



Swedenborgians Come together to Celebrate 200th Anniversary



The opening ceremony began with a procession of banners from the societies and affiliates of the Swedenborgian Church, which were then hung as a backdrop to the proceedings.



The 200th Anniversary Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church (193rd convention), “Rooted in Our History, Growing in The Word,” was celebrated in West Chester, Pennsylvania, July 8–12, 2017. The convention was held in the Philadelphia area to commemorate the first convention (which was held in Philadelphia).

In a departure from past convention

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A Short History of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem

BY JIM LAWRENCE

One Tree, Many Branches, Twelve Crops, Many Leaves

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. (Revelation 22:1–2)

Every Swedenborgian denomination in the world, and there are at least five, use the phrase New Jerusalem in the official incorporated language. Every Swedenborgian denomination has followed suit from the first one, in England, by selecting the closing image of sacred scripture: the Holy City New Jerusalem descending from heaven to earth. The tree of life lines the river that runs through the city, and as the various Swedenborgian

denominations are routinely referred to as the various branches, we wish to claim this image yet again today at this 200th anniversary juncture of denominational activity in America—or, as Columbia University religious studies professor Marguerite Beck Block once so aptly named it in her book *The New Church in the New World*.

Living Our History! Swedenborgianism in North America, 1817–2017

The nineteenth century saw an explosive growth of Christianity and of Christian denominations in the new

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The Editor's Desk



Starting Over

It is with sadness that I inform my readers that my wife, Judy Ziegler, passed away early on the morning of July 8, the first day of the annual convention (obituary, p 119).

I had been taking care of her since she returned from a hospital stay three weeks before her death. I regretted missing an annual convention for the first time since beginning regular attendance, but, of course, it didn't matter—life and death take priority.

Many people stepped up to help me put together this convention issue of *the Messenger*. Kevin Baxter, Rebecca Esterson, and many others took photos; Everyone who gave a speech or a talk sent copies, Kurt Fekete sent the SCYL report, and Karen Conger sent meeting minutes. Jane Siebert has been

helping me with putting everything together. I apologize for the late delivery of this September *Messenger*, but I am sure you understand.

Judy's death has set me back in a way I did not imagine and could not have imagined. I have suffered great losses in my life but I was not prepared for this. She had plans and we had plans. She retired only a year and a half ago, and my *Messenger* job is part-time (and I can take my office with me—my computer and my phone). We planned to do a lot more travelling, to see new places and learn new things, but also we planned more visits to friends and family. Judy had begun, for the first time in her life, to spend her days as a full-time artist; she had begun organizing and creating many elements for installation pieces.

I have been fortunate in having many friends and loving family, who have helped me struggle through this loss. My Cambridge Church community, the greater Swedenborgian communities, longtime friends of ours, extended family members, college and school friend—all have been kind and supportive. I have been overwhelmed with the outpouring of sympathy for me, and love and appreciation of Judy,

during her last weeks of life and following her death. On the eve before her death, Susannah Currie sent me an audio of the ministers at their concluding service singing "We Are Sending You Light." I played it for Judy as she began her transition. She was unconscious, but I am sure she received the light and the love.

I am bereft but I know that I must learn and grow from this tragic loss and find a new way of living, without Judy. It will take time, but I will do that and I will be of better use on my path to regeneration, and Judy will be glad of that.

—Herb Ziegler

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Church Calendar

- **September 30:** Deadline for lungerich Fund proposals
- **October 6–9:** SCYL Columbus Day Weekend Retreat, Duxbury MA
- **November 3–5:** General Council Fall Meeting, Framingham MA
- **October 6–7:** CSS Board of Trustees Fall Meeting, Berkeley CA

the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America

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

September 2017

Volume 239, No. 7, Whole Number 5422

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Subscriptions: free online subscription at

www.swedenborg.org. Printed and mailed to US address, \$20/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$35/year; single copies, \$2.00. Libraries & prisoners, free. Send check made out to "Swedenborgian Church" with "Messenger" on the memo line. Other requests, write or call Central Office.

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

The opinions and views expressed are those of the authors, not of *the Messenger*, the Communication Support Unit, or the Swedenborgian Church.

The President's Convention Address

Sharing the Good Work 2016–2017

Last week a friend from my Peace Corps days and his wife from Laos came to visit. As we sat around the dining room table, he asked that question that so many of us get. “Tell me about your church.” I paused, wondering where to start and how deep to go. I knew my friend Skip grew up in the American Baptist Church, just like I had. I knew his wife came to the US as a refugee with her four children, and Skip married her and adopted the children.

So I took a breath and shared.

We do our best to follow the example of Jesus in how to live useful lives and we study the Bible for guidance. One difference from my American Baptist traditional upbringing is that, as a Swedenborgian, I can accept and love Jesus; this is my path; I am a Christian. And I can respect and accept that this is not the only path.

When I came back from four years living in Zaire, Guatemala, and Sierra Leone with Muslims, Buddhists, among ethnic religions and a wide range of Christian traditions, my childhood faith had to break out of the mold that had been set. It didn't fit the world or the God I had seen in the eyes of so many wonderful people in Africa and Central America.

God flows into every human being with all God's divine love, all God's divine wisdom and all God's divine life. (True Christianity §364)

I went on, “Swedenborg writes that all people are born for heaven. How could there be just one way?”

Skip asked, “Why did Jesus say, ‘I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me’?”

I paused and smiled knowingly, as



I had struggled with this verse myself.

When I read that verse, I ask, What is the way of Jesus? What did Jesus tell his disciples was the most important? The answer that makes sense to me is Jesus tells us to love one another. I believe this is the way Jesus was talking about, and it has been turned to be what we say we believe rather than how we love one another that leads to everlasting life. To believe in Jesus means to love like he taught us to love.

At this point Skip's wife, Orady, looked at me deeply and asked, “Do you mean my parents and grandparents from Laos might be in heaven? They were kind and helped others, but they didn't know Jesus.”

“Yes. God loves your parents and grandparents as much as God loves you or me. God wants all to have eternal life and that is why it's not about what we say we believe, but how we love one another.”

My friend Skip then said, “You have a religion that is poised for the twenty-first century. You have what people are searching for.” And I nodded.

[I]t is plain that the church of the Lord is not here, nor there, but that it is everywhere, both within those kingdoms where the church is, and out of them, where people live according to the precepts of charity. (Secrets

of Heaven §8152)

And this, my friends, is why we work so hard to keep the doors of our churches open: to create ministries without doors, to serve as chaplains, as teachers, as leaders. We have a gift of freedom in our religion. We can be Christians and not have to convert others to our way of thinking. We can embrace teachings of truth from a variety of sources. And we have the gift of the inner sense of the scripture that makes it useful to our lives and helps us to love one another.

I want to share the highlights of my first year as president. For me, the joy and promise in our future is the work that our ministers, our licensed pastors, and our lay members continue to offer throughout the year. I am concentrating on the churches, camps and retreats that I visited during my first year. In addition, there is so much more going on with the work of Swedenborgian chaplains, Swedenborgian ministers serving other denominations, Swedenborgian ministers creating new and unique ministries and Swedenborgians doing their best to live their love and faith in the communities they serve. This is a brief tour, and there is so much more that could be said. I am sharing activities and developments in our denomination and ideas that you might use in your communities.

First stop is the **Church of the Open Word** in St. Louis, also known as the Garden Chapel. It is the one church I can drive to in a day. This welcoming group hosted the annual convention three years ago. It was my delight to install Pastor Paul Deming in the church he has served for over ten

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Convention Sermon

Thy Will Be Done

BY 2017 CONVENTION MINISTER,
REV. SUSANNAH CURRIE

On this 200th anniversary of our denomination, it is a time to reflect on the journeys of some of the many New Church persons over the last two centuries who dedicated their lives to the Lord as members of the churches which joined together in 1817 as this General Convention. They are the “willing spirits” spoken of in the Psalm we heard today. They are the “persons who love the Lord and keep his word” and in whom God “makes a home.” They lived, loved, and learned and remembered the presence of God in their lives, and continually prayed to have a “new and right spirit within.”

The persons I would like to focus on today are the women of the churches, as the written history of the churches certainly documents men’s contributions in great detail. I feel that the women of the past have done much of the work to nurture the ongoing life of our churches and our denomination, and I invite you to reflect with me on their journeys as I attempt to bring to life 200 years of experiences of ordinary New Church women. We will travel along in fifty-year increments, both to highlight the experiences of the very real women who are our ancestors, and to arrive finally at today, embracing all the variety of generations alive in our churches. In our different upbringings from different decades, we bring a wide range of life experience and perspective to church life today, just as our foremothers brought in their times, and we will honor their experiences and their legacies.

So, let me first explain why I have displayed the image behind me, that



of a church steeple a distance away. I come from New England, and it has often touched me, when coming around a bend in the road, or over a rise, or down a river, when I see a church steeple in the distance. I imagine being a traveler two centuries ago, hungry, thirsty, and weary, suddenly seeing that steeple in the distance. That steeple and the church community it guides travelers to, represents for me, and I hope for that long ago traveler, a place of sanctuary, shelter, safety, kindness, nourishment, and faithful community in a world of dangers and potentials for harm. It was then, and should be now, a beacon of goodness and truth to guide travelers from the darkness of the wilderness into the light of love and community. It is before us now, inviting us, as well as challenging us, to consider how our churches, and our denomination, are, or can become, greater beacons of love and light and hope, inviting travelers out of the darkness in today’s world into a life of faith and community.

Mrs. Everyman

So let us travel in our imaginations down this river, like a river of time, back to 1817, and I’ll introduce myself. I am Mrs. Everyman from Philadelphia. My first name is known only to family and close friends. I am a wife

and mother, a homemaker and a faithful churchgoer in the New Church that has recently been organized by my husband and other men who read the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. I have listened in on their discussions when they take place in our home, but I have had limited time or access to the books to read the writings for myself. My husband shares the insights he has had about how to live these new beliefs and he has helped me to prepare lessons for the children that I share with them in our home. While I sit in worship, I feel the Lord’s presence and a *resonance with the preaching about eternal life* that comforts me when infants die early and when I fear that I will die in childbirth myself. I live my life, with *my focus on my family* and remember that the Lord is guiding me and the growth of this New Church, and I pray to God, “Thy will be done.” I am your great-great-great-great-great-great-great grandmother, and my legacy to the denomination is in the teaching I gave my children.

Mrs. Everyman III

Traveling further along the river of time fifty years to 1867, my name is Mrs. Everyman III from Boston, and I live daily in much the same way as my great-grandmother, as a wife and mother, a homemaker and a faithful churchgoer, but I now find time to read the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. I also read the newsletters of the many other small churches that have been meeting, and of our new denominational organization that was *incorporated in 1861*. I read in the local and national newspapers of the efforts of

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Convention Sermon

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women working for women's right to vote. Through my reading, and talking with women from other churches when I travel with my husband to the annual convention, I have become aware of the many different ways that the Swedenborgian theology is being lived, and I have heard that some New Church people are taking Swedenborg's writings west with them into the hard life of making new homes in the wilderness. Here in Boston, I see the city growing with new industrial jobs drawing families from farms to urban living, and I watch our young men go to war with our Southern brothers over the cause of slavery. At our church we prepare lessons for the children that we share with them before the worship. At our annual convention this year we *organized a national Sunday School Association* to share resources among our churches. While I sit in worship, listening to the sermons, read the scriptures and Swedenborg's writings, and serve on the Association's committees, I feel the Lord's presence and a *resonance with the teachings about love as the guiding force of life*, which I try to live in my daily life, helping our new neighbors to settle into their homes and offering support when others suffer through the illnesses that plague our inner cities. I live my life, *my focus on my family and on my growing understanding of my faith*, and remember that the Lord is guiding me and the growth of this New Church, and I pray to God, "Thy will be done." I am your great-great-great-great-great grandmother, and my legacy to the denomination is the teaching I gave the church's children, and my participation in the Sunday School Association.

