



## Seeking World Peace in Difficult Times Swedenborgian Church of North America is Represented in the National Council of Church's Peace Pilgrimage to the Middle East

BY RICHARD L. TAFEL

Early in September, 2017, nine delegates representing the leadership of the National Council of Churches in Christ (NCCC/USA) engaged in a peace pilgrimage to the Middle East with six goals:

- To bear witness to peace in the region
- To express solidarity with Middle East Christians
- To engage in interreligious dialogue for peace and justice
- To commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Occupation (occupied Palestinian territories)
- To build and strengthen relationships with regional partners
- To carry out fact-finding, observe the current situation, and explore opportunities for advocacy

Delegates on the trip represented the Friends, the United Methodists, the Baptist Alliance, the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, the Armenian Church of North America, and the associate general secretary and the general secretaries of the National Council of Churches. I joined, representing the Swedenborgian Church of North America and as a convener of the NCC Muslim-Christian Dialogues.

The leadership team for the trip first

stopped in Lebanon to meet with the Middle East Council of Churches. The entire group then met in Cairo, Egypt. Over September 8–16, we engaged in twenty-eight meetings with leaders throughout the Middle East.

### Egypt

In Egypt, we met with Christian Protestant leaders. They wanted to share with us the state of persecution that they felt. Many shared their relief that the current president of Egypt had taken over the nation in a military coup. They felt that had the preceding president (whose power base was with the Muslim Brotherhood) stayed in power that they would have become refugees like Christians in Syria and Libya. As in any group of church leaders, a variety of opinions were shared, but we had a great discussion. I found the support for the current president as eye opening.

### Coptic Church

After our meeting with a variety of Christian leaders, we then met with Bishop Thomas, a leader of the Coptic Church of Egypt, who serves St. Peter and Paul's Church in Cairo. On December 11, 2016, a suicide bomber ran into the sanctuary and blew up twenty-nine worshipers, all but one woman, as he entered the women's side of

the church.

Our visit was meant to show solidarity with his church. We worshiped there and had a good meeting. He then



*Rev. Tafel with Bishop Thomas, head of the Coptic Orthodox diocese of Qusia, at St. Peter and Paul's Church.*

showed us the damage in the sanctuary from the large ball bearings the attacker had in his bag that shot throughout the church and blew off the wooden ceiling. Of all our visits in the Middle East, this one was the most powerful. The power came in the Bishop's telling us that those hurt in the blast announced their forgiveness of the attacker, and that all Christians in Egypt must be ready for martyrdom and not hate their fellow countrymen.

### President of Egypt

This meeting was followed by a formal meeting with the president of Egypt. Our visit made its way to the

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## The Editor's Desk

This month, the editor takes a break from his column to make room for important announcements.

—Herb Ziegler

## CSS Students' Learning Trip to Sweden

This January a group of six students and faculty from our Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) will travel to snowy, cold Sweden for a week of contextual learning about Emanuel Swedenborg. The seven-day course, running January 8–January 15, will take students to sites related to Swedenborg's life and times in order to prompt critical thinking and dialogue about the scientific and religious cultures that gave rise to Swedenborg as a pioneering scientist and later a visionary mystic.

"Learning on location," our students will be live-blogging, tweeting, and instagramming their reflections on the experience, and you can follow the trip as it unfolds on the course blog: <https://swedenborgimmersion.blog/>. The trip will include visits to places in Stockholm and Uppsala where Swedenborg

## International Teen Camp Postponed to 2019

After much consideration, my friends in the UK and I have decided to postpone the International Camp in England to summer 2019. With Convention 2018 in San Jose and many teens having to travel a great distance

lived and worked as well as an excursion to the folk province of Darlana, where Swedenborg spent time crawling through the tunnels of the great copper mine, Falu Grava.

The trip is an exceptional opportunity for our graduate students and seminarians to better understand the Swedish dimensions of Swedenborg's thought, and it will be led by faculty member Dr. Devin Zuber (who lived and did research in Sweden during his sabbatical at the University of Stockholm in 2015–2016). CSS needs your help, however, in making this trip possible for some of our students. We are crowd-funding to raise the means for this learning adventure to be accessible for every one of our students who wants to go; any donated amount, no matter how small, will help Cory Bradford-Watts, Colin Amato, Rachel Madjerac, and Jeffrey Adams be able to participate and learn from the class. Please visit the course website (<https://swedenborgimmersion.blog/>) for more details, or contact Francesca McCrossan at [cssinfo@gtu.edu](mailto:cssinfo@gtu.edu).

