



## Outing Day at the 2017 Annual Convention: Bryn Athyn Cathedral and Glencairn Museum

BY ROS TAYLOR

The 2017 Bicentennial Convention begins with Outing Day. Our time of celebration and renewal will be off to a fun start! You will have the opportunity on Saturday, July 8, to renew friendships and build com-

munity as we travel to Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, to see some of the sights and meet some of the folks in the other Swedenborgian centers in the Philadelphia area.

Chartered buses will take you across town to the Historic District of Bryn Athyn, a National Historic Landmark since 2008. You can tour the beautiful Gothic/Romanesque Bryn Athyn Cathedral, the seat of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, as well as browse the Book and Gift Store.

Lunch will be served at the home of Bishop Tom and Nina Kline, a short distance on foot through the gorgeous grounds of the Cathedral. Transportation will be provided for you if walking presents difficulties.

Tom is a retired Bishop of the General Church, and Nina is a retired teacher in the Academy of the New Church Girls' School. (Tom and Nina are the parents of Dr Rebecca Esterson, professor at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.) Their gracious hospitality is greatly appreciated as we celebrate together our mutual roots in the beginning of organized Swedenborgian Christi-



**Save the Dates!**  
**Annual Convention 2017**

**July 5–7: Ministers Meet**  
**July 8: Bryn Athyn Tours, Convention Welcome**  
**July 9–11: Mini Courses, Business Sessions, Worship Services, Ordination**  
**July 12: Departure, Optional Tour of Philadelphia**



The Bryn Athyn Cathedral



The Great Hall at Glencairn Museum

anity in the United States of America. Another short walk after lunch will bring you to the Glencairn Museum, with its renowned religious art collections, from antiquities, to Native American art, to New Church Art, and much more. The Arts and Crafts era design and interior finish of the Museum is exquisite. You will be able to take a self-guided tour to explore whatever piques your interest and ride up to the top of the tower. If it's a clear day, you'll be able to see all the way to the

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**The Editor's Desk**



**Martin Luther King**

In the USA, we celebrate the life of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on January 19. This year, in light of the dominance of acrimonious, disrespectful, disingenuous behavior on the political stage, we do well to reconsider why we honor Martin Luther King.

King emerged from the early civil rights movement of the fifties as a singular voice. As a well-read, thoughtful, and powerful minister, he preached an approach to freedom and justice to his (mostly African-American) audience that departed from conventional notions of strong leadership. He had studied the writings of Henry David Thoreau on civil disobedience and Mahatma Ghandi's use of those writings in pursuing Indian independence from Great Britain. His unique approach afforded him a national audience, to whom he continued to espouse the moral imperative of justice

through non-violent witness. He was the key figure bringing to America's attention the injustices visited on the African-American population, injustices largely accepted and acquiesced to by silence from the majority and from the government.

He was not alone, of course. There were other leaders and vast numbers of ordinary citizens who put their lives on the line to demonstrate nonviolently for justice, even when severely provoked. But King was the acknowledged leader of this movement, and without him we may not have seen the progress in recognizing and rectifying official and accepted discrimination and injustice, culminating in the Civil Rights Act of 1965.

His leadership was strong, but he never stooped to the political tactics of chest-thumping, denigrating, disrespecting, mocking, or appealing to the base instincts of fearing and demonizing the "other." His speeches were rousing, not because he roused the anger of the multitudes but rather roused their sense of moral righteousness.

Among King's principles of nonviolence were that nonviolence seeks to win the "friendship and understanding" of the opponent, not to humiliate him; that evil itself, not the peo-


ple committing evil acts, should be opposed; and that nonviolent resistance avoids "external physical violence" and "internal violence of spirit" as well: The resister should be motivated by love in the sense of the Greek word *agape*, which means "understanding" or "redeeming good will for all men." Finally, King believed that the nonviolent resister must have a "deep faith in the future," stemming from the conviction that "the universe is on the side of justice."

As we embrace 2017 and navigate the political and moral landscape, let us now remember Martin Luther King.

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **June 6–9, 2017:** Swedenborg and the Arts Conference, Bryn Athyn, PA (<http://tinyurl.com/j4dbkkm>)
- **July 5–12:** Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention, West Chester, PA (COM begins July 5, Outing Day July 8, convention begins July 9)
- **September 21–24:** Gathering Leaves Swedenborgian women's retreat, Punslich, Ontario

the Messenger

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## Letter from the President



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

Dear Friends,

Happy New Year!

This is a time for looking back at 2016 and ahead to 2017. I don't know about you, but 2016 was a hard year for me. There were many good things in the year; I have enjoyed meeting various church members, offering worship services and trying to be of help to them. There have been a lot of meetings, and most of them were useful and productive. But threaded through it all was the overhanging shadow of things that didn't go so well in my personal life. And the divisive election that continues to create discord in our country, our families, and our lives, seems to darken the horizon and optimism of the new year.

I think we need to turn our faces from the events of 2016 and look forward to 2017. This is the New Year. It offers us new beginnings, new vision, new opportunities for change.

I remember the words of a young minister in General Convention, "New beginnings flow out of our willingness to show up in the present moment as who we are, formed by our past, but not defined by it."

As I visit the many churches with the rich history that we have, the members tell me their past sometimes binds them, holds them down, and keeps them from growing. Change is hard, especially for those who have lived the history. In some

ways it seems like it is easier to plant a new church than to regrow an existing church. It is important for all of us "to show up in the present moment, . . . formed by our past, but not defined by it." We must allow the Spirit to move and that often means change.

Sometimes we must be willing to give up our old way of doing things, the way that has served us in the past—maybe not served us well, but we are familiar with it. It is comfortable. We need a new consciousness or awareness that there is another way. We must believe that we have a choice to begin anew.