Mrs. Everywoman

Traveling further along the river of time 50 years to 1917, my name is Mrs.

Everywoman from Cincinnati, one of many cities now growing in the middle of the country. I am in touch by mail with some of my Philadelphia friends, but some have left our Convention to start an organization of their own. Many people are moving to find the life that they feel called to: old friends to start new denominations and settlers moving further west to settle in California. *Women now have the right to vote* in most states. There is a war in Europe and women everywhere are taking a larger part in the world of work while the men serve as soldiers. I have taken on duties as a laborer as well as being a wife and mother, a homemaker, a faithful churchgoer, a reader, and a Sunday School teacher. I travel eagerly with my husband to the denomination's annual convention and meet with other women serving the Sunday School Association and the *newly formed Women's Alliance*. I serve on committees within these women's organizations and have a voice in their leadership. While I sit in worship, listen to the sermons, read the scriptures and Swedenborg's writings, teach the children, and serve on committees, I feel the Lord's presence and a *resonance with the teaching of life's purpose as living an active life of faith* that helps me to know that what I do matters. I live my life, my focus on my family, my understanding of my faith and on my growing sense of purpose and remember that the Lord is guiding both me and the growth of this New Church, and I pray to God, "Thy will be done." I am your great-great-great grandmother and my legacy to the denomination is the teaching I gave the church's children and my participation in the Sunday School Association and the Women's Alliance. My children are called the Greatest Generation, and their children are the Silent Generation. They are the oldest members of today's churches, and although some may not still be able to attend worship,

they are with the church in spirit, and if you visit them, they have much wisdom to share.

Ms. Everywoman

Traveling further along the river of time fifty years to 1967, my name is Ms. Everywoman from San Francisco, and styles are becoming more and more informal. The world is still reeling from the aftermath of a second world war. And this time, women have not gone back home from their jobs as readily, after the men serving as soldiers returned. I continue in my duties a wife and mother, a homemaker, a faithful churchgoer, a reader, a Sunday School teacher, and an active member of the Women's Alliance as well as a laborer. There is a split these days between those who work within and outside of organizations. Some have been dubbed Yuppies (Young Urban Professionals, those who choose to work within the system) and others are called Hippies (those who reject systems and are creating and embracing new forms of community). There are some who reject organized religion entirely, those who embrace it, and everything in between. It is an era of a search for a sense of belonging on many levels. The civil rights movement and the women's movement have influenced how I feel about my role in marriage, family, the workforce, our church, our denomination and the world. I am one who embraces our religious tradition, and so I have worked to become a leader within many of the denomination's committees. I travel to the annual conventions and I have a voice in committee leadership. Women are studying in our seminary and, maybe soon, women will be ordained as ministers. While I sit in worship, listen to preaching, sometimes being a lay leader myself, read the scriptures and Swedenborg's writings, teach the children, and serve and lead within my denomination, I feel the Lord's presence

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and a resonance with the teaching that all who live a good life, the best they know how, are indeed living the life that leads to heaven. I live my life, my focus on my family, my understanding of my faith, my growing sense of purpose and a desire to see the good and truth in all people and remember that the Lord is guiding me and the growth of the New Church, and I pray to God, “Thy will be done.” I am a grandmother now and I am still active in the church, and I hope my legacy to the denomination will be the teaching I give the church’s children, my participation in the Sunday School Association and Women’s Alliance, and my work throughout the committees of the denomination. I am a baby boomer, and we are the active elders in our churches, leading and mentoring younger members into the traditions that we grew up with, or found and made our own, and sometimes we are nervous about the future of the changing church.



Rev. Everywoman

Traveling further along the river of time fifty years to 2017, my name is Rev. Everywoman from Philadelphia, and I have the honor of having been ordained as a minister in this denomination, and to stand before you now. I serve one of our denomination’s churches and serve and lead on many boards and committees within the denomination. I am a wife, a mother, a faithful churchgoer, a reader, a Sunday School teacher, an active member of many denominational groups and a professional clergyperson. I am blessed to have a husband who enjoys the chores of homemaking. I have found purpose as a leader within the denomination serving in elected and

appointed positions. I travel to the annual conventions to meet with the Council of Ministers, men and women who have devoted their lives to the Lord through serving this denomination and its churches and ministries. While I lead worship, read the scriptures and Swedenborg’s writings, teach children, and serve as a minister in this denomination, I feel the love of spiritual community. I feel the Lord’s presence and a resonance with the teachings that the life of heavenly communi-

ty begins NOW, here on earth. This enlivens me to reach out beyond my church and my denomination to others of different faiths. I have personally been heartened to see interdenominational cooperation growing within the Swedenborgian tradition. I see this in the work of the Swedenborg Foundation, the Gathering Leaves retreats for Swedenborgian women, and the work of In Company with Angels to bring attention to our common belief in the reality of angels and eternal life. These groups, and others, have brought together people from organizations which, having split apart in our foremother’s day, have found a new respect and desire for relationship with one another, while keeping true to their individual faith journeys. I live my life, my focus on my family, my understanding of my faith, my sense of individual purpose, a desire to see the good and truth in all people, and the possibility of creating heaven on earth in today’s world. I remember that the Lord is guiding me and the growth of the New Church, greater than any one faith tradition, but the Holy City descending, “The Lord’s New Church on Earth,” that includes people of all faiths throughout the world seeking to live lovingly and wisely, and I pray to God, “Thy will be done.” I hope our legacy to this denomination will be the

teaching we give the church’s children, our participation in all the work of the denomination, and what we do today to bring heaven to earth.

Today and the Future

The multigenerational aspect of our churches and our denomination means we have differing world views, much more varied than our ancestors had. In addition to Baby Boomers, we are Generation X (41–51-year-olds who grew up with the new creative potentials of the science and technology boom and the widespread access to global information); We are the newly named X-enials (34–40-year-olds who have grown up with the digital world and its potential for virtual relationships); We are Millennials (19–33-year-olds who grew up during the birth of virtual community and instant communication). And we are Generation Z (18-year-olds and younger who are growing up in a world in which change is exponentially increasing). And I believe that all of us in this religious organization, as we see our membership and attendance at traditional worship decrease, are questioning the church’s relevance to this exponentially changing world. As we focus on our families, our neighbors, our church communities, our denomination, our countries and our world, we wonder if we can leave a legacy of invitation into our spiritual community. We wonder if this religious tradition can create relevant and meaningful worship, spiritual community-building, and multi-cultural appreciation that beckon people from the darkness of self-absorption to the light of faith. We wonder if we truly are loving God and loving our neighbors. If we are honest with ourselves, we know now is the time to ask ourselves, “How can we ourselves, our churches and our denomination become a greater and greater beacon of love and light and life in the world?”

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The Challenge

The women of the past two centuries added greater and greater responsibility and commitment to their churches and the denomination over the decades. Women's roles expanded with each generation, and significantly, women layered all these new roles over their continued commitment to marriage, child-rearing, home, and work. Our challenge today is to appreciate, going forward, that gender roles can and will move and change with the times, and that individuals, of all gender-identities, need to look within themselves and allow themselves to manifest their spiritual goodness and truth uniquely and authentically as they follow God's call, and trust that their growth, and the growth of the faith communities to which they belong, is in God's hands, God who loves all people. It is our part to pray together to God that in the mystery of discovering who we are and who we can be, in ourselves and in our organization, "Thy will be done!"

And now I draw your attention back to the steeple, the place of sanctuary, shelter, safety, kindness, nourishment, and faithful community. Is this what our churches and our denomination are in the world? Are we standing strong and steadfast as beacons of goodness and truth in the darkness of the evils and unknowns in the world? If we project our travels further along the river of time fifty years into the future, to 2067, will our names all then be Everyperson? Will each one of us be our true selves, people of all ages, gender identities, sexual preferences, colors, ethnicities, socio-economic levels, educational backgrounds and mental and physical abilities? Will we come together as a "unity of diversity," and shine our unique goodness and truth into the world as one light? The

Convention Business Report

GC Pre-Convention Meeting

The General Council (GC) of the Swedenborgian Church held its pre-convention meeting on July 8, 2017.

"steeple" of our denomination stands before us now, and it challenges us to consider how each of us individually, our churches, and our denomination can expand our outreach of God's love into the world by being beacons of love and light and hope in the darkness and unknowns of the world. Our ancestors did this, and their greatest legacy to us is how they uniquely lived their faith and loved God and their neighbor. Like all those ordinary women throughout the centuries, we too are being called to reach out with the teachings that inspired them, and inspire us, NOW!

They are calling to us today, from the reaches of our history, to preach about eternal life, to teach about love as the guiding force of life, to inspire each other to know life's purpose is to live an active life of faith, to believe that 'all who live a good life, the best they know how', are indeed living the life that leads to heaven,' and to trust that as we live faithfully, the life of heavenly community is NOW, HERE on earth!

Let us be the "willing spirits" spoken of in the Psalm we heard today, each day being "persons who love the Lord and keep his word" so that in us God "makes a home." Let us love, live, and learn and remember the presence of God in our lives and continually pray to have a "new and right spirit within" and say often, with the humility and strength of our fore-mothers, "Thy Will Be Done." ☸

Rev. Susannah Currie is the Convention minister for the 200th Anniversary Swedenborgian Convention. She is pastor of the Bridgewater Church of the New Jerusalem.

The funds from the sale of the San Diego Church have been invested in the Common Fund. The corpus is to be held for twenty-five years to support a new Swedenborgian church that might arise in the area. The interest from the investment is for General Convention's use.

Rev. Gard Perry reported on the Council of Ministers (COM) meetings. The *Our Daily Bread* (ODB) internet platform is up and running (<http://spiritualquesters.org/>). The Executive Committee will create a process for assessment of ODB's administration and publication online.

COM had been asked by GC to consider the matter of General Convention membership as there is a lack of consistency in the criteria for membership in the denomination. Rev. Perry believes the discussion that ensued was fruitful in a number of valuable ways, emphasizing that our theology supports complete and total inclusivity. COM will appoint a committee to study the matter and present a report to GC by the fall meeting.

Board member Lon Elmer reported that much of maintenance is needed at Wayfarers Chapel, in particular to the roof. Renovation to the entire grounds is needed, including electrical upgrades. The Visitors Center is being renovated to include some offices. The Wayfarers Board is devising a capital campaign to address these needs.

Convention Business Sessions

The 193rd Session of the Swedenborgian Church came to order on July 11, 2017, in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

On July 10, the first business session was brought to order by President Rev. Jane Siebert. She introduced the other officers of General Convention, Tom Neuenfeldt, vice president; Karen

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President's Address

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years. This church is built in the modern style of Wayfarers Chapel, bringing the outdoors in through the architecture and open space.

The Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, was facing a different challenge and celebration: the pending retirement of Rev. John Maine. Thanks to the work of John and the board, his transition has been a smooth one, and they are now served by a Mennonite interim-trained minister as they prepare to put out a call for a new minister. I happened to be there for the first Sunday in the new church year, and they were celebrating with a community potluck meal on the lawn of the church. Rev. John is the organizer and promoter of our annual denominational themes, and the children's Sunday school created a banner for the 2016–2017 cycle "The Year of the Word."

Wayfarers Chapel, in Rancho Palas Verde, California, is guided by the staff: Rev. David Brown, director of ministry; and Shannon Reynolds, director of administration; and the board, composed of Swedenborgians from around North America. The many weddings, baptisms, memorial services and visitors (500,000/year) help to fund this amazing chapel, built as a memorial to Emanuel Swedenborg. Wayfarers and locals gather each Sunday to worship, enjoy the music and share this sacred space.

