



The SCYL Fall Retreat: Teens in the Bible, Part II

BY KURT FEKETE

A record number sixteen teenagers ventured to Cedar Hill Retreat Center in South Duxbury, Massachusetts, on a Friday evening in early October to attend the retreat “Teenagers in the Bible: Part 2.” Many teens who attended this retreat last year returned to catch the second part of this two part series on some of the more famous adolescents and young adults from the Bible. Also joining us were five teens who have never traveled to this retreat before. Eleven of the teens came from the Midwest (Indiana, Michigan, and Ohio); nine of these teenagers rode the van piloted again by the very capable drivers Rev. Kit Billings and Tammara Mounce; and two teens were fortunately enough to fly, thus avoiding the often less than pleasant sixteen-plus-hour van ride. (I am very appreciative that Rachael Sbrocco was able to host the van group on Thursday night at her home in Pennsylvania so they did not have to make the entire grueling drive in one day.) Three teens came up from New Jersey to join one local teen from Massachusetts and one teen from Maine.

Rounding out our retreat staff, we welcomed Holly Bauer and Nina Sasser. These two adults, both past presidents of SCYL, are very active in our young adult Transitions group, and we were very grateful that they could join us in staffing this retreat. Nina and Holly oversaw the teen kitchen teams that did all the cooking and dishes and led the group icebreaker game. Nina

Isaac and Rebekkah’s twin sons, Jacob and Esau. I first reviewed the history of the family from Abraham to remind the teens of my session last year on Isaac and Ishmael before discussing Jacob and Esau. We read the story of their birth in Genesis 25 and how Esau was born first with Jacob following, grabbing Esau’s heel. We learned how Esau was red and hairy and Jacob

was smooth-skinned. Then we heard the story about Esau giving away his birthright for a bowl of stew.

I explained how this story relates to the point in our life when we first become independent and start to live our life on our own as referenced in Anita Dole’s *Bible Study Notes*. The twins represent the con-

flicted and clear division between our desires (Esau) and our knowledge (Jacob). We no longer have another adult, a parent or guardian, responsible for our actions. When we strike out on our own, we want to do good and be good but we also have these strong, often selfish desires and we lack wisdom. We’re all frequently tempted to grasp at some present outward satisfaction at the sacrifice of a future great and more interior good. This is the repre-

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The SCYL retreat group at Alley Kat Lanes

also helped out with grocery shopping and assisted with the end of retreat cleanup. What a blessing to have such wonderful staff at this retreat to help guide our teens!

As mentioned above, at this retreat the teens revisited Bible stories involving children, teens, and young adults, and discovered how these ancient stories, as illuminated by Emanuel Swedenborg, might be helpful to us today.

I opened the retreat-themed sessions on Saturday morning with the story of

The Editor's Desk



Brainstorming at the New York New Church

I have the privilege of serving on an ad hoc committee appointed by President Jane Siebert to consult with the New York New Church on possibilities for their future. We met with the trustees, at their request, at the New York New Church in October to discuss possibilities for future direction. Attending the meetings were New York trustees Cheryl Bryant, Anna Martinian, and Will Linden and committee members Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Young Min Kim, Jennifer Lindsay, Tom Neuenfeldt, Rev. Anna Woofenden, and myself.

The New York Church has a long and rich history extending to the early part of the nineteenth century, but its congregation has shrunk over time, and the trustees want to reimagine the best use of the church's resources in fulfilling its mission. This problem is not unique to the New York New Church. Most of our Swedenborgian Churches



(Clockwise from upper left) Young Min Kim, Jennifer Lindsay, Jane Siebert, Tom Neuenfeldt, Anna Woofenden, Anna Martinian, Will Linden, and Cheryl Bryant.

and, indeed, most mainline churches, are facing the same problems.

Anna Woofenden, who "planted" the Garden Church in San Pedro, California, over two years ago, offered ideas and perspectives on alternative forms of church and worship, and arranged for the group to attend a Monday evening service at St. Lydia's Church in Brooklyn.

St. Lydia's is a dinner church in a storefront (<http://stlydias.org>); it holds services while participants share dinner, preparation, and cleanup. Weekdays, they rent co-working space to individuals working independently without an office. Rev. Emily Scott,

the founder and pastor (Lutheran), has planted a thriving alternative church.

Jane Siebert invited a consultant to learn about the church and its challenges and to help us envision possibilities. We had an encouraging meeting in which she shared a number of ideas for using and growing the church. Her experience is in bringing people together (mostly Millennials) for one-time and ongoing events based on community and common striving for meaning in their lives.

The trustees of the church and the committee will continue to pursue new ideas and find ways to put them into practice.

—Herb Ziegler

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Church Calendar

- **Dec 27–30:** SCYL Winter Retreat: "Divine Writings," Almont Retreat Center, Allenton, MI
- **January 19, 2017:** Emanuel Swedenborg's birthday*
- **July 8–12, 2017:** 2017 Annual Convention, West Chester, PA

* This is the date in the Julian calendar, used in Sweden when Swedenborg was born, in 1688. In the Gregorian (modern) calendar, the date is February 8.

the Messenger

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Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith, Renée Hellenbrecht, & Trevor
Communications Support Unit: Elizabeth Blair, Tamara Mounce & 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

Business and Subscription Address:
The Messenger, Central Office
50 Quincy Street
Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: manager@swedenborg.org

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Letter from the President



*2016–17: The Year of the Word:
The Power of the Holy Scriptures*

Dear Friends,

Volunteers are on my mind as I write this post. As I have the opportunity to travel around to meetings and churches, I am brought to my knees as I experience the gift of volunteerism that is essential to our denomination, our camps, our churches, and one another.

Two weekends ago I met with the Wayfarer's Chapel Board in Palos Verdes, California. Seven volunteer board members from around the US and Canada met for two days to oversee the activities, ministry, and work at the chapel. They met with the director of ministry and the director of administration to budget, plan, and supervise the ongoing care of the chapel and grounds. This board puts in many additional volunteer hours, serving in a variety of capacities. They have two face-to-face meetings and at least one teleconference each year.

That same weekend, the Board of Trustees of our seminary, The Center for Swedenborgian Studies, met in Berkeley. Twelve volunteers serve on this board that meets for two days twice a year to support our seminary, our professors, our staff, and Swedenborgian seminarians throughout the nation. They also orchestrate the graduation and corporation meeting at annual conventions.

Last weekend, I enjoyed a productive meeting in Chicago with the Cabinet. This group of volunteers

(chairs of the five support units, chair of the Council of Ministers, a representative of General Council) is charged with keeping the organizational structure of General Convention working. We met as the Cabinet to understand what each support unit is working on and to come together as a team.

