan, New York, Ohio, and Kansas Associations; the Massachusetts New Church Union; the National Alliance of New Church Women; the San Francisco, LaPorte, and Urbana Churches; Wayfarers Chapel; and the Almont New Church Assembly.

Rev. Wilma Wake honoring Chris Laitner for helping found and serving on the board of SwedenborgianCommunity.org

President Turley presented the following certificates of appreciation: Roslyn Taylor (COMSU), Dagmar Bollinger (IMSU), Gloria Toot (MINSU), Tammara Mounce (MINSU), Chris Laitner (SwedenborgianCommunity.org), Karen Conger (Nominating Committee), Rev. Kathleen Easton-Gilhooly for twenty-five years in ministry, and Rev. F. Robert Tafel for fifty years in ministry.

Rev, F. Bob Tafel receives the 50-year service award from Ken Turley

Election results were announced.

- Vice-president: Betsy Coffman
- Recording secretary: Susannah Currie
- Treasurer: Polly Baxter
- General Council layperson: Barbara Cullen, Lon Elmer
- General Council minister: Sky Paradise
- COMSU: Katie Rienstra Pruiett

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Enjoying the Convention Experience

In addition to conducting business, participating in mini-courses, witnessing the ordination of ministers, hearing and making wonderful music, and worshiping together, delegates and friends always enjoy social activities—organized or self-initiated.

When ministers arrived on Sunday for their meetings, their fears for a hot and humid July convention in the Midwest were realized, and they appreciated the air-conditioned dorm rooms, dining hall, and meeting rooms. But, as if by magic, on Wednesday, the hot, humid weather was replaced by a delightful dry air, sunshine, and temperatures in the mid-to-high seventies by day and low sixties by night.

The beautiful weather settled in for the duration of the convention, and on Sunday, gradually departed as conventioneers headed for their homes or the airport.

Annual conventions provide many opportunities for social interaction—making new friends and renewing old friendships, discussing a wide range of subjects—between meetings and events. This year, the participants were particularly pleased with the pleasant atmosphere for interaction provided by the dining hall and its attached dining patio and the lobby outside the main meeting room. A pleasant path through the campus between venues afforded lots of walking and talking opportunities.

Continued from preceding page

- EDSU: Paul Deming
- FPRSU: Jennifer Lindsay
- IMSU: Kevin Baxter
- MINSU: Marjory Leas, Dick Tafel
- MINSU: Nadine Cotton, Carley Preusch
- CAM: Rebecca Esterson
- CAM Jane Siebert
- SHS Representative Class: Alison Longstaff, Gardiner Perry, Nancy Little, Robert Morrill
- Nominating Committee: Sue Ditmire

Carla Friedrich and Catherine Lauber from the COM Hospitality Committee thanked the local committee for all their work, the Illinois Association for their gifts and financial support, the Massachusetts New Church Union for the COM coffee breaks and Renée Hellenbrecht for all her work behind the scenes.

President Turley thanked musician and host Paul Deming; choir director Laurie Turley; musicians David Fekete, Andrew Sciarretta, Lisa Grace, and Christine Campbell; worship and music coordinator Kit Billings; and the officers of Convention.

The Women's Alliance luncheon and annual meeting (page 114) took place over a lengthened lunch break, after which delegates returned to the meeting room for the annual SCYL (Swedenborgian Church Youth League) Worship Service.

The teens of SCYL (page 102) designed and wrote the service, in which they depicted the choice between heaven and hell with readings accompanied by painting the choices on two easels; they sang and played music for the service. At the conclusion of the service the teens introduced themselves; Bekka Lange, president of SCYL, and Swedenborgian Church youth director Kurt Fekete gave reports.

The event that many consider the highlight of annual conventions took place on Friday evening—ordination.

Rev. Elizabeth Blair and Rev. Anna Woofenden

Elizabeth Blair and Anna Woofenden, having obtained their master of divinity (MDiv) degrees and SHS certificates, completing the requirements of the Committee on Admission to the Ministry, and being recommended by the Council of Ministers, presented themselves for ordination (pages 96 and 98). At the reception following, sponsored by SHS, the Michigan Association, and Convention, the two 2014 graduates, their relatives and friends, and the delegates celebrated the occasion.

Morgan Beard from the Swedenborg Foundation

On Saturday morning the Swedenborgian Church Children's Ministries held its annual meeting. There followed a presentation by Morgan Beard from the Swedenborg Foundation, showcasing its continuing new directions into social media and digital offerings.

Saturday afternoon was reserved for the annual convention communion worship service, led by convention minister Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen (page 100), followed by an early dinner in preparation for the evening social event.

