



## 2015 Annual Convention Brings Swedenborgians to “Maine in Massachusetts”

The 191<sup>st</sup> Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church<sup>1</sup> commenced on Saturday evening, June 27, 2015, in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, at Bridgewater State University. Ministers, members, and guests gathered for a welcome from the Maine Association (“Maine in Massachusetts”), delivered by Martha Richardson, Rev. Gard Perry, Rev. Susannah Currie, and Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen.



Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen

This was “The Year of Regeneration,” and the theme of the convention was “Toward a Newer Church.” Its focus was an exploration of the meaning of the “New Church” in the twenty-first century, a “Newer New Church” as keynote speaker Rev. Dr. George

Dole put it.

Following president Rev. Ken Turley’s opening address, the conventioners gathered with old friends and new to share news and views at a reception-sponsored by the Swedenborg Founda-

tion. Every evening, after the scheduled activity, a reception brought people together for social interaction.

Community worship is a significant component of the annual conventions.

*Continues on page 109*

### Keynote Address

## A Call

BY GEORGE DOLE

*The theme of the 2015 Annual Convention, “Toward a Newer Church,” was explored in a series of articles in the Messenger by Rev. George Dole, beginning with an introductory article in the November 2014 issue and continuing in six parts through the May 2015 issue. He brought his ideas and suggestions together in the convention keynote address.*

It says in *Divine Love and Wisdom* §258 (DLW) that “By birth, we are all gifted with the ability to understand what is true even to that deepest level where angels of the third heaven are.” This tells me that somewhere inside each one of us are the answers to our most urgent questions, so there is a very real sense in which I don’t want to tell you anything that you don’t know. I just want to put words to some feelings and thoughts that are in there, trying to get out. So my talk will be punctuated by a couple of pauses for you to listen toward

that place where all your best ideas come from and to jot down what comes to mind—it may be wiser than it seems.

As a church, where are we going? Theologically, I’ve been going here and there for the past few decades, with little obvious sense of direction—perhaps relying on some parody of inertial navigation. I’ve been fascinated by the sequence of Swedenborg’s theological works, by the task of translating the theological works into more intelligible English, by a fresh glimpse of the continuous spiritual sense of the Word, and by the present state of the dialogue between science and religion (see forthcoming book); and these days I’m delving into a “missing chapter” of Swedenborg’s life. It’s only recently that these have seemed to converge on thoughts about where we as a



*Continues on page 104*



<sup>1</sup> The General Convention of the New Jerusalem

## The Editor's Desk

### Giving and Receiving

The Swedenborgian Church is able to conduct business and provide services to its members through the generosity of past donors, individual members, congregations, and other affiliated bodies. Polly Baxter, treasurer of the Church, reported at the annual convention an increase of donations to the Church and encouraged pledges for this year. She offered thanks for the generosity of the following:

- Bridgewater Church Society
- Fryeburg New Church
- Korean New Church
- LaPorte New Church
- San Diego Church
- San Francisco Church
- Urbana Church
- Washington DC Society
- National Alliance of New Church Women
- Almont New Church Society

## Contents

2015 Annual Convention Brings Swedenborgians to "Maine in Massachusetts" .....	97
Keynote Address: A Call .....	97
The Editor's Desk .....	98
Letter from the President .....	99
Convention Sermon: Regeneration Means Coming Near to God.....	100
SHS Graduation Address.....	102
Convention Photo Album .....	110
Ordination Sermon: The Meaning of Service: Rev. Julie Conaron.....	112
General Council Meetings.....	113
¡Olé! Fiesta Fun at the Women's Alliance Luncheon!.....	114
Lois Dole's Address to the Women's Alliance.....	115
Painting Patterns and Navigating Norms.....	118
Closing Sermon: Building a Church .....	120
Council of Ministers Meeting.....	123
Passages.....	123
"Toward A Newer Church"	
A Look Back and A Look Ahead .....	124

## A Look Ahead

Continued from page 124

um at Bridgewater State University.

So, what might you expect to see and hear in June of 2016? George Dole is already at work distilling what he learned from preparing, delivering, and receiving feedback from his keynote address, and I will be in conversation with him over the coming months to bring his findings forward for Part Two.

Each of the four mini-course presenters in four areas of denominational life will soon be asked to carry their

- Illinois Association
- Massachusetts New Church Union
- Michigan Association
- New York Association
- Ohio Association
- Pacific Coast Association
- Wayfarers Chapel

Rev. Dick Tafel, Capital Campaign Fund Drive chair, announced donations from the New Church of Southwest Florida to several restricted funds and reported on the progress of the Tafel Fund, established in 2011.



Rev. Dick Tafel

—Herb Ziegler

To subscribe to *the Messenger* online, scan this image with a QR reader on your cell phone or tablet.



## Church Calendar

- **September 25–26:** SHS/CSS fall Board meeting, Berkeley CA
- **September 30:** Application deadline for 2016 lungerich Fund grants
- **November 5–8:** Fall General Council meeting

work forward into 2016. The four areas are "Our Denominational Presence in the 21st Century" (Chris Laitner), "Our Teachings On Regeneration" (Rev. Jenny Caughman), "Our Face to Face Ministries" (Rev. Jane Siebert), and "Our Response to Issues of Social Justice" (Rev. Robert McCluskey).

In addition, I received several responses and ideas about our newer New Church, which have been taken on board. Readers of *the Messenger* are invited to follow developments for Convention 2016 educational program, "Toward A Newer Church, Part Two." Let's continue the conversation.

Rev. Dr. Gard Perry lives in Conway, New Hampshire.

## the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America

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 2015

Volume 237, No. 7, Whole Number 5402

Editor, design and production: Herbert Ziegler

Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith, Renée Hellenbrecht, & Trevor

Communications Support Unit: Elizabeth Blair, Kristina Madjerac and Katie Pruiett

Printing: Gnomon Copy, Cambridge MA

Editorial Address:

Herb Ziegler, *the Messenger*

2 Hancock Place

Cambridge MA 02139

Tel: 617.388.0252

Email: [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org)

Business and Subscription Address:

*The Messenger*, Central Office

50 Quincy Street

Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org)

Subscriptions: free online subscription at

[www.swedenborg.org](http://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 three weeks before the first day of the month of issue.

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

## Letter from the President



*2014–15: The Year of Regeneration:  
The Way of Change*

*2015–16: The Year of Spiritual Uses:  
The Call to Be a Blessing*

Dear Friends,

For five years now, I have been speaking about how the world is changing around us and how we need to be willing to look at changing ourselves to be in harmony with the world as it is becoming. The church year that came to its conclusion with the end of our annual convention was designated “The Year of Regeneration: the Way of Change.”

I’m pretty sure we have all come to grips with the concept of change. Acknowledging the changing world around us, we engage those changes in a wide variety of degrees. Acknowledging the changes in what church means and is becoming, we both maintain our traditional approaches and engage in exploring and developing new approaches. We acknowledge the changes within the ever increasing opaque boundaries of our own denomination, having elected Rev. Jane Siebert as a new president to take us into the next cycle, beginning with the end of Annual Convention 2016, and as we observe some of our churches shrinking, some growing, some completing their life cycle, and others struggling to begin a new life cycle. There is no question that change has been a dominant dynamic with just about every aspect of our lives, as individuals, as individual churches and as a denomination.

With the conclusion of the 2015 Annual Convention this past July, we begin a new year with

a new focus: 2015–2016 is designated “The Year of Spiritual Uses: the Call to Be a Blessing.” As I enter the closing year of my presidency, as I enter the last chapters of my life on earth, as I mark the transitions of life that are happening around me, I am amazed at how appropriate this designation is. My observations have led me to conclude that the greatest blessings we can be and receive happen as we engage and fulfill our spiritual uses. This may seem obvious, and yet actually accomplishing it is not always so easy.

Fulfilling our spiritual uses requires incorporating a number of different factors. Foremost is the willingness to be led by the Lord. That’s a given, yet as easy as it is to say, the application gets complicated. For we must also take into consideration both our own loves and our own limitations. We must also take into consideration what our current circumstances provide us in terms of the field in which we cultivate and the conditions in which we plant, tend, and harvest our particular seeds. Finding the delicate balance between what it is we love to do, what it is we are good at, and what is actually of use to anyone else is sometimes a rather illusive accomplishment. If we are lucky—change that to *blessed*—both ends of that equation are equally clear, and we simply set about the work. Often one or the other or both ends of that equation take more time and effort to come into clear discernment. While we must honor our inner loves and gifts and work with what we have, we must also recognize what is needed and most useful outside of ourselves. Somehow we must find a way to integrate the two.

As a church, we must honor our theology, our teachings, and our traditions. We must honor who and what it is we have to work with and who we are as people. Yet at the same time, we must attempt to identify what is needed beyond our own needs and borders and what we can offer that is actually of use to others in the world around us!

*Continues on page 103*

## Convention Sermon

## Regeneration Means Coming Near to God

## 2015 Convention Preacher, Rev. David J. Fekete

Isaiah 40:21-31  
Mark 1:29-39  
Psalm 147

Regeneration is coming near to God. For only when all the blockage is removed are we able to bear the heat and light of God's love and wisdom. As is the case in all love relationships, God wants to be near to us, for God loves us. Swedenborg states,

The Lord, from the Divine love or mercy, wills to have all near to Himself; so that they do not stand at the doors, that is, in the first heaven; but He wills that they should be in the third; and, if it were possible, not only with Himself, but in Himself. Such is the Divine love, or the Lord's love (*Arcana Coelestia* [AC] §1799).

God also wants to make us all as happy as we can bear. This, too, is because of God's love for us. Swedenborg says that there are three essentials of love: 1) to love others outside self; 2) to will to be one with them; and 3) to make them happy from one's self (*True Christian Religion* [TCR] §43). "When a person loves, one wishes to make our beloved happy. How much so is this for the Source of all love. So God wants to make us all happy."

Jehovah, or the Lord's internal, was the very Celestial of Love, that is, Love itself, to which no other attributes are fitting than those of pure Love, thus of pure Mercy toward the whole human race; which is such that it wishes to save all and make them happy for ever, and to

bestow on them all that it has; thus out of pure mercy to draw all who are willing to follow, to heaven, that is, to itself, by the strong force of love (AC 1735).

This is why humanity was created—so that God could be one with us and make us happy. This is heaven—being in God and in eternal blessedness forever.



The third essential of the Love of God, to make them happy from itself, is recognized from eternal life, or blessedness, happiness and felicity without end, which He gives those who receive His Love. For as God is Love itself so also is He Blessedness itself, since all love breathes out from itself what is delightful, and the Divine Love breathes out blessedness itself, happiness and felicity to eternity. Thus God makes angels happy from Himself, and also men after death, by conjunction with them (TCR §43).

What we have to do is clean house, and we will find ourselves close to God and as happy as we can bear—each according to his or her own character "... because the Lord wants to save everyone, he makes sure that all of us can have our places in heaven if we live well" (*Divine Providence* [DP] §254).

So it's clear that God's pulling for

us. What we need to do is to respond to God and remove anything in us that comes between God's love and us.

This opens up the question of evil, for what comes between us and God's love is called evil. Evil isn't a very popular topic these days. We are taught to have healthy self-esteem, feel good about ourselves, have a positive self-image. The thought that we might have evils in us is not one we will hear from modern psychology. However, we may hear that we have developed coping mechanisms that no longer are effective for the giving and receiving of love. We may hear that we have neuroses that we need therapy to

overcome. If these psychological terms mean that our ability to give and receive love is blocked by dysfunctional coping mechanisms, or neuroses, then I guess we may be talking about the same thing as what theologians call evil. For evil is nothing else than a maladaptive behavior pattern or feeling that interferes with our ability to love. The only difference between psychological terms for this and theological ones is that theological terms refer to our ability to love God—as well as our neighbor.