Another friend talking about new beginnings said, "We all know in the background of our minds, what we need to do. It is just so hard to know where or how to start." Wanting to change and seeking that change is the first step. Prayer and listening for that still, small voice is essential also. From the Psalms we pray, "Create in me a clean heart, O Lord, and renew a right spirit within me." We are not in this alone. God is with us every step of the way, but so often we forget to ask for help and then we don't recognize the help when it is offered.

One thing we can and must do, though, is to let others begin anew in our families and our church families. This may involve forgiving and forgetting old hurts. Holding wrong decisions over someone is unkind and not helpful. We must give one another the opportunity for a fresh start. Not only do we need to believe we can change, we need to believe others can too.

I encourage you to look deeply into your lives and your churches. What is holding you back? What is holding us back? What needs to change to truly make the new year new?

May this be a good, healthy, and productive New Year!

—Rev. Jane Siebert

# Listening For God In Unusual Places

## The Unorthodox faith of Robert Frost

BY JAY PARINI

Thirty years ago, I met Robert Frost's close friend, Rabbi Victor Reichert, who lived only a mile down the hill from the poet in Ripton, Vermont. Reichert told me about the time Frost came to his synagogue in Cincinnati. There Frost delivered a passionate sermon, explaining to the crowd that he had no time for "irreligion." He considered Scripture a live, ongoing revelation, and he considered himself a mouthpiece for the word. In describing this, Reichert seized my wrist, squeezed it and said: "I hear the voice of God in his poems. He was deeply spiritual. He was listening to God."

Fifty years after Frost's death, it is still hard to say exactly what sort of divine power Frost was listening to. The poet cannot easily be placed on the religious spectrum, nor can his lifelong quarrels with God be easily categorized. But any reader of Frost's poems or observer of his public statements will know that he thought deeply about theological matters, and he wondered aloud about the relations between human beings and God. In 1947 he described himself in a letter to an old friend, G. R. Elliott, as "an orthodox Old Testament, original Christian," but he claimed that his approach to the New Testament "is rather through Jerusalem than through Rome or Canterbury."

The word lived in Frost, as a poet and teacher. But he shifted through many different views of what this word meant and how it should be expressed by him throughout his ongoing struggle to come to terms with the meaning of God. The struggle moved through his reading, which involved the Bible,

Augustine, Aquinas, Pascal and Einstein. In his late poem "Kitty Hawk," he claimed that his ultimate goal as a poet was "to say spirit in terms of matter and matter in terms of spirit," a point of view that confirms his incarnational aesthetic.



Robert Frost

Frost's mother, Isabelle Moody Frost, was a Scot, and she was a devout follower of Emanuel Swedenborg. Swedenborg was a Christian mystic who began life as a scientist and, on Easter

**"It might be an expression of the hope I have that my offering of verse on the altar may be acceptable in His sight Whoever He is. Tell them I Am, Jehovah said."**

Day 1774, began to experience visions. One of his most important ideas was that of correspondence. That is, he believed that a relation existed between the material and spiritual worlds. Every aspect of nature revealed some aspect of divine providence. He preached

the union of faith and charity in a Christian's life, arguing that both were necessary for salvation. Mrs. Frost took her young son to a church founded on Swedenborg's principles, and he absorbed a mystical sense of the world, an understanding of the universe that was founded on the idea that everything we see is a foretaste of things to come and that one must listen for the voice of God in unusual places, such as the wind in the trees or the ripples of lake water against the shore.

It should be noted that Frost's father, William Prescott Frost, was a severe skeptic and a Harvard-educated journalist who worked on a newspaper in San Francisco, where Frost was born. William Frost had no time for religion, and young Robert would have had his father's voice in his head long after the elder Frost's death, when his son was only 11. One certainly hears a wry note of skepticism in Frost's poetry. It is there in his wonderful sonnet, "Design," which is a meditation on St. Thomas Aquinas, who argued that the design of the universe was itself an argument for God's existence. "What but design of darkness to appall," Frost wrote, noting that everywhere in nature one found aberrations, difficulties, harsh things. The sonnet is very dark indeed, and it remains the centerpiece in a bleak array of poems that reflect the poet in a somber mood. Reading poems like "Desert Places," "Acquainted With the Night" or "The Most of It," one can hardly doubt that Frost plumbed the deepest levels of depression.

I suspect that he was a manic-depressive, although that is hardly a professional diagnosis. He would sometimes walk for hours, chattering mad-

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## Listening for God

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ly to anyone who walked alongside. He sometimes went to bed for days on end, keeping his shades drawn. He could spend weeks alone in his cabin in Ripton, hesitant to see anyone. Rabbi Reichert and several close friends of Frost told me that the poet was always mercurial, drawn either to intense socializing or austere solitude, with very little middle ground. He defined poetry as “a momentary stay against confusion,” suggesting that it was only in the clarity of the poem itself that he found solace, clarity and grounding.

Frost spent a lot of time reading Ralph Waldo Emerson, the great American essayist, who remains for me a core religious writer. Like Swedenborg, whom he read closely throughout his life, Emerson believed in deep correspondence between the natural world and the spiritual world. “Nature is the symbol of spirit,” he wrote in his essay “Nature,” one of the central texts of American religious thinking. Frost never lost interest in Emerson, and he returned to his essays throughout his life, rereading them, allowing Emerson’s philosophy of life to seep into his poetry.

Speaking to his friend Lawrence Thompson in 1948, Frost commented on his poetry in relation to God: “It might be an expression of the hope I have that my offering of verse on the altar may be acceptable in His sight Whoever He is. Tell them I Am, Jehovah said.” There was, indeed, a sacramental aura in his work from beginning to end, and one cannot read a poem like “Directive,” his last great poem, without noting his allusion to St. Mark near the end. In it, the poet wanders into the woods to seek revelation—a typical scenario in a Frost poem. In this instance, he happens upon the ruins of an old farmhouse, with a stream—“Too lofty and origi-

## Alpha and Omega

... *The one eternal God, whom earth and heaven adore; for thus it was, is now, and shall be evermore. Amen. (“Now thank we all our God” [hymn])*



The LaPorte New Church rededicated and blessed its newly repaired and painted sanctuary was on September 11, 2016. It was the capstone of a several years-long project of upgrades, repairs, and restoration, achieved through the talent, sweat, and treasure of the congregation.