Rev. Elizabeth Blair and Rev. Anna Woofenden offer Communion at the Communion Service

Buses (provided by the Illinois Association) ferried people to lovely Lafayette Park, which was surrounded by beautiful houses from St. Louis's golden age of industry and commerce. Awaiting the group was a section of reserved chairs and space for blankets amidst a large audience arrayed on the lawn in front of a gazebo. Soon, the Ralph Butler band took the stage on the gazebo. Ralph introduced the band, including lead guitarist Paul Deming from the St.Louis Church of the Open Word, who in turn introduced the Swedenborgian group to the audience.

Ralph Butler turned out to be a consummate entertainer, vocalist, and musician, and his band was versatile and accomplished, performing an eclectic play list from ballads and blues to hard rock and pop tunes; Paul played some stunning guitar leads and solos. Swedenborgians of all ages turned out to be exuberant and creative dancers, exuding a joy that seemed to infect the whole crowd. The host group provided meals, snacks, drinks, and delicious ice cream. As darkness fell and the gazebo glowed under blue lights, conventioneers returned to Webster University.

People who chose to stay in on Saturday evening gathered for games and conversation in a dorm lounge.

On Sunday morning, buses transported everyone to the Church of the Open Word Garden Chapel for worship. Rev. Kit Billings led the service in the inspirational, serene, and lovingly cared

Rev. Kit Billings leading the Sunday Service at the Church of the Open Word

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President's Address

Continued from page 95

an acorn, that within that dying shell peeking and pushing out are the irrepressible signs of totally new life. Right now, it may seem small and completely unfamiliar and dissimilar to that from out of which it is growing. We might not even recognize it for what it is. It is new and tender in forms that seem hardly suited to the form and function and purpose which the acorn shell was so well suited to fulfill. It seems vulnerable and chaotic, and in fact it is often easily re-directed, stifled, or even destroyed. But if left to grow, or even fed and watered, we all know, given time, what becomes of the little sprout that was the cause of the demise of the acorn's shell. It becomes the tree which is the very source of the acorn.

Yes my friends, the old form of church, even that which we so optimistically call "the New Church," is falling apart and, in fact, dying. But it is doing so because the birth of a new church life-form, a new as of yet unidentifiable form, born of that which has served us so well and for so long, is coming into being and forcing its way from, through, and out of that which we thought, and in fact was, the New Church.

We are going through nothing less, and nothing more, than regeneration, the very thing that our church so eloquently teaches as the means to salvation. We are in the midst of the birth pangs of new life; we are in the tremors and labor spasms of rebirth; we are undergoing regeneration. That which was is dying, that which continues is in reformation, and that which will be is only just beginning to emerge and take form.

We cannot stop or change what is happening all around us or, for that matter, what is happening within our own depths. Our freedom, our hope, and our salvation are found in how we respond to what is happening. We can deny it is happening, and it will go on happening all around us while we are left behind. We can fight against it and it will go on happening all around us while we expend our energy in the futile attempt to stop the inevitable. We can give up and assume the attitude of casualties and victims, and it will go on happening all around us, with little or no sympathy as we simply become the detritus that feeds the living. Or we can choose to acknowledge what is happening all around and within us and willingly and even enthusiastically embrace what is and will go on happening all around us; we can fully engage our courage and our curiosity and experience the exhilaration of discovery and the thrill of the ride and the deep inner fulfillment of becoming what we did not know we could become.

The question before us is whether we have the courage and the strength of character to risk becoming what it is that God would make of us . . . .

I would suggest that it is time for us to stop teaching that which we know so well and set ourselves about learning that which is waiting to be discovered; I suggest it is time for us to stop assuming we have what others should have and set about learning how to contribute to what it is that others are wanting; I would suggest it is time for us to stop trying to protect and preserve what we have always had and start investing in what could become.

Look around us. In every aspect of life there is a violent polarization taking place. Big events are happening and the pace of things seems to be accelerating. Unless I am completely mistaken, this is the Lord's Second Coming happening all around us! How are we going to respond? Is it to take sides in the artificially contrived war of opinion and worldly values that seems to drive our culture? Is it to try and be what we have always been? Is it to try and preserve in the ways and means that we have always used? Is it to try and stay within the forms and structures that served earlier times? Should the sprouting oak devote its life energy to staying within the acorn shell? I'm sorry if it is scary and painful, but I don't think so. And if I may be presumptuous, I don't think the God that calls us forward is even sorry!