Our national church in Washington, DC, **Church of the Holy City**, makes us all proud. It is a powerful space, located in the city that needs an active Swedenborgian church. Rev. Rich Tafel is striving to bring new life into the sanctuary. They often have visitors, and one recent visitor told Rich, "My guardian angel told me to walk in these doors." Rich has started Spiritual Entrepreneur Dinners at the church.

This experience has led him to feel that young people often have a crisis of meaning, purpose, and hope. Our open and affirming theology is often a step away from what they have encountered in church. The spiritual but not religious fit right in. Rich shares that the election of 2016 has been devastating and disorienting for many of these groups. We must hold a space for all views and speak to the spiritual truths that transcend the moment. This is what we uniquely have to offer.

In the middle of the Southwest Desert another Swedenborgian community is thriving, the **New Church of the Southwest Desert** in Silver City, New Mexico. This is a church with a diversity of people that reaches out to the community with many service projects. I had the joy of installing Pastor Linda Callander, who works with Rev. Carla Friedrich to serve this society that is new to our Swedenborgian tradition.

One of our oldest churches is the **New York New Church** in New York City. They are without a minister at this time and are working hard to make good use of this amazing space. The Korean New Church, led by Rev. Young Min, worships here. In addition, the church council has hired Monica McCarthy to gather people for a monthly Interfaith Spiritual Salon and guest speakers. Monica's minicourse at this convention offers ideas on how to bring people in to make good use of our beautiful buildings. The New York New Church has much to offer, and I hope someday they will be ready to call another minister that has the fervor and willingness to re-imagine church in this sacred space in the middle of this bustling city.

Our newest church was started in an empty lot in San Pedro, California, almost three years ago: **The Garden Church**. The garden and the members are flourishing. The goal is to re-imagine church in a social-justice,

participatory fellowship. Members gather on Sunday at 3 PM to garden and share other activities, worship together at 4 PM, and then share a meal together, often including produce from the garden, at 5 PM. It truly was an empty lot when Rev. Anna Woofenden selected the site. One of the first things started was a preparing the ground, as the soil was questionable due to chemicals and pesticides. They had to haul in a lot of soil and compost to make raised beds in the middle of the city.

New life has been breathed into the **Hillside Community Church** in El Cerito, California, with their new minister, Rev. Thomas Muller. This was my first installation of an ordained minister. Over forty people gathered to wish him and his wife, Ellie, well in their new church home. Thom has a comfortable way of explaining our theology that comes from trying out a variety of religions before settling into the Swedenborg tradition. He is attracting new searchers and questioners, which is our best outreach. Their new sign reads, "Hillside, An Inclusive Community of Spiritual Seekers."

Our newest church building is the **Elmwood New Church** in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts. This building, designed under the direction of Rev. Donna Keane, functions as a community gathering space also, with bingo and community potlucks. Membership, attendance and the Sunday school have grown since the opening.

The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware, is a beautiful building with a long history. Our newly ordained minister, Rev. Shada Sullivan has accepted their call for a part time minister. We will keep them in prayer as they work together to serve one another and the community.

The New Church of Montgomery near Cincinnati tore down their old building, selling the property to put money back in the coffers. Now

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President's Address

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they are sharing space with the General Church congregation in Glendale, Ohio. The General Church worships there once a month and the Convention group worships there three times a month. Of interest, this building was originally one of four Convention churches in the Cincinnati area. Times changed and it was sold to the Ohio Association and then to the General Church, and now they are back sharing the space. They simply change out the altar cloths and a few other things. More and more they find ways to worship together and share meals. This group is lay led thanks to strong members like Pete and Gloria Toot. Out front you are welcomed by the children's garden which has attracted a lot of attention, and the children love it.

Many of you have seen **Swedenborg Chapel**, nestled in the midst of Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Like Wayfarers Chapel, it attracts visitors from far and wide. Recently, one young woman told Rev. Sage Cole, "when I walked into your chapel for the first time, I felt like a child that had come home after a long time. I felt loved at the chapel and accepted, and I knew I was in the right place." We must keep our doors open. People are searching for just what we have to offer.

And last, I want to share the two churches in Kansas. Since I am traveling so much as president, the congregation of the **Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church** welcomes Pastor Bernard, a retired Methodist minister who fills the pulpit once or twice a month. The congregation enjoys his services, and he is learning about Swedenborg from the congregation, too. Like so many of our churches, the sanctuary is packed at Christmas, and it is important to have a place to return to and to bring their children, even if it

Convention Business Report

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Conger, recording secretary; and Polly Baxter, treasurer.

Karen Conger delivered the General Council (GC) report, in which she explained a little about how the GC fulfills its duties. She highlighted some of the business that had been transacted during the church year, including approval of hiring a website developer, approval of the sale of the San Diego Church, working with boards of the churches; extensive discussion of the structure of convention governance, and other matters pertaining to the Church.

Rev. Catherine Lauber, secretary of the Council of Ministers (COM)

reported that there were thirty-five ministers and four licensed pastors in attendance at their meetings. They received Visions of Ministry from Colin Amato and Nancy Piorkowski, as well as a plan of ministry from Rev. Shada Sullivan. COM changed the Roll of Ministers to reflect the passing of Revs. Ernest O. Martin and Adam Doyle Seward; they removed the name of Rev. Kin'ichi Kuniyeda from the roll of former ministers and reinstated it on the Roll of Ministers.

COM recommended and the delegates approved that Karen Feil, on approval from the Committee on Admission into the Ministry, be given Licensed Pastor standing, serving at the Swedenborg Library in Chicago.

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is only once a year. The same is true for the members of **Pawnee Rock Church of the New Jerusalem**, which is working hard to keep their church alive. They lead the community Easter Sunrise Service, which brings people from all around the area to watch the reenactment of the resurrection of Christ, performed on the rock for which the community was named. Both churches are now lay led. There is value in preserving these sacred spaces.

Many associations have weekend retreats like the one in Kansas that was started over forty years ago by Rev. Eric Zacharias. It is a special time of fellowship with members from Kansas, Colorado, and sometimes Oklahoma.

One of our most successful ventures is our camps. Last year I attended **Almont New Church Assembly** in Michigan and this year **Fryeburg New Church Assembly** in Maine. Both are family camps that offer wonderful teaching, conversation, activities, and the joy of spending quality time with a wide variety of Swedenborgians. Paulhaven is a teen camp in Alberta,

Canada. Each one of the camps can only exist with many hours of volunteer labor of love.

I hope I have given you a few reasons we work to keep the doors of our churches, retreats, and camps open—for cradle-born Swedenborgians and joiners to carry on the traditions, for searchers and questers wanting to make our world a better place for all to live, for children to be taught an inclusive Christianity that makes room for all in God's world, for children and the rest of us to understand the connection of our earth and our spirituality, for church camps where kids of all ages can come to experience a bit of heaven on earth, for our 97-year-old members and our three-year-old future members, and for our world.

My prayer is that during my three-year term as president we may work together to open our doors, to tell our stories, to reach out to those that are searching for just what we have to offer, and to learn to love one another in this big, wide world. Amen. ☪

Women's Alliance Worship Service

BY REV. JENNY CAUGHMAN

Good Morning. As we shall hear in just a moment, “the purpose of the Alliance shall be to promote the life of charity among the women of the church through spiritual development, practical service, and fellowship with women in the world at large.” In the words of Chris Laitner, who is not able to be with us here today but whose spirit and wisdom are very much present, “the excellent work of those who have been involved for the past 113 years reminds us of the ongoing need for community, personal growth, service, and outreach that has always been at the center of the work of the Women’s Alliance (WA), and we are looking forward to carrying on this legacy in new and different formats in this new millennium.”

The Women’s Alliance has, historically, faced the issues of the day. This is good, important, and risky. Too often we avoid talking about the issues because . . . well, they’re issues. People don’t agree, don’t see eye-to-eye, have strong, opposing opinions. This can be uncomfortable. And when people don’t agree, especially about religion and politics, it can easily move past uncomfortable and actually get ugly. And that can be really uncomfortable. Well the Women’s Alliance has been bravely addressing the issues of the day for 113 years, and we felt it was important to continue on in this challenging, but important direction.

The first official meeting of the WA was in 1904. It wasn’t easy to address the issues of the day then, and it isn’t easy now. But it was important then, and it is still important now. Perhaps, given the current proliferation



of weapons of mass destruction, it is more important now than ever. If we, as individuals, as a church, as a country, as the human race, are to grow spiritually, if we are to become regenerate, we must what? Swedenborg tells us the three steps are repentance, reformation, and

then regeneration. The first step in this, repentance, requires that we recognize where we have gone astray, how we are believing falsities and acting without charity. We need to acknowledge where we have failed to act lovingly, where we have failed to see the truth. This is hard for all of us, and something we need to work on our entire lives. We need to be honest with ourselves, and recognize our growing edge and then seek to move past this challenge, to seek to grow, through inflow from the Divine, so that we become more loving and more open to the truth, even when we are confronted by people with whom we do not agree—especially when we are confronted with people with whom we do not agree, we do not like, or do not trust. And it seems, in this day and age, we are so very often coming face-to-face with people with whom we do not agree, whom we do not view as kindred spirits.

As our ability to travel has evolved over the past several hundred years, as our technology has evolved, people have said the world has grown smaller. We used to live in our little towns, in our little alcoves, and not interact with people who were much different than us. But those days are long gone. For better and for worse, the world, is quite diverse. We are often reading about or meeting people who are different from us, who we do not understand, and who may make choices which confuse, surprise, or even anger us. We are all,

in some way, thrown face-to-face with some issue of diversity that we are not comfortable with. This experience often takes us to our spiritual growing edge—to the place where it is hard for us to act lovingly.

What’s interesting about diversity is that we don’t all struggle with the same parts of it. I don’t believe anyone of us is completely immune from prejudice (OK, maybe the Dalai Lama, but not us common folk.) For some, their intolerance may come out when hearing about opposing political beliefs, for others it is race or ethnicity related, for some religious, for others socio-economic, perhaps stemming from levels of intelligence, consideration, or how people drive—all of us have buttons that can, and will, be pushed. The key is to know what our buttons are, to know what makes us want to shut down to the other, shut down to the truth, and cling to our limited perspective. And if we’re honest, we’ll admit that when we shut down like this we are also shutting down to the Divine, as in that moment we are not open to the truth and we are motivated, more often than not, by love of self rather than love of neighbor. However, by acknowledging our growing edge, recognizing when we want to shut the other out, or push them away in anger, fear, or disgust, we have taken a step toward the Divine because we have opened ourselves up to greater truth.

One of the reasons that I love Swedenborg’s theology is that it can lead us ever closer to the Divine. Swedenborg had such a rich, deep and comprehensive understanding of both human nature and the Divine. In hearing about what heaven is like, we are also hearing about what we, as individuals and as communities are called to be, what we are to strive for. What Swedenborg

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Women's Alliance Service

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teaches us is that heaven is a diverse, multi-faceted place, filled with people with different gifts, talents, and interests—and this diversity is, in fact, a key aspect of heaven's perfection. And low and behold, like heaven, so is the earth filled with people with different gifts, talents, and perspectives. Here, however, instead of being a means toward perfection, our diversity is, far too often, a source of conflict, leading to mean-spirited words and behavior. What is the difference? Well, as we heard in the reading from Heaven and Hell, in heaven these diverse angels are united—united in their desire to love and worship the Divine. Their desire, their ruling love, is to be open to divine goodness and truth; this is what motivates them.

What, I ask, would happen if we strove to move beyond our fear and intolerance for people with different ideas, interests, political orientations, ways of understanding the Bible, ways of understanding Swedenborg? How might we grow spiritually if, the next time we are face-to-face with someone with whom we strongly disagree we choose, in that instant, to be open to the inflow of divine love and wisdom? What would happen if, instead of trying to show them how wrong they are, we strove to see the divine good in them? We strove to understand the kernel of truth in their perspective? We strove to understand the falsity in our own? What if we tried to truly believe that diversity is an aspect of perfection? Of heaven? Even when that diversity makes us uncomfortable.