The Ministries Support Unit disburses the mission funds for special mission needs of our churches, and each member of the support unit has five or six churches that they call regularly and offer support to.

The Education Support Unit plans and organizes the mini-courses at convention; in addition, they oversee the Swedenborgian Church's youth director and youth programs.

The Information Management Support Unit is working hard with the Digital Presence Group to restructure the denominational website. The Communication Support Unit is also working on the new website, a welcome packet for churches, and oversees *the Messenger* editor.

The Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit is working with the treasurer on the sale of the San Diego Church and consults on the budget. They also serve as the Augmentation Fund Committee, which accepts grants and offers assistance in funding ordained General Convention ministers' salaries.

The Investment Committee met in Boston in October. Six volunteers with financial expertise meet twice a year, in addition to conference calls, to advise on the Common Fund where many of our churches, our seminary, affiliated organizations, and the denomination have their monetary assets invested. The fund, managed by Pierce Park Group, regularly performs in the top ten percent of similar investment funds.

This weekend the 2017 Convention Planning Committee is having a teleconference. Ten volunteers will talk monthly to garner ideas, split up the work and the responsibilities to offer the best annual

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sensation of the struggle between Jacob and Esau. Desire (Esau) comes first. Without motive and passion, there is no thinking or acting. But in order to act, we first must figure out how. There is a continual dynamic and tense relationship between our desire and our knowledge, and nowhere is this more pronounced than in our late teenage and young adult years.

Rev. Kit Billings led our afternoon session. Kit told the teens the story of Samson found in Judges 14–16. He emphasized how Samson had super strength but also suffered from super weaknesses, namely bad choices. Kit had the teens consider their strengths, their unique God given gifts, talents, and abilities, and had them make a vow to not sell out these strengths to anyone or anything. He explained that even if you mess up on your vow, “God is there to forgive and help you to do better the next time.” He closed with, “Remember where your strengths come from and look out for anyone who tries to offer you a free haircut.”

Saturday afternoon was spent frolicking in the warm sunshine throwing the Frisbee and beachcombing the sandy shores of Kingston Bay. The Cedar Hill Retreat Center grounds were so beautiful on this afternoon, with the tall roughly worn cedars rising dramatically out of the dense green field above the shrubs and piercing the cloud-dappled blue skies, giving way down the hill to the misty gray-blue sea in the distance. Later as the sun gently lowered into the waiting waters, darker clouds approached from the south and the teens departed the darkening

day into the retreat center for a warm, inviting dinner. After dinner, we went out into the dark, drizzly night, loaded into cars and vans and traveled to Alley Kat Lanes for our annual disco glow bowl outing. The teens enjoyed the arcade games and bowling while Kit and I valiantly competed and humbly lost on the lanes against the shrewdly capable,



Scout, Ivy, and Freya lounging on the sofa

much younger, and more agile Nina and Holly. We returned to Cedar Hill in time for a more personal and intimate session with Tammara where the teens were able to check in and share specific challenges and gratu- tudes in a circle of open and honest sharing. The night ended with indoor oven s’mores (they were delicious!) as it was too wet outside for an evening campfire.

On Sunday morning we awoke to a strengthening storm with waves of gusty winds and pelting rain. We were experiencing the remnants of Hurricane Matthew, which had traversed far out to sea but still brought us a day of wind and rain as the outermost bands



Nina, Bekka, Kurt and Ava on the way to the beach

of the storm grazed the Cape. There would be no sunshine frolicking today. Instead, after breakfast the teens were invited to join me in an exciting session on the story of David and Goliath

(1 Samuel 17). As this is such a familiar story to most of the teens, I had them recount the tale to me. I would interject on occasion to fill in a finer detail or emphasize an important aspect of



Last day on the beach until next year

the story. Then, once we reviewed the story in detail, I showed two video reenactments of the famous David and Goliath scene. The first video was a clip from The History Channel acclaimed miniseries *The Bible* (<http://tinyurl.com/zkszbaz>). I instructed the teens to carefully watch the video and tell me if they discovered any inaccuracies in the video when compared to the story from the Bible. I found six when I watched it before the retreat, but the teens found all six of mine plus one that I did not catch! You may want to watch the video yourself and see how many you can find. Then I showed them an animated video made for youth by Crossroads Kids’ Club based on the actual story (<http://tinyurl.com/gngevqt>). It was interesting for the teens to see that a cartoon directed at children could be closer to the real story than the more realistic-appearing video from The History Channel.

To end the session, I talked to the teens about the powerful inner meaning of the story, how the Philistines represent truths without good, or truths,

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falsified. Goliath, being the biggest, baddest Philistine, can represent the biggest lie we tell ourselves and come to believe. The smooth stones from the brook represent spiritual truths proved by experience. These are the solid, trusted truths we must use when facing big challenges of falsity and temptation. Each teen was invited to come forward and select a smooth stone from a bowl of water. Then we talked about some of the biggest falsities we face. Most of the teens agreed that anxiety was the Goliath in their lives.

Kit's afternoon session was on the prophet Samuel. He opened with, "Man looks at outward appearances, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7). From here, Kit talked about his personal struggle with his body image and the anxiety it caused him in his teenage years. He went on to share how finally, after much difficulty, he slowly realized, "My identity should come from God alone." This is a message that is so important for



Midwest van riding teens Tony, Gillian, Luke, Paige, Scout, Joey, Emily, Lauren and Nathan

teenagers to hear. Many teens struggle with identity and body image, and hearing an adult talk about it was powerful medicine. The Lord told Samuel to see beyond appearance to the heart when he looked at David. This is a lesson that all of us can learn from. Kit closed with the prayer,

"Dear Lord, Thank you for how you have touched my heart and mind with Your truth. Remind me daily that I

New Elmwood Church Dedicated

The new Elmwood New Church in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts, celebrated its dedication service, followed by an open house, on September 11, 2016. It was attended by members, friends, and neighbors, numbering almost 100.

The event marked the conclusion of a multi-year project, shepherded by the Elmwood Church minister, Rev. Donna Keane. The original church, from the mid-nineteenth century, was razed after being condemned.



am to live for you alone and not by the world's standards. Free me from my battle with my body so that I can fully love You, others, and myself. Amen."

Later Sunday afternoon we mostly played board games and relaxed. A few brave teens went out into the rain and wind to "report" on the weather. Luke played Weather Channel meteorologist by standing on a picnic table and challenging the wind to push him around!