As the sanctuary was being prepared for painting this summer, the very old worship-service board was removed from the wall on which it had hung for many decades. It had been unused for a long time, but



its presence has historical and sentimental significance to the congregation.

With a bit of imagination, time, and, money, this beautiful frame has assumed new purpose.

Who has performed and accomplished it, Calling forth the generations from the beginning? “I, the LORD, am the first, and with the last. I am He.” (Isaiah 41:4)

And He told me, “It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To the thirsty I will give freely from the spring of the water of life.” (Revelation 21:6)



The LaPorte New Church is a vibrant, thriving community of all ages, with a Sunday school, youth groups, study groups, and community events in addition to Sunday services. ☩

nal to rage”—running nearby. There he finds a children’s playhouse, with a little goblet that reminds him of the Holy Grail. Frost describes the goblet as like one “Under a spell so the wrong ones can’t find it,/ So can’t get saved, as Saint Mark says they mustn’t./ Here are your waters and your watering place./ Drink and be whole again beyond confusion.”

St. Mark was commenting on the fact that Jesus spoke in parables, which had the effect of keeping out those, in some instances, who had yet to believe. Faith, in other words, was essential for understanding. One believes in order to understand, as Augustine (and Anselm) suggested, not the other way around.

Frost’s own poetry was “too lofty

and original to rage.” Readers are baptized in the Jordan River of his poetry, where they drink and feel “whole again beyond confusion.” This is, in my view, sacramental poetry of a high order. It is beautiful and true, but it is also complicated, even thorny. The faith of Robert Frost was nothing straightforward. He was not a simple Christian, but his faith was real, it was profound, and pointed readers in directions where they might find solace as well as understanding, where they would find their beliefs challenged, where they find answers as well as questions. ☩

Jay Parini, a poet and novelist, is the author of *Robert Frost: A Life* (Henry Holt) and *Jesus: The Human Face of God* (Houghton Mifflin).

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

BY DAVID J. FEKETE

*In this article, 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, Inc., 1998).*



When we think about the present 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 technology, such as alternative energy sources, cleaner emissions, hybrid or electric automobiles, and recycling. But these efforts address the effects, not the underlying cause of our crisis. The underlying cause is spiritual, not material. While technology and science can ameliorate the problems of the environment, they do not address the underlying spiritual cause.

The crisis results from excessive consumer demand and unbridled production to feed that demand. Production is 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. Specifically, the sins called greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity or pride would be seen as driving western economics. In the Swedenborgian tradition, spirituality means renouncing sin and adopting good. This practice can be applied as a spiritual solution to the environmental crisis by 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 both 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, animals, and man and woman. When the whole created order is complete, 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 fellow humans. 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 whole natural world.

Frugality is a kind of self-denial, but it needs to be said that frugality is not holy poverty, or 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. In 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 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

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## Toward Spiritual Eco-Justice

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Christian love and solidarity with one's fellows primarily by creating competition and hostilities. I know of two friends, one of whom went out and bought a Maseratti. 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 consumption.

There is an element of Christian charity associated with frugality. The Puritan John Winthrop taught that we are to "abridge our selves 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 can also be 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 unbridled acquisition of material goods, we exploit nature's limited resources and create unmanageable waste. The belief behind this ecologically unsound economic system is that productivity must continually grow in order to sustain economic health.

We have an anthropocentric, or human-centered economy. A new relationship between consumer demand and industrial production that is more sensitive to the natural ecosys-

tem 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. As individuals moderate the acquisition of material luxuries in order for others to have necessities, so wealthy and powerful nations need to moderate their excessive demand for the world's resources so that less wealthy nations may have basic necessities. Wealthy nations cannot hoard and waste 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. 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 demand for material goods against the needs of nations of lesser power and wealth.

### Humanity and Nature

Environmental problems happen when we forget our interdependence with nature, forget that humans share the sacred space created by God as the natural world. We think that our relationship with nature is as subject and object. We are the subject and nature is the object to be exploited by human avarice.

When humans are one with nature, then 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 the Hebrew word *shalom* means more than the cessation of war. It does include peace among humans. But it also includes the wellbeing of the whole created 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 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 is a personal virtue that means right relations with God. Frugality establishes right relation with God by subduing and moderating greed, gluttony, envy, and vanity. These passions, called 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 with moderate possessions and establishes a caring and giving relationship with one's fellows.

As a global economic ethic, frugality means the moderation of the excessive exploitation of limited natural re-

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## Rev. Sallie Crenshaw: a Woman Ahead of Her Time

*Rev. Sallie Crenshaw's daughter, the late Mary Crenshaw, was active in both the Detroit Swedenborgian Church and General Convention. Rev. Crenshaw's granddaughter Terrie Crenshaw is a member of the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church and a member of the Board of Trustees of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.*

BY GAY MOORE

**B**orn around 1900 in LaGrange, Georgia, of Irish, Cherokee, and African-American descent, Sallie Alford Crenshaw was reared in Chattanooga. A July 3, 1977, *Chattanooga News-Free Press* article described her as a “tiny, caramel-colored lady.” She described herself as “born fifty years ahead” of her time.

A graduate of the Chattanooga public schools, she attended Tennessee State Normal School, Gammon Theological Seminary, Clark College, and the University of Nebraska. She was the first African-American to attend Tennessee Wesleyan College. Hers was a practical schooling that included courses in Christian education, church administration, missions, religious work in urban areas, hymnology, Bible, recreation, and child care. Since ordination was closed to women, she became a missionary under the auspices of the Methodist Board of Missions.

By 1930, she was living in Virginia. Licensed to preach in 1930, she received deacon's orders in 1934 and elder's orders in 1938.