So in discussing our relationship with God, we need to open up the issues of evil, maladaptive coping mechanisms, or neuroses. From his Lutheran upbringing, Swedenborg retains the idea that we begin life self-oriented, in evils, and in need of regeneration. In *Divine Providence*, Swedenborg writes,

*Continues next page*



*Continued from preceding page*

From birth, each of us is like a little hell in constant conflict with heaven. The Lord cannot rescue any of us from our hell unless we see that we are in it and want to be rescued (DP 251).

It requires introspection to determine if Swedenborg is right in this. But if he is not right about this, the whole notion of regeneration does not make sense. What would we need to be reformed from if we are born heavenly? Why would Jesus have said that we need to be reborn?

But we can all be regenerated. Everyone. Swedenborg is very clear about this.

All may be regenerated, each according to his state; . . . those who are principled in natural good from their parents, and those who are in evil; those who from their infancy have entered into the vanities of the world, and those who sooner or later have withdrawn from them . . . and this variety, like that of people's features and dispositions, is infinite; and yet everyone, according to his state may be regenerated and saved (TCR 580).

Some people seem to be born in natural good and some seem to be in evil. But everyone—good and evil—need to receive life from God and be regenerated.

Regeneration is actual character transformation. We become different people than we had been. It seems that we begin our adult life concerned with ourselves and our standing in the world. This is the way things need to be for us to find our niche in life. But a person wholly consumed with self and the world is obstinate, harsh, and ego-driven. This is the character that needs to be softened and broken up in order to receive love from God and care for our neighbors. Ego is broken up and softened by temptations. These are hard times—the slings and arrows of

outrageous fortune that lead us to realize that we aren't the center of the universe. Swedenborg describes this kind of character transformation. Before the regeneration process, the things we love—the goods of our life—relate to ego,

the goods . . . with which they comply, [are] the love of self and the world, . . . of self love and of contempt for others in comparison with self, consequently what is of self-glory, and also hatred and revenge arising therefrom. . . (AC §3318).

Beginning our adult life this way, we need to change. Temptations soften and break up our self-will and we become new people,

This is the reason why a person is regenerated, that is, made new, by temptations, or what is the same, by spiritual combats, and that a person is afterward gifted with another genius, being made mild, humble, simple, and contrite in heart (AC 3318).

The very things that we enjoy change. We start out our adult life enjoying the things that bring financial reward and that feed our egos. But after we are shaken up and knocked around in life, we see that other things matter, too. Our whole affect becomes directed to more humane values. We cease loving worldly interests only, and look around us at our fellows. We feel like a person among others, rather than a superior or inferior individual.

All affections have their delights; but such as are the affections, such are the delights. The affections of evil and falsity also have their delights; and before a man begins to be regenerated, and to receive from the Lord the affections of truth and good, these delights appear to be the only ones; so much so that men believe that no other delights exist; and consequently that if they were deprived of these, they would utterly perish. But they who receive from the Lord the delights of the

affections of truth and good, gradually see and feel the nature of the delights of their former life, which they had believed to be the only delights, that they are relatively vile, and indeed filthy. And the further a man advances into the delight of the affections of truth and good, the more does he begin to regard the delights of evil and falsity as vile; and at last to hold them in aversion (AC §3938).

Such radical change cannot take place in an instant. It means recreating new pathways in the brain, which coincide with new feelings and thoughts. It means interrupting nerve pathways we have formed by habit, and generating new ones. Swedenborg describes this process in remarkably modern terms that agree with brain science today,

There are thousands of individual impulses that go to make up any particular evil, and . . . there are thousands of individual impulses that go to make up any particular good tendency. These thousands of impulses are so precisely structured and so intimately interconnected within us that no single one can be changed without changing all the rest at the same time . . . (DP §279 [5]).

The feelings of our volition are simply changes of the state of the purely organic substances of our minds, that the thoughts of our discernment are simply changes and shifts of their forms, and that memory is the ongoing effect of those changes and shifts (DP §279 [6]).

Regeneration is re-programming those nerve pathways that coincide with our emotions and thoughts. Re-programming our nerve pathways takes a lifetime and even into the next life. There are some passages in Swedenborg that suggest, "The tree lies where it falls" (DP 277b). But in his final work, *True Christianity*, Swedenborg states that once we have begun

*Continues on page 103*

# SHS Graduation Address

BY REBECCA ESTERSON

It is an honor to be here tonight to celebrate the academic achievements of our denomination's seminary students and to look forward to the important uses they will perform with the tools gained from this experience. It is with gratitude for our students and alumni and their presence here in our church that I offer the following reflection.

This summer my husband and I will pack up our home for the last ten years and our three children and move across the country, from one coast to the other, in order to join the community of scholars at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (Swedenborg House of Studies). As we move from the Cambridge area to the Berkeley area, we will trace the path of the very community we go to meet, who made this move as an institution some sixteen years ago. These are two cities that are known at their best for their exceptional minds: Cambridge being famous for its sharp minds and Berkeley for its open minds. In many ways, this "Tale of Two Cities" seems an appropriate fit for a tradition which holds, as its core, the marriage of wisdom and love, intellect and compassion.

And so, by way of grounding, of celebrating the fertile ground that our seminary, and soon my family, plants itself into, I want to pause and consider what it means to us, as Swedenborgians, to "have an open mind," because our tradition has quite a lot to say on the topic and it speaks to the work our graduates have been engaged in over the past few years. Swedenborg was particularly fascinated by the question of how one's mind opens. Time and again he describes the levels and



layers of our minds: continuous, discrete, concentric. And these levels open, when conditions are right, as gates, or doorways to more inward places: to heavenly, divine realities that have been there, hidden in our minds the whole time.

Our tradition holds that, among other things, the Bible tells the story of the opening of the levels of the individual human mind. This is told through the story of seven days created in the beginning, and the seven seals broken at the end. It is in the going down into and the coming out of Egypt. It is in the rending of the veil of the Holy of Holies, split open like the red sea, providing passageway and access to new and holier realities. The biblical narrative is the narrative of our individual opening. But what exactly does it mean to have an open mind? How does one go about opening one's mind? And what does the end result look like?

When used broadly in the language of our culture, it tends to mean being open to the experiences and truths of people different from us. Sometimes it connotes moral relativism, or the idea that "anything goes." It might privilege a certain political outlook, or a critique of orthodoxy. What do you think? What is the opening referred to by these biblical images? What does our theology teach about this subject?

I want to share two paragraphs from the writings, which come at the question from two different angles. The first is from *Divine Providence*, §139 and speaks to the essential role that love plays.

No one is reformed in a state of fear, because fear takes away freedom and reason, or liberty and ra-

tionality; for love opens the interiors of the mind but fear closes them; and when they are closed a person has but few thoughts, and then only those which present themselves to the person's mind or senses." Our minds open only in a state of fearlessness; a state nurtured by the warmth of love.

Truth also plays an essential role in opening the mind. Here I quote *Divine Love and Wisdom* §253, about opening the "spiritual degree" of the mind. We read here that

love alone or spiritual heat alone do not open it, nor wisdom alone or spiritual light alone, but both in conjunction. Consequently, when genuine truths, out of which wisdom or light arises, are unknown, love is inadequate to open that degree; it only keeps it in the possibility of being opened . . . Something like this is seen in the vegetable kingdom, in that heat alone does not cause seeds and trees to vegetate, but heat in conjunction with light effects this.

So both love and truth, light and heat, are needed to open our minds. This comes as no surprise to us as Swedenborgians. We are accustomed to thinking about these two faculties and the importance of their balance in our spiritual lives. However, we don't always agree on what exactly is meant by truth or by love. After all, we read in the same paragraph that genuine truth is manifold "*veritas est multiplex*." So, which truth is genuine? Whose truth? Whose interpretation? What kind of love is Divine Love? Is it indiscriminate? Do we love without discernment? If not, how do we judge our own loves? Put another way, how do we distinguish between loving good things and loving harmful things? We Swedenborgians, when it comes down

*Continues next page*

*Continued from preceding page*

to it, hold a spectrum of views on these matters, and the result can be a sound like a cacophony of voices and opinions. Spend any time on Facebook or chatrooms with Swedenborgians and this becomes quickly apparent. There is as at least as much mind closing as mind opening in these discussions. So how can we move forward?

For our purposes, I just want to point to one sentence, further down in the same paragraph that can help us through some of this confusion. It speaks about the condition of people whose minds do not open, who do not allow the light of truth to join with their loves. It says that these people “do not trouble themselves to know what faith is or what charity is.” I love this line so much I want to read it to you in several translations: such people “are not concerned to know what faith and charity are” or they “can’t be bothered to learn what faith and charity are.” This is suggesting not a list of critical beliefs and practices for the righteous person but a particular stance towards learning—a willingness to learn. Or more than a willingness, a stance of being bothered. The Latin verb here is *satago*, and it means to fuss, to make strenuous effort, to be anxious over, or to have one’s hands full. To be bothered. And I love this because it is, I believe, at the heart of the work of our seminary, whose students, faculty, and staff have this in common if nothing else: they are bothered to learn about faith and charity. Their love of our theology and its potential application in a troubled world bothers them. They are bothered by how to translate the teachings the Lord has given us in the New Church across religious traditions; how to translate them across academic disciplines; and how to translate them into useful, transformative practice in the community. All of this is aided by the advancement of our intellects: by

## Convention Sermon

*Continued from page 101*



the process of reformation, we can continue our regeneration in the next life,

There are two states which a man enters and passes through

while from natural he is becoming spiritual. The first state is called Reformation, and the second Regeneration. In the first, man looks from his natural state toward a spiritual one, and desires it; in the second state he becomes spiritual-natural . . . One who has begun upon the first state in the world, can after death be led into the second; . . . (TCR 571).

Our life improves immeasurably when we undertake the process of regeneration. We are more accepting of life; we live in harmony with our brothers and sisters; we are at peace with God and with ourselves. In every way, we are happier, more joyous when we are coming near to God. Think of the ecstasy that love brings! And think

strenuous learning, by the sharpening of our minds. Our students enter seminary having been led by the Lord from their loves. The learning they do in seminary, ideally, joins with this love and opens the mind.

We have our hands full with this work. We have our minds full with this work. This bothering is the sand in the oyster’s shell. It produces magnificent things. Uses that we, in the words of Proverbs, bind on our hearts and tie around our necks. Let us continue this work fearlessly. Let us be bothered to learn about faith and charity, that our minds might open. ☩

Rebecca Esterson is the scholar-in-training and a lecturer at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

what this means when we are speaking of All Love, the Source of All Love. This is what God wants for us: to love and be loved by God, and to express that love among our fellows. This is what happens in our lives when we come near to God.

The Lord, from the Divine love or mercy, wills to have all near to Himself; so that they do not stand at the doors, that is, in the first heaven; but He wills that they should be in the third; and, if it were possible, not only with Himself, but in Himself. Such is the Divine love, or the Lord’s love (AC 1799). ☩

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete is pastor of the Edmonton (Alberta) Church of the Holy City.

## New Small Group Opportunity

The New Church Journey program is starting a new small group series called “Living Gratefully.” Based on Swedenborg’s laws of Divine Providence, this seven-week program is open to all and will be launching September 27, 2015, and again on February 7, 2016.

Learn more about the program at <http://www.newchurch.org> or email [campaignteam@newchurch.org](mailto:campaignteam@newchurch.org).

## Letter from the President

*Continued from page 99*

When the gifts we are and have to offer connect with the needs and uses of others, a reciprocal blessing occurs. And that is the Lord’s presence and heaven on earth. May we each, throughout the coming year and beyond, in our own way and in community with one another, devote ourselves to responding to the call to be a blessing and in that response, find the way to fulfill our spiritual uses.

—*Blessings, Rev. Ken*



## A Call

Continued from page 97

church or as churches might and presumably should be going—the vision of the New Jerusalem. When I shared some of this with my peer ear, Gard Perry, and with Ken Turley, one thing led to another. With apologies to Descartes, I seem to have been thinking, and here I seem to be.