—Rev. Jim Lawrence, dean

at considerable expense, I did not want parents and teens to have to decide which one of these two great events to attend. This will allow more time for families to try to save money and the SCYL to work to raise money so that as many teens as possible can travel to London and attend the camp in England at Purley Chase in 2019. I apologize for any inconvenience this may have caused you, and I thank you for your understanding. Look for a new announcement about International Camp 2019 soon!

—Kurt Fekete, youth director

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## Church Calendar

• **June 28–July 5, 2018:** Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention, San Jose CA.

## the Messenger

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## Letter from the President



**2017–18—The Year of the New Jerusalem:  
The emergence of a new world**

Dear Friends,

Do You Belong?

Often, our loyal camp attendees at Almont, Fryeburg, and Paulhaven Camps comment, “This is where I belong. This is my church. This is one of the few places I feel I can be me and totally accepted.”

Brene Brown, in his book *Braving the Wilderness, the Quest for True Belonging and the Courage to Stand Alone*, reports on a group of eighth graders who worked on defining what it means to *belong* compared to what it means to *fit in*.

- Belonging is being somewhere where you want to be, and they want you. Fitting in is being somewhere where you want to be, but they don't care one way or the other.
- Belonging is being accepted for you. Fitting in is being accepted for being like everyone else.
- If I get to be me, I belong. If I have to be like you, I fit in.

It is a gift to feel like one belongs, and I am grateful that we have been able to offer that gift to many at our camps and retreats. I also realize that camp is not for everyone, and some have not found this “belonging” at camp, and that is okay. But what I would like to explore a little deeper is

how sometimes a special acceptance that touches one in the depths of their soul and is cherished and makes one feel like they belong breaks through. It brings them back to camp; they bring their friends; and when they are older, they encourage their kids to come to camp.

As we look around our churches, ministries, and societies, we need to ask,

- What can we learn from camp experiences or retreats that can carry over to our churches and ministries?
- We may feel we belong, but how do we reach out to others that come through our doors to help them feel like they belong?
- Are there one or more individuals who act like the church belongs only to them? They may actually like small because it is comfortable and controllable, although think they want the church to grow.

Personally, having attended all of our camps, I know it is easier to be loving and acceptant for a close week together than it is to live with one another weekly in our churches. But easier is not the route that really changes us and helps us to see our personal shortcomings and what we need to work on in our spiritual journeys. This is

**Save the Dates: Convention 2018  
at San Jose State University, San  
Jose, California; June 28–July 5, 2018;  
Hosts: Center for Swedenborgian  
Studies in San Francisco and  
Swedenborgian Church and Hillside  
Community Church in El  
Cerrito, California**

not the ultimate goal of church either, but it is the one that people often cite as reasons they don't attend church—not the shortcomings they see in themselves, but rather in those sitting in the pews around them (smile). We can turn this around because research shows what bugs us most about another person is often what we are struggling with in ourselves.

We need camp and we need church.

Church is a place to learn to love and accept

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# SCYL Fall Retreat: Teenagers Tackle the Taxing Relationship Between Science and Religion

BY KURT FEKETE

**N**ine teenagers, seven making the long trek from the Midwest, gathered for a long weekend in early October at Cedar Hill Retreat Center to discuss the confusing and often complicated relationship between science and religion.

I kicked off the sessions on Saturday morning by asking the teens to take two different color strings and make a model of the relationship between science and religion/spirituality then explain their designs. Some interesting patterns and rationales were created. Next we made a science versus religion/spirituality word association list. On the science side, teens wrote words like hypothesis, chemistry, genes, atom, big bang, and facts. Some of the words added to the religion/spirituality side were like God, church, Jesus, Bible, and stories. Then we found a group of interesting words that fit in the middle that could slide to the science side or the religion side like desire, truth, ethics, answers, and explanation.

We ended the session listening to a NPR “Fresh Air” interview with Astronomer Chris Impey, a faculty member at the University of Arizona and the author of *Humble Before the Void*. Impey recounted his journey to Northern India to teach a program designed to introduce science into the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition. <https://tinyurl.com/ycjz3793>. The Dalai Lama, said, famously, “If modern science is found to disagree with a basic

tenet of Buddhism, then Buddhism will change.”