In 1935, the Board of Missions sent her to minister to the black coal miners around Bluefield, West Virginia. She lived with desperately poor mining families, often sleeping on the floor, teaching them, especially the children, what she could. At the same time, she was pastoring churches in the East Tennessee Methodist Conference.



Portrait of Rev. Sallie Crenshaw

Over her career, she served as supply pastor to twelve churches, including several in Chattanooga. She was later appointed as the first African-American to travel the country, preaching to both black and white congregations and promoting church desegregation.

In 1947, the East Tennessee Conference asked her to survey neglected areas in Chattanooga. Although she was initially cursed and doors were slammed in her face, she found the needs in the St. Elmo community to be particularly severe and started a mission in the neighborhood. She began with a Sunday school in a tavern that was closed on Sundays. Sixty-five children and three adults came the first Sunday. Two months later, she moved to a rented house.

Realizing she had to feed the children before she could teach them, she knew, “If they were hungry on Sunday, they were hungry on Monday and every other day.” She also knew many pre-school children were left alone while their parents worked. Thus the idea for a daycare center was born. Located in the same dilapidated house, she and several other women were soon

caring for 100 children. Christened “The Good Shepherd Fold,” the house was eventually condemned, but Crenshaw persuaded city officials to grant her time to build a new center.

Patching together funds from private donors, businesses, a local foundation, and the Methodist Board of Missions, she stood on street corners with other women asking for donations. In 1954, a new center opened at 4318 St. Elmo Ave.

Having definite goals for “The Fold,” she and her staff “wanted the children to have food and clothing . . . a sense of belonging . . . and a feeling of being wanted and loved.” Personally, she wanted to establish the center when she overheard a woman ask, “Where is there a Negro woman intelligent enough to found an institution?” Crenshaw knew then, “I had to do it then or die trying.” The Fold cared for a daily average of 125 black and white children from age two through five. She was particularly proud that the children were taught to read in kindergarten.

In 1958, Crenshaw became the Rev. Crenshaw. She was the first woman ordained by the East Tennessee Methodist Conference.

Over her career, she received many honors, including an appointment to a White House conference on children and youth.

The Sallie Crenshaw Bethlehem Center in Alton Park was named in her honor. The center continues to serve the community, especially children. Her portrait, painted by Herman Sardin, hangs in the lobby of the center, a reminder to all of this determined woman, who said of herself in the 1977 *News-Free Press* article, “I’m Sallie Crenshaw. I’m no common, ordinary person . . . I do God’s work and I live to the part. He provides everything for me. I just stand in front of

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# Reflections on FNCA 2016

BY TREVOR

The first thing that comes to mind when reflecting on the 2016 camp session of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA), was our second annual Rev. Everett K. Bray visiting lecturer, the prominent Swedenborgian scholar, nuclear physicist, and author of *Starting Science From God: Rational Scientific Theories from Theism*, Dr. Ian J. Thompson (<http://fryeburg.org/ekblecturer>).



Dr. Thompson lecturing on quantum physics and Swedenborgian thought

Dr. Thompson is a theoretical nuclear physicist at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Livermore, California, and has been a fellow at our seminary since 2013. His five lectures were both deeply intense and heady, as well as strongly interactive. His opening lecture, “Quantum Physics for Swedenborgians,” set the tone, leaving some people’s brains behind in the dirt and elevating others’ minds to previously unattained heights. “Amazing!” said one camper. “Incomprehensible!” said another. Luckily, his follow-up lectures dove into more simplified explanations of the concepts along with coaxing understanding from the audience of his more difficult ideas via

the Socratic Method.

The second thing that comes to mind is the sheer quantity of arts and crafts activities. There was, of course, the usual amount of handwork during lectures: knitting, crochet, carving, quilting, felting, coloring, and the like (<http://fryeburg.org/lectureschedule>). There were also several classes offered across a fairly wide spectrum, including Friendship Bracelets, Nail Art, Card Tricks, String Figures, and

Paper Cranes (<http://fryeburg.org/eveningactivities>). And many campers, from young Sparks to our most cherished Embers, were seen at various times crafting on the front porch and deck, around the fireplace in the dining hall, in the Dole Wing lounge, or just sitting along the edge of the front lawn overlooking the Saco River (<http://fryeburg.org/handwork>).



Herb Ziegler finally masters the “Witch’s Broom!”

And the third thing that strikes me most about FNCA 2016 is how “our little slice of heaven” offers something for just about everyone.

One camper said,

A favorite part of camp for me last summer was the time available—on the porch of the main house or on a cabin porch—for conversation with such a variety of people. One-to-one thoughtful dialogue feeds my mind and soul, and seems to benefit others as well. Camp offers that opportunity like no other place I know.

One of our long-time children’s religion class teachers underlined the FNCA’s central purpose when she wrote that her favorite part of camp last year was “hearing what the Sparks have to say in classes, how they think about being good people.” (Yes! It’s working!)



Margaret demands a password from Rachel Madjerac

And finally, here’s one camper’s delightful comments that highlight the intergenerational, spiritual, communal, and sheer family quality of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly:



Heidi Woofenden’s “Osage Two Diamonds” makes a good mask!

I love watching my grandkids jump endlessly off the dock into the Saco River until they were blue but wanted more and remembering I used to do the same . . . hearing lectures and discussions that bring esoteric topics to life to become pertinent in our daily lives . . . reconnecting with friends and family, some seen only once a year . . . living life without the usual daily responsibilities enabling us to go a little deeper spiritually . . . practicing a more heavenly life here on earth. ☸

Trevor is the FNCA’s activity director, as well as Outreach Committee chair, webmaster, and member of the Board of Directors. For more information and lots of photos, please visit the Assembly’s website at <http://fryeburg.org>.