If we are to live, we must engage the life changing process of spiritual regeneration. And that means allowing ourselves to grow and transform from that with which we are comfortable and familiar and become that which we do not yet know. Our forms serve a function, but it is our essence that is the source of our life. And our life essence is cracking and breaking out of the forms that once served well, but have now become the source of limitation and constraint. We should not fear this process of change; we should celebrate it!

Tonight we find ourselves in St. Louis, the Gateway to the West, and we find ourselves at a spiritual crossroads, and before us is the gateway to our future. I for one am far more eager to trust the providence of the Lord and risk the unknown in search of new life than I am in holding back and holding on to what I know and what is familiar and comfortable. I expect that there are, in fact, those acorns that try to remain within the safety of their shells. I expect also that in choosing not to risk the pain and uncertainty of leaving those shells behind, they almost certainly choose a quiet and uneventful and nearly immediate death. We can seek to remain in the familiar and comfortable structural shell of church life as we have known it, and I expect we will find the same result as the oak

Continues next page

Continued from preceding page

that never breaks out of the acorn. Or we can, with gratitude and reverence, leave behind the constraints of the structural forms which are already breaking down around us and take the risk to discover a new stage and a new form of church life. We are, at least by self-naming, the New Church that promises new life in the Lord. It is time we got about the business of really being what we call ourselves. In reading the Word, I find very few places where the Lord calls us to just lay back and remain as we were, to take the easy familiar path to what once was; to just settle in and hold on to the comforts of life as we have always known it—very few places where the Lord encourages us to focus on preserving our self-identity as we currently understand it. It is probably there to be found, but it serves merely as the reminder that we are charged with making a choice.

We may be small in numbers, but we have the committed people; we may not be powerful, but we have resources; we may not be well known, but we have the imaginative minds. We have a theology that even today is what others are looking ahead to find, and I know we have the love of God in our hearts. The question before us is whether we have the courage and the strength of character to risk becoming what it is that God would make of us, if we would but screw up our courage and give it our best shot.

It may seem like coincidence, but I think it is indeed God's doing that we stand here at the Gateway, the Year of Providence behind us and before us the Year of Regeneration. God is calling us forward, as individuals, as our many churches, and as a denomination. Lewis and Clark stood at this very spot and prepared to set out on a journey into the unknown. We are here now, and the prospect of a similarly daunting journey is before us, with all of the risks and dangers and perils and yet also all of the promise and unknown wonders to be discovered. But nothing will happen unless we choose to venture forth into the unknown. None of that will happen unless we choose to say "yes" to God calling and embrace the change that is the essence of spiritual regeneration. None of that will happen unless we give God the chance to make us into that which we ourselves cannot yet know.

How, with all that we hold true in the teachings we have been given, can we doubt that God has wonderful things in store for us if we but risk the challenge of becoming? How, with all that we know from the Word made known to us by the explorations of Swedenborg, can we doubt the importance of our part in the Second Coming if we will but risk the exploration? How, with all that we have shared together over the years, can we doubt that we have together the purpose, power, and presence of a heavenly community even as we labor here on earth?

Please tell me now that the lives that have gone before us, the careers that have been laid down one after another, that the steps that have been taken year after year to bring us to this place standing at the gateway to this moment pulsating with promise have not been given only to hear us say, this is far enough.

We have the creative and imaginative minds. We have the caring and compassionate hearts. We have the necessary information and enough resources to get us a good way down the path. We have the strength of character and the integrity of purpose. All we need now is the willingness to let go of what we have and where we are, and go where we cannot yet see and become what we cannot yet know. It will take courage. It will take perseverance. It will take faith in God. But more importantly, it will take the power of love in our hearts for God and one another, a love that is not shaken by earthly fears and temporary setbacks. It will take strength of character and integrity of purpose. It will take becoming and being

- Open to the Divine presence and leading in all things
- Authentic and enthusiastic about living our Swedenborgian faith and vibrantly communicating this at all levels
- A living body finding unity within our diversity, inclusive and meeting others where they are
- Inspired by God's love, wisdom, and energy, sharing creativity and resources to facilitate health, interconnectedness, and transformation of people for joyful and excellent service to the world and each other.

Let's get to work and—with God's guiding presence—make it happen!

—Blessings, Rev. Ken

2014–15: The Year of Regeneration

Our denomination, the Swedenborgian Church, operates on a seven-year cycle of annual themes, each theme being based on a key teaching of Swedenborgian Christian faith. The theme gives us an opportunity to learn about and celebrate a particular teaching in different ways, e.g. in art, worship, music, and service and in personal, family, and community life. This church year, 2014–15, the annual theme is "Regeneration," which means "re-creation" or "re-birth." Swedenborg, like many other spiritual guides, tells us that human beings are essentially made to be twice-born, once in the body and eternally in the spirit, through a lifelong journey of growing into a new consciousness of who we really are, as angels coming-to-be.