After dinner, we enjoyed a late-night-movie-brownie-sundae Sunday evening. With only a few hours sleep for the teens, the van from the Midwest departed just after 4 AM to drive straight through and get everyone home in time for school and work on Tuesday. Nina, Bekka, and I worked hard cleaning up Cedar Hill before we made the trip up to Logan airport in Boston, dropping off Bekka as Nina and I made our way back home to Maine.

I am extraordinarily grateful to Tammara, Kit, Nina and Holly. And of course, I am thrilled about the large number of amazing teens that attended this retreat. Our little weekend together living in community and learning about teens in the Bible helped all of us

Rather than spend a great deal of money to repair it, the congregation decide to replace it with this understated, right-sized, low maintenance house of worship.



The community and congregation are well-pleased with the result. ☩



Rev. Donna Keane stands by the new altar, built by member Andrew Campbell using reclaimed wood from the original structure.

remember the strength of our love for one another and the power of the Lord's Word and its wonderful wisdom. ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church. He lives with his family in Gorham, Maine.

Toward a Spiritual Eco-Justice: James A. Nash and the Virtue of Frugality

BY DAVID J. FEKETE



Rev. David Fekete gave the following talk at the 2016 North American Interfaith Network Convocation, Espacio Sarado (Sacred Spaces), in Guadalajara. (See the October 2016 Messenger, page 122.)

In this talk I draw heavily on an article by James A. Nash, “On the Subversive Virtue: Frugality,” in David A. Crocker and Toby Linden, *The Ethics of Consumption: The Good Life, Justice, and Global Stewardship* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1998).

When we think about today’s environmental crisis, we tend to think in terms of science. We see global warming as the result of greenhouse gasses generated by fossil fuels. We talk about auto emissions or industrial waste. We seek to solve these problems by the application of science, such as alternative energy sources, cleaner emissions, hybrid or electrical automobiles, and recycling. But these efforts do not get at the underlying causes for our ecological crisis. The underlying cause for us is spiritual, not scientific. While technology and science can ameliorate the problems of the environment, they do not address the underlying spiritual cause.

Our environmental crisis is the result of excessive consumer demand and unbridled production to feed that demand. Consumption and production are structured to fulfill human cravings for more, better, bigger, newer, more prestigious goods.

In terms of classical Christianity, craving goods in this manner would be

considered sinful. Four of the cardinal sins—greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity (or pride)—would be seen as driving western economics. In my Swedenborgian tradition, spirituality means renouncing sin and adopting good. This practice can be applied as a spiritual solution to today’s environmental crisis.

The spiritual solution to the environmental crisis is by the individual and collective renunciation of greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity and the individual and collective adoption of the Christian virtues called frugality and charity. Frugality is the renunciation of greed, and the practice of Christian charity is giving and caring for our wider social and natural environment.

Environmental problems can be seen as the product of a broken relationship between humanity and God on the one hand, and between humanity and nature on the other. Personally and collectively, a lifestyle of greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity interrupts relationship with God on the one hand, and relationship with nature on the other. Adopting an ethic of frugality and Christian love restores relationship with God and with the environment. Frugality works as a spiritual solution for a spiritual problem because the whole created order—humans and nature—is sacred.

The whole created order is sacred space. This includes nature and humanity. We need to recognize that humanity is part of God’s sacred created order. It is not as if humans stand apart from nature; rather, humans stand within nature. In Genesis, God creates the water, land, plants, and animals, and man and woman. When the whole created order is complete, then God looks upon it all, including humans, and says that it is very good. So

humanity is part of the natural order and is in the sacred space of the world created by God.

Humanity and God

Frugality means moderating our cravings for material goods. It is a virtue that stands opposite the cardinal sins of greed, gluttony, envy, vanity, and pride. The cardinal sins are considered vexations of the soul that cause spiritual unrest. They oppose contentment with God’s grace and provision, Christian love, generosity, and solidarity with one’s fellows. The vexing nature of the cardinal sins can be seen by the discontent characterizing a person who never has enough. A frugal person is content with moderate possessions and stands in solidarity with the whole created order—other humans and the natural world. Frugality involves moderation of human cravings, and as such it is a kind of self-denial.

But it needs to be said that frugality is not holy poverty, not asceticism. It is not extinction of desires but moderation of desires. It is putting a limit on material acquisition, not a complete renunciation of material goods.

Frugality is not only a Christian virtue. It has origins in Classical philosophy. Plato taught a moderation of the passions. In his philosophy, the properly ordered soul is governed by reason. The insatiable appetites which crave sensual gratification and the exercise of ignoble emotions are subordinated to the governance of reason. For Aristotle, temperance is the golden mean between overindulgence on the one hand and deficiency on the other. Happiness cannot be had in a deficiency of possessions nor in overindulgence in luxuries and sensual gratification. The golden

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mean is in moderation, or what James A. Nash would call frugality. Both Plato and Aristotle call for moderation of human cravings, but not asceticism or poverty. They would like the virtue of frugality.

Frugality, as an individual spiritual virtue, challenges the advertising propaganda that tells us we need to out-buy our neighbor. Greed disrupts Christian love and solidarity with one's fellows, primarily by creating competition and hostilities among one's fellow humans. I know of two friends, one of whom went out and bought a Maserati. His friend went out and bought a Ferrari the next day. Consumption has become a way of acquiring self-esteem and supposed superiority over one's fellows. Not "having" generates envy and feelings of inadequacy, for which the solution is spending. Shopping has also become a recreation. In the face of all this, frugality challenges competitive spending by replacing the greed, envy, and vanity of conspicuous consumption with solidarity with one's fellows and moderate material possessions.

There is an element of Christian charity associated with frugality. The Puritan John Winthrop taught that we are to "abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others' necessities." So frugality is not only moderation of one's own appetites for the good of the soul, it is also an act of Christian charity in that we limit our luxuries to allow sufficient necessities for those without.

This idea can be generalized to world economics and ecology. Our western economy is set up to feed an insatiable appetite for consumer goods by means of unbridled production. When our unmoderated appetites seek gratification through acquisition of material goods, then we exploit nature's limited resources and create un-

manageable waste. The belief behind this ecologically unsound economic system is that productivity must continually grow in order to sustain economic health. Excessive consumption and production, which is structured to fulfill human cravings for more, better, bigger, newer, more prestigious goods, can be called an anthropocentric economy, or a human-centered economy. A new relationship between consumer demand and industrial production that is more sensitive to the natural ecosystem needs to be established. What is called for is an eco-centric economy. This is the subversive element of frugality. Frugality is subversive because it challenges the assumption that ever expanding markets are requisite for economic health.