Serena, Astrid, Caleigh, and Erin decorating tiles

# The Starbucks Encounter

BY PAUL DEMING

*An encounter with Sally, a spiritual but non-religious person, who inquires of the Gospels, "Is there more than what I've heard?" challenges me. How do I describe the message and what really matters?*



I met Sally at Starbucks, halfway across town. It was a rare Sunday that I took off from church to spend a leisurely morning at home, but, since she had called, it was an excuse to get out of the house and enjoy the crisp, cool air under a cloudless sky.

Sally was one of those friends who could be described as fiercely independent and very attractive. Her blond hair was always well-coiffed, there was a hint of freckles left over from her youth, and her warm smile revealed perfectly white teeth. Sally was probably in her fifties but her slender figure and looks were deceiving, and anyone would guess ten years younger at a mere glance.

She did not belong to a church but seemed to me to have a high standard of ethics and was one of those people who felt a stronger connection to animals and nature than to people. Though we were not dating, she was a well-read friend whose companionship and conversation brought me joy, and she often enlightened me with her opinions on current affairs.

She was already there when I arrived, holding a table for two in the corner near the unlit stone fireplace. Even though the place was bustling with business, it felt like we had the corner to ourselves, separated from the crowd by a short bookcase filled with donated books offered for loan. Sally was busy checking her email on her smart-phone when I sat down.

"Can I get some coffee for you?" I asked. I could see she was waiting to

order for fear of losing this great spot.

"Sure, I'll hold the table," she said. "What are you having?"

"My usual" I replied, "A soy latte with just one pump of hazelnut, other-

wise it's too sweet." I described it as though I needed to explain the strangeness of the order.

"Make it two," she said, and I left for the counter before she could fish any money from her purse.

Returning a few moments later, I smiled and handed her drink to her, "I'm treating this morning; it's rare you let me get away with it so I took the opportunity." She smiled because she knew it was true.

**"I imagine all churches do something like it," she explained, "where they try to bring people in, tell them how sinful they are, get them to repent, and then try to get them to come back again and again."**

"So. . ." she started to take a sip, "were you awake when I called?"

"Oh heavens, yes," I said, "I've been working on this paper for my theology class." "Oh that's right," she responded, "you're getting 'pastorized' as I recall."

She loved to tease me about the fact that I was pursuing a special program through a unique denomination that would allow me to pastor a small church in our area without actually becoming ordained. "It's a licensed pastor program," I corrected her. "Sort of a provisional ordination that allows me to work with just the local church. It's not a full ordination."

"I get that," she said, "it seems like you've been doing that for years." "I've

been a 'lay-leader' for lack of a better term. This just sort of puts a title on it and a blessing, if you will, for doing the sacraments and offering occasional sermons."

"So you'll be pastor of the Church of the Open Word?"

"I call it the Garden Chapel, but yes, I'll be pastor if they'll have me."

"Don't expect me to show up," she exclaimed, "I worship at the church of the open deck." This was her description of the deck behind her townhouse. I knew she made a routine of reading her Sunday morning paper and enjoying the sound of the forest behind her complex.

"I know it's peaceful on your deck"—I had been her guest for dinner in times past—"and I have no expectations of people flocking to hear me speak."

"Oh you'll do fine I'm sure," she said, "although, I can't imagine you doing a Billy Graham thing."

"Billy Graham thing? Is that what you think I do?"

"I imagine all churches do something like it," she explained, "where they try to bring people in, tell them how sinful they are, get them to repent, and then try to get them to come back again and again."

"Do you think I've done that to you?" I asked cautiously.

"No, no . . . nothing like that. That's not like you," she confirmed.

"I hope that's not the impression that anyone visiting our church would have." I explained, "I'd rather that people feel welcomed by a loving community that enjoys a low-key kind of service that is non-threatening, and, hopefully, join us as we seek to understand God better."

She sipped her coffee while listening and furled her brow as if puzzled.

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## The Starbucks Encounter

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"I don't see how that would work," she said pensively. "I mean, it seems today like you need some sort of gimmick to compete with the mega-churches out there. Otherwise why would a 'low-key' service appeal to anyone?"

"What would appeal to you?" I asked sincerely. "I don't know," she responded, "I mean I love hearing about Jesus but I just can't stand the 'churchiness' of it. The pastors I see on TV look slick and talk with authority like they have all the answers and God is a personal friend of theirs and they're so certain that all others who don't believe like they do are going to hell. I just don't trust them."

"I know what you mean," I agreed. "But you said you love hearing about Jesus. Tell me what it is you love about it."

"I don't know," she said. "I don't remember much about my childhood church days. My parents were Episcopalian, and all I remember about church and Sunday school was hearing about Jesus. How he cared for the sick and turned water into wine and healed lepers and resisted the hypocrites."

"I know," I said. "I love that too."

"And the sermon on the mount," she continued, "I remember that he blessed all sorts of people, the poor, the gentle, the ones who wanted to see God and do righteous things."

"Yes," I nodded. "That's the one."

"He was not churchy!" She said. "He was the real deal."

"Yes," I said. "I spend my life trying to be more like him. But I have a long way to go and much, much to learn."

"No," she said, "You're not that bad." We both laughed at how silly that sounded. "But seriously," she said, "Don't you think you're saved?"

I hesitated. I wanted to ask her what she meant by *saved* but I decided to offer her something of myself. "I'm hop-

ing," I said, "that over the course of my lifetime that I will 'be saved,' but it's not automatic. Even the apostle Paul said, 'work out your own salvation,'<sup>1</sup> meaning it takes a life-time of loving, learning, and doing." She was quiet for a moment. Then I added, "What do you think it means to be saved anyway?"

"Oh that's easy," she said, "to be connected with God and allowed into heaven."

"What would you say," I asked, "If I told you that God is already inside you?"

"Uh-oh," she responded, "are you going to take an offering for your sermon?"

I ignored her comment and continued, "Our theology teaches that heaven welcomes and accepts those who welcome and accept heaven into themselves." She was still chuckling at her own comment but said nothing. I paused for a moment then added, "I suppose that sounds preachy, but I have a lot a passion for letting people know how loved they are."