After a prayer we will be closing this service with a beautiful song, entitled "Many Gifts, One Spirit." Swedenborg teaches that all that is good, all that is true, is of divine origin. The song we will hear expresses how there are so many Gifts that all come from, are all

Convention Business Report

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COM also recommended and the delegates approved that Shada Sullivan, supported by a call from the Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware, and on the recommendation of the Committee on Admission into the Ministry be ordained into our ministry.

It was voted to Amend the bylaws as follows:

Article VIII. Sec. 6 General Council

Any member of General Council, of any committee appointed by General Council, or of any Support Unit who fails to attend at least one duly called meeting during a calendar year may be deemed by General Council to have submitted his or her resignation, and shall be so informed by the Secretary. If no good and sufficient reason for said absence is offered, General Council may appoint a qualified individual to serve until the next meeting of Convention."

It was voted to amend the Constitution as follows:

Article VI. Meetings of the Swedenborgian Church

Section 1. Sessions of the Swedenborgian Church shall be held at least triennially, at such times and

filled with, the One Divine Spirit. May hearing this music help each of us to open our hearts and minds to the inflow of the Divine, so that we can truly ask of the Divine One, "in our differences unite us in the circle of your love." For in that we will be blessed, for we will have taken a step toward heaven. Amen. ☩

Rev. Jenny Caughman is a trustee at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate theological Union. She is a Swedenborgian minister serving on the pastoral team at First United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee.

places as it may determine. Meetings of the Swedenborgian Church must be called with 90 days' notice published in The Messenger or through a mailing to the members.

Section 2. A quorum to hold a convention shall consist of twenty percent of the number of persons qualified to vote as defined in Article IV, Representation and Voting.

Section 3. A quorum to conduct business at the convention shall be a majority of the registered voters at the convention, as defined in Article IV, Section 1, Representation and Voting.

Kurt Fekete reported that the Structure Review Committee (SRC) had processed the many responses to the survey that they distributed last year and asked the convention to take part in break-out groups to discuss and fine-tune action plans. Results were referred to General Council.

President Siebert reported on the successful and relatively simple sale of the San Diego property and commented that its ease highlights once again the importance of dissolution clauses. The San Diego Church had a very good clause, and the parameters that they established are being implemented so that the proceeds has been deposited in a reserve fund for twenty-five years, while General Convention may use the interest.

Outgoing treasurer Polly Baxter was presented with a toy cash register containing a toy coin symbolizing the over \$5,000 that has been donated so far to the Saturday's Children line item, which supports scholarships for children attending annual conventions. Appreciation was expressed through much applause and laughter to thank Polly for her years as a faithful servant of the Lord through the Church.

The results of the election were

- Vice president: Tom Neuenfeldt
- Recording secretary: Karen Conger
- Treasurer: Jennifer Lindsay

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A Brief “Her-story” of Women in the General Convention and the National Alliance of New Church Women

At the 2017 Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church (General Convention), members of the National Alliance of New Church Women (Women’s Alliance) presented a short program on the history of women’s presence in churches and communities and their involvement in the representation and work of the General Convention. The presentation covered the establishment of the National Women’s Alliance with its focus on supporting needs within the denomination and its celebration of local church women’s groups.

The National Alliance of New Church Women was officially established in 1904 and has continued to provide a place of fellowship, personal growth, and sharing among women of the Church ever since. The women of the Church had already been very active in the work of their congregations and communities for many decades. The creation of this national connection provided a place for women—who, at that point, had no roles as delegates or leaders within the General Convention—to come together during annual convention sessions to share insights into the Church’s theology, to communicate with one another about the work that they were doing in their congregations, and to create a warm and welcoming community to support the lives and work of women in general.

Early Involvement of Women in the Life of the Church

History shows that women were active in the life and learning of the Swedenborgian Church long before the establishment of the National Alliance of New Church Women. In 1790, Mrs. Hetty Barclay established a

reading group for Swedenborg’s Writings in Bedford, Pennsylvania, and the group ultimately became the first New Church Society beyond the Alleghenies. Mrs. Margaret Prescott, of Salem, Massachusetts, regularly hosted a Swedenborgian reading group that the Rev. Samuel Worcester organized into a Society in 1818. In 1817, Mrs. Prescott had written and published one of the first New Church collateral works in America, called *Religion and Philosophy United*. Twenty years later, in 1837, a Mrs. Minot, also from the Salem group, wrote and published *A Little Book of Lessons for Children*. It is notable that both Mrs. Prescott and Mrs. Minot were criticized for presuming, as women, to enter upon philosophical discussions.

Later in the nineteenth century, Swedenborgian women were involved in the suffrage movement. In 1868, some of these women were among the 172 women trying to vote in an election in Vineland, New Jersey. In 1870, Swedenborgian women were involved in a similar attempt in Orange, New Jersey, and, in that same year, Swedenborgian women took part in a voting attempt in Sturgis, Michigan.

Women’s Votes at Annual Conventions

While some Swedenborgian women were engaged in the suffrage movement, inside the General Convention women were not allowed to be voting delegates. Change was coming, though, as women had been given voting status in some of the local and regional church organizations which led to the 1887 submission by the Society of Topeka, Kansas, of the name of Mrs. F. L. Higgins as a voting delegate to the Committee on Credentials for

the annual session of the General Convention. The Committee on Credentials quietly omitted her name from the list of accredited delegates. The Topeka delegation inquired as to why, and the fight was on. Ultimately it was determined that the governing documents of the General Convention did not have any language that prohibited women from serving as voting delegates to a national convention session, and Mrs. Higgins was seated. There was a subsequent attempt to add the word *male* to the language regarding delegates, but that attempt failed.

Initiating Change: 1893

A pivotal event occurred in 1893 with the establishment of the Parliament of the World’s Religions, to be held in conjunction with the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Conceived by the Hon. Charles Bonney of the Chicago Swedenborgian Society, this was the first formal gathering of world representatives of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions.

The women of the Chicago Society of the New Church operated a Bureau of Information for both the Exposition and the Parliament. They also corresponded with as many New Church members as possible to elicit interest in and attendance at these events. The women also established meeting rooms and gathering spaces for women of the New Church who attended.

One hundred ninety-four papers were presented at the Parliament. The presentations were dominated by English-speaking Christians, but forty-two papers were presented by representatives of a broad variety of Eastern spiritual traditions. There were also nineteen papers presented by women,

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Her-story of New Church Women

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one of whom was Lydia Fuller Dickinson, a member of the St. Louis Society of the New Church. Her topic was “The Woman Question,” discussing the place and value of women in relationships, presence, and service as found in Emanuel Swedenborg’s theology. One of the results of this presentation was that in September, 1893, the General Convention held a denominational gathering of about three hundred people where nine talks were presented under the heading of “Women of the New Church.”

These events and presentations created opportunities for the General Convention to address the role of women in local societies and regional associations. As an example, in 1893 the New York Association voted to identify as missionaries, teachers, etc., “. . . such persons as can best accomplish the work, whether they be men or women,” and they also voted to appoint women delegates to annual conventions whenever they were nominated.

Women as Delegates and Leaders of the General Convention

Beginning in 1893, women appeared regularly as voting delegates to the annual conventions with one female delegate in that year, one in 1894, and two in 1895. By 1914, the list of lay delegates to the annual convention showed thirty-two men and forty-three women. Women were becoming the bedrock of representational voting.

By the second decade of the twentieth century, women were firmly established as voting delegates to annual conventions of the Swedenborgian Church. The increasing voice and vote of women in the business of the General Convention was not detrimental to the work, needs, focus and fellowship of the National Alliance of New

Church Women, which continued to hold annual luncheon meetings during annual conventions. Articles and talks from the Alliance meetings continued to be published in the *New Church Messenger*. The Alliance kept creating year-long Bible Study materials for its members as well as using a per capita tax (dues) and “Mite Box” offerings. (Members set aside “thank offerings” during the year and brought them to the annual meeting) to support denominational work such as Sunday Schools, camps, youth and young adult programs, the National Church, and Urbana College/University as well as denominational missions and other program needs. These offerings and uses continued for well more than a century.

The establishment and purpose of the National Alliance of New Church Women has always been to support and celebrate the wisdom, care, and community that women can bring to the work of the General Convention, as well as to provide a place of fellowship and communication for all women of the Church. The Alliance focus is broad: joining together the Church women of North America and helping

ministry and mission needs of the Church throughout the world.

Over the decades, the role and service of women within the General Convention has changed significantly. In the current work of the General Convention, women are very active locally, regionally, and nationally, holding appointed and elected positions at all levels of leadership as well as being ordained into the ministry of the Church. These positions and responsibilities represent huge changes in the status of women within the General Convention since the establishment of the National Alliance of New Church Women in 1904.

What’s Next?

At this point in its history, the National Alliance is re-evaluating how it can be of best service based on its long history of creating community and assisting denominational needs.

The evolution of the organization is in process, but as has been the history of women of the Church, the Alliance will determine the best ways to be a useful, involved, intelligent, and helpful presence, serving the Church and supporting the personal and spiritual growth of its constituents.

Today, we are looking carefully and prayerfully at ways in which the National Alliance can continue its strong history of supporting the needs and ministries of the General Convention as well as providing a place of community, connection, and support for the women of the Church. The purpose of the National Alliance of New Church Women still holds: to promote the life of charity among the women of the Church through spiritual development, practical service, and fellowship with women in the world at large.

Stay tuned for the next iteration of the useful work of this organization. ☸

Summary written by Chris Laitner; information gathered by Sue Ditmire, Karen Feil, and Chris Laitner.

Latest Journey Program: Practicing Forgiveness

New Church Journey Programs announced the newest Journey program, “Practicing Forgiveness,” by Sasha Silverman and John Odhner. The first worldwide launch kicks off on October 1, 2017, with the second, winter launch on February 4, 2018.

- For more information:
<https://tinyurl.com/ybp2pe2w>
- To order workbooks:
<https://tinyurl.com/y7wt4x7x>

Contact Michelle Chapin at michelle.chapin@newchurch.org with questions or to help brainstorm ways to run this program in your area.

The SCYL at Convention

BY KURT FEKETE

Thirteen teens participated in the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) program at the convention. It was a wonderful experience for everyone. After the fantastic banner processional, president's address, and opening worship, the youth settled in as they began work on their SCYL worship service to be presented on Monday evening. Yikes! Only a little over twenty-four hours to pull together a meaningful, coherent, spiritual experience for the congregation.

The teens decided to create a service relating the life of a tree to the life of a person. Trees and humans, both starting in darkness as a dormant seed, are born and grow in strength and maturity to become strong and vibrant. They related this in their worship service through acting, video, and



The SCYL escapes the 80s

music. They also showed how storms can blow in and cause pain and damage to trees and humans. But with love and care from others we can recover from challenges and difficulties and become more loving, more wise, and more complete. They really rallied to work very hard as a team to get everything accomplished. I am very proud of the worship service that the teens led.

On Tuesday, they went on an outing to Philadelphia. First, they had to put

on their 80s garb because the highlight of the outing was a trip to a room where they had to "escape the 80s." The group had to work together to solve puzzles and riddles related to the 1980s to unlock boxes and rooms to try to escape in less than one hour. They made it in fifty-six minutes. Yay!

Next they went to Reading Terminal Market and saw historical downtown Philly. On the way back to campus, they stopped at the mall to pick up souvenirs to remember the Philly Convention 2017.

This historic convention was an amazing experience for everyone. Growing in friendship, spirit, and love, the SCYL was active and involved in the whole convention experience. ☸

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.



Peyton shows off her awesome 80s fashion

SCYL President

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was raised as Catholic and had inherited that faith from my father but I also had the Swedenborgian beliefs from my mother.