### I

I want to start where we all are physically and where I suspect most of us are mentally, here on this planet at the tumultuous beginning of the twenty-first century. For that, I turn to astronaut Edgar Mitchell's moving account of something he had seen and how he had seen it. He wrote,

It began with the breathtaking experience of seeing planet earth floating in the immensity of space—the incredible beauty of a splendid blue-and-white jewel floating in the vast, black sky. I underwent a religious-like peak experience, in which the presence of divinity became almost palpable, and I knew that life in the universe was not just an accident based on random processes. This knowledge, which came directly, intuitively, was not a matter of discursive reasoning or logical abstraction. It was not deduced from information perceptible by the sensory organs. The realization was subjective, but it was knowledge every bit as real and compelling as the objective data the navigational program or the communications system was based on.

Then my thoughts turned to daily life on the planet. With that, my sense of wonderment gradually turned into something like anguish. I realized that at that very moment people were fighting wars; committing murder and other crimes; lying, cheating, and struggling for power and status; abusing the environment by polluting the water and air, wasting natural resources, and ravag-

ing the land; acting out of lust and greed; and hurting others through intolerance, bigotry, prejudice, and all the other feelings that add up to man's inhumanity to man.

As I survey the challenge facing humanity today, I see only one answer: a transformation of consciousness. And finally, the value-free, rational-objective-experimental mode of Western science, based on materialism, is not sufficient by itself for coping with the ever-increasing planetary crises besetting civilization.<sup>1</sup>

I believe that Mitchell is one hundred percent right. I also believe that when it comes to “the transformation of consciousness,”

Swedenborg wrote not only the book, but a whole encyclopedia. Regeneration is, after all, a transformation of consciousness. I believe this adds up to a call to each of us individually and to our church.

An encyclopedia is handy if we are looking for answers to specific questions, but we don't lead our lives in alphabetical order. Swedenborg, for all his ability to write at length, was capable of stating the essence of our theology very concisely. In *Secrets of Heaven* (SH), for example, he described his own mission as restoring to the church—the church of his own times, that is—a “doctrine of charity” that had been displaced by a “doctrine of faith” that was “much alienated from the truth”; and he found the essence of that “doctrine of charity” expressed very simply—in the two great commandments, love to the Lord and love of the neighbor (SH §6633). There's our whole theology, simple, clear, and inescapably demanding.



### II

So let's take Mitchell seriously and look a little more closely at what our theology tells us about the transformation of consciousness. There's a brief overview in *Secrets of Heaven* §5126:2:

From infancy to early childhood we are sensory creatures, for all we take in through our physical senses is earthly, bodily, and worldly. . . . communication with the inner self has not been opened yet. . . . from early childhood to puberty communication is opened to a deeper earthly level so that we learn what is decent, civil, and honorable . . . from puberty to young adulthood, communication between the earthly and the rational is opened so that we learn what is true and good as to civic and moral living and especially as to spiritual living; and to the extent that we live what we learn, the rational is opened . . . for those who allow themselves to be regenerated, the rational is gradually opened . . . especially in young adulthood and adulthood, and progressively to the end of life—and then in heaven to eternity.

What Mitchell describes as a transformation of consciousness is here pictured as the opening of deeper levels of our minds. If we share his sense of urgency, we need to commit ourselves to it as a lifelong practice, including teaching it to our children.

Swedenborg was able to describe this transformation of consciousness because he had lived it. The “missing chapter” that I mentioned earlier is the time between his admission into the spiritual world and his writing *Secrets of Heaven*, from 1745 to 1749. He wrote and left unpublished masses of material to which we have paid shamefully little attention.

The first thing he wrote has come to be known as *The Word Explained*, and it is big—not as big as *Secrets of Heaven*, but definitely in that league. Here I

<sup>1</sup> *Saturday Review*, February 22, 1975, pp. 20f.



*Continued from preceding page*

am finding a ponderous but ultimately gripping story of the transformation of Swedenborg's consciousness. I'd like to share a little of that story with you.

Shortly after his Delft vision in 1744 (about a year before the London vision that introduced him to the spiritual world), Swedenborg had written in his *Journal of Dreams*, "At last it was granted to me by the grace of the Spirit to receive faith without reasoning, a real assurance of it. . . . Faith then appeared to me far above the reach of reason . . . we must make our understanding captive to the obedience of faith" (April 18, 1744). Almost exactly a year later, his experiences of the spiritual world awakened and energized his lovely, innocent childhood faith (a passionate pietistic strain of Lutheranism); but as he proceeded through Genesis in *The Word Explained*, his highly developed scientific mind began to wake up and protest. The beloved child and the brilliant adult were in conversation, and they were not comfortable with each other. At one point he wrote, "Since it could not yet be clear to me how evil can then be imputed to man, and also his not receiving the faith offered him by mercy, these being questions of the deepest investigation, I have not dared to reason in such matters" (§2/961). How can God hold us responsible for evil if we're totally incapable of doing anything good? His reason was not content to remain subject to his dear childhood faith; it was challenging one of its central tenets. This was profoundly scary, so he backed off. He didn't dare.

This strategy didn't work. Before long, he suffered a traumatic "dark night of the soul," an overwhelming conviction that what he had been granted by the divine mercy of God Jesus Christ was of no use, that "thus up to now the labor has been in vain" (§2/1063). He wrote a brief plea for di-

vine help, drew a line across the middle of the page, and left the rest of it blank. He had gotten as far as Genesis 47, and he had hit a brick wall.

He could no longer avoid the issue; and he got back to work with that in mind. Two chapters later, in his treatment of Jacob's blessings of his sons in Genesis 49, Dan is described as "a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that the rider falls backwards" (Genesis 49:17). Swedenborg took this to represent "those who, by reasoning, . . . wish to scrutinize and search out things superior, such as things spiritual and celestial . . . and this from their own daring (*ex proprio ausu*)," with the result that the reasoner "falls backward and lapses into continual errors . . ." (§2/1279). This, he says, had been happening to him innumerable times. All the same, he wrote, "It must be known what is to be believed, for without the knowledge of these things, faith is not possible; it would then be believing without understanding and reason, and this is not human." (§2/1075).

By now, it has become evident to the reader that when he had been writing in general terms about *homo*, the generic "human being," he had been writing about the example of *homo* that he knew best—himself. He had been identifying with the characters of the story, with the Egyptians who had sold themselves into slavery to buy grain, and now he had identified with Dan, who had "fallen backward."

His conclusion?

"Since this is so dangerous, therefore, of the divine mercy of God Messiah, it has been granted me to dare to do this, not from my own daring, but from the inspiration of God Messiah. . . ." (§2/1281)

He picked up his quill and got back to work.

Over a year later, on August 7, 1747, he would write a little note at the head of his index of Isaiah: "A change of state in me, into the celestial kingdom,

in an image." Clearly, a transformation of consciousness. He had entered intelligently into the mysteries of his childhood faith, and he had paid the full, high price of admission.

### III

So what did Swedenborg do that enabled this transformation to take place? He just kept trying to do his best at the task that had been set before him.

Now bear with me for a couple of minutes—I'm going to talk about something else, and then connect it with this.

In the course of translating *Revelation Unveiled* (*The Apocalypse Revealed*) for the New Century Edition, I kept running into the phrase traditionally translated "the good of love." The image of this in the holy city is gold. Measuring the city by the golden reed signifies, in Standard Edition language, "that there is given by the Lord to those who are in the good of love, the faculty of understanding and knowing what the quality of the Lord's New Church is, as to doctrine and its introductory truths" (§904). But what is "the good of love"? Would you recognize it if you found it? Section 934 tells us very clearly: again in Standard Edition language, ". . . 'fruits' signify the goods of love or charity, which are called in common speech good works." The good of love is the fruit of love. It is not some abstract quality or warm, fuzzy feeling, but what that feeling prompts us to do and say. Swedenborg's faculty of understanding the doctrine of the Lord's new church was the result of his devotion to bringing forth the fruit of his love.

If we then want to discern and know our church's doctrine and its introductory truths, the main prerequisite is that we in our own situations and with our own distinctive gifts do the good that love can do. This is the gold standard. Swedenborg could not have un-

*Continues on page 106*

## A Call

*Continued from page 105*

derstood the theology so well if he had not lived it so faithfully.

Isn't this getting things backward? Don't we need the truth to tell us what's good? So I was taught, and so it may seem, but it turns out that this is merely "an appearance of truth." To quote *Secrets of Heaven*, "We believe that truth enables us to perceive what good is because it teaches us; but this is an appearance; it is good that enables truth to perceive, for good is the soul or life of truth" (§3207:5). Let's face it, preach to me ever so wisely and wonderfully, if I'm in a lousy mood, I won't even listen to you. This is said with remarkably inconspicuous clarity in the first paragraph of *The Doctrine of Life*:

... if we are leading a good life we think good things not only about God but also about our neighbor, which is not the case if we are leading an evil life." "People who are caught up in doing the good that love can do are given by the Lord the ability to discern.

Gold is everywhere in the New Jerusalem.

"And the street of the city was pure gold like clear glass" means that all the truth of that church and its doctrine takes the form of the good love does when it flows in together with light out of heaven from the Lord. (Revelation Unveiled §917).

To be true, truth must be done, must take the form of deeds. The doctrines are only the recipe. The new church isn't the cookbook, it's the cake.

## IV

That is where the little work *The New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Teachings* comes into its own. Its order of presentation is highly unorthodox. It does not start by talking about God, Scripture, and salvation, but by talk-

ing about human nature and process. Both its title and its preface suggest the reason for this oddity. The book is not just—perhaps not even primarily—about the heavenly doctrines. Read the title. It really *is* a book about *The New Jerusalem*, the New Jerusalem as defined by its heavenly theology; and the preface starts with a sketch of the deeper meaning of that description of the holy city in Revelation 21—a kind of outline or preliminary draft of the detailed treatment Swedenborg would publish some eight years later.

*New Jerusalem* has thirty-three brief chapters, and the first fourteen are about what it is to be and to become human. In fact, with the chapter on the Lord coming at the end, we might take it as the outline of a program. First find out who you are, get your life straightened out, and then you will be able to "think good things not only about God but also about [the] neighbor." The presentation starts with the basics.

§11 At the heart of everything in the universe that is in accord with the divine design is something good and something true. There are no exceptions to this in heaven or in the world because everything good, like everything true, comes from the Deity, who is the source of everything.

Nothing, Swedenborg goes on to say, is more necessary, more urgently needed, than this.

Repeat: "Nothing." This is it. Priority number one.

At this point, translating concerns come to the fore. How do we translate those sweeping generalizations into everyday English?

The book itself tells us right up front that "No one who is resolutely and ha-



bitually devoted to what is evil and what is false can know what is good and what is true because such people believe that their evil is good and that their falsity is true" (NJHT §19). The word "good," then, is a blank that we fill in with our lives. My computer tells me that the word *bonum* occurs 34,491 times in the published theological works. If I fill it in wrong—for example, with sectarian self-righteousness—that really does a number on my understanding of the doctrines.

A few years ago, I took that opening chapter and tried my own hand at filling in the blanks, substituting some specifics for Swedenborg's generalities. I took my total self as a microcosm of "everything in the universe," if you will, and with the second great commandment in mind substituted "caring about you" for "something good" and "understanding you clearly" for "something true," and so on. This is what came out for that first paragraph:

§11 My entire humanity, to the extent that I am truly human, comes down to caring about you and understanding you clearly. This applies to everything in my soul and in my behavior because both the caring and the understanding come from the Deity who is the source of everything.

Carrying on from there (without taking time to give you an actual translation), I found the chapter saying the following:

§12 Clearly, then, this means that nothing is more necessary than knowing what true caring and clear understanding are and how they interact with each other, how in fact they are united to each other. This is especially relevant to my relationships because just as true caring and clear perception are at the heart of everything within me, they are at the heart of my relationships as well. That is why I need to get this straightened out first if I want to understand what life is all about.