"I don't mind it when it comes from you," she stated. "It's a lot easier to swallow when you put the message that way."

"That, pretty much, is the message."

"Are you saying that's what you read when you open the Bible to Matthew, Mark, George, and John?" she inquired.

"It's Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John! You're confusing the apostles with the Beatles!"

We both laughed again. "Okay," she said still laughing, "I'm not the one getting 'pastorized' so I don't have to know the Bible names."

It never bothered me that she teased me whenever she had the chance. I've always suspected that people tease others when they care enough to get their attention and she had mine. "Everyone

knows the gospels," I declared. "You're just being silly."

"No, I really don't . . . except for a few verses I remember from annual Christmas programs. 'And behold they wrapped him in swaddling clothes and placed him in a manger!'" She suddenly picked up a ministerial tone.

"You do that pretty well!" It was my turn to tease her. "Maybe you should consider reading the rest of it. I see a burgeoning ministry."

"No you don't," she retorted, "What you see is someone who barely knows her away around the gospels. I got lost after the 'begats' and the long ancestry of Jesus." "Well," I explained, "Judeans had to be convinced that he was the real deal as well."

"And the 'begats' did that for them?"

"Well, not exactly. But, they had to know that his lineage went all the way back to David, as was prophesied. It was a culture steeped in family ancestral roots."

"And from that they get a message that they are loved?" She was seriously curious.

"Jesus turned the whole world upside down," I continued. "The timing of his arrival and growth couldn't have been better. The spiritual darkness of the world had made it impossible for souls to find the truth in the religious leaders of the day. The institution of religion had lost the central focus of God's love, forgiveness, and caring for the neighbor." Now Sally was listening. For the first time she seemed genuinely enthralled with what I was saying. "Now I am preaching. I'm sorry. Should I continue?"

"Yes," she pleaded, "tell me if you are talking about the churches of his day or the churches of our day!"

"Good point," I responded. "Our theology teaches that the church is not really a church at all unless it has three basic components: namely, acknowledging the divinity of God, the sanc-

<sup>1</sup> Philippians 2:12

## The Starbucks Encounter

*Continued from page 11*

tity of the Word, and—this is where some institutions have fallen—charity to the neighbor.”

“I’ll say,” she agreed. “What I seem to see are churches protesting the rights of gays and lesbians, and refusing to serve other humans because of their preferences . . . all in the name of God.”

As if I was accepting responsibility, I responded, “We have fallen down in the areas of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with our God.”

“Did they have the same problems in gospel times?” she asked.

“There was a group of men who wanted to stone a prostitute to death for the sin of adultery.”

“I remember that story from my childhood!” She exclaimed, “And Jesus told them ‘whoever is without sin cast the first stone!’”

“That’s right,” I said. “And when they had all left he asked her, ‘Where are your accusers?’ And when she said they were gone he answered, ‘Neither will I condemn you; go and sin no more!’ ‘He is still giving us the same message today. God does not condemn. He honors our choices and encourages us to ‘sin no more.’ If that’s not telling us we are loved, I don’t know what is!”

Sally broke into a smile and said, “The next latte is on me!” and left to order the drink before I could say thanks. I wondered if she was thirsty or just tired of hearing me talk. I decided she was leading the conversation as much as I was.

I was left alone for a moment and thought about my theology course and the week we talked about Jesus and the woman at the well. Jesus was tired and asked for a drink and soon found himself engaged in a conversation that would change a woman’s life. I found my mind wandering to a commentary on the Gospel of John by Wil-

liam Bruce, who said “But how can we give him to drink? We give to the Lord when we gratefully return to him what we have received from him, and especially when we give to each other.”<sup>2</sup> I smiled at the prospect of sharing in conversation what I love about Jesus and giving that “drink” of living water to someone who might be ready to hear it.

Sally returned with two lattes and handed one to me. “I seem to remember,” she said pensively, “that some of the books in the gospel have different versions of the same story.”

“That makes sense in a way.” I responded. “Have you ever listened to a husband and wife try to tell a story about their first date or some event they experienced and both have a peculiarly different version?”

**“You are constantly giving and constantly challenging yourself to do more. You make it a point to love and be loved. This is what ‘good news’ really is. I am lucky to know you.”**

“Yes,” she snapped as she sat down with her drink, “and the wife is always right!”

Again, we both chuckled, but I kept right on. “It makes sense then that the writers would remember some of the same events differently. In a way, I think it lends more credibility to the story.”

She was listening quietly as she sipped her latte. “You mentioned the Sermon on the Mount,” I reminded her. “Jesus said love your enemies and pray for your persecutors. That was not the culture at the time, believe me!”

“It’s not the culture now either!” she responded.

“I have a friend through our de-

nomination,” I continued, “that I introduced to my ex-wife when the denomination had a convention here in St. Louis. His daughter worked for the same airline my ex did. His daughter was killed in one of the planes that flew into the Twin Towers.” Sally put her cup down on the table. “His name is John Titus. After the tragedy he and his wife, Bev, were moved to forgiveness and to promote peace and not war. It was like an epiphany to John. He saw that out of all of the pain that there was a deep sense of interconnection with all people.”

I could sense a profound impact on Sally. She had known people who died but never knew someone who had been murdered in such a heinous and public way. “There’s a meditation I remember portions of, from a book of Earth prayers, about being connected to all life:

What are you? What am I? Intersecting cycles of water, earth, air, and fire, that’s what I am, that’s what you are. Streaming fluids floating our cells, washing and nourishing through endless riverways; [I was struggling to remember the rest] moisture pouring in and through and out of you, of me, in the vast poem of the hydrological cycle. You are that. I am that. Earth pours through us, replacing each cell every seven years. Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, we ingest, incorporate and excrete the earth, are made from the earth. I am that. You are that.”