Even through miles of distance I know that every single person in the SCYL, in the Church, anywhere at all from this community, will be there for me. I have never felt alone or afraid to speak my mind among the people in this community. I have never felt afraid to talk about the fun and frivolous things and I have never felt afraid to talk about the serious things. The Swedenborgian Church has been a safe place for me for my entire life.

I hope that as the SCYL president, and as the voice of teens, I can also use my voice to provide that same feeling to others. I want nothing more than to be a listening ear to each and every issue, to try to find solutions or at least be a shoulder to cry on. I am the president entrusted with planning themes, deciding points of interest, deciding discussion points and activities, and being in charge of the others in the SCYL. But more than a president, I want to be a friend. I want to be a friend to every single participant in the SCYL and I want to be a friend to all of you here.

My parting words are few, and echoed amongst many other presidential speeches before my own. I am

thankful to have been chosen for this position by the others in the youth league, and moreover I am thankful to everyone of you. I'm thankful for any and all donations provided to the SCYL, to those who participate in the sales and auctions in our name, and to everyone who gives us not just emotional support but monetary support. I am thankful for all the love that you have provided for the SCYL, and I am thankful to all of you for encouraging your teenagers—past, present, and future—to join the SCYL and continue sharing their gifts.

Once more, as the voice of the SCYL, I surely want to voice their most prominent feelings as I say: Thank you, thank you, thank you. ☸



The Center For Swedenborgian Studies

Graduation Address: On What Matters Most

BY GARD PERRY

On behalf of the chair and members of the Trustees of CSS, Dean Lawrence, the faculty and staff, and our graduates, welcome! To speak with you today as a member of the Board of Trustees is a privilege and great pleasure.

Perhaps you've heard the one about the minister who, upon reaching the pulpit, takes his watch off and carefully places it on the lectern next to his sermon. A nine year old girl sitting in a pew next to her mother asks, "Mommy, what does it mean when the minister takes off his watch?" Her mother, rolling her eyes, says with exasperation, "Absolutely nothing." On this occasion, I assure you that I will speak for less than fourteen minutes.

As for my title, "On What Matters Most," I offer three ideas: 1) The Swedenborgian Church matters; here we engage our theology in depth, with perspective, on a path toward radical love for the "other" that is so needed today. 2) Leadership matters because we are a spiritual community that requires skillful facilitators to hold the safe and creative space necessary for healthy spiritual community. And, 3) *who you are* and *who you are becoming* matters.

To this third idea I add, "If this is true, what does it *mean*?" I believe your answer to that question is what matters most.

Dean Lawrence has famously referred to his professors at the (then) Swedenborg School of Religion as the "Four Lions." George Dole, Bob Kirven, Cal Turley and Bill Woofenden were a force in Jim's educational journey. I, too, was a student of the Four Lions. On one occasion, in his "Overview

of Swedenborg's Theology," Bob Kirven paused longer than usual, and said, "I am a Swedenborgian, because Swedenborg's theology provides the most complete answers to the most important questions."

I did not know what Bob's questions were, nor could I see the horizon of his answers. I knew his questions were deep and important, though, and that his answers covered a lot of ground.

Bob and his colleagues taught us to find our own questions and how to refine them—in Swedenborg's works and beyond. The question to which I have come is, "What is it that makes us *truly* human?"

I do not have a complete answer to that question, but have come upon suggestions, insight, and imagined possibilities. Our *potential* for becoming *more* truly human is found in a composite of several paragraphs in *Heaven and Hell*.

The deeper levels of the human mind and disposition are . . . [in the pattern of heaven] . . . The Lord flows into each one of us according to heaven's design . . . [so that] we can accept heaven into ourselves . . . The Lord dwells in our inmost self and governs . . . the way to our becoming an image of the Lord . . .

Were Bob Kirven here, I can hear him ask, "If this is true, what does it *mean*?"

My response: Sigmund Freud found that the unconscious contained repressed survival instincts; Carl Jung described a collective unconscious populated by artifacts from ancient cultures across the globe—*that's* more



like it; Emanuel Swedenborg discovered divinity itself within the unconscious of each and every one of us—that *is* it.

To become *conscious* of divinity in our inmost self, to benefit others and ourselves is what matters most.

But we have issues! We need spiritual community in which to accomplish this great work.

The Fryeburg New Church Assembly in Fryeburg, Maine, features a lecture and discussion program at the family camp week every August. On the occasion of which I speak, our lecturer was introduced as a guest of the Assembly and as having been recently ordained by our denomination.

The next person in the circle said, "I believe we are all ministers," in a tone of voice that caused an awkward silence to fall over the circle. Our discussion leader said,

Yes, we are all ministers; however, some are called out of their lives to gain the knowledge, skill, and experience necessary to foster the spiritual well being of others, and to provide the conditions for healthy spiritual community. The commitment to foster the spiritual growth of others is an important aspect of what we celebrate here today.

Henry James, the father, wrote a book called *The Secret of Swedenborg*. It is a difficult read. So difficult that it is widely held that Henry James must have kept the secret to himself!

I once made the attempt to find the secret . . . and failed. However, having the text on my desktop to open from time to time, I gradually came to believe that I found Henry James's secret

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Highlights from the Dean's Report from the Center for Swedenborgian Studies

BY JIM LAWRENCE

Our school of theology just concluded its 151st year in operations: 135 Years as the New Church Theological School and Swedenborg School of Religion in Boston; fourteen Years as the Swedenborgian House of Studies at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, and now two years as the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley.

In our sixteen years on the West Coast, we have enjoyed forty-three completed academic journeys as SHS/CSS graduates (this does not include some students who did not complete studies, nor the many dozens of non-Swedenborgians in Berkeley institutions who have taken our classes). Of our West Coast graduates: twenty have served existing Convention ministries;

ten in chaplaincy ministries; two in another denomination; thirteen in entrepreneurial ministries; and three have simply wanted the experience of a Swedenborgian graduate school education to enhance their careers and lives. The total of vocational destinations is larger than the number of graduates because some have served in more than one category.

We are excited to be working with twelve capable students in various educational paths. For the ordination path (M.Div.) we have Cory Bradford-Watts, Rachel Madjerac, Colin Amato, Nancy Piorkowski, and Dr. Devin Zuber. For the licensed pastor path we have Helen Barler (Puget Sound), Linda Callander (Silver City),

Paul Deming (St. Louis), Christine Campbell (Temenos), and Karen Feil (Chicago). For the Doctor of Ministry path we have Rev. David Brown, and for the Masters of Arts degree we have Jeffrey Adams.

Three big news items this year enriched our institution. We hired our newest professor, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, as assistant professor of sacred texts and traditions and as the new Dorothea



Harvey Professor of Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union. Professor Devin Zuber co-chaired and hosted (and also presented at) the most impressive academic conference ever held in Swedenborgian studies in early June, "Swedenborg and the Arts," which drew attendees and presenters from eleven countries. And after sixteen years in our first home after leaving Boston, we moved—but only across the Quad. We had to carefully dismantle our center space and move into Pacific School of Religion's neo-gothic signature building, Holbrook Hall, where our faculty offices and library were already located.

With the closing of our spring semester, we also celebrate an astounding marker. Dr. George Dole, who concluded four decades of teaching "Swedenborgian Bible" to M.Div., M.A., and L.P. students, is leaving this course and mode of teaching. We are planning on supporting a seven-week course each semester to the church at large in community education, and we hope you will spread the word. Look for information in *the Messenger*! ☸

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

CSS Graduation Address

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of Swedenborg. It lies hidden in the phrase, *Divine Natural*, which occurs numerous times.

The *Divine Natural* conveys the realization that divinity entered the author's literary imagination and his real-world personal relations. Henry James came to reading Swedenborg with a prodigious intellect and a depressed emotional state; in his reading he may have found divinity filling and enlivening his creative life and his social being in the world. And it may have saved his life; indeed, he may have begun to become more truly human.

The Swedenborgian Church matters because here we can practice the

art of becoming more truly human. Leadership matters because we are a spiritual community, and healthy spiritual community requires skillful leadership. And you matter, because who you are, and who you are becoming matters.

The deeper levels of the human mind and disposition are . . . [in the pattern of heaven] . . . The Lord flows into each one of us according to heaven's design . . . [so that] we can accept heaven into ourselves . . . The Lord dwells in our inmost self and governs . . . the way to our becoming an image of the Lord . . .

"If this is true, what does it mean? The answer each of us gives to *this* question is what matters most. ☸

Rev. Dr. Gard Perry in Chair of the Council of Ministers.

Ordination Sermon

What Kind of Messiah Is This?

By Rev. Shada Sullivan

(Mark 5:25–34) *And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."*

Recently, I was watching a television show where a woman felt invisible. She was an otherwise competent and diligent woman, a policewoman even, but whenever she tried to engage with sensors like an automatic doorway, or the soap dispensers or faucets in a bathroom, they wouldn't work. This was annoying and confusing for her. She would even jump up and down in front of the automatic doors, but it was like she wasn't there.

One day, in the course of her work, she made a friend. This friend sat down with her and listened to her story. When she was done talking, the new friend invited her to stand up, and silently offered this woman a hug. It was clearly a relief to her to be seen and held. And lo and behold, when she went into the bathroom, everything worked for

her! It was like she was solid and real again.

This struck me as a modern version of the story in our text today of the woman with the bleeding condition. We have all experienced times of feeling invisible or unseen, and have experienced times when touch or attention have grounded us, reminded us of our own worthiness. I have always loved this Gospel story, and while it is present in all three of the synoptic Gospels, I am partial to this version in Mark,



particularly because of how it is positioned narratively, and what that tells us about healing and relationship.

The woman in this story is unnamed, particularly compared to the synagogue leader, Jairus, who is named directly beforehand, and whose daughter will be healed immediately afterwards. This woman is invisible to the world, suffering, and marginalized. It is likely that she is burdened by constant ritual impurity due to her bleeding condition, experiencing ongoing boundaries around who she would be allowed to touch and who would be allowed to touch her. The text tells us that she had endured much and yet grows worse; she is desperate. She embodies

conflicting impulses like many of us often do: audaciously fighting her way through the crowd, yet also proceeding in stealth, doubting her own worthiness to approach. And then, her hand barely brushes Jesus's clothing and she is immediately healed. A miracle.

We could be forgiven for thinking this might be the end of the story, for she has gotten what she wanted. And indeed it might be, if we were reading a story about a simple miracle worker, and if the point were to simply demonstrate the overflowing magnificence of Jesus's power. But no, the story has much more to say to us than that. Jesus stops and searches for her. The text tells us, "He looked all around." She mattered to him. With all his power, she mattered to him. By this point in the narrative, Jesus has accomplished numerous miracles, driven out demons, healed sicknesses, calmed a storm on the sea. What is one more insignificant person, one more in the crowd? She mattered because, I believe, the narrative is prompting us to wonder, "What kind of Messiah is this?" What kind of kingdom will he bring into being?"

Of course, I cannot help but see my own journey in the story of this woman, identify with her combination of determination and perceived unworthiness. From a place of spiritual hemorrhage, I too took a deep breath and entered into the swirling crowd in an attempt to find healing. I wanted to be able to touch Jesus's clothing, or in Swedenborgian terms, apprehend the essential truth, that I was equal, whole, beloved. And I found that encountering and touching ultimate truths can

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Ordination Sermon

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heal, for they are foundational to our understanding of ourselves; I touched the cloak and learned that my call was not a mistake or a misunderstanding, and that living into my call was not an act of hubris but of providence. I learned of my essential value and my essential wholeness.