*Continues next page*

*Continued from preceding page*

§13 When I'm functioning the way the Lord created me to, my caring and my understanding are not two separate activities but are one single motion of my whole being. This is because they come from the Lord as a single energy and are a single energy in the depths of my being; so they should be a single energy in my relationships to others. If I knew this oneness in depth, it would feel like a marriage.

§14 All my ability to comprehend and evaluate comes from this oneness. Caring without understanding accomplishes nothing, and understanding without caring accomplishes nothing. This is true of my subconscious and my conscious mind alike.

§15 Because the oneness of my caring about you and my understanding of you is a kind of marriage, I can see that when I care about you I truly want to understand you, and that the more clearly I understand you the more deeply I care. Each motion of my being feels unreal if it is separated from the other. If I find myself not longing for this kind of wholeness in my relationships with you, I have not found inner wholeness. This means that I have not yet let the full meaning of heavenly community into my heart or my mind, because it is this oneness that makes a community heavenly.

When I talk with you, even about ordinary, everyday things, I must really want to understand what you are saying; and when I respond to you, I must really want to be understood.

## V

So much for the second great commandment, love to the neighbor, what about the first? Where is the Lord in all this? What is the basic policy of divine providence? In the interest of the dialogue between religion and science, I call to the witness stand first none other than Charles Darwin. Yes, he did

write that blunt statement that "the general law leading to the advancement of all species" is "multiply, vary, let the strongest live and the weakest die,"<sup>2</sup> but over a hundred pages earlier he had offered a very different view:

It may metaphorically be said that natural selection is daily and hourly scrutinising, throughout the world, the slightest variations; rejecting those that are bad, preserving those that are good; silently and insensibly working, *whenever and wherever opportunity offers*, at the improvement of each organic being in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life. [emphasis Darwin's]<sup>3</sup>

This is a far cry from the popular view of survival of the fittest as a dog-eat-dog struggle for existence, long favored by all who want to believe that might makes right (and resisted by those who don't). It is really quite lovely—the image of a subtle, omnipresent consciousness permeating the world and using every opportunity we offer it to make things better for all organic beings and for their relationships. Scrutinising daily and hourly, throughout the world—that's very much a personal activity, and at least a kissing cousin of omniscience. We could simply replace the words "natural selection" with "divine providence" and sneak the paragraph into DP.

It would fit beautifully. In section 4:4 Swedenborg tells us that "A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united." Then in §7, he adds, "It is the intent of divine providence that everything created, collectively and in every detail, should be this kind of whole, and that if it is not, it should become one." Doesn't this sound a lot like "the improvement of each organic being in relation to its or-

ganic and inorganic conditions of life"?

Both our theology and Darwin, then, tell us that the answer to Einstein's big question is that the universe is a profoundly friendly place—provided, that is, you take seriously a doctrine of tough love.

## VI

So how is natural selection/divine providence doing these days? Where has it brought us? Understandably, claims that *homo sapiens* is the goal and crown of creation are often seen as narcissistic. At the same time, there is widespread agreement in the scientific community that the process of evolution has moved consistently toward greater complexity and adaptability, and that *homo sapiens* excels all other species in this regard by a wide margin. The eminent biologist-naturalist Edward O. Wilson describes us as "the culmination of an evolutionary epic that was continuously played out in great peril."<sup>4</sup>

The only thing I find narcissistic in this is Wilson's word, "culmination," which suggests that we are the *final*, triumphant achievement of the universe. Why should we assume that after thirteen billion years of this evolutionary epic, thirteen billion years of unceasing emergence, the universe should have decided to rest on its laurels? Neither Mitchell nor Wilson finds those laurels very satisfactory. "... the primate species," Wilson says, "is destroying its own biosphere."<sup>5</sup> A biologist named Harold Morowitz certainly does not. Citing Teilhard de Chardin, he goes on to anticipate further progress. "There is every reason to believe," he writes, "that there will be a next emergence, and I think that candidates are on the horizon . . . ."<sup>6</sup>

4 Edward O. Wilson, *The Social Conquest of Earth* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), p. 13.

5 *ibid.*, p. 50.

6 *The Emergence of Everything* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002) p. 184.

*Continues on page 108*

2 Charles Darwin, *On the Origin of Species* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), p. 135.

3 *ibid.*, p. 32.

## A Call

Continued from page 107

Wilson does not go quite that far, but he does hold forth a hope. After speculating that some extraterrestrials may have “grown up” to the point of realizing that the great problems of humanity can be solved only by the practice of “eusociality” (sounds much more scientific than “cooperation”) he concludes, “So now I will confess my own blind faith. Earth, by the twenty-second century, can be turned, if we so wish, into a permanent paradise for human beings, or at least the strong beginnings of one.”<sup>7</sup> Charles W. Isaiah’s peaceable kingdom?

“Biology-watcher” Lewis Thomas goes even further: “Or perhaps we are only at the beginning of learning to use the system, with almost all our evolution as a species still ahead of us.”<sup>8</sup>

In looking for the next emergence, Morowitz proposes two possible “candidates,” technology and spirituality. As we heard earlier, Edgar Mitchell holds out no hope whatever for technology when it comes to addressing “the ever-increasing planetary crises besetting civilization.” Neither do I. Yet I feel that I am in the very good company of Teilhard, Wilson, Thomas, Morowitz, and yes, Swedenborg, in believing that there are better centuries ahead—and perhaps closer than we might think. A remark by Winston Churchill comes to mind: “You can always count on the Americans to do the right thing—after they’ve tried everything else.” I wouldn’t restrict that description to Americans only.

I would see us, then, as pressed by divine providence (cleverly disguised as natural selection) toward the emergence of a species based upon but more advanced than *homo sapiens*, to be

known perhaps as *homo sentiens*. This species would be as sensitive and responsive to the realities of caring and understanding as *homo sapiens* is to material realities. This is a live possibility. There is evidence of such sensitivity in such phenomena as the contagious emotional climate of crowds and moments of sudden, spontaneous empathy in more intimate situations. Such experiences offer a direct challenge to the persuasive and ultimately psychopathic illusion that “only *my* feelings are real.” When Swedenborg defined love as “feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves,” he was identifying very precisely a level of consciousness, of “being in touch with reality,” that I believe is not merely a huge improvement for the human species “in relation to its organic and inorganic conditions of life,” but is also crucial to our survival.

I believe that our theology both calls and equips us to focus on nothing less than the transformation of consciousness, with the knowledge that any separation between spirituality and social action cripples both—that only when we are focused on the good that love can *do* are we able to “think good things not only about God but also about our neighbor.” We cannot understand our theology unless we do it.

## VII

When I turn to thinking about ways to institutionalize or administer this, I find myself thinking that they must emerge from the intersection of our ideals and our circumstances, and that we must be as realistic as we can about both. I doubt that we would do well to turn the clock back to the beginning of the church in 1789 and try to start from scratch. I think it would be wise for us to start where we actually are and begin by looking seriously at our present selves and the communities in which we find ourselves to see what in particular stirs our caring and chal-

lenges our understanding, and to see what others are doing that is getting results. Is there something we could be doing that would help every church (or “non-church”) better live up to its own ideals? Are there some organizational or institutional patterns that seem to be working?

I think, for example, of the church as a spiritual health maintenance organization (and not just because I like the acronym). HMOs are intelligently designed to help people lead physically healthy lives. Another model that keeps nagging at me is that of the support group. Such groups are gatherings of people who are facing or have faced particular challenges. They operate across denominational boundaries to offer both emotional support and the enhancement of understanding. They do not compete with churches by meeting primarily on Sunday mornings. They work because they operate right where “the rubber hits the road”—participants care about each other and are united in their understanding by their shared experience. They are all about “the good that love can do.”<sup>9</sup> To put it crudely, they quite indiscriminately try to make church members better.

Is there then some significant experience that we all share? The prime candidate would seem to be obvious—aging. We started doing it at birth and will continue doing it until we die. It is important—it is the very crucible of the transformation of consciousness. It seems to take different forms along the way—growing up and growing old are different—but essentially, it is something that the youngest and the oldest and all those in between have in common. Denial—both subjective and objective—is both common and futile. I have no idea how such support groups might be financed, but that may be

7 *Op. cit.*, p. 297.

8 Lewis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* (New York: Bantam Books, 1975), pp. 166f.

9 Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Love and Wisdom* (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 2003). \$47.

Continues next page



## 2015 Convention Report

*Continued from page 97*

Each morning, before breakfast, some gathered for a “morning sing,” which was followed by morning chapel. Each evening, before retiring, some gathered for a short vespers service.

The annual memorial communion worship service was held at the Bridgewater New Church, where the congregation invited us to join them for their Sunday worship, led by Rev. Kit Billings and Rev. Susannah Currie. Tuesday afternoon, the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) hosted a service that they created, filled with music and a dramatic presentation ex-

*Continued from preceding page*

primarily because we spend so much money on things that are far less important. What is the dollar value of the insight that leads to the healing of a broken relationship?

Come to think of it, though, if “transformation of consciousness” is a cradle to grave enterprise, so is the church, at least ideally. It has an enviable record of being there for its members from cradle to grave. What a unique opportunity we have when on a good day we can see almost a total life span gathered in a single room! I can imagine a church ad that said something like “Are you getting older? Growing up? Growing old? Are you doing it well? Is it a blessing or a curse?” We agers could use a little help.

And that is where I’d like to leave it—wide open. Let’s face it, now that I’ve finished my saying, what I have said is less important than what you have heard; so let’s talk about it. But let’s not just chat. How would you fill in those blanks? Let’s talk about it driven by the haunting suspicion that this is a matter not only of personal spiritual growth or church growth, but

pressing spiritual truths. The annual convention communion service on Tuesday afternoon featured a sermon by the 2015 convention preacher, Rev. Dr. David Fekete ([page 100](#)).

Sunday afternoon began with a keynote speech by Rev. George Dole on the convention theme and program, “A Call” ([page 97](#)), which followed on his six-part series on “The Newer New Church” in the November 2014 through June 2014 *Messengers*. His address provided time for listeners to assemble in pairs or small groups to listen—*really listen*—to one another.

Business sessions were scheduled each day. On Monday, reports were received from the officers and General Council, the Council of Ministers, the Nominating Committee, and support units.

On Tuesday, the convention heard presentations from

- Morgan Beard for the Swedenborg Foundation
- David Ormsbee for Urbana University
- Rev. Jenn Tafel on “Painting Patterns and Navigating Norms” ([page 118](#))
- Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake for the SwedenborgianCommunity.org,
- Rev. Catherine Lauber on her ministry, Revelation of the Spirit

### Elections

Election speeches were given for contested offices (president, Nomi-

of global survival. That doesn’t depend on church growth, but it may well depend on church health. We have been given marvelous resources, tailor-made for coping effectively with “the ever-increasing planetary crises besetting civilization,” and the clock is ticking. We have no more time to waste. ☸

Rev. Dr. George Dole lives in Freyburg, Maine, with his wife, Lois. He is a professor at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

nating Committee) and elections were held.

The following people were elected to offices and committees:

#### One-year term

- Rev. Betsy Coffman, vice-president
- Polly Baxter, treasurer
- Karen Conger, Recording Secretary

#### Three-year term

- Rev. Jane Siebert, president, beginning at the close of the annual convention in 2016
- Stan Conger and Rob Lawson, General Council (layperson positions)
- Rev. Susan Turley, General Council (minister position)
- Rev. Elizabeth Blair, Communication Support Unit (COMSU)
- Karen Feil, Education Support Unit (EDSU)
- Rev. Paul Martin, Financial & Physical Resources Support Unit (FPRSU)
- Val Brugler, Information Management Support Unit (IMSU)
- Rev. Nadine Cotton and Chris Laitner, Ministries Support Unit (MIN-SU) Suzanne Toupin to fill a one-year unexpired term
- Page Morahan, Committee on Admission to the Ministry (CAM) to fill a one-year unexpired term
- Rev. David Fekete, Nominating Committee. (five-year term)

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies elects four trustees to its board each year: two are elected by the Swedenborgian Church annual convention and two by the New Church Theological School annual meeting

- Karen Conger and Jennifer Lindsay (representative class)
- Robert Reber and John Titus (at-large class).