Before she could speak I held up my hand with closed eyes as I was pulling the rest out of my memory hoping I didn’t paraphrase too much of it.

Air, the planet’s membrane, the inhale and the exhale; Breathing out carbon dioxide to the trees and breathing in their fresh exudations; Oxygen kissing each cell awake, atoms dancing in orderly metabolism, interpenetrating; That dance of the air cycle, breathing the universe in

<sup>2</sup> *Commentary on the Book of John*: William Bruce, p. 92

## The Starbucks Encounter

*Continued from page 12*

and out again, is what you are, is what I am.

Fire from our sun that fuels all life, drawing up plants and raising waters to the sky to fall again replenishing; the inner furnace of your metabolism burns with the fire of the Big Bang that first sent matter-energy spinning through space and time. And the same fire as the lightening that flashed into the primordial soup catalyzing the birth of organic life. You were there, I was there, for each cell of our bodies is descended in an unbroken chain from that event.

“Wow,” she said. “I’m pretty sure that’s not in the Gospels!”

“No,” I responded. “I might have paraphrased a line or left some out but this was written by John Seed and Johanna Macy.<sup>3</sup> It speaks to me of the interconnectedness of all life down to the smallest atom, and the warmth of the sun represents God’s love for each and every one us.”

“That’s beautiful,” Sally sighed. There was a pregnant pause and I could tell she was debating whether to ask me the next question. “Doesn’t that fly in the face of creationism? I mean, aren’t you supposed to support the whole six or seven days of creation thing?”

“The six days of creation described in Genesis are really a depiction of our spiritual birth and growth, not to be taken literally,” I answered.

“Really?” she looked puzzled. “I’ve never heard that before!”

“God’s work in us is never done until our spiritual growth is complete. Then, after the sixth day, he can rest and look and say ‘It’s all good!’”

She laughed. “‘It’s all good?’ ‘Does God really say that?’”

“In the first chapter of Genesis, God looked at all he had made and said, ‘It is good.’ I’ve heard it once said that in every situation, something good is trying to come out of the end result.”

“So,” she asked, “the six days of creation really represent something else?”

“Most of the Bible,” I responded, “is a combination of historical events and allegorical representations. And many of the historical accounts represent something deeper.” I knew that Sally’s curiosity was piqued but I was reluctant to go too far in my explanations for fear of squelching that natural desire to know, to explore, to learn. “Look, Sally,” I said, “I don’t really know much about the Bible and I don’t have all the answers. In fact, I have more questions than answers, but every time I look into the scriptures with an open mind, I learn something new, something personally applicable to me in my spiritual journey. And a large part of it, for me, is learning how to listen to people. People like you.”

Sally reached for my hand and held it in hers across the table. “And I can tell that you love it so much!” she said. I couldn’t tell if she was being dismissive or if she was truly touched by any part of our discussion but the fact that our hands were touching brought an additional connection to our conversation.

“Sally,” I said, “do you remember how you and your son took that service dog to the old-folks home a few months ago and let them enjoy the affection of a loving dog for a little while?” She nodded. “And do you remember when you planted that garden between your condo and your neighbor’s apartment?” Again she nodded.

“I definitely love reading about Jesus as much as you loved hearing about him. And I definitely want to be more like him. But I also want to be more like you.” Her eyes were becoming moist as I continued. “You may not know the scriptures as well as I, but you know life and you enjoy living to help oth-

ers and to see creation grow. You personify what the Gospels are to me. You love life and, in spite of its setbacks and challenges, you live it like it no one else I know. You are constantly giving and constantly challenging yourself to do more. You make it a point to love and be loved. This is what ‘good news’ really is. I am lucky to know you.”

She pulled her hand back to reach into her purse for a tissue and began dabbing her eyes. “No,” she said, “I’m the lucky one to know you.”

To be clear, this was not some romantic exchange of niceties. There was something powerful happening here and perhaps, at the surface, nothing more than lowering our defenses and baring our souls, complete with our inadequacies as well as our joys.

“Sally,” I asked, “why are you crying?”

“There are so few people,” she said wiping her eyes again, “and so few conversations that feel this genuine.”

“I know,” I said. “Even when I pray I imagine the Lord sitting across from me and sometimes I hear what would seem like a still, small, genuine voice, and other times I hear nothing, but each time I make it a point to not do all the talking and to just sit still and listen.”

We both sat quietly for a moment as Sally gathered herself and rested her arms on the table. She had a look of contentment. “If I decide to read the Gospels again,” Sally blurted, “I’ll skip the ‘begats’ and go on from there. What would you recommend I look for as I’m reading?”

“That’s easy,” I responded. “Look for yourself. You are somewhere in the midst. You might be someone asking a question of Jesus trying to understand where he is coming from or you might be the mother tending to his broken body before an angel greets you. You might be one of two disciples walking the road to Emmaus greeted by

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<sup>3</sup> “What are You? What am I?” John Seed, Johanna Macy, in *Earth Prayers from Around the World*; edited by Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, p. 130

## The Starbucks Encounter

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a stranger who seems to understand your grief and sorrow before his words warm your very heart.”

“You better stop there,” she said, “or I’ll start crying again!” We both laughed.

“In any case,” I said, “I’ll be here to talk to when you want to bounce ideas off of me. As I said, I learn so much from you that I can only hope it is a two-way street.”

She reached across and grabbed my hand again. “It is a two-way street! And maybe that’s the good news!”

“Indeed it is!” I proclaimed.

As Sally and I parted company that day I remember feeling a little like Jesus when his disciples approached him at Jacob’s well and urged him to eat after his conversation with a woman he had not met previously. “I have meat,” he said, “you do not know of.” I smiled and thought,

“Thank you Lord . . . I’ve had a full meal this morning, and you have made me glad!” ☩

Paul Deming is the licensed pastor serving the St. Louis Church of the Open Word. He also teaches music to pre school through grade six students and plays guitar in a St. Louis band.