Frugality can be generalized to a global ethic, as well. In order for frugality to solve our ecological crisis, it needs to become a global system. As individuals moderate the acquisition of material luxuries in order for others to have necessities, so wealthy and powerful nations must moderate their excessive demand for the world's resources so that less wealthy nations may have basic necessities. Wealthy nations cannot engulf the limited resources of the planet while poorer nations possess little, often not even enough. Frugality in this sense can be thought of in the light of Christian love and charity. Frugality as a planetary ethic means that the whole world economy be considered. Even as charitable giving is practiced by individuals to establish just distribution of goods, so in the world economy, wealthy and powerful nations need to balance their desire for material goods against the needs of all nations.

Humanity and Nature

Frugality is the realization that the whole created order is a sacred ecological system. Humans are part of God's created universe, as are water, land, mineral resources, air, plants, and ani-

mals. What is called for is not only reverence for nature, but also the recognition that humans are part of nature. The natural world isn't sacred space set off from the world of human society. Rather, humans and the natural world are part of the same sacred space.

Ecological problems happen when we forget our interdependence with nature. Ecological problems happen when we forget that humans share the sacred space created by God with the natural world. When we think that we stand apart from nature, we view the natural world as something apart from ourselves. Then we regard our relationship with nature as subject and object: We are the subject and nature is an object to be exploited according to human avarice.

When humans and nature are one, we will have health on the planet. This relationship of oneness with nature is captured in the Hebrew word *shalom*, which we usually translate as peace. But *shalom* means more than the cessation of war. It includes peace in the human realm, but it also includes the wellbeing of the whole world. It means rain falling in season, fecundity of crops, and health and fertility of livestock. Since humans, animals, plants, the land and its mineral resources, and water are all sacred creations of God, peace, *shalom*, means wellbeing for all of creation:

For you shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:2).

Perhaps the flourishing of the whole created order captured in the word *shalom* is even more clearly stated in Isaiah 32:15–18. That passage speaks of a time when

the Spirit is poured upon us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field, and the fruitful field

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is deemed a forest. Then justice will dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness abide in the fruitful field. And the effect of righteousness will be peace, and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust forever. My people will abide in a peaceful habitation, in secure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.

Conclusion

Frugality is right relations between a person and God, between person and person, and between humanity and nature. Frugality establishes right relation with God by subduing and moderating greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity. These cardinal sins are vexations of the soul. They cause discontent that disrupts peace, and they break up solidarity with one's fellows. Frugality combined with Christian charity brings peace and contentment and establishes a caring and giving relationship with one's fellows. Frugality means moderation of cravings for more, better, more prestigious, newer goods to assuage feelings of inadequacy and moderation in struggles for social superiority.

As a global economic ethic, frugality means the moderation of the excessive exploitation of limited natural resources by powerful and wealthy nations, so that there are sufficient resources for the needs of less wealthy and powerful nations.

Finally, frugality is the reestablishment of a sacred integration of humans in the natural world. It is the recognition that humanity is part of God's sacred creation, and that nature is not something apart that can be exploited to fulfill wants of an anthropocentric economics. Frugality establishes an eco-centered economics.

When frugality is a personal virtue, a global ethic, and a sacred relationship with nature, then the words of Isaiah will be fulfilled:

Reflection

On Swedenborg and the Church

BY KIT BILLINGS

This piece first appeared in the July/August 2016 LaPorte Report, the newsletter of the LaPorte New Church in Indiana.



What strikes me about my experience of

looking at our church as a whole, as well as at our Swedenborgian faith from a bird's-eye perspective, is that we, while not large yet in numbers, are immensely blessed!

The Divine has been calling and leading a beautiful diversity of people—lay, ordained and now Licensed Pastors as well—through the merciful and loving Light of the Lord's Second Coming. Indeed, God's universal New Church on earth has been growing. Our unique denomination is but one part of a much larger and expanding movement of God's love and wisdom taking root and transforming life all over the globe. And through our denomination, one that honors uniqueness, creativity, and the freedom for each person to sift and discern for ourselves what we each feel and see as spiritual truth, many lives are touched. Through you, the Divine touches and blesses others. I think about the beautiful things being accomplished through our Charity Sundays, and I feel joy inside.

You shall go out in joy, and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands (Isaiah 55:2). ☪

Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D., is pastor of the Edmonton, Alberta, Church of the Holy City.

Our church is special and unique, in good part because the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg help bring a rational and more sensible depth of pluralistic Christianity to life at the natural-world level. Here's an example of what he wrote about the role of the clergy in the Lord's New Church on earth:

They are to teach people the way to heaven and also to lead them. They are to teach them according to the doctrine of their own church and lead them so that they live by it. . . . The clergy are to claim no power over people's souls because they do not know the state of others' deeper reaches. Much less are they to claim the power of opening or closing heaven. . . . The clergy are to teach people and lead them by the truths to goodness of life, but they are to compel no one since no one can be compelled to believe the opposite of what he or she thinks at heart is true. If someone believes differently from the clergy and makes no trouble, then he or she is to be left in peace. (*Heavenly Secrets* §10794–10798)

I am in awe of how many precious gems of truth Swedenborg was inspired to write, as well as countless other thinkers, leaders, poets, and activists. So many diverse, colorful, and loving people, architects of a renewing, healing, and better world—and we get to participate in it! I look forward to many more good years of facilitating our unique way of being and doing church with you in LaPorte and to helping the Lord transform our world, gradually, through what is good and true. ☪

Rev. Kit Billings is the pastor of the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana, where he lives with his family..

Kansas Association Fall Retreat

BY LINDA KRAUS

This article first appeared in the October 2016 Plains Banner, the newsletter of the Kansas Association.

Camp Mennoscah is over for another year, and another successful fall retreat camp experience it was. It is such a special place. I found a quote from Ansel Adams that I believe explains the feelings I have. “We either have wild places or we don’t. We admit the spiritual-emotional validity of wild, beautiful places or we don’t. We have a philosophy of sim-

licity of experience in these wild places or we don’t.”

Sometimes camp seems loosely structured, but there is always time for study, time for friends and family and fun, and time to spend in the quiet surroundings of nature.

We especially enjoyed the wisdom and company of the



(L to R) Ethan, Karen Perry, Noah, Drew and Jane Siebert, Camryn, Levi, Tolli, Linda Kraus on the deck overlooking the Ninnescah River

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence. He not only has great sports analogies but is also a good sport himself. Saturday, he led the group in a study of Wilson Van Dusen’s book, *Uses*, and later in the day we learned more about Revelation.