### CSS Annual Meeting

The New Church Theological School held its annual meeting on Sunday evening. Dean Jim Lawrence announced its new affiliation with the

*Continues on page 122*





## Convention Photo Album







More photos at <http://tinyurl.com/Cnvntn2015>





## Ordination Sermon

# The Meaning of Service: Rev. Julie Conaron

*Genesis 29: 13–20 (NIV): (Leah is given to Jacob first, but Jacob is happy to serve another seven years for Rachel because he loved her.)*

*John 13: 1–15: (Jesus washes the disciples' feet and instructs them to do the same for others.)*

Arcana Coelestia 3816

Arcana Coelestia 3824

**T**he theme today is service, or specifically the love of service.

What do we think of when we hear the word service? We may think of it as something demeaning, as perhaps servants in the service of the people of the manor? Is it defined as the lowly serving the higher ups?

No of course not! When the Lord came down on earth did the birth take place in a manor? No. In a humble stable, in a manger surrounded by animals. Our creator could have been born like a king, but that would have defeated the purpose for coming. People had become so engrossed and mired in evil and false things that Jehovah, Creator of the universe had to take on a human form to battle the hells in order to save the human race.

Not only did our Creator not come down as a king, but the purpose of the coming was to heal people, to tell them about heavenly things and to serve them, not lord it over them. Simon Peter was shocked in our reading from John today, horrified that Jesus would wash just his feet. Simon Peter did not know that the Divine works hard for us to help us choose good things in our lives, which necessitates the removal of the “dirty” or sensual things there, which prevent us from living truly happy lives.

Hence that special moment when the Creator of heaven and earth bent low to wash the disciples' feet. I won-



der if they truly understood what magnificent moments these were? Reading that story is so moving to me, and I am truly grateful that Jesus loved them so very much, fallible beings that they were and as we all are.

I frequently mention to my desolate and depressed hospice patients that God never leaves us, no matter what the appearance, and no matter how bad we think we are. Indeed God sends rain on the just and unjust, loving the young man who coveted money, who went away sorrowing when told to sell all he had. Are we not all fallible human beings who frequently forget the Divine and lose our focus for heavenly things? I see the Divine as a loving parent who cares so much for us that protecting and guiding us gently is part of the process of redeeming us.

The story of Jacob brings another slant on the subject of service: Jacob served seven years for Rachel, which weren't tedious because he loved her. Even though Laban tricked him into having Leah first, Jacob was willing to serve another seven years to “pay” for Rachel. There is no doubt that when we are “young and in love,” as my hubby used to say, time flies by. I am grateful we both felt that way for the last few years of his life also, despite the horror of his illness.

But what about other times in our

lives? Does our work always fill us spiritually the way we would like? I am grateful that my five years in ministry has perhaps fed me more than my almost thirty years as a microbiologist, though I believe my earlier life was preparing me for this latter part of my life.

I'd like to read some passages on the work of ministry from Swedenborg

Goodwill itself is acting justly and faithfully in our position and our work, because all the things we do in this way are useful to the community; and usefulness is goodness, and goodness in an impersonal sense is our neighbor...our neighbor is not only individual people but also our community and the country as a whole. . . .

Priests who teach truths from the Word and use truths to lead to a goodness of life, and therefore to heaven, are practicing goodwill in very important ways, because they are caring for the souls of the people in their church (TCR 422).

So our work is important to others, no matter how humble. As I used to say in my microbiology lab days, “If the CEO goes on vacation for six weeks no one suffers. If the trash collectors go on strike however, the work comes to a standstill!”

From this passage we can see that the role of a minister is very much one of service to others, and very precious because it is one of caring for the souls of others.

Here's one of my favorite passages about ministry:

As for priests, their duty is to teach people the way to heaven, and also to guide them. They must teach them in accordance with the teaching their church derives from the

*Continues next page*



Continued from preceding page

Word, and guide them to live in accordance with it. Priests who teach truths and by their means guide people to lead good lives, and so bring them to the Lord, are good shepherds. Those, however, who teach, but do not guide people to lead good lives, and so bring them to the Lord, are bad shepherds. (NJHD 315)

The subject of shepherding a flock is a common theme in the Bible. We are all familiar with the comforting Psalm 23 speaking about the Lord as our shepherd through all parts of our lives, even to death but in Ezekiel we find the passages not only about good shepherds but also the bad shepherds who did not look after the sheep. And it's in Revelation that we hear that not only is Jehovah a shepherd but also the Lamb!

I was once lent a book about sheep; they are very high maintenance animals and require looking after at all times—rather like us? It must take all the angels and the Divine lots of “time” to look after us, that is, if there is such a thing in the spiritual world!

So the simple message is: we are here to love God and serve others. That's why we're here.

From Elizabeth Lesser, *Broken Open*, (pp. 261–262):

There was no telling how long this bigger perspective would last, but for the moment they all seemed to know something that God knows; that we are sent here to love each other and to help each other—that our lives are about each other. All of our plans fly out the window in such moments of awakening. Plans for great things are replaced by the greatest thing of all, which turns out to be love, in its simplest, most tender, most personal form. . . .

So much of what we do each day is a diversion from what our lives are really about. A traumatic event is like a knife slicing through our di-

## General Council Meetings

In order to avoid the appearance of email spamming, General Council voted to direct Central Office to refer requests for use of its mailing lists for email broadcast communications to the chair of the Council of Ministers or the president of General Convention as appropriate, with an indication of the request's time-sensitivity, breadth of interest, and need for action. In cases of disagreement with the decisions made by these officers, com-

versionary tactics and exposing the vein of truth – the truth of what we really want, of how we really feel, of the wrongs we have visited upon each other, of the love we crave from each other. In our habitual lives, we exercise the foolish luxuries of complaining, avoiding, and blaming. We gossip about the annoying behavior of friends or colleagues, shutting them out of our hearts, turning our backs on their complicated beauty in favor of their obvious flaws. It seems easier to do this than to move toward each other, to take responsibility when it is ours to take, or to speak directly to others when it is theirs. All the while, the truth waits patiently, until it shows up in the eyes of a frightened little boy.

And as His Highness the 14th Dalai Lama said more simply,

We are visitors on this planet. We are here for 90 or 100 years at the very most. During that period we must try to do something useful with our lives. If you contribute to other people's happiness you will find the true goal, the true meaning of life.

Amen. ☸

Rev. Julie Conaron is a hospice chaplain with Optum Palliative and Hospice Care. She lives in Willow Grove and conducts services at the Creekside Independent New Church in Southampton, Pennsylvania.

plaints can be referred to the Executive Committees of the Council of Ministers or General Council.

The Church is completing a search for a Convention 2016 site in San Francisco; Urbana University is the backup site if nothing is available.

A steering committee has been formed to plan for Annual Convention 2017 in Philadelphia for the 200th anniversary of the Swedenborgian Church; Rev. Kevin Baxter is the chair.

General Council is in communication with the Temenos Retreat Center near Philadelphia and the Washington DC Society on property matters.

General Council voted that the Church will trust the discretion of the publishing bodies within the denomination to convey information supportive of the activities and opinions within the denomination.

The Council continued discussing the a proposal to have a digital communications manager.

A proposed constitutional amendment on removal of elected individuals for cause was referred to the Committee on Amendments

The Council voted to appoint a committee to research and prepare a position on blending congregations and report back to General Council at the 2015 fall meeting.

The Council approved the following appointments:

- Lem Putnam and Rev. Rich Tafel, Wayfarers Chapel Board
- Investment Committee, Dan Dyer
- Retirement Committee, Rev. Rich Tafel
- Building Fund, Rev. Erni Martin
- Committee of Inquiry, Stan Conger
- Tafel Fund, Rob Lawson
- Ad Hoc Committee on Blended Congregations, Rev. Dr. David Fekete, Rev. Betsy Coffman, and Polly Baxter. ☸

## Women's Alliance Luncheon

# ¡Olé! Fiesta Fun at the Women's Alliance Luncheon!

The National Alliance of New Church Women held its annual luncheon and meeting at

the 2015 Annual Convention in Bridgewater on June 29. A fiesta theme accompanied our taco-bar lunch, and a record number of nearly fifty women attended.

The group was treated to a wonderfully entertaining [talk by Lois Dole](#) who had prepared thoughts on her life as a lifelong Swedenborgian, nurse, wife (to General Convention's honored speaker this year, the Rev. Dr. George Dole), mother, artist and craftswoman, and tireless church worker—all cleverly communicated with style and wit that delighted the audience. Accompanying Lois were her daughters, Alicia and Sarah, who assisted her in displaying a table of her beautiful art work. It was a memorable time of sharing, which can continue as you read Lois's talk reprinted here in *the Messenger*.

The business of the Alliance included presenting a check in the amount of \$1,510.32 from the 2015 Mite Box Offering to Rev. Anna Woofenden for tools and supplies needed for the work of The Garden Church, in San Pedro, California. The Mite Box for the coming year was designated for the "tween" youth group, SPLATz: "Super Powered Lovable Almost-Teens." A good start on this collection was made on the floor of the convention.

The Alliance will be restructuring this year as the executive committee examines its purpose and functioning. The "alliance" of many women's

groups from church societies around the country, who gather together yearly as a way of participating in the life



BJ Neuenfeldt, Chris Laitner, Connie Helm, and Ros Taylor at the luncheon

of the church, is no longer a paradigm that matches congregational life or women's roles in the Swedenborgian Church. So, be on the lookout for some changes as we get in step with the denomination and move "Toward a Newer Alliance!"

### Meet Lois Dole

Today we are fortunate to be able to have among us an enduring woman in our denomination, a from-birth Swedenborgian. (I recently heard a Catholic priest refer to those born into his religion as Cradle Catholics, so I think it would be fitting to say that we are about to hear from a Swaddling Swedenborgian!) This lady's accomplishments and influence in so many areas of life are impressive, though she will not like me saying so. However, I have it on several good authorities that Lois Dole is a woman to be admired.

Born into a prominent New York Swedenborgian family, the Seekamps, Lois grew up in the Brooklyn Church. She may have some stories to tell about that period in her life, so I will skip ahead to the point where she captured the heart of the very eligible George Dole, whom she married in 1957.

This convention is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate George—prac-

tically a Swedenborgian legend—but we ladies realize that he didn't achieve that status on his own. Lois had a nursing career, raised their five children, worked tirelessly on church projects, and created beautiful handcrafted art with stained glass, chair caning, and cross stitch—most donated to fundraising in the Bath and Fryeburg Churches.

Recently, Lois compiled and condensed the history of the Maine Association Annual Meetings into a book that, I know, she will be telling you about. This impressive productivity seems to be just normal procedure for Lois, who is matter-of-factly modest about it all. According to her husband, who expressed his marvel at her abilities in what I consider a classic Georgeism: she is "inconspicuously indispensable." He added: Lois's motto is, "If something needs doing, you do it, and then it's done."

Other comments about Lois:

- From a nursing colleague who said to her, "Lois, don't you ever do anything bad?"
- From a church and family friend, "Lois is the embodiment of charity to which George refers when he talks about the good that love does."
- And one more from George, who told me he would need a dozen pages or so to adequately sum up Lois for my introduction. He said, "It has been a challenge trying to be the kind of husband she deserves."

When I contacted Lois about speaking to us, she thought she'd have difficulty coming up with material to fill even ten minutes. When I recently touched base with her on the phone, she let me know she was quite ready

*Continues next page*

## Lois Dole's Address to the Women's Alliance

I appreciate having been asked to speak today because I well know that all of you have served the church, and many in more ways than I. When I complained to George that I wasn't as bright and accomplished as Anita Dole he said that he didn't want to marry his mother, which pretty much shut me up. Of the list of topics Marjie asked me to cover, I can say about mothering that we bumbled along like anyone else, probably too strict with Stuart until he taught us otherwise. George was very much a present father. Now he gives advice when asked. It's the same thing with being grandparents, as we do like to see our children and grandchildren.