Yet, I cannot in good faith belabor this point, for I am well aware of the privileges the have made my own journey much more tolerable than for the woman in this story, and for many women around the world. What I would prefer to focus on is the people and institutions who searched for me in the crowd, who embodied Jesus for me. For we learn from this story that truths alone, no matter how empowering, are not the end-point of the kingdom. For the woman in the text, even though touching Jesus's clothes healed her, her story continued. Jesus stopped and turned around. Being seen by another made her whole in way beyond the physical, just as being seen by others made important foundational truths real for me, allowed me to believe them. Healing is not mechanical but ultimately relational. And so I want to, and need to, thank those who saw me when I doubted that I had any worthiness to approach and fulfill my calling to ordained ministry.

My family, my parents, in-laws, husband, and children, thank you for seeing me. My cohorts, friends, and support circles, thank you for seeing me. New Church Live, thank you for seeing me. Lutheran Theological Seminary at Philadelphia, thank you for seeing me. Gloria Dei Church, thank you for seeing me. Center for Swedenborgian Studies, and the Swedenborgian Church of North America, thank you for seeing me. You made God's love real for me; you challenged me because you believed in me; you helped

me see that I could heal myself, that my own faith could make me whole.

Now, as we celebrate 200 years of the New Church, of the Swedenborgian movement in this land, I wish to broaden our view even wider, if I might, to see what this story might have to say to the Church, in all its many branches and manifestations. If, in George Dole's phrasing, the Bible is "the story of us," then this story of Jesus and the bleeding woman has much to say on this occasion.

Scholars believe the placement of this story in the gospel of Mark is very intentional. The gospel itself is roughly divided into two halves: the first a "movement of power" and the second a "movement of glory."



The first movement is filled with Jesus' miraculous works—healing fever, leprosy, paralysis, casting out demons, walking on water. Indeed, the verse directly before our reading today tells us that "all the people were amazed." They marveled at him, with good reason. He was doing amazing things.

The second movement, however, is a steady march toward the cross. Jesus begins to predict his death, but the disciples cannot hear it. They are more preoccupied with who will sit at Jesus right hand in glory. But in the end they cannot prevent the death of their beloved teacher and, worse still, they fall asleep at Gethsemane, they disown him, they scatter, and it is the women

who witness where this once mighty miracle worker was laid.

The operative idea behind this two-fold structure is the notion that the Messiah cannot be understood apart from the passion. The "one who comes" cannot be understood simply in terms of earthly power, in terms of magic tricks. For the loss of such a miracle worker as that would indeed have been a shame, but that is all it would have been. It would not have been sacrifice, and it would not have meant resurrection. The second movement makes the case that the kingdom of God, and thus Jesus' true identity, turns not on power as we would understand it but the on the counter-intuitive power of transformation. True power comes, not from might, but instead from power's relinquishment, for in the kingdom the last shall be first. True power comes from love.

The story of the woman, then, comes three-quarters of the way through the first movement, the movement of power. Jesus is still busy working miracles, but the miracles themselves are starting to actively foreshadow what is to come. The Greek word *sozo* used here, often translated to mean "to heal," literally means "to save," and it is a word that is prominently used in the crucifixion story, when Jesus is sarcastically invited to "save himself" and come down from the cross. Contemporary hearers of the Gospel would have noticed the repetition and the irony, would have understood that Jesus saving himself missed the entire point, would have understood that power for its own sake could never usher in the kingdom, but rather is found in relational servant-hood. We are prompted to notice that Jesus stopping in the midst of the crowd, turning around and looking for the woman, prefigures the crucifixion, that standing alone in the swirling crowd prefigures hanging alone on the cross, eyes searching for you and me and every

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individual soul, heart reaching across time. Jesus turned to the woman because the incarnational mission was to overcome the divide that was separating the human and the divine, the incarnational mission was to become her and all her human brothers and sisters, over and over and over again throughout his life via temptations, for entering into human suffering is how the divine and the human are united. Jesus chose not to save himself because his sacrifice was an act of radical and intentional relationality, for the point of both the cross and the miracles was not a taking away of suffering but an entering into it, human and divine together.

In Swedenborg's *Heavenly Secrets* §1812, we read,

The Lord however, in all his conflicts brought about by temptations, never fought out of self-love, that is, for Himself, but for all throughout the universe. He did not fight therefore to become the greatest in heaven, for that is contrary to Divine Love. He scarcely did so to become the least. He fought solely so that all others might become something and be saved.

The healing, the salvation, is not complete without the turning around and seeing, is not complete unless those healed are able to meet God's gaze, for the grace is in the love itself.

So the question, then, to us as a church is, where do we find ourselves in this story? As an organization that would prayerfully attempt to be a conduit for the coming of the Kingdom, to have a part in the birthing of the New Jerusalem and the embodiment of God in this world here and now—how are we finding ourselves represented within this crowd, within this story? Are we charging forth, attempting to not be distracted from our perceived goals? Are we mildly cynical, incredulous, or protective like the disciples? Do we

kind of not believe we should even be here, like the woman? Or are we like the pausing Jesus, mindfully searching for those who are suffering? Are we ourselves enacting the incarnation, are we turning around, looking for those who have been pushing against the crowd for so long, hemorrhaging their spirit day-by-day in a world that is systematically against them. Are we actively lifting people up so that they might meet the gaze of God?

These are important questions, but still, I feel I must push us even one step further, for I cannot forget the premise of my own sermon, now can I? In our righteous pausing, searching and lifting up of others, can we also remember the relinquishment of power, the relational servant-hood? For, we must remember that the hemorrhaging woman knew what she needed. The experts had failed her for twelve years, they had nothing to offer. She instead was the expert on her own experience, her own struggle. There are many in this world who have been struggling for a long time, pushing against the crowd. We do not need to tell them anything about the reality of the world, or the grace of God. Likewise, Jesus didn't tell this woman what she needed to do (or who she needed to read). Rather, he enfolded her into his cosmic family calling her "daughter" and telling her "your faith has made you whole." His words were not didactic, they were about relationship, empowerment, and release. In the presence of the incarnation of God, her faith was identified as a necessary part of the healing, for we remember, miracle and passion, healing and relationship, must be understood as one. We are thus challenged: Can we as people who follow the Swedenborgian faith, or any faith or ideology, can we relinquish our secret sense of chosenness, of secret knowing, of rightness? Can we relinquish our very desire to be the New Church, to be special? Oh,

how can I ask that? It's too much. Let me gather up the words and put them back in my mouth! But yet this question is a natural and unavoidable consequence of bringing the kingdom into being. With both courage and trepidation we must wonder, is it possible that when we give up our hearts desire, when we give up our yearning and instead just show up to do the work in joy and wonder and gratitude, we often times find a greater fulfillment than could have ever been imagined. Can we fight, as the Lord did, solely so that others might "become something?" The last shall be first. This is not disparagement, this is not a bait-and-switch, it is mercy, it is resurrection, it is heaven.

What kind of Messiah is this? What kind of church are we? The human predicament, to borrow Paul Tillich's phrase, is that of estrangement and invisibility, from ourselves, from each other, and we imagine, from God. Yet, the cloak that we as a church would endeavor to wear, the ultimate truths we would endeavor to live, tell us instead of a God who stopped and turned around, who counters invisibility with attention and solidarity, who looks for us, comes to us, and wants all people in the universe to "become something," to become blessed and whole. How will we be an extension of that mission? Who are we looking for? Who do we have eyes to see?

We hear from Swedenborg about the angels in *Heavenly Secrets* §10130 that

All turn their eyes towards those they love. Those who love the Lord turn their eyes towards the Lord as the Sun; those who love the neighbor with love received from the Lord turn their eyes towards the Lord as the Moon . . . And what is astonishing, whichever way they face, that is, whichever of the four quarters they turn towards, they still behold the Lord in front of them.

Amen. ☪

Swedenborgians Come Together

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schedules, an outing was offered on the day before the official start of the convention, on Saturday, July 8. Seventy or eighty people arrived early to tour Bryn Athyn Cathedral, Pitcairn Museum, and the Lord's New Church. This was a new experience for many, and there was much interest in the structure and history of these two sister denominations. Rev. Tom and Nina Kline hosted everyone at the convention to their lovely home for an al fresco dinner.

On Saturday evening, Rev. Susannah Currie and other members of the In Company with Angels board introduced the Tiffany stained-glass angel window series titled "Angels Representing Seven Churches" and showed the film *Angels Restored* and the premiere of *Angels Rediscovered*, a video of the story of the windows. (Go to <https://tinyurl.com/ya9e7b5n> for more information.)

Sunday morning began with President Rev. Jane Siebert opening the Word, signifying the commencement of this annual meeting, followed by the traditional procession of banners, wherein every society and affiliate was represented; Polly and Kevin Baxter had young people create banners for those that didn't have them. People marveled at just how many there were.

Sunday worship followed, led by Rev. Susannah Currie, the 2017 Convention Minister (page 96).

Rev. Kevin Baxter presented a program illustrating the history of the first meeting of the General Convention, which was held in Philadelphia in 1817, and then President Siebert favored the assembled with her address, expressing her sense of excitement and hope as she finishes her first year as president (page 95).

After lunch, a panel consisting of Rev. Jim Lawrence and Rev. Jenn Tafel from the General Convention, Rev. David Lindrooth and Ruth Clausen from the General Church, and Rev. Hugh Odhner and Dawn Potts from the Lord's New Church presented histories and future hopes for their respective denominations.

The keynote speaker, Diana Butler Bass, spoke next about gratitude, the

a candle in remembrance of family and friends who have passed fully into the spiritual world.

The second round of mini-courses ran on Tuesday morning, followed by the annual meeting of the New Church Theological School (DBA the Center for Swedenborgian Studies at the Graduate Theological Union). The dean, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, gave a short talk outlining the history of the school since moving to Berkeley, California, in 2000, and shared a little about the paths of the graduates since then and the current students (page 109). The annual meeting is also the occasion for graduation, and Rev. Gard Perry, a CSS trustee, gave the graduation address (page 108). Shada Sullivan, who would be



Folks from all three denominations of the Church of the New Jerusalem (Swedenborgian) shared a meal and conversation at the Kline's.

subject of her forthcoming book.

Sunday concluded with a barbecue and worship service at Temenos Retreat Center, the Swedenborgian Church in West Chester. General Church and Lord's New Church members were invited to both the barbecue and the other opening day events, and many attended, meeting and talking with General Convention folks.

The morning worship service on Monday was presented by the Women's Alliance, with a sermon by Rev. Jenny Caughman (page 102). A presentation on the history of the Women's Alliance followed (page 104).

The first business session convened after the morning break (page 99), followed by mini-courses in the afternoon.

The Monday evening worship service was created and led by Swedenborg Church Youth League, under the leadership of Kurt Fekete, youth director of the Church (page 106).

Tuesday morning began with the annual Memorial Worship Service, led by Rev. Kevin Baxter. Worshipers were invited to come forward and light

ordained that evening and Karen Feil, director of the Chicago Swedenborgian Library, received the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies.

The second business session transpired on Tuesday afternoon, concluding the official business of the convention.

The convention activities concluded with the ordination service, held at the First Presbyterian Church of West Chester. Shada Sullivan was ordained in a traditional ceremony led by Rev. Jane Siebert. Ministers selected by Shada came forward to lay hands on her as she knelt to be ordained, continuing a line of ordination leading back to the beginning. Rev. Sullivan received her stole and doctrinal books from Rev. Siebert before receiving a standing ovation from the more than 200 in attendance. This was a communion service, so Rev. Sullivan offered the bread and the wine in her first official act as a minister.

The convention ended with the ordination service, and people said their goodbyes throughout the following day. ☿

A Short History of Convention

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free marketplace of religion in the United States. Not only did the dominant Protestant mainlines all grow significantly, but hundreds of schisms and new ecclesiastical movements shaped the contours of this highly religious period, and Swedenborgians were a part of it, with the General Convention of the New Jerusalem forming into an organized denominational movement in 1817.

There would be two more branches arcing off the trunk of Swedenborg's writings as the witness of and testifier to a New Christianity. The General Church of the New Jerusalem formally took shape in 1890, and The Lord's New Church Which Is Nova Hierosolyma formally took shape in 1937.