(L to R) Ethan, Noah, Logan, Blake, Tolli, Camryn, Levi, and James, in rapt attention with Rev. Jim Lawrence (holding football)

On Sunday as church began, we started the service singing our traditional “Shall We Gather at the River.”

To close the weekend, Vivian Bright prepared her delicious turkey dinner that we look forward to all year. And one of the more encouraging signs of camp was the presence of eight kids ages 5 to 14.



Rev. Eric Zacharias and his daughter, Lynn Charlesworth, working a puzzle

East Coast Fall Retreat

Retreaters gathered at the Rolling Ridge Retreat Center in North Andover, Massachusetts, for the second East Coast Fall Retreat Columbus Day Weekend. They shared meals and stories, laughed together, learned together, and worshiped together. Attendance was low, but everyone agreed it was a meaningful experience.



The outdoor chapel at Rolling Ridge retreat center

After a quiet evening of fellowship, the group participated in a workshop on gratitude, led by Rev. Susannah Currie. Following a brief presentation by Rev. Currie, individuals reflected and journaled on the gratitude they feel in their lives, and then came back together for sharing.

The last part of the afternoon was

spent exploring the grounds of the center, including a labyrinth in the woods and a quiet lake; a few hardy souls went out on kayaks and canoes.

Sunday began with a worship service that focussed on gratitude, and the retreat concluded with the fall meeting of the Massachusetts New Church Union.

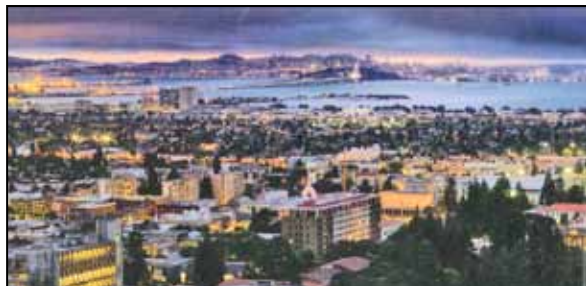
The View from Holy Hill

The Graduate Theological Union's multiple centers of learning give it the resources to face an interfaith future

BY KAREN STILLER

This article is reprinted from the Summer 2016 issue of In Trust, the magazine of the In Trust Center for Theological Schools.

The Center for Swedish Studies is a member center of the Graduate Theological Union.



The view of San Francisco Bay from Holy Hill in Berkeley

The phone rang just as Susan Hoganson, chair of the board of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California, was dashing out the door to a Palm Sunday service. It was one of her dearest friends, a Jewish woman with whom Hoganson has traveled the world. During their brief conversation, Hoganson realized her highly educated friend, who was immersed in literature and art, had no idea what Palm Sunday was. "I said, 'I'll have to explain it to you,'" she remembers. And that became another chapter in ongoing interfaith conversations Hoganson regularly has. "It's more than learning about other religions," she says. "It's having the opportunity to talk with someone who practices a different faith and really understand what is important to them. And in some way it strengthens your own faith by understanding them." That is the kind of dialogue that is at the heart of the Graduate Theological Union, a consortium of eight theological schools and more than a dozen research centers representing a variety of traditions, including Jewish, Hindu, Islamic, and Buddhist, and Swedish, among others. The consortium and most of its individual schools occupy Holy Hill, a neighborhood just north of the University of California's flagship campus in Berkeley.

A Complex Governance Structure

The GTU board of directors, which Hoganson chairs, is the governance body that oversees the whole consortium. The board itself reflects GTU's diversity: It's made up of the president of each member school, plus GTU president Riess Potterveld. Each of the eight member schools also elects one representative member, who serves alongside two members of the core doctoral faculty (elected by their fellow faculty members), one doctoral student, and one master's student. Up to twenty-four at-large board members round out the governing body.

But the overall governance is even more complex, because each member school has its own board of trustees, as do the affiliate organizations. The research centers have advisory councils. The Council of Presidents guides the GTU's daily operations, meeting monthly. (Only the presidents of the member schools sit on the council, although the heads of the affiliates update the council on their activities and plans.)

Hal Leach, past chair of the board, believes that if GTU is going to thrive in an interreligious world, the whole board must embrace its vision and learn to see themselves as part of a pioneering effort.

It is the role of the board to initiate

conversations about growth, risk, and new offerings, he says. "If you're not moving forward, than you're regressing. Boards need to continually push that."

Hoganson, who succeeded Leach as chair, agrees. She calls GTU "a powerhouse jewel that is sitting on the hills." She says that one of the board's frustrations is that "we have this little treasure, and we want more people in the community to know it's there, to participate, to give money, to be aware."

Hoganson says the largest challenge is making sure that the members of the board represent the diversity of the faiths that GTU serves. "We've been minimally successful at it," she says. "I'd like to see us become even more successful. It's something we are working at."

Hoganson also says that the board is looking for potential members who are enthused by an interfaith board. "We are looking for the person who is excited by that, not the person who says, 'Oh gosh, I'm a life-long whatever and I'm only interested in that.' That might be a good person for an individual school's board, but not necessarily the GTU board."

Strategic planning happens at multiple levels at the sprawling consortium. Each school and center does its own planning for its own governance, programs, and facilities, but joint offerings are planned and implemented at the consortium level. And that includes interfaith activities that are central to the GTU's DNA.

These are exciting and perilous times, and GTU has plans not just to survive but to flourish. That means marshalling all the consortium's assets

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to reach out to the Bay Area and the state in all their diversity.

Reaching a Growing Edge

Berkeley lies in Alameda County (population: 1.6 million), just across the Bay Bridge from San Francisco. The county's ten largest faith groups, in order, are Catholics, nondenominational Christians, Muslims, Mormons, Southern Baptists, members of the Assemblies of God, Mahayana Buddhists, Presbyterians, and Reform Jews. Countless smaller groups are represented as well. That's GTU's context.

"Hopefully there is sufficient interest in interreligious studies that we will regain our ability to attract students and to reach a stronger model going forward," says Potterveld. From the beginning, GTU's founders described it as interfaith, but in the consortium's early years, that meant various kinds of Christians studying together. Moving beyond "interdenominational" to embrace multiple religions has been "a long time coming," he says.

The administration is optimistic that enrollment will pick up as students are drawn by a vast banquet of courses—about 700 per year—that represent a multitude of faith traditions. And they hope that the opportunity to study alongside students of other faiths and learn from professors who actually practice those faiths (most faculty are fixed in a tradition) will be a growing edge that sets GTU ahead of the competition.

How are they recruiting those students? Each member school operates its own admissions office and recruits its own master's-level seminarians; Potterveld says that the various admissions offices generally don't compete for the same students. Furthermore, any student can take a course at any member institution, and cross-registration helps

How Do You Fund a Sprawling Consortium?