I was born in 1932 at the height of the Depression, apparently something of a surprise. My mother was 45 and Father 55 and they already had five children. My brother Wesley was closest in age, at seven. Somehow my mother named me Lois Joy, which is pretty much the way she felt about children. Mother was raised Catholic. She



had a lovely contralto voice, and she was hired to sing in the German Swedenborgian church that my father's family attended. I think she was quite lovely, with masses of auburn hair. She named me Lois after Lois Burnham, whose family attended the Swedenborgian Church in

Brooklyn, the one our family attended until it was torn down, I think some time in the 50s.

Lois Burnham married Bill Wilson, the cofounder of Alcoholics Anonymous. Lois herself cofounded Al-Anon when she realized that the families of alcoholics needed help as well. George gave me her autobiography, called "Lois Remembers." She paints Bill as a charming and brilliant financial analyst, trusted by important businesses, until he is too drunk to function, so they are chronically without funds, until he has a life-changing event that starts him on the road to recovery. As we know, one of AA's important tenets is absolute reliance on a higher power.

I grew up in Queens, Long Island, New York, in a quiet and friendly neighborhood. My father walked down the street to take the Long Island Railroad to his insurance business in Brooklyn and every Sunday he drove the whole tribe into Brooklyn to the Church of the Neighbor.

By the time I was Sunday-school age there were no other children, so I amused myself until the service was over, then felt it was my job to go up to the robing room next to the chancel and take the minister's hand as we walked downstairs and up again to the foyer where he greeted his congregation. That was Mr. Wunsch, who must have had a warm heart, though his visage was somewhat forbidding.

I spent three high school years at

the Northfield (Massachusetts) School for Girls (my class just had its 65th reunion). Then I went to Denison University in Granville, Ohio for two years, prior to attending Cornell University-New York Hospital School of Nursing, graduating in 1955 with a BS in Nursing.

During those years I attended the New York church on 35th St., where Bill Woofenden was minister, his wife being George's sister Louise. I sometimes babysat their then four children. Louise one day said, "You must meet my brother."

George had finished an MA at Oxford in 1954, where he had won the Oxford/Cambridge mile that got him into the race in which Roger Bannister did a sub-four-minute mile. (There have been three documentaries chronicling that race recently that you can find online.) After that, he took a motorcycle tour of parts of the Continent, returning home in time to enter graduate school at Yale in the fall. He came down to New York and Louise arranged a date for us.

I think that one of the reasons George was interested in me was that he hadn't known me earlier. What I mean is, I was too shy to attend Fryeburg camp where he considered the girls to be like his sisters, so when he met me, I was different. He says that has nothing to do with it, but I'm not so sure. My mother said that she had had her eye on George at conventions, but my father wasn't so pleased, because he was at the time the chair of the Board of Pensions.

While we were engaged, I was working nights at my hospital. George didn't like that after taking me back to the nurses' residence I had to go to work.

We were married at the New York

*Continues on page 116*

*Continued from preceding page*

with her talk, was glad there might be questions to help the conversation along if needed, and admitted, "This is going to be weird!" But that is her humility and down-to-earth sensibility talking, and I know we are in for a wonderful glimpse of an extraordinary New Church Woman. So please welcome Lois Dole!

—Marjory Leas,  
president





## Lois Dole

*Continued from page 115*

Church with Bill Woofenden officiating and moved right into the New Church Theological School in Cambridge, living upstairs in the big brown house with Rev. Everett Bray living downstairs. Mr. Bray was pastor of the Cambridge Church on campus. George became his assistant, having been ordained in 1960, and he became pastor of the church upon Mr. Bray's retirement a few years later. I used to walk across Harvard Yard to take the subway to Mass General Hospital, where I worked three days a week as an RN for two years before Stuart was born. Then I stopped working.

When Alicia came along we moved to a third-floor walk-up apartment, an easy walk from the church and the Semitic Museum, George now being enrolled in grad school at Harvard. Although he had spent three years in grad school at Yale, his thesis advisor died, the new one didn't like his topic, and he was due at New Church Theological School (NCTS), so he set his sights on Harvard. It was fun occasionally entertaining the eminent professors; I remember impressing one of them with my lentil soup.

The parsonage of the Newtonville church became available, and my father helped us buy it. There was an agreement to assist at the church, which was in the next block, and we moved before Sarah was born. The house was a spacious Victorian in not very good shape but with a lovely yard. I remember George painting and papering, handyman skills all Doles seem to have, before we moved in. George received his PhD in 1965.

Andrew and Bruce completed the family by 1969. My father lived with us for a short while after my mother died,

and later Mother Dole lived with us for a few years before moving to Canada to live with George's sister Gertrude. The children were able to walk to school, it was safe for Stuart to ride his bike, and of course we drove the whole tribe to Cambridge to church. After a while I decided to take voice lessons, which entailed walking up the hill to the All



*Lois Dole (3rd from L) with (L to R) her niece Anna Woofenden and her daughters, Alicia and Sarah Dole*

Newton Music School where Mrs. Milius taught. Her husband was our Cambridge organist. Her method of teaching was very traditional, including Vaccai exercises in Italian. Eventually I was able to do some solo work in church; the most fun was singing duets with Dickie Campbell in Elmwood. If you have heard Dickie sing, you know that he had to restrain himself in order for me to be heard at all, which he was charitable enough to do.

Now, I have to confess that I never taught Sunday school, which I bet lots of you have done. Am I right? Well, I admire you for it. I just didn't think I knew enough to do it, and George never seemed to expect me to, though I'm pretty sure his mother did, though she never said so to me.

George began teaching part-time at NCTS and a few years later resigned from Cambridge. He also candidated at the Bath church at that time but wasn't chosen, so he became full time at the theological school. In later years he said that his not going to Bath was providential because it allowed him to

become more proficient in Latin and in church theology, paving his way to work on the New Century Edition of Swedenborg's works. Living so close to the school we got to know the students well, often having them over to the house.

In 1972 we decided to move to Sharon to be near the Woofendens, into what had been a farmhouse with a three-story barn, with a stream in the backyard and a pond across the street. Once Bruce was in nursery school, I decided to return to work, accepting a job as RN at the newly opened New England Sinai Hospital in nearby Stoughton. I was there for twenty-one years, working the evening shift, which meant that George got the children up and off to school in the morning. He says now that he has no memory

of that. When I retired, they gave me a party, a plaque, and a crystal vase, and one of the nurses made a quilt and took it all around the hospital for people to sign.

George and I joined choruses in both the Sharon and the Bath areas. The chorus in the Sharon area put on a number of Gilbert and Sullivan operettas in which Sarah and George had leading roles. If you remember Muff Worden—she was the contralto duchess to George's Duke of Plaza-Toro in *Gondoliers*. George was well trained by his mother to sing accurately and was usually the tenor to follow. Unfortunately his hearing now prevents him from any enjoyment of music.

We had close to four acres in Sharon. It was there that I developed my love of gardening. I had a rock garden which led down to a small garden pool with a few goldfish. When we were moving to Maine, I was worried about what to do with them until I looked out one day and saw a great blue heron standing there.

*Continues next page*



*Continued from preceding page*

In Bath, in 1999, we found a two-family house across the street from the church and a short block from the house where George grew up. He was happy to have “come home,” and we all enjoy being able to walk downtown. Once settled, I looked around for something to do and found “Neighbors,” a company that provides non-medical care in the home, driving clients to appointments and so forth. One of my first jobs because of my nursing background was with a gentleman with Parkinson’s who had taught at Harvard in the same department where George had received his PhD; he had cooperated with George on a paper, though they had never met. Over the years I saw some of the beautiful areas in the nearby coast and met some remarkable people.

I also took the ten-week course leading to certification for hospice. When I was a nurse I never had time to really talk to patients. I found out that in hospice you mostly listen, that people loved to talk about themselves to someone who hasn’t heard it all.

At the high school in the next block I took evening courses in soap making and stained glass. For my second stained glass project I decided to replace the fogged glass in the black front door. The new multicolored panels were professionally installed in the door, now painted white.

Alicia moved into the apartment in the Bath house about ten years ago, supposedly to take care of us in our old age, whenever that happens. She is a constant, cheerful presence, a great help with computer problems, having become proficient in her job as copy editor for the New Century Edition. She also coordinates communications with the rest of the family.

Of course I was also involved with church activities from 1999 on. When we started, the former pastor’s wife

asked me if I could perform in that role. I said I didn’t know, not having had the opportunity before. When Rev. Alison Longstaff asked me to make a list, I found out that there were thirteen tasks I had taken on, from organizing coffee hours and church suppers to starting the silent auctions to managing the neighborhood raised beds for vegetables on the south lawn of the church. I’m sure that you are familiar with all of these kinds of activities.

George has always been quietly encouraging but never pushy. Every birthday and Valentine’s Day he takes a piece of computer paper, folds it in fourths, draws something on the front, and inside composes a poem for me. He washes the dishes, and never asks me to critique his sermons or read his books. He has enjoyed being a dad, and the family, watching how he lives, has found the guidance needed.

I don’t know that I have much wisdom about the future of the church. I do know that Swedenborg envisioned his revelations bringing hope to all peoples. His medium was the written word. Ours may be something special to our times. But it has been and always will be the way we live that is the church’s best testament.

I would like to take a few minutes to talk about the record of the Maine Association from 1875 to 1911 that was found in Fryeburg while I was secretary. The penmanship is beautiful, the ink still crisp. I condensed 483 pages down to twenty-six by leaving out the itemized treasurers’ reports and lists of those attending meetings and including events that seemed of interest.

The reports of each of the three Maine churches and any related organizations were meticulously entered. There were often reflections by the writer on the tone of religious life and on reactions to New Church teachings.

The Association was formed for the purpose of missionary work, and the ministers employed and the towns vis-

ited are prominently covered. I would say that those ministers had to make exhaustive reports of their activities even to receive their small salary from the Association. There are names of many prominent ministers. In July 1878, the Fryeburg Society was instituted by Rev. Samuel Dike, who was pastor in Bath for fifty years. In 1879, in Bath, there were both morning and evening services with audiences of 200 or more. In fact many churches at that time had two services on Sundays. In Portland that year the average attendance was 150. Six evening lectures were given there. By 1888 the association was unable to hire a missionary due to lack of funds, though at every subsequent meeting the need was expressed.

In 1892, Rev. George Henry Dole assumed the pastorate in Bath. He had morning and evening services as well as presenting a Wednesday evening study of the writings of the church. There were about thirty-eight students in Sunday school with five teachers. In addition to his sermons and lectures, he made 349 house calls. That year Rev. Junius Spiers was hired as missionary for thirty-nine weeks at the salary of \$15 per week.

The Association meetings seemed to be *the* social event for New Church people; there are several references instructing the Association secretary to arrange reduced railroad fares for those attending. Summaries of the learned papers read at the meetings are included in the reports. At the 1894 meeting in Bath, about forty-three persons took an excursion to Five Islands in Georgetown for a shore dinner. The evening entertainment was songs sung by Mr. Manfred Lilliefors of the Cambridge Theological School.

I found that the volume showed me the tenor of New Church society at the time. Since it is a fascinating historical document, I feel that it could be of interest to a wider audience. ☪

# Painting Patterns and Navigating Norms

## An Explanation of the Ministry Q-CROSS@MSU

*Rev. Jenn Tafel gave the following address to the 2015 Annual Convention to introduce her proposed amendment to a standing resolution of the denomination. The resolution passed unanimously.*

As the religious advisor of Q-CROSS (Queer Christians Reclaiming Our Sexuality and Spirituality), my preferred pronouns are female (she, her, hers)—I will address the importance of this later. My disclaimer is that I am not an expert. I am also not here to change anyone's belief system. I am here to share information and stories—which often helps to shift hearts and open minds.