## Rev. Sallie Crenshaw

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the mirror every now and then to see how I am looking.”

Crenshaw died on Dec. 12, 1986. She is buried in St. Elmo’s Forest Hills Cemetery. ☩

Gay Moore is the author of a number of books, including *St. Elmo, Forest Hills Cemetery, New Rules to Live By*, and two children’s books, *Barney and the Missing Shoes*, and *Alissa and the Magnificent, Magical Hair Bow*.

Reprinted from the April 17, 2016, *Chattanooga Times Free Press*. The original article can be found at <http://tinyurl.com/gpx6s9j>

## Convention Outing Day

*Continued from page 1*



*Bryn Athyn Cathedral interior*

Philadelphia skyline.

Busses will then transport you to the other side of the picturesque Pennypack Creek, which runs through Bryn Athyn. Here you will be treated to the hospitality of the folks at the Lord’s New Church. You will be offered a tour of the bucolic campus and buildings, which also house an impressive private art collection, as well as a chance to learn more about this branch of Swedenborgian Christianity.

At the conclusion of the Convention, you might want to take part in a bus trip on Wednesday, July 12, to see



*A passageway at the Glencairn Museum*

some of the historic landmarks in the city of Philadelphia. This trip could include stops at important sites in Philadelphia in the history of the Philadelphia Society of the New Church, and at the site of the first annual convention in 1817, whose bicentennial we will be celebrating. ☩



*The chapel of the Lord's New Church*

## National Church Hosts NCC Leadership

The Church of the Holy City in Washington, DC, was honored to play host to the dynamic leadership team of the National Council of Churches last August. The Swedenborgian Church is a member of the National Council of Churches. ☩



*NCC leadership team in the DC Church parlor*

## Passages

### Confirmations

**Tony Kalinowski, Jr.**, was confirmed by Rev. Kit Billings and invited into membership by the congregation of the LaPorte New Church in LaPorte, Indiana, on September 4, 2016. His mother Tam Mounce, brother Joey, and close friends were a supportive presence.



### Marriages

Taunya Proudlove-Mercier and Chris Semken were wedded on November 5, 2016, officiated by Taunya's aunt, Linda Reed. Taunya is secretary of the

### Toward Spiritual Eco-Justice

*Continued from page 7*

sources 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 other which can be exploited to fulfill wants of an anthropo-centered 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:

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 the pastor of the Edmonton, Alberta, Church of the Open Word.

Western Canada Conference and is on the board of the Edmonton Church of the Holy City, where Linda is the lay leader.

### Deaths

**Edna Charzewski**, long-time member of and provisional representative to the Western Canada Conference of the Swedenborgian Church, passed away on November 17, 2016, at the age of 83. She lived in Winnipeg, Manitoba. She is survived by her children Reg

Moore, Steve, Dan, and Jarod Charzewski; eleven grandchildren; and ten great-grandchildren.

### Transitions

Rev. Kevin K. Baxter has accepted a call from the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem (an unaffiliated Swedenborgian church) to be the assistant minister. The Boston Society was established in 1818 and was until recently affiliated with the General Convention. ☩

## Reflection

# Looking through Different Lenses—Whose Vision Is Right?

BY DIANNE ROESINGER

Everyone has opinions, many of them strong, be they about relationships, raising children, politics, or the church. But we are all in this together. No matter what or how we feel about various topics, we need to remember what is best, not just for ourselves but for everyone involved.

I spent time in Europe last year, where I spent most of my time in Germany. Germany has welcomed over one million refugees since 2014; this whole little country that is smaller than Alberta, with a population of eighty-two million, has open arms and open hearts. Sixty of these people will be placed in the little town I visited, where already a variety of people live.

The landscape of this town will change, reflecting the impact of new immigrants as well as younger generations. Different-looking houses of worship have popped up in many places. But all in all, Germany is still an orderly place; in towns and villages the church bells call people to church on Sunday morning, wake them for work,

and send them home for lunch.

Most of the refugees are fleeing their countries of origin because of violence and want to go on to live a peaceful life that presents opportunity; they risk their lives to make the journey.

Some may struggle with how taking on such a large number of refugees will affect their lives. At the same time, our heartstrings were tugged at the sight of the lifeless body of the five-year-old boy on the beach. We are all God's children.

We can think of this globally as well as personally. Be it the world, the country, or the Church, things will change; the landscape or how we message will have to change, and our church members and refugees need to know that we have open hearts and open arms. We should not be blinded by the crisis, but be prepared to deal with it. We need to embrace new ideas and work together to bring visions to fruition, and we must always value each other, as we are all in it together, no matter what. ☩

Dianne Roesinger is president of the Western Canada Conference. She belongs to the Calgary New Church Society in Alberta.

### 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.

## Convention 2017: Banners for the Opening Ceremony

This summer, from July 8–12, the Swedenborgian Church is celebrating the 200th anniversary of its first convention in West Chester, Pennsylvania, a suburb of Philadelphia, where that first convention was held.

In addition to great speakers, events, services, and mini-courses, an opening ceremony will recreate some of the moments from the first Swedenborgian annual convention. That first convention commenced with a roll call of societies and affiliated groups, and at the opening ceremony of this convention, we will reenact that roll call as part of a banner processional.

This means we need every society, association, and organization affiliated with General Convention to participate. We request that all groups fill out this google form online: <http://tinyurl.com/hcxgmc>, or you can email Rev. Kevin Baxter at [baxtonia@gmail.com](mailto:baxtonia@gmail.com). The form seeks information important for event preparation:



- The name of your society or organization
- The date of organization
- Will a representative be present at convention?
- Do you have a banner?

Until recently, many annual conventions began with a banner processional, so your society or group may have a banner. If not, and we know in time, we will produce a banner for you.

While we encourage everyone to attend this historic convention, if your organization has nobody able to attend, we still want you represented! Please let us know as soon as possible. ☩