All of the schools in the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) run annual fund campaigns, draw from their own endowments, and (of course) generate tuition and fees from students. Auxiliary income is generated by activities like rental property and continuing education programs.

But what about the consortium itself? GTU President Riess Potterveld explains: "Member schools are obligated to pay into the library, through a prescribed formula based on student credit hours, and a general allocation that helps underwrite the expense of running the GTU." The GTU itself also pays into the library and is in fact the largest contributor, because GTU has the largest student enrollment. Moreover, GTU has its own annual fundraising and its own endowment of more than \$40 million.

Individual member schools may also contract with the central GTU administration for services like accounting, financial aid, and informational technology. Fees for these services are arranged between the GTU business office and the school.

-Karen Stiller

break down isolated silos. If competition for students does exist, it is friendly, and all students are poured into the wide-open world of the GTU.

Interfaith Collaboration

The consortium is trying to offer a healing example for troubled times. "We are living in a world where many religions are in conflict with each other," says Potterveld, but at GTU, there's a unique opportunity to examine what he calls persistent perplexing problems—and perhaps even to work on solutions. "What we're slowly doing

is developing the capacity to get all the religions to focus on some of these issues that are tearing cultures apart, the things that need to be resolved for us to have a more peaceful world."

GTU's seventh annual Islamophobia Conference was held last April. The conference, one of many regular events hosted by GTU's Center for Islamic Studies, is an example of that center's dual commitment to scholarship and service to the wider community.

The Center for Islamic Studies was established in 2007, and Munir Jiwa has been its director since the beginning and also teaches Islamic Studies. He says that the center "brings together academic study in an interreligious context where the practice of faith matters." He adds: "A lot of what we do is outreach to other academic communities, but we also want non-academic communities to participate, whether it's art communities or interfaith communities. They are all important for us to enlarge the conversation and see Islam as an American religion, which it is."

The collaboration between GTU's Center for Islamic Studies and the Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies is the poster child for how interfaith collaboration can play out on GTU's campus and beyond.

In 2009, the two centers joined forces to offer the Madrasa-Midrasha program, which produces workshops, lectures, courses, and public events exploring "what is similar and what is different," says Jiwa.

"As the two non-Christian centers at the time, we decided there was so much misunderstanding of both traditions and of each other's traditions, and there wasn't a lot of time and space to study them both together and learn something about Jews and Muslims," he adds.

The first public class held jointly by

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GTU Member Schools

- *American Baptist Seminary of the West* (American Baptist Churches)
- *Church Divinity School of the Pacific* (Episcopal Church)
- *Dominican School of Philosophy and Theology* (Roman Catholic)
- *Jesuit School of Theology at Santa Clara University* (Roman Catholic)
- *Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary* (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America)
- *Pacific School of Religion* (United Church of Christ with historic ties to United Methodist Church and Disciples of Christ)
- *San Francisco Theological Seminary* (Presbyterian Church [USA])
- *Starr King School for the Ministry* (Unitarian Universalist)

GTU Centers

- *The Asia Project* offers courses on Asian religions, cultures, and theologies.
- *The Black Church/Africana Religious Studies Program* offers a certificate program for students enrolled at GTU or its member schools.
- *The Center for the Arts, Religion, and Education* promotes scholarship, reflection, and practice in the arts and religion.
- *The Mira and Ajay Shingal Center for Dharma Studies* supports scholars and students studying Hindu and Jain philosophy and religion.
- *The Center for Islamic Studies* provides graduate courses in Islamic history, theology, philosophy, culture, arts, and religious practice.
- *The Richard S. Dinner Center for Jewish Studies* offers programs for Jewish students planning careers in Jewish studies or Jewish education and provides for exchanges between Jewish and non-Jewish scholars.
- *The Center for Swedenborgian Studies* was an independent seminary from 1866 until 2001, when it became a house of studies at Pacific School of Religion. In 2015, it affiliated with GTU, where it offers courses in theology, the arts, spirituality, history, and biblical studies. The center is the official seminary of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.
- *The Center for Theology and the Natural Sciences*, incorporated as a nonprofit in 1982, promotes dialogue between religion and science.
- *The Institute of Buddhist Studies*, an affiliate of GTU since 1985, is associated with the Buddhist Churches of America and offers a master's degree in Buddhist studies jointly with GTU.
- *New College Berkeley*, an evangelical institution affiliated with GTU since 1992, offers a year-round program of continuing education and seminars in topics like "faith and daily life," "faith and science," and "faith and geopolitics."
- *The Patriarch Athenagoras Orthodox Institute*, a "patriarchal institute" under the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople, offers lectures and other educational programs and cosponsors (with GTU) a master's in Orthodox Christian studies.
- *The School of Applied Theology* was founded in 1960 as the Institute of Lay Theology to train lay leaders for the Catholic church. Today the school provides sabbatical and spiritual renewal programs for Catholic religious leaders and lay people of all traditions.
- *Women's Studies in Religion Program* offers programs and a certificate in women's studies in religion for graduate students at GTU and its member schools.

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the two centers was filled to capacity, and they haven't looked back. Since then, class topics have included "Media Representations of Jews and Muslims," "Hagar in the Jewish and Islamic Traditions," "Kosher and Halal," and "Thinking about Gaza," all examined by Jewish and Muslim scholars who study and practice their faiths together.

Revised Doctoral Programs Play to GTU's Strengths

GTU is launching two doctorates with revised curricula this fall—a Ph.D. and a Th.D.—that will provide further opportunities for interdisciplinary and interreligious studies.

President Potterveld says that four broad interdisciplinary categories will make up the new programs:

- Sacred texts and their interpretation
- Historical and cultural studies of religion
- Theology and ethics
- Religion and practice

Within those categories are more than thirty concentrations, such as rabbinic literature, Buddhist studies, Hindu theology, Islamic philosophy and theology, and homiletics. Organizers hope the new configuration of the program encourages more cross-disciplinary and interreligious study and dialogue.

Just Enough Challenge

Mauricio Jose Najarro is a current Ph.D. student. He's a Catholic, with family roots in the rich soil of liberation theology in El Salvador, and teaches courses at the infamous San Quentin Prison, including a class on religious literacy.

Najarro's own faith, and how he presents other faiths to his students in prison, has been deeply shaped by his time at GTU. "I can be at that table

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Op Ed

We Have More in Common than You Think

BY REV. JENN TAFEL

It's difficult for me to pay attention to the news lately. I immediately question if I'm being "fed" stories or if it is true investigative reporting, and this leaves a bad taste in my mouth. I find it difficult to overcome such internal barriers to learning about current events. When I finally learn about a current event, I am often

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and have a better sense of who I am, because I'm not who they are," he says. "We can ask these questions and I can feel my Catholicism when I give my answers. The richness of the discussion is really important."