People are dying. This is nothing new. However, for the LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and queer) or just [queer](#) and [trans\\*](#) (see [sidebars](#)) community, this is a palpable aspect of the movement's history. While we understand that the HIV/AIDS virus is something the general population needs to address, we also know that the LGBTQ population feels its impact every day. Preliminary reports



show that there are 1,612 reports of murdered trans\* people in sixty-two countries since 2008. This may not be a shocking total but it should be. These numbers reflect people who are no longer with us because they chose to live authentically and died violently. This

is the imminent threat facing people who wish to transition, especially trans women of color). Because we live in a society with a history of nonacceptance of identities outside of our heteronormative bias, our nation's youth face consistent bullying, harassment, and often violent attacks. It is not surprising, though incredibly sad, that this situation leaves our youth feeling unable to cope, and why suicide too often seems a viable solution.

The rainbow is an iconic symbol of this community. It is a symbol of the covenant between the God we know—the God of love. It is a symbol of reconciliation and reclamation. For many, it is a symbol of unity and a desire to remove divisions. In short, a symbol of hope and perseverance

“What if affirming their sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression as part of their spiritual core was part of the healing process?”

This was the question asked by the founder of Q-CROSS when she attended a “Believe Out Loud” conference after the 2010 epidemic of youth suicides. It was a reflection and a call to action. It is also the question members of our group continue to ask during the individual journeys of coming out.

Many of us hold a holistic view of ourselves; however, what we often leave out of the equation is a healthy understanding of the connection between sexuality and spirituality. Again, I'm not an expert, and this is a conversation for another day, but it is something that needs to be put on the table.

Our theology speaks about life that comes from death—a process of being reborn through regeneration. If we are not in a relationship with God, we are in a form of death. If we are to live out what God has in mind for us—a reclaiming of our soul and unification of our natural and spiritual selves (while journeying toward the celestial) in rela-

*Continues next page*

### “But What Is Meant by Queer?”

Think of *queer* as an umbrella term. It includes anyone who identifies as queer and feels somehow outside of the societal norms in regards to gender or sexuality. This, therefore, could include a person who values highly queer theory concepts and would rather not identify with any particular label; a gender fluid bisexual or heterosexual; a questioning LGBT person, and a person who just doesn't feel like she quite fits into societal norms and wants to bond with a community over that difference.

Queer is a fluid label as opposed to a solid label, one that only requires us to acknowledge that we're different without specifying how or in what context. It is also a concise word that people may use if they do not feel like shifting their language along with their ever-evolving gender, politics, or sexuality. It may also be an easier and more concise identity for some people to use if and when people ask, because they do.

More at <http://tinyurl.com/okvqxuu>

### What Does the Asterisk in Trans\* Mean?

*Trans\** (the asterisk is part of the word, not a footnote) is a general term that refers to all identities within the gender spectrum. There's much diversity there, but we often group them together. Thus, trans (without the asterisk) can be intentionally used to describe trans men and trans women, while the asterisk includes all transgender, non-binary, and gender nonconforming identities.

More at <http://tinyurl.com/pxqqput>

*Continued from preceding page*

tionship with the Divine—why would we leave people out of this opportunity for spiritual growth and regeneration—specifically the queer and trans\* community? We have a chance to participate in systemic regeneration by opening doors and hearts for all people to participate in the engagement of a relationship with God.

Q-CROSS was founded before I came on board; following is the charter that was chosen from Scripture:

For I am certain that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, neither heights nor depths—nor anything else in all creation—will be able to separate us from the love of God that comes to us in Christ Jesus, our Savior (Romans 8:38–39, Inclusive Bible).

I have come to appreciate this passage at a deeper level each year I am involved. Because the group is interdenominational, it is a passage that can speak across Christendom.

Our mission statement reads,

To serve as an interdenominational (ecumenical) coalition of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Christians exploring spirituality in an affirming environment as faithful disciples of the loving Gospel of Christ through outreach, evangelism, education, and fellowship, allied to the community at and around Michigan State University.

This is the task appointed to us and a vision of who we are called to be and to whom we are to minister.

I'm often asked, "What do you do in your meetings?" I can guess at what the person is really interested in, but what I really want to say and hardly ever articulate is that in our weekly gatherings, the power of the Holy Spirit has gathered folks who are on the edge and scared beyond measure to live their authenticity out loud. If you are wise and

pay attention you can feel that power and presence. The air almost crackles because the Divine has found a space to be realized and embodied. It is a feeling that gives one hope to live another day. It is the power that draws two or three gathered in the name of Christ.

Does that happen every week? Heck no, but it happens often enough that I know I need to be part of the movement. So really, what we do is a rotation of Bible study, worship, and discussions on various topics, including current biblical scholarship, and fellowship

Our mission is to serve as an interdenominational (ecumenical) coalition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning Christians exploring spirituality in an affirming environment as faithful disciples of the loving Gospel of Christ through outreach, evangelism, education, and fellowship, allied to the community at and around Michigan State University.

### **A vision for the future—how this ministry can help our denomination as a whole**

Our denomination should have a listing of ministries that are fully inclusive. This means that members of the queer and trans\* communities are welcome to participate in all aspects of church life: church membership, the rites and sacraments, marriage, calls to ministry, and so forth.

### **Full inclusion and a radical welcome**

As I mentioned in my introduction, my preferred gender pronouns (or as some folks say, "These are my pronouns.") are female (she, her, hers). Why does this matter? As I started with the group, I quickly learned that this practice is common in many LG-BTQ groups and it is a way to honor those in the trans\* and gender-nonconfirming community and include

them in our group. It helps build a bridge through language.

I am proud to be part of a denomination that expanded our welcome statement some years ago, and I propose amending it by inserting *sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression* as follows:

In its ever-growing desire to serve all of God's children, the General Convention (aka The Swedenborgian Church), urges Swedenborgians everywhere to acknowledge that the Church Universal is inclusive and to act in this spirit. Let no Society of the Church exclude any from membership on such considerations as ethnic origin, race, color, [*sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression*] condition of health, handicap, or economic status; but seeking those who accept our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as Redeemer of the world and who accept the essentials of faith of the Church, welcome all with joy and affection into the full and free community of the Church. ☩

Website: [www.qcrossmsu.org](http://www.qcrossmsu.org)

Email: [qcrossmus@gmail.com](mailto:qcrossmus@gmail.com)

Twitter: @QCROSSMSU

Facebook: [www.facebook.com/MSUQCROSS](http://www.facebook.com/MSUQCROSS)

---

## **Iungerich Fund Grants**

The deadline for submitting Iungerich Fund grant proposals for 2016 is September 30, 2015. The purpose of the fund is to provide free distribution of Swedenborg's writings or promote greater understanding of the writings.

Email [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org) or mail to

The Swedenborgian Church  
50 Quincy Street  
Cambridge, MA 02138

The Iungerich Fund Grant Guide is available from the above addresses or from the chair of the Iungerich Fund Committee, Chris Laitner, at [chris.laitner@gmail.com](mailto:chris.laitner@gmail.com). ☩

---

# Building a Church

## Closing Sermon by Rev. Dr. Donna Keane

1 Chronicles 22:2-10  
Acts 2:36-47

Five years ago our church, the Elmwood New Church [Massachusetts], after years of deferred maintenance, was condemned by the local building inspector, and we had to vacate the premises. We could no longer worship in a church that had stood since 1854 on that spot. It was a difficult time for all of us, especially the older members of the congregation.

We had our final service on November 7, 2010, and the sanctuary was filled with 153 people. Many people wanted to share what the building meant to them, and they were not shy about how angry and sad and disappointed they were at the loss of the church where so many events in their memories had occurred—weddings, funerals, Sunday school, and other activities. I even had a letter from someone in Colorado chastising us for daring to tear down the building where her parents had been married, and oh, by the way, she had lived in Colorado for twenty-eight years! As everyone was speaking and sharing, I found myself getting angrier and angrier. Finally it was my turn to speak and I thanked them for sharing and then asked them “Where have you been? If you think this is painful for you, imagine what we feel! This is our church, our space and we are losing it!”

After the service, one of the other ministers in town commented that he didn’t know how I had managed to be so gracious to those people who had spoken.

We had to find a new place to worship; we have been renting retail office

space in a small strip mall on the back side of the building. With no signage out front, we are definitely a destination church; if you want to find us, we have to give you directions. The community believes that we have gone out of business and don’t exist anymore!

One thing has changed dramatically for our congregation: we now sit very close together and talk with each other much more than we did. In ad-



dition, the minister and congregation sit and stand within five feet of each other, so we are very intimate in our dynamics of faith! Also, we have Bingo every Wednesday night, and one of our friends from Bingo, a staunch Catholic, came to our service one Sunday. At coffee hour, she asked, “So, what do you believe?” I groaned, and wondered if she wanted the five minute response or longer, but before I could speak, every person around the table started telling her what we believe! I was floored—they actually had heard and understand the concepts that Swedenborg shared and that we have lived out in our church. It was much more powerful for them to answer her than it would have been for me, and I gladly kept silent while the Lord worked through them.

We are surviving and have recently decided to finally demolish the old building and build a new, much small-

er building that will serve our needs better. It has taken us this long to decide because the grieving and mourning process had to be completed before the excitement and energy could be released to be able to trust that the gains will outweigh the loss of the old building. I am planning to buy a hard hat and feel as though I am getting a PhD in contracting dealing with the local bureaucracy, contractors, and utility services!

I was going to title this sermon “Ask not what God can do for you, but rather, ask what you can do for God.” Certainly a play on words from JFK’s inaugural speech, but it also points out a subtle shift in emphasis on our relationship with God and how we approach him.

Too often, we look at the images of God—Father, Son, Holy Spirit—and we choose to relate only to the idea of idyllic parent, the one who supplies us with all we need, the person who will take away any problems we have and give to us without question. We stand in front of God and put our hands out in supplication for God’s blessing, grace, and love. And God has promised us that he will be there for us, through Jesus Christ and the Comforter, that we will indeed have all we need to live a rich, useful life.

*But!* There is always a condition, an expectation, a requirement of us in order for this rich and useful life to materialize. We have to follow the rules! *And* we have to be partners in this rich and useful life by bringing our gifts to the table and using our will power to make things happen. We are expected to answer the invitation to come to the banquet—to not make our personal agendas so important that we do not and cannot heed the Word of the Lord

*Continues next page*



*Continued from preceding page*

when he invites us to his party!

How often we have heard about miracles occurring, people's lives saved, wounds healed, etc. We sometimes believe that these are gifts of grace, that these people have done nothing to merit this grace. And in a way, that is true, for God's grace is always there for us. But these are not gifts with no strings. The story of Jesus with the woman who touches his garment and is healed is typical. To a bystander, it looks as though she has done nothing to warrant this healing. But Jesus tells us something different. Because she believed and reached out and was willing, the power went out from him and healed her. He said to her, "Your faith has healed you, go in peace."

**We have to believe**—we have to believe that the gospels tell us the good news and believe that the stories and sayings apply to us; they are not just lovely stories we read or hear once a week in church. The purpose of church is to hear the good news, to receive the truth from the Lord in his words, and to apply this directly to our daily lives.

**We have to reach out**—we have to reach out and become active in our church community and prayer life. There is no real difference between our inner spiritual life and our outer community life. They are one and the same and are linked together like a horse and carriage or love and marriage. Our outer community life in this church reflects our inner spiritual life. We can believe in God and pray to God and have immense spiritual experiences within the aloneness of our souls; but if we do not put these experiences into our outer religious life, into the life of our church community and our community at large, we will not be doing God's work. We do not increase our spirituality only for the selfish reason of getting closer to God. We increase our spirituality so that our words and

acts and deeds can glorify God in the larger community. We are expected to "spread the word," to "tell the good news," to reach out to people who may be lonely or troubled or searching and tell them what we have seen and heard.