This is all the Lord's doing and the Lord leading us, all the way.

Women's Alliance Luncheon

The annual meeting of the Swedenborgian Women's Alliance was held on Friday, July 4th, at their annual luncheon at the Swedenborgian Annual Convention in St. Louis. A large group of women enjoyed the time of fellowship. The annual meeting, led by president Marjory Leas, focused on how to increase Mite Box giving and how to envision the function and use of the group going forward. An inspiring talk was given by the newly ordained Rev. Anna Woofenden about her plans for the Garden Church.

Women's Alliance president Marjory Leas and the officers, BJ Neuenfeldt, Ros Taylor, Gloria Toot, and Connie Helm

The Mite Box donations for 2013–2014 totaled $938. A check for that amount was presented to Bekka Lange, president of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League, for use by the Teens and Tweens (SCYL and SPLATz) for retreats.

The donations given to the Mite Box campaign in 2014–2015 are designated for The Garden Church being planted in San Pedro, (south of Los Angeles), California. Rev. Woofenden told the group she is earmarking the funds for acquiring garden tools.

Donations from churches, individuals, associations, local alliances, and isolated members are very welcome and should be made out and mailed to

National Alliance of New Church Women
c/o Chris Laitner
10 Hannah Ct.
Midland, MI 48642-3615

Anna Woofenden explaining how the Garden Church will use the gift of the Mite Box

General Council Pre-Convention Meeting

The General Council of the Swedenborgian Church met on July 2, approving the following motions:

- General Council will institute a policy that all outside bodies be directed to the denominational website for publicly available contact information for churches.
- General Council will direct all General Convention publishing, especially the editor(s) and editorial board of *the Messenger* and request of the Council of Ministers and the editor(s) of *Our Daily Bread* to limit the content to inclusion of
  - theological and/or academic articles (not promotional or propagandistic articles from groups outside of Convention)
  - General Convention groups and ministers reporting their activities
  - General Convention churches reporting their programs.
- Adopt for General Convention the policy statement titled, "Procedures for Handling Allegations of Misconduct Against Our Ordained Ministers Or Our Lay Leaders" as revised.

An Orientation to the Gospels

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete is offering a nine-week online course October 3–December 5, 2014. Tuition is $75.

The course looks at Jesus' life: events before His ministry, events in His ministry, the trial and crucifixion, and the resurrection—including the healings, the parables, theological topics, and the many short sayings in the Gospels.

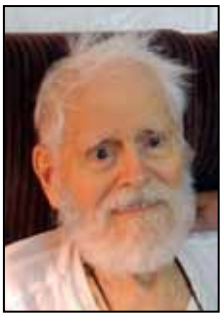
The course is not a historical deconstruction of the Jesus movement and the New Testament. Instead, the course is structured on Mark's Gospel, the first and most basic of them. We consider material from the other Gospels when there are conflicts in narrative or supplemental material not found in Mark. Students will come away from the course with a solid understanding of Jesus' life and teachings as presented in the Gospels.

For more information or to indicate interest, please contact Rev. Dr. Fekete at revdrfekete@gmail.com.

Passages

Deaths

Rafael (Ray) Manuel Julio Guiu, 93, of East Bridgewater, Massachusetts, son of Jose Guiu and Marina Llerena Guiu, died Friday, July 11, 2014, at home. Ray was born in Havana, Cuba, and came to this country in 1940. He graduated from Rindge Technical High School in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Introduced to the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg by his wife, Betty, and his father-in-law, Rev. Everett Bray, Ray became an ardent follower. After working at the Greenfield Tap and Die Co. in Greenfield, Massachusetts, for twenty-five years as a mechanical engineer and draftsman, he gave up engineering and became the manager of the Swedenborg Book Room in Boston. Taking over when Miss Bernice Quimby retired, he moved the Book Room from Joy Street to Newbury Street. There he worked for more than thirty years. He promoted, sold, and lent books, but Ray's strength was in talking about Swedenborg to the curious folks who saw the Swedenborg Library sign and walked in to see what Emanuel Swedenborg was all about. He was also for many years the treasurer and general secretary of the Massachusetts New Church Union. When his children were young, he was an enthusiastic supporter of Camp Blairhaven in Massachusetts and the Fryeburg New Church Assembly in Maine.