Najarro also appreciates that GTU fosters scholarship from many angles. "People are able to do research that doesn't get done in other places." He cites Munir Jiwa's work on Muslims in the media as a top example.

Is GTU, with its interfaith reality, the star of the show, a good fit for every seminary student?

Probably not, says Najarro. "You want to be challenged, but it can't be 100 percent challenged or it won't work. And it can't be 100 percent home or you won't ever be challenged." But nevertheless, he thinks that GTU's interfaith mix is great. "It's definitely the way I think religious and theological conversations are going and should go." ☩

Karen Stiller is a freelance writer in Port Perry, Ontario. She is senior editor of *Faith Today* magazine.

This article is reprinted from the Summer 2016 issue of *In Trust*, the magazine of the In Trust Center for Theological Schools.

disheartened because I find more war, violence, lack/wealth imbalance, vitriol being spewed, and so on. Current events make it difficult for me to pay attention to the world, and I do need to pay attention to the world if I am going to create any type of relevance in ministry and pastoral support. One of the themes that especially hurts my heart is when I hear instructions from the powers in charge to turn away or dismiss immigrants/refugees, the LG-BTQ+ population, those who are differently abled mentally and physically, and more.

When I hear bigotry like this, my mind turns to these two passages from the Old Testament:

"In the same way, you too must befriend the foreigner, for you were once foreigners yourselves in the land of Egypt. (Deuteronomy 10:19)*"

"The foreigner who lives among you must be treated like one of your own. Love them as you love yourself, for you too were a foreigner in the land of Egypt. I am YHWH" (Leviticus 19:34).

The current language in the media is divisive, and I see a variety of television shows, the news and even movies, seeking to tear apart relationships and nations from one another. Perhaps it's always been this way and I'm just now getting to see this picture. I cringe when going to restaurants because there are televisions everywhere inundating the population with these views.

The other option is to stay home and remain isolated, and that doesn't seem like a good alternative, although the temptation can be great as we an-

swer to the parts of us that seek isolation rather than connection. The false narratives in the media can lead one to sink and ruminate in isolation.

Ah, but there is yet another alternative, and it's something in our wheelhouse as Swedenborgians—yes, you guessed it: nature. Yes, when I connect with nature (minus the insects) I begin to see connectedness, similarity, unity, and strength between plants and animals, and beyond. I hear differently because I am tuning into what the creator had in mind for us: harmony.

When I disconnect with the noise of the world and reconnect with sounds of nature I begin to feel different. The next person I encounter is no longer a stranger but rather a fellow traveler in life. I ask myself, "Why would I wish harm in any way for this person?"

Interconnectedness is perhaps what will save us. It is a spiritual practice to see another person as whole and a child of the Divine—and that is who each of us is. It takes effort to reach beyond who we are as individuals, the nation, and ultimately as humans, but the effort and blessings far outweigh the isolation.

Isaiah 43:1 says, "But now, Leah and Rachel and Jacob, hear the word of YHWH—the One who created you, the one who fashioned you, Israel: Do not be afraid, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are mine." ☩

Rev. Jenn Tafel is the religious advisor to Queer Christians Reclaiming Our Sexuality & Spirituality at Michigan State University. (<https://qcrossmsu.org>) in East Lansing, Michigan.



* Bible Source: *Priests for Equality. The Inclusive Bible: The First Egalitarian Translation.* (2009). Sheed & Ward. Kindle Edition.

Blogging the Life of Rev. Horand Gutfeldt

The following is an introductory blog about the life of Rev. Horand Gutfeldt, written by his sister-in-law, Esther "Lyra" Knierim. Read more at <http://estherknierim.blogspot.com>.

When my sister Elizabeth Gutfeldt was a teenager, she acquired a nickname—Cindy—short for Cinderella, due to her “fairy tale princess” long golden hair, and her love of dancing. Soon everyone who knew her was calling her Cindy. So Cindy is what I’ll call her in these stories.

Cindy died in February of 2013 at the age of 84. Her life had been full of fantastic experiences, but she died without having written them down. She had told me about many of her experiences and those of her husband, Rev. Horand Gutfeldt. So I’m attempting to write her memoirs for her. I’ll tell the stories as they were told to me.

I’ll start with some stories of Horand during World War II, long before he met Cindy. This young German man wanted to make the world a better place and seemed to have a charmed life. Due to Horand’s background, which you will learn about later, he felt that the really important reason for the war was to defeat Russia, and prevent those communists from taking over the world. At the beginning of the war he had also believed Hitler’s propaganda: People in the surrounding countries were being freed from their oppressive governments and allowed to live under good German rule.

Cindy told me the stories of her husband as he had told her. Later, some relatives provided me with portions of memoirs Horand had written. Those will be helpful in getting the facts straight. Unfortunately, part of what he wrote has been lost. I’ll do my best to tell the stories accurately, and plan to post a new story approximately once a month. You’ll get to read them! ☩

2017 Annual Convention

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for just a few days, but the effort required for that travel, and the disruption to these people’s lives, extended far beyond the event’s formal length. It is my belief that, after two hundred years, such passion still rests within us.

It is my hope that the opening ceremony for Convention 2017 will contain that spirit. We will be drawing on resources from the past not to make an idol of history, but rather to highlight the passion and energy flourishing in the present. The past has given us many gifts, but God is working with us in the present. Rather than look backward, we aim to bring the past to the present to emphasize the importance of the work we have before us, as well as to acknowledge the gifts we have been given.

I hope both our congregations and our unaffiliated association members will take the time to reflect on why our forebears risked so much and gave so vastly of their time to travel to Philadelphia for the church’s sake. Further, I pray that a great many of us will attend convention this year, sensing the importance of our message in transforming both individual lives and the world. It is my hope that the announcement of Convention 2017 will be met with excitement on par with that of the first annual convention’s attendees—and that we will celebrate as intensely as they did in 1817 the existence of a forum in which to discuss what is truly important in our lives and world. Our gatherings are, at their core, celebrations of the gift we have been given and the gift we want to share, not business meetings.

The teaser for the opening of the 2017 Convention can be found on the [Annual Swedenborgian Church Convention Facebook page](#). I know where I will be next summer, and I hope to see the receivers of the teachings of the

Letter from the President

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convention possible. And 2017 is a big convention with the celebration of the 200th anniversary of annual meetings.