How many of us have not spoken up about our faith because we have been afraid, or shy, or concerned that we will turn people off by talking about our spiritual journey? How many of us have robbed the other person of the opportunity to hear the message and to find the answers because our egos have gotten in the way of our message?

**We have to be willing**—we have to be willing to hear "no" for an answer. We have to be willing to put ourselves second and the good of the community first. Jesus and his disciples lived a life of communal sharing, and this was natural in the Jewish world. To the early Christians, many of whom were Jewish first, living and working together and celebrating together was a way of life. To the early Christians who came from other cultures, this was a new way of being together. Thinking and believing rightly and participating in the collection of money for the use of the community are both part of the right understanding of Jesus Christ and his mission.

And so we have some work to do and decisions to make about the kind of church and community we want to be. The building of the temple by Solomon to house the Ark of the Covenant was a splendid idea whose time had come, and David was a wealthy king who provided more than sufficient money and products for the temple to be big and beautiful. He also made sure there would be a group of people to tend to the temple and to perform the ritual sacrifices necessary in the Jewish Church.

The New Testament brings a new idea of worship and the church. The early Christians did not have buildings and steeples to show off their new be-

liefs. Rather, it was the way they treated each other that showed them as Christians. It was their love for one another and their keeping of moral commandments that set them apart from the pagans and other folk in their cities and towns. Jesus gave no directions for the founding of a new church, only the word of God and the way to live in this world. But that included discipline and obeying God's word, just as the Old Testament required of the Israelites.

So we have some work to do. In Elmwood, we have a church building to rebuild and a call to go out and work in the greater community. Our building was condemned five years ago, and we have been renting space for the last four years. It has taken us this long to understand and become willing to let the old building go and be willing to build a new one. There will be sadness when the old building finally comes down, but there is also anticipation and joy in the idea of a *new* church on the old land. We have toyed with the idea of calling it the Elmwood *New* New Church! We are excited to be able to be more visible in the community, to reach out from a place of newness and spread the good news of God's salvation. In the larger church, we have to do the same, to decide what resources we have, what skills we have, what we are willing and able to do. And then we have to bang that up against God's love for us and his asking of us to "tell the good news" and bring his message to others.

For many of our churches, we have been blessed with the gifts of the Swedenborgian angels and ancestors who have left us money to carry on the "good work" of our denomination. In many instances, that has meant that we continue to maintain, refurbish, and hold together with toothpicks and chewing gum the structures that were built many years ago. Often, in our old

*Continues on page 122*

## 2015 Convention Report

*Continued from page 109*

Graduate Theological Union. Formerly known as the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS), it is now the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS). He reviewed the accomplished work of SHS during its tenure from 2001 to 2015 at the Pacific School of Religion. Professor Dr. Devin Zuber reported on the state of academics at CSS and presented a vivid explanation of the relationships of all the schools, institutes, and centers on “Holy Hill,” the location in Berkeley, California of many seminars and theological academic centers, including CSS. The Board of Trustees chair, Tom Neuenfeldt, gave the nominating report for the at-large class of trustees, and conducted the election.

## Closing Sermon

*Continued from page 121*

building in Elmwood, which was built to seat 150 in the sanctuary, we would have ten to twelve people on a Sunday morning. One would be in the back of the church, in the last pew, another would be about midway up the aisle on the other side. Someone would complain that it was too cold, and I would invite people to sit closer together, to take advantage of body heat. The responses were expected: “I’ve sat in this pew for fifty years, I’m not about to move now!” In addition, as the congregation aged, some would complain that they could not hear very well, even though we had a perfectly good sound system. When I suggested they may want to sit closer to the front of the church, I got the same response: “This is *my* seat, I’ve been here for years!”

We are such creatures of habit that we will be uncomfortable and miss a lot of what goes on around us to maintain our habits of a lifetime!

We can use this seating issue as a

The commencement ceremony began with the commencement address, delivered by Rebecca Esterson, scholar-in-training, ([page 102](#)). The ceremony concluded with the conferring of the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies on Julie Conaron of Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, and the Certificate of Basic Module—Licensed Pastor, on Helen Barler of Puget Sound, Washington.

## Mini-Courses

Mini-courses were offered both Monday and Tuesday afternoons, continuing the convention theme of “Toward a Newer Church”: Rev. Jane Siebert led “Traditional and Emergent Ministries, Summer Camps, Workshops, and Retreats”; Chris Laitner led “Denominational Digital Presence for

metaphor for our present church and the new year in General Convention. We may have to become uncomfortable, to start doing things differently, to find new ways to relate to the changing world around us—the demographics, the cultural shifts that are happening with or without our permission, the idea that our old way of thinking and doing needs to be revised to meet the brave new world which is out there for us to engage.

Let us pray on this together. Lord Jesus, we want to do your will and carry the message of your love and salvation as presented by the revelations of Swedenborg to the rest of the world. Help us to decide the best use of our time and talents to glorify your name and bring more people into relationship with you through this church. We are willing to be your servants completely, and to do your bidding. We ask that you reveal to us through our committees, our leaders, and our personal prayers your will for us and that you grant us the power to carry it out. Amen. ☪

the 21st Century”; Rev. Robert McCluskey led “Our Denomination’s Response to Issues of Social Responsibility”; Rev. Jenny Caughman led “On the Relationship between Individual Regeneration and Spiritual Community Renewal”; and Rev. Jenn Tafel screened the documentary “Affirmed” about experiences and viewpoints regarding the intersection of sexuality and spirituality.

## Music

Music was, once again, a popular and vital part of the convention. After twenty years of creating the convention music program and directing the convention chorus, Laurie Turley handed the baton to Greg Huang-Dale, who fulfilled his task admirably. The Convention Choir, with little rehearsal time, sang beautifully.

The social activity on the last evening was “Sharing Your Gifts Open Mic,” led and backed by the convention players: Paul Deming on guitar, Laurie Turley on keyboard, Greg Huang-Dale on banjo, mandolin, bongos, and hammered dulcimer, and Ken Turley on guitar and bass. They shared their musical gifts and then welcomed volunteers to the stage to sing and play.

## Recognitions

Certificates of appreciation were presented to the following in recognition of their service to the Swedenborgian Church:

- Carl Helm, General Council, 6 years
- Rev. Kit Billings, General Council, 6 years
- David Vigas, General Council, 6 years
- Steve Sanchez, COMSU, 3 years
- Jane Fullerton, MINSU, 2 years
- Rev. Renee Machiniak, Nominating Committee, 5 years
- Rev. Freeman Schrock, Committee on Inquiry, 5 years

*Continues next page*

## Passages

### Baptisms

**Andrew Chase Tafel** was baptized into the Christian life and faith on June 21, 2015, at the Wayfarers Chapel in Rancho Palos Verde, California, with his great-grandfather, Rev. Harvey A. Tafel officiating.

### Transitions

**Rev. Carla Friedrich** has answered a call to the New Church of the Southwest Desert, in Silver City, New Mexico. Rev. Sky Paradise, who planted the church, has retired. ☪

*Continued from preceding page*

- Rev. Susannah Currie, Secretary, 5 years and Wayfarers Chapel Board, 3 years
  - Pete Toot, Investment Committee, 13 years
  - Laurie Turley, Choir Director, 20+ years.
- Certificates of appreciation for mile-



Rev. Jerry Poole



Rev. Wilma Wake



Rev. Randy Laakko

stone years of service were presented to the following ministers in recognition of their service to the Swedenborgian Church:

- Rev. Dr. Wilma Wake, 25 years
- Rev. Jerry Poole, 50 years
- Rev. Randy Laakko, 50 years.

### Children's Ministries

The Swedenborgian Church Children's Ministries met on Tuesday. The officers announced "Sunday School in a Bag," samples of which will be giv-

## Council of Ministers Meeting

**T**he Council of Ministers (COM) met for two days preceding the annual convention. There were thirty-seven ministers and seven guests present at the meeting, which was chaired by Rev. Kevin Baxter.

The COM annual educational program was a workshop, facilitated by the chair, on the topic of the Peer Supervision program for clergy.

In elections, Rev. Rich Tafel was elected to the Executive Committee, Rev. Kathy Speas was elected to the Committee on Admission to the Ministry (CAM), Rev. Carla Friedrich was elected to the Nominating Committee, Rev. Kit Billings was elected chair of CAM, and Rev. Susannah Currie was elected convention preacher for 2017.

The Council of Ministers took these actions:

- Appointed a search and oversight committee, and assigned it the task

of restarting the *Our Daily Bread* ministry, to develop ways of continuing to fulfill its mission with a larger focus on making use of digital publishing options.

- Made plans to revive *Our Daily Bread*, the monthly devotional publication of COM and General Convention.
- Voted the name of Rev. Matthew Samuel Pritchard Glowe be removed from the Roll of Ministers and added to the Roll of Former Ministers. He was ordained in 1973 and entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on February 13, 2015.
- Received Visions of Ministry from Lisa Solwold and Shada Sullivan, and by Skype from Thomas Muller, all of whom are on the ordination path.
- Granted continuation of permission for the Virginia Street Church (St. Paul) to employ Gordon Meyer as their pastor and for the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos (West Chester, Pennsylvania) to employ Christine Campbell as their pastor, with reservations, outlining the steps needed to build stronger relations between Christine Campbell, COM, and the Swedenborgian Church at Temenos.

Helen Barler, a candidate for licensed pastor status, shared her ministry background and her ongoing service to the Swedenborgian Church of Puget Sound. The Council voted to recommend to the General Convention that she be given licensed pastor standing at her church.

Julie Conaron presented a Plan of Ministry. She related her chaplaincy and ministry training and experience. The Council voted to recommend to the General Council that Julie Conaron be ordained into the Swedenborgian ministry. ☪

en to several Sunday schools. Information on how to create your own will be made available. Election results were Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen, president; Rev. Kit Billings, vice-presi-

dent; Rev. Kevin Baxter, secretary; and Debbie Dolley, treasurer.

Sunday brought the closing session of the convention. Rev. George Dole and Rev. Gard Perry summarized the proceedings on the theme, and Rev. Jenny Caughman led a followup discussion. Rev. Donna Keane's preached at the closing service ([page 120](#)). Hugs and goodbyes followed as conventioners departed for home. (Visit [pages 110–11](#) to view photos of the convention.) ☪

### About the Swedenborgian Church

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

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

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

## "Toward A Newer Church"— A Look Back and A Look Ahead

BY GARD PERRY

I invite you to take a look back at the Educational Program conducted at the 2015 Convention at Bridgewater State University in June, and will glance ahead to Convention 2016. The bridge between the two is continuity in the Educational Program: "Toward A Newer Church." The 2015 Convention was Part One with a Part Two already in a planning phase for Convention 2016.

In the opening session on June 28, Rev. George Dole delivered his keynote speech, "A Call" (page 97), in which we heard his prophetic voice call us "Toward A Newer Church."

George conveyed what our denomination's charter, Revelation 21, has to say about qualities of a Newer Church. In Swedenborg's exegesis, George found that the gold described there is the "good that love does," while the wall is the "literal sense of the Word," that points directly to teaching us how to live.

He then brought our attention to the easily overlooked phrase from *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings*



At the heart of everything in the universe that is in accord with the divine design is something good and something true. There are no exceptions to this in heaven or in the world because everything good, like everything true, comes from the Deity, who is the source of everything (NJHT §11).

Not content with these generalities, George substituted his own experience of "caring about you" for what is good and "understanding you clearly" for what is true. In an experiential exercise of conversation between two people (or in a small group) we practiced exactly that: "caring about you and understanding you clearly."

What a difference an experience of what is good and true makes! A number of participants spoke to me about how much they learned about the teachings of the church and becoming a newer church in that conversational time.

The response to the educational program was positive, and I have been asked to serve as chair of the educational program for Convention 2016—a program that will build on what we learned on that Sunday afternoon in the auditori-

*Continues on page 98*