All three of these branches sprouted right here in the greater Philadelphia area. Despite distinctive traits among the three American branches, which all have some level of international profiles, there is also a deep shared love of the foundational source that comes through the writings of the Christian revelator Emanuel Swedenborg. And it is a special delight to share both this stage and this history together with representatives from each branch to present some highlights of *Living Our History: Swedenborgianism in North America, 1817–2017*.

Swedenborgianism First Organized in France and Sweden

But it all did begin in Europe, and let's glimpse what happened before the first Swedenborg lecture occurred on American soil. Esoteric French Freemasonry was the very first organizational toe-hold for the writings of Swedenborg. The Swedenborg Rite, or Rite of Swedenborg, was a fraternal order modeled on Freemasonry and based on Swedenborgian ideas. Comprised of six degrees (Apprentice,

Fellow Craft, Master Neophyte, Illuminated Theosophite, Blue Brother, and Red Brother), it was created in Avignon in 1773 by the Marquis de Thorn and involved the well-known figures Benedict Chasanier and Abbe Perne-ty. The Swedenborg Rite order initially focused heavily on social engagements in those Revolutionary times, but as its politics overwhelmed its spirituality in the public eye political ideology was eventually dropped from the rite. This earliest organizational form of Swedenborgianism only lasted a decade but was reprised a century later as a hermetic organization, that one fading out in the early twentieth century. In 1982, a patent of the Swedenborg Rite was transmitted by the English Freemason Desmond Bourke, in his office at the British Museum, to Masonic author Michele Moramarco, who after revising the rituals by Bourke's permission revived that tradition in Italy under the title of "Antico Rito Noachita" ("Ancient Noachide Rite"). My moles tell me there are a few persons today involved in a contemporary freemasonry Rite of Swedenborg.

Carl Bernhard Wadström, born in 1746, converted as a young man to Swedenborg's view of Christianity through his engagements with the



*Wadström Organizes
in Sweden*

first Swedish publishing efforts, started a society in 1779 in Norköping, Sweden. But he's famous as an emigrant to England where he became a central figure in the British abolition movement. He worked to establish a colony in Africa built on agricultural trade as an alternative to slavery. His anti-slavery

program was heavily influenced by his reading of Swedenborg, as he understood Swedenborg as saying the "African race" was "in greater enlightenment than others on this earth, since they are such that they think more interiorly, and so receive truths and acknowledge them" (*A Treatise concerning the Last Judgment*, §118) and that there existed a hidden African Church, whose members could naturally comprehend the highest truths.

Wadström's most famous work was his two-part abolitionist classic *An Essay on Colonization, particularly applied to the Western Coast of Africa, with some Free Thoughts on Cultivation and Commerce* (1794–95) which exposed the cruelties of slavery and appealed to rational thought on how world economies would be stronger without slavery. The book made Wadström one of the leading voices of abolitionism in Britain and won much recognition around Europe, being translated into German and French. Wadström relocated to Paris in 1795, where he was made an honorary citizen and where he continued to provide leadership against slavery and for free colonies.

Ecclesiastical Swedenborgianism Organized First in England

Swedenborgians have been categorized in numerous ways by religious historians and history-of-Christianity scholars. We have often been grouped with the Protestant dissenting tradition in England, where organized Swedenborgianism began. In the European model of national churches, only England had at that time developed a broad policy of dissenters, and Swedenborgians are frequently grouped with better known movements such as Puritans, Baptists, and Quakers and lesser known movements such as the Muggletonians, Grindletonians, and Levellers. Other scholars prefer shaping a category called the "spiritual Reformation"

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as a sixth wave of the Protestant Reformation, and prominent here are Quakers, Theosophists, and Swedenborgians. Still yet another group of historians, and perhaps the most common one today, feel the framework of New Religious Movements is the category for Swedenborgians, especially in the American context, and we are placed alongside such nineteenth century movements as Mormons, Seventh Day Adventists, and Christian Scientists. Swedenborgians have generally regarded themselves as a wholly new church and have called themselves the New Church, but the interpretations as to what that means in terms of Christianity in general covers a spectrum that ranges from replacing other churches to being part of the yeast for the rising of all churches.

But factually, the denomination began as a dissenting tradition in England formed as the General Conference of the New Jerusalem (1787). William & Catherine Blake signed the roll in the incipient meeting, and the first ordained minister was a Methodist minister, Rev. James Hindmarsh. They drew lots as a way to get the clergy ranks going.

Earliest Organizer in America: Francis Bailey, Revolutionary Printer

As one wag once cracked, "Swedenborgians believe in salvation by publication," and it was surely prescient that the first significant active Swedenborgian in America was not only a printer, but a great Revolutionary War printer: Francis Bailey. He was quite the Revolution radical, fighting British taxes vehemently via his press. Originally from Ireland, he was used to fighting the British, and he published for many years the *Freeman's Journal*, which he continued to publish from

Pennsylvania with a large international subscription base. He was the printer to whom the Founding Fathers turned to publish the Articles of Confederation (the first American constitution). And he also started the very first Swedenborg reading circle; he began printing the first Swedenborgian tract literature in America and the first American editions of Swedenborg's writings. His political radicalism helped his printing business thrive, but his religious radicalism severely damaged his clientele base over time.

First American Convention, 1817: Held in "Nunc Licet" Temple

That work of reading circles evolved into a network of societies that evolved into churches with religious services. Philadelphia was ground zero for the first quarter century, with the most groups, though the church in Baltimore had the most members of a single church. Quakers and Swedenborgians



Rev. John Hargrove (1750–1839): first American ordained Swedenborgian minister; first president of "the Convention";

got along well, both being drawn to a powerful idea of the inner spiritual dimension of personhood, and the most significant channel of conversions into the new fledgling Swedenborgian societies were Quakers, a tradition that was about a 150 years old at that time. The first Swedenborgian church building in Philadelphia opened on New Year's Day 1817, was modeled after the Nunc Licet Temple described in *True Christian Religion* 508:

One day a magnificent church building appeared to me; it was square in plan with a roof like a crown, with arches above and a raised parapet running around . . . Later, when I got closer, I saw there was an inscription over the door:

Nunc Licet [Now It Is Permitted]. This meant that now it is permitted to enter with the understanding into the mysteries of faith.

As many societies had cropped up around the eastern seaboard, the idea was sprung to have a general convention of representatives from the many groups, and they met in May of 1817 in the new Nunc Licet Temple. It is this event that we commemorate at this bicentennial 200th convention.

Johnny Appleseed: Swedenborgian Missionary

As the new Swedenborgian outreach into nineteenth-century thought sprouted vigorously, a lot of apple trees were also sprouting in the westward expansion of Euro-American culture, and this double-sprouting occurred through the work of Swedenborgianism's most legendary missionary, John Chapman (1774–1845). Better known as Johnny Appleseed, the itinerant nurseryman crisscrossed countless thousands of miles in the four decades he worked. American law required there to be fifty apple trees per homestead, and that's where John came in. On his many plots of land, especially in Ohio and Indiana, he raised thousands of small groves of saplings that could be transported and replanted for the incoming settlers. It is not known how many Swedenborgian readers he developed, but his religion was known far and wide, and the Midwest was a stronghold of early Swedenborgianism.



Herding Cats: A Centralized Convention

As the fledgling new religion began to expand ten-fold and more in a

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largely free, unplanned, and entrepreneurial fashion, decisions were needed on whether the widespread and largely independent societies should harness themselves into a more connected, incorporated denomination. Viewpoints on the form and structure of church government and even on whether clergy were needed varied considerably, and debates were fierce.

In retrospect, Thomas Worcester was the single most impactful personality and mind for General Convention in the nineteenth century. Founder and pastor for forty years of the Boston Church and also founding visionary and president of what became and remains the theological school for General Convention, in 1838 Worcester tried to impose an episcopal form of church government upon the diffuse gaggle of Swedenborgian congregations. In what infamously became known as “the squeezing rule,” Worcester engineered at the twenty-second convention an edict requiring all societies to become organized according to a new Rule of Order by the following year or be dropped from the rolls of Convention. All heaven broke loose with schisms and new regional conventions, called the Western Convention and the Central Convention, to rival the New England-centered General Convention, called by some the Eastern Convention. The Western Convention represented the least interest in centralized government, and the Central Convention represented the greatest commitment to centralized government.

It took decades for it all to settle

down, and when it did, the spirit of the General Convention insisted on a decentralized congregational polity over a centralized episcopal one, but the core of the Central Convention became a sprouting root leading to the eventual secession in 1890 that became the General Church, with an episcopal form of governance.

Tempestuous Times in Religious America

Nineteenth century America witnessed a profusion of new branches in Christianity—more than a hundred schisms and new movements, which included the Swedenborgian branches. Polemics and apologetics dominated discourse, and Swedenborgians were in the thick of it. We were known especially for our commitments to the afterlife, a oneness approach to the Trinity that inveighed against a tri-personal interpretation of the Godhead, a view of a lived regeneration rather than a fixed salvation, and a key to unlocking the inner sense scripture wherein a clarity of spiritual life becomes manifest.

Two of the most significant episodes in American religion in those decades were spiritualism and the slavery issue, in both of which one Swedenborgian was the most prominent of all: the brother of a direct ancestor of the 41st and 43rd U.S. presidents, whom we like to call George I. Arguably the highest profile mainline intellectual to convert to Swedenborgianism, the New York University scholar became engrossed by the evidence he

saw in the new spiritualism, the new psychics and seers, especially Andrew Jackson Davis. He led the charge within Swedenborgianism to accept that the experience granted to Swedenborg was becoming accessible more widely in the New Age, and he also became a prominent intellectual defending spiritualism more largely in the culture. He changed his mind, however, after becoming disenchanted with Davis and decided the conservative and cautious position was best, but the spiritualist craze was a big story in American culture at the time, and Swedenborgians were caught up in it in visible ways.

George Bush also took the lead in spurring Swedenborgians to figure out where they were on the slavery question. Bush felt by the late 1840s that the general silence in the Swedenborgian Church on slavery could not be excused, and he shaped a public running dialog in the *New-Church Repository* in a series spanning two years and called “Aphorisms on Abolition and Slavery.” It represents the only systematic Swedenborgian conversation on the slavery question in Antebellum America.

In so many denominations, educational visions took a central role in producing the right kind of new world,

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Thomas Worcester (d. 1878)
 • Founder and pastor of the Boston Church
 • President of Convention
 • Chief architect of Convention
 • Founder, first president of theological school



George Bush “the first” (d. 1859)



New Church Theological School, founded in 1866

A Short History of Convention

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as hundreds of colleges and seminaries were founded. General Convention launched its two primary educational institutions during this time with Urbana College, as it was then called, and the New Church Theological School, as it was then called.

Peaks (so far . . .)

In terms of statistics, General Convention's peaks for societies, members, and ministers occurred at the halfway point in our 200-year history. Like so many of our spiritual co-religionists, we are grappling with the challenges of institutional forms of engaging the spiritual needs and potentialities in our cultural and social milieu. It is clear from social scientific studies of American religion at the end of the nineteenth century that Swedenborg and Swedenborgians had finally achieved household name status from about 1885 through 1910.

It is commonly remarked by religious studies scholars of American culture that Swedenborgianism has probably the biggest disparity between numerical size and reach into cultural thought. As Yale church history professor Sydney Ahlstrom writes,

Of all the unconventional currents streaming through the many levels of American religion during [the nineteenth century], none proved attractive to more diverse types of dissenters from established denominations than those which stemmed from Emanuel Swedenborg. His influence was seen everywhere: in Transcendentalism and at Brook Farm, in spiritualism and the free love movement, in the craze for communitarian experiments, in faith healing, mesmerism, and a half-dozen medical cults; among great intellectuals, crude charlatans, and innumerable frontier quacks.