The weekend after that, General Council will gather near Boston for their annual face-to-face fall meeting. Nine elected volunteers meet with the elected officers and the chair of the Council of Ministers. They are responsible for the business side of the denomination. This year we have a full two-day agenda which includes analyzing and approving the budget, considering issues within the societies and associations, and reviewing the structure of Convention and its effectiveness. In addition, they meet the day before and just after the annual convention. The Executive Committee of the General Council has a conference call monthly.

In between meetings, I am enjoying visits to our churches and camps, and, again, it is the volunteers who keep the doors open. I have visited St. Louis, Kitchener, New York, San Pedro, Washington DC, Almont Camp in Michigan and the Kansas Association Fall Retreat.

I don’t know where to begin to offer thanksgiving for each one who serves on local committees, prepares food for communal services, teaches Sunday school, drives youth to retreats, plans and carries out camps, and dusts the pews or picnic tables.

And this is just the beginning. There are many more committees and teleconferences. We are a church of volunteers, and I thank you all from the bottom and top of my heart.

—Rev. Jane Siebert

New Jerusalem throughout North America there too! ☩

Rev. Kevin Baxter lives in Queensbury, New York with his family. He is chair of the Convention 2017 Planning Committee.

Passages

Births

Zachary Benjamin Cole was born on September 13, 2016, at 8 lbs 9 oz. and 22 inches long. Zachary was joyfully welcomed by his big brother Theo and parents, Revs. Sage and Ted Cole.



Deaths

Elizabeth Langshaw Johnson, long-time member of the Swedenborgian Church, transitioned peacefully into the spiritual world at her home in Bellevue, Washington, on August 5, 2016, surrounded by her loving family. She was the wife of the late Rev. David Powell Johnson, who predeceased her in November, 2010.

Elizabeth lived to the amazing age of 101 years, four months and four days. She was actively and vitally engaged in life to the end. Her interests and talents included painting, reading, cooking, world events, social justice, her women's support group of forty years, her family & friends, and her own spiritual development. She loved and was loved by many. Elizabeth had a great love of all things beautiful. In her later years she spent many happy hours in her sunroom where she could view the sky, trees, flowers, birds and "critters." She continued to savor and enjoy life to its fullest, even as she adapted to increasing physical limitations.

Elizabeth was born in Philadelphia on March 14, 1915. She met David Johnson at the "young people's group" of the Philadelphia New Church in 1937, during her first year of "normal school" and his second year of college. When David decided to become a Swedenborgian minister, they married in May of 1939, just prior to moving to Cambridge, Massachusetts, where he

attended the Swedenborg School of Religion. During this period, they welcomed their first son, David Powell Johnson, Jr.

In 1942 the family moved to Kitchener, Ontario, where David became and remained the minister at the Church of the Good Shepherd until 1963. During those years, Elizabeth was very involved in the life of the church, serving in numerous church organizations and activities. She was able to find expression in her love of music as a member of the church choir. But perhaps her greatest accomplishment in this area was her instrumental role in the founding of the local Twin City Operatic Society which is still active—all this while managing a household and raising six children!

She was a regular attendee at annual church conventions, was very involved in the ministers' spouses programs, and made many lifelong Swedenborgian friends around the continent. When David became President of Convention in 1957, she accompanied him on a goodwill mission to Swedenborgian churches and groups in England and Europe, where the aftermath of World War II was still evident in many areas.

In 1963 the family relocated to Bellevue, where David, along with the Revs. Calvin and Owen Turley, was developing a new type of team ministry, called Project Link. Again, Elizabeth was very active in this new setting and continued her involvement in the wider church as well.

After David's retirement, in 1982, the couple traveled all over the United States, to England, Ireland and Europe, and to Australia. They often spent some winter months in Hawaii with close friends from their Kitchener days. In summer, they spent several weeks with children and grandchildren in the beautiful Thousand Islands in the St. Lawrence River in Canada, on land passed down through several

generations of Johnsons. For Elizabeth, retirement became an opportunity for her to develop her love of painting. Her talents led to a very prolific output of watercolor and acrylic paintings which became much in demand as gifts for family weddings and other events. Her paintings were also shown at a number of community events where she donated them for auction.

Always vitally involved and interested in the lives of each of her family members, Elizabeth is survived by five children, David Johnson (Carmella), Betsy Coffman (Bill), Nancy Johnson, Stephen Johnson and Paul Johnson (Shelly). Her son Worth Johnson predeceased her in January, 2012. Also surviving are twelve grandchildren, twelve great-grandchildren, her sister, Elora Schoch (Hampton), and many dear and loving friends.

A service in memory and celebration of Elizabeth's life was held at St. Luke's Lutheran Church in Bellevue on October 22. It was officiated by her daughter, Rev. Betsy Coffman and followed by food, fellowship, and sharing.

The family asks that any donations in Elizabeth's memory be made to either the Alicia Titus Memorial Peace Fund, Urbana University Development Office, 579 College Way, Urbana, OH 43078 or The Sophia Way at www.sophiaway.org.

David Allen Lemée, member of the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, passed into the fullness of the spiritual world on September 21, 2016. A service of remembrance was held on October 4, 2016, Rev. Susannah Currie officiating.

Grace A. Rainey, member and long-time organist of the Bridgewater New Jerusalem Church, passed into the fullness of the spiritual world on October 23, 2016. A service of remembrance was held on October 28, 2016, Rev. Susannah Currie officiating. ☩

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.

Living Our History: the 2017 Annual Convention



BY KEVIN BAXTER

“A convention of the receivers of the doctrines of the New Jerusalem . . . [shall] be held at the New Jerusalem Temple in the city of Philadelphia, . . . 1817.” This quote may ring a bell for individuals who attended the 2016 Convention of the Swedenborgian Church at Urbana University. The quote may also be familiar from the video announcement of Convention 2017, to be held at West Chester University, near Philadelphia. Either way, this sentence comes from a 200-year-old announcement of the first North American gathering of Swedenborgian churches, in which congregations sought to unite in hopes of greater achievement together rather than separately.

We have some special plans for the opening of the 2017 Annual Convention (July 8–12), but I do not want to spoil the surprise. So I will do my best to talk about what is going into the opening celebration on a deeper level.

Rather than offering a blend of retrospective and anticipatory viewpoints, which has shaped many of our past anniversary celebrations, the opening of Convention 2017 will focus our attention on the passion and urgency possessed by the founders of our denomination. That fierce determination was evident in their willingness to devote significant time to travel to and from a national gathering in an era when travel was both difficult and dangerous. Our New Church predecessors may have met

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The 2017 Annual Convention will be held at West Chester University near Philadelphia.