Ray was recently predeceased by his wife of sixty-nine years, Elizabeth, and a daughter, Cecelia Guiu Searle. He is survived by two daughters, Cristina Wood and Gloria Costello, six grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

A memorial service was held July 26 at the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church. A recorded interview of Ray telling about his life and his faith is on the "Recordings" page at www.bridgewaternewchurch.org.

Donations in lieu of flowers may be sent to the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, Robert Perry, treasurer, 61 Clark St. Waltham, Mass. 02453

Transitions

The **Rev. Gabriella Cahally** Has answered a joint call to serve the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church in Pretty Prairie and the Pawnee Rock New Jerusalem Church, both in Kansas.

Now in Audio, Swedenborg's Classic Account of the Afterlife

The New Century Edition translation of Emanuel Swedenborg's most popular and influential work is now available in audio format. *Heaven and Hell*, translated by George F. Dole and read by Gordon Meyer, is a powerful affirmation that we are all born for heaven, regardless of background or religion, and that the choices we make in this world shape our destiny in the next.

Visit the Swedenborg Foundation (http://tinyurl.com/m7p6zry) to listen to an excerpt, download three free sample chapters, or purchase the MP3 or iTunes full audio download.

The audio download is eighteen hours long and costs $14.99.

Become a member today and receive a 20% discount on books and videos.

General Council Post-Convention Meeting

The General Council took the following actions at its post-convention meeting:

- Approved the SHS Representative Class as voted by Convention,
  - Rev. Dr. F. Gardiner Perry
  - Rev. Alison Longstaff
  - Nancy Little
  - Robert Morrill
- Made appointments,
  - Retirement Committee, Merry Conant Piotti
  - Building Fund Trustees, Betsy Lau Aldrich
  - Wayfarers Chapel Board, Sarah Ferguson
  - Wayfarers Chapel Board, Grace Sudden
  - Swedenborgiancommunity.org, Phyllis E. Duarte
  - Iungerich Fund Trustee, Susan Wood-Ashton
  - Investment Committee, Barbara Boxwell
- Approved a corporate resolution for the Investment Committee,

  Resolved that the General Council of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the U.S.A., authorized Treasurer Polly Baxter, and the members of the Investment Committee as listed in the General Convention Journal, or any one of them acting individually at the instruction of the Investment Committee, to buy and sell investments in the General Convention's Common Fund, as specified in the General Convent's Bylaws, Article XVIII. Said funds to be deposited in the cash account of the Common Fund of the General Convention.

The Swedenborgian Church of
North America
50 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138

Address Service Requested

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.

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

Rev. Susan Turley Receives NAPW Woman of the Year Award

Reverend Susan G. Turley has been selected by the National Association of Professional Women (NAPW) VIP Division as a 2013/2014 NAPW Woman of the Year to represent the chaplaincy profession for the state of Maryland.

Rev. Turley (one of the two women ordained second to Dorothea Harvey) has had a long and illustrious career laboring in a very difficult and challenging field. She has overcome hardships both personal and professional.

Rev. Turley's areas of expertise include training, development, crisis intervention, counseling, trauma counseling, women's concerns and issues, management, professional training in chaplaincy, coaching, film production, grant writing, consultation, student recruitment, volunteer training and development, and teaching and supervision of professional chaplains and spiritual care partners. She is Associate Clinical Pastoral Education (ACPE) supervisor and chaplain at the Department Of Veterans Affairs, Maryland Health Care System, which specializes in spiritual care, chaplaincy, and supervising and training chaplains seeking national certification. She received her M.S. in Education from Suffolk University in 1978. She received her Master of Divinity in Religion from Pacific School of Religion and was ordained as one of the first three women in the Swedenborgian Church in 1980. She founded a nonprofit ministry to those affected by AIDS in San Francisco. She has worked with victims of violence and coached women and men in their personal and professional development.

Susan is the proud mother of Pfc. Keith Jesse Moore, who tragically died while serving the US Army in Iraq in 2006. She has been married for thirty-five years to Clifford J. Moore, Jr., Esq.

Her passion also lies in film development. Her latest completed film is *Broken Hearts Lifted Spirits: Mothers of the Fallen Speak Their Truth*. This film is about mothers who have lost their children in war; it is an educational and training resource that includes a teacher's manual for those who want to learn how to be an effective presence to others who have suffered trauma and loss.

Rev. Turley is drawn to and passionate about charitable organizations, including Gold Star Mothers and those concerned with the environment, marginalized communities, and Veterans and their loved ones. She is dedicated to giving voice to those who find no room at the table.