Our Ever-Present Famous Names List

Indeed, the reach of Swedenborgian thought has always been immensely greater than the numerical size of its church movements. Swedenborg is being studied anew in the past quarter-century as his significance in history across so many major cultural figures, especially in literature and art, has evolved into a now solidly entrenched author affecting a somewhat spectacular array of fields. Whereas his household name level of recognition waned dramatically throughout much of the twentieth century, it began to rise again, especially in higher education starting in the 1970s and then gaining much ground in the 1990s and continuing today.

Today, it would be a rare American religion historian and a rare modern literature or modern art historian who would not be familiar with the catalytic visionary Swedenborgian tradition. The church movements have not been irrelevant to this recovery, since Swedenborg's writings have been kept in widely available editions by adherents to the three American branches.

Pioneers in Pluralism and Ecumenicity

The Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893 made an immense impression on American consciousness, and the Parliament of the World's Religions held in association with it attracted world-wide attention. It was the brainchild of prominent Chicago lawyer and

Swedenborgian Charles Carroll Bonney, once on the short list for Supreme Court nominees and legendary for his work in fair labor practices for new immigrants.

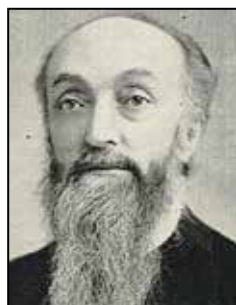
Bonney's original address constructed a pluralist vision from Swedenborgian theology. In this picture Bonney is seated in the large high chair presiding over a plenary session. Bonney later wrote, "During the organization and conduct of the World's Congresses of 1893, I was led to feel that all my life had been a preparation for this work; and that in a thousand ways provision had been made for its extraordinary needs." Historian Richard Seager refers to Bonney's inspiration and organizational work as "the dawn of religious pluralism." Of the 250 congresses, the World Parliament of Religions is the only one that is still going today. It was first revived at its centennial in 1993, and the planning committee expressly asked for Swedenborgian participation because, in the words of the request letter, "We owe Swedenborgians so much." Several gatherings have occurred since then, such as the 2015 gathering in Salt Lake City that drew nearly 10,000 attendees from seventy-three countries, thirty major religions, and 548 sub-traditions.

The National Council of Churches (NCC) formed in 1950 in the US largely as a movement to address social concerns together as Christians. Originally, thirty-two communions joined, though five more have been added since then, including the Swedenborgian Church of North America, which was accepted in 1967 despite having a membership total less than the usual threshold of 50,000 members. A recent book on the *New York Times* Bestseller List, *The Secret History of the World* by Mark Booth remarks that the Swedenborgian Church is the only esoteric or edgy spiritual tradition that has been included in the NCC

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*Ralph Waldo Emerson
praised Swedenborg*



Charles Carroll Bonney

A Short History of Convention

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membership. Spearheaded by then-Convention President Erni Martin and Swedenborg School of Religion professor Robert Kirven, the NCC membership was deeply impressed by the theological presentations and membership application documents. In recent times Rev. Robert McCluskey and Rev. Dr. David Fekete have served tirelessly as representatives and have written many NCC-related articles for *the Messenger*.

Watershed Standing Resolution on Ordination Adopted in 1986

At the 1986 annual meeting of the Council of Ministers, the following standing resolution was adopted unanimously: "In light of the inclusiveness of the vision of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, from which our theological perspective is drawn, the Council of Ministers believes that the central consideration in evaluating requests for ordination is the quality of the ministry that it believes the individual is capable of providing."

In other words, Convention does not ordain women or men, straight people or gay people, people of a particular race, ethnicity, or class; it ordains individuals who are prepared and trained to provide skillful ministry in a world of complex spiritual needs.

20th and 21st Century Initiatives

The numerical strength of General Convention has slowly declined for the past 100 years, a national pattern for organized religion. The effort to find new expressions and uses has been persistent and has bloomed new forms of worship, spiritual articulations, and ministry in addition to long-serving traditional expressions. The multi-generational family camps have proven immensely popular, and for a time many new ministries have shaped new

The Price of Vision

A 7-week online course with Professor George Dole

Weekly 90-Minute Face-to-Face Online Sessions

October 2 through November 13, 2017

Monday afternoons, 1:30–3:00 PM EST

Enrollment limited to 6 students

Course Cost: \$75

Course Overview: Before *Arcana Coelestia*, Emanuel Swedenborg was working on a writing known as *The Word Explained*. This deep immersion into the Bible as revelatory in a new way was his first major effort to respond to his calling vision. At the beginning of the work, Swedenborg writes like a convinced and devout Lutheran, but that soon changes in an exciting and illuminating way. Prof. Dole has been writing a new book on this little studied but revealing multi-volume work, and he has uncovered a profound personal process occurring within the Swedish sage. It lies in an intense dialog between Swedenborg's emerging new faith and his rational faculties. This course is designed to let students come into a conversation with this new study and writing and explore some powerful questions. This is truly a ground breaking work—and you can be in on the first effort to bring it to the world.

Course Requirements

- Moderate-length readings for each week
- No written assignments
- Face-to-Face class meeting via a no cost web-based video conferencing platform
- Read the weekly material, contemplate the subject and come ready to discuss with your classmates and Professor Dole

To enroll, email the Center for Swedenborgian Studies: cssinfo@gtu.edu

wineskins for a new abundance.

Restarts and new starts have often given new hope, many Convention Swedenborgians have been philosophical about the larger trend of decline—musing that perhaps the organized New Church has fulfilled a specific purpose already in Divine Providence and that our job is to continue trying, praying, and celebrating the spiritual gifts of the new Christianity, keeping open hearts and minds for how we can contribute to the unfolding New Church and New Age. ☸

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies and Assistant Professor of Spirituality and Historical Studies at the Graduate Theological Union.

Convention Business Report

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- General Council: Lay members, Lon Elmer and Barb Halle; Clergy member, Rev. Junchol Lee
- Communication Support Unit: Katie Rienstra Pruiett
- Education Support Unit: Paul Deming
- Information Management Support Unit: Rev. Kevin Baxter
- Financial & Physical Resources Support Unit: Carl Helm
- Ministries Support Unit: Tory Henderson and Marjie Leas
- Committee on Admission to the

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Passages

Deaths

Judy (Frankenberger) Ziegler, wife of Herb Ziegler, editor of *the Messenger*, passed fully into the spiritual world at age 71, on July 8, 2017. Judy was a talented artist and graphic designer. She resided with Herb at the same address in Cambridge, Massachusetts, since 1975. They were married in 1969 after a romance of four years that began on a blind date at a Rolling Stones concert in 1965. They were married for forty-eight years.



Judy was born in Cincinnati and attended Walnut Hills High School there. She received a BFA from Carnegie Mellon University in 1969. She was a graphic designer for the Boston 200 Bicentennial celebration and worked at the Experimental Etching Studio in Boston in the seventies. Later, she helped found the Tudor Street Etching Studio in Cambridge and designed two acclaimed posters for the Endangered Animal series published by the Graphic Workshop. She expanded her creative work to include installation art, book art and letterpress art using handset type, which enabled her to combine her love of paper, typography, printmaking, and words.

Judy's art was inspired by craftsmanship of all kinds. She loved process and execution as much as the end result. She studied bookbinding, Japanese woodblock printing, and letterpress printing and attended classes at Haystack Mountain School of Crafts in Deer Isle, Maine. Her impeccable sense of design informed everything she made: she was confident about composition, color, and the power of shapes, lines, and letterforms.

All her life Judy was a knitter.

Knitting calmed her and kept her hands that always wanted to be making something busy. She made beautiful sweaters, usually with designs that she created, as well as "fruit" hats for infants, gloves, stockings, and scarves.

Judy was loved and respected by her friends and family for her unfailing and unconditional love, patient kindness, and caring for others. She had a sweet and gentle nature that everyone, even people she knew only briefly, noticed and responded to. Children she knew loved her, returning the gentle and intense love she showered on them. Judy's smile was so big and so genuine that she glowed when she smiled; her eyes sparkled and her mouth opened wide in unself-conscious and unrestrained joy. She has received an outpouring of loving remembrance from family, friends, and acquaintances.

Judy was devoted to her family. Her younger sister, Paula, with whom she was able to share her deepest self, died tragically in an automobile accident at the age of 26. Herb and Judy shared their home with Judy's much younger brother, Doug, when he needed their support and they helped him as he completed his high school education in Cambridge.

Judy took courses at the Harvard University Extension College and Harvard Summer School to expand her knowledge of art, art history, art criticism, and art curating, as well as economic and political history. She was particularly interested in Japanese cultural history and took many courses in that field.

Judy was troubled by discord, hatred, cruelty, self-aggrandizement, selfishness, racism, classism, sexism, and unkindness in any form. Nevertheless, she went out into the world every day and engaged in it and tried to make it a better place. She felt a solemn obligation to be useful and contribute what she could to help others.

Judy was deeply spiritual. She was

devoted to a daily practice of Bible study and religious readings. She felt the presence of God, and through God, a deep connection to all of humanity. At the end of her earthly journey, her faith helped her find peace. ☩

Convention Business Report

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Ministry: Page Morahan

- Nominating Committee:
Bill Coffman
- Center for Swedenborgian Studies Board, representative class:
Rev. Alison Longstaff Moore,
Rev. Dr. Gard Perry

The Creekside Church, in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania, having been voted into the Middle Atlantic Association, was formally welcomed into the denomination; Rev. Julie Conaron and two of the members of the church were present to receive joyous applause.

President Siebert celebrated gifts from the Michigan Association for \$2000, the LaPorte Church for \$1513, and the Wayfarers Chapel for \$5000.

The Rev. Dr. James Lawrence rose to extend a formal invitation from the Pacific Coast Association for Convention 2018 in California's Bay Area.

Post-Convention GC Meeting

The Council approved the following appointments:

- Wayfarers Chapel:
Shelley Dolley, Todd Board
- Investment Committee:
Pete Toot, Bob Perry
- Retirement Committee:
Meredith Conant Piotti
- Building Fund: Betsy Aldridge
- Swedenborgian Community Online: Tom Muller

The Council confirmed the election by the CSS Annual Meeting of Rev. Anna Woofenden and Rev. Jenny Caughman to the Board of Trustees of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, at-large class. ☩

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.

SCYL President Riley Tishma's Convention Address

The Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) has been working very hard over the course of many years to help the teenage youth of the Church to feel as though they have an impactful place on the outcomes and efforts of the Church.

I find myself very honored and blessed to be able to stand as representative of this year's SCYL. I, as the SCYL president, am entrusted with a lot of responsibilities—being in charge of planning themes for retreats, coming up with new ways to raise funds, trying to help all of the teens contribute something new and special to our group of kids. But I also am entrusted with something vastly more important: I am entrusted to be the voice of the SCYL. I am the one who has to speak on their behalf to the youth director, Kurt Fekete, to any adults, who have millions of questions, and to you all here. It is a true privilege, and something I will not take for granted.

As I consider my time in the SCYL, I think of the things that have stuck with

me. Not just the emotional things, but the fun things too. I have been a part of this Church since before I was born. Even in my mother's womb back in the glory



days of 1999, I knew I was a part of something special. I had always felt at home at Almont New Church Assembly, even from the millions of miles away when I was at home. It was always an exciting time to travel to camp, the almost nine-hour drive from St. Louis, to Alenton, Michigan. Even as I grew older, camp was excit-

ing because it was the time for me to be finally at home. This is true anywhere that I find the SCYL and the Swedenborgian Church. Anywhere those people are has become home for me. I can consider most of the members of SCYL to be some of my closest friends, practically family. I find that to be the most beautiful thing of all.

Earlier in this convention, our president, Rev. Jane Siebert, talked about how the Swedenborgian Church is made in unity and in acceptance. That's one of the most beautiful things about it. I

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