The Dalai Lama also said, “Do not accept my words, test my words like



Miranda, Ivy, Lauren, Jack, Joey, Oliver, Freya, Kristofer, and Nathan wrestling in front

the metalsmith tests metal to see if it is pure.” It was fascinating to contrast the way Buddhism handles science compared with Christianity.

Rev. Kevin Baxter visited later in the morning to join us for lunch and to lead the Saturday afternoon session. He discussed early religious traditions and early scientific method. Kevin explained how the history of science and religion is more nuanced than people might think. Religious figures played a roll in the development of science, and several modern secular “science” companies and industries have the same oppositional relationship with science

as the church is claimed to have. Ancient “Greeks and others focused more on math. Science was not at odds with religion. It was often viewed as part of God’s plan or just separate.” He further explained how the two have not always been in conflict nor need be in conflict now. “Both science and religion can be true at the same time, as long as they respect their limits and stay true to their area. Science and religion are conversation partners . . . they both claim knowledge. [With] dialogue and conversation . . . the truth of science and religion can be integrated into a more complete or full whole.” Kevin closed his session with, “We believe science increases in quality over time due to humanity’s effort. Is it beyond the realm of possibility that faith and religion can also?”

Center for Swedenborgian Studies



CSS ministry student Rachel Madjerac leads a discussion on Galileo and the Church.

student Rachel Madjerac led the Saturday evening session. Rachel’s topic was Galileo Galilei and his struggles with the powerful leadership and strong

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## SCYL Fall Retreat

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Nina oversees Nathan, Joey, and Jack in the kitchen.

beliefs of the church. Rachel had the teens read the early seventeenth-century letters between Galileo and the Church in an early modern English translation. The teens got a kick out of reading the passages out loud and also got into some great discussions over the content of the letters.



A teen-created mandala

On Sunday morning Rev. Kit Billings tackled the difficult subject of fundamentalism in faith and science. Kit addressed closed-mindedness, biblical interpretations, pseudoscience, and the argumentative aspects of conservative religion and hard science. Kit concluded by relating Newtonian and quantum physics to spiritual thought and Swedenborgian theology.



Miranda and her mandala

Our sessions concluded Sunday afternoon with Rachel leading a workshop with the teens to help them develop a science and faith personal philosophy. The teens meditated over the creation of a

mandala that they designed and constructed in pairs or singularly. A Buddhist tradition, a mandala circle is a spiritual symbol that can represent the cosmos metaphysically or symbolically—a microcosm of the universe. In this activity the teens created mandalas to illustrate their views on the relationship between faith and science. It was a great way to conclude a heavily rational and analytic left-brained topic.

When the teens were not engaged in all of these heady and philosophical discussions and activities, they had lots of free time to romp around and play. Miranda brought several *kendamas* for her friends to try. The *kendama* is a variant of the classic cup-and-ball game and we all had fun honing our skills and trying different tricks.

Saturday was a beautiful day and much of the afternoon was spent at the beach gazing into tidal pools, gathering shells, playing in the sand, and exploring marine life. Saturday evening, we went on our usual exciting outing to Rock 'N Bowl at Alley Kat Lane.

Sunday was a rainy day so we stayed inside, played games, and enjoyed mulled cider and homemade apple crisp. Sunday night we indulged ourselves in a brownie-sundae movie night. The van carrying the Midwest retreaters departed in the wee hours of Monday morning while the rest of us stayed back and cleaned the retreat center before we made our own less rushed exodus.

I am so very grateful to Amy Little and Kit for making the long drive from the Midwest so that all of these teens could participate in this retreat. I am also thankful for local staff support from Nina Sasser and Holly Bauer, who drove in from NYC with her sister Charlie Bauer.



Ivy and Jack play ukulele on the beach

Nina and Holly did a great job working with the teens in the kitchen and helping out with cleaning at the conclusion of the retreat. A last big thank-you to Rev. Kevin Baxter, who rode his motorcycle down to join us on Saturday and to Rachel Madjerac for flying all the way from California to participate in this retreat. The closing communion worship service led by Rev. Kit Billings, Rachel Madjerac, and Nina Sasser on Sunday evening was both



Fearless youth director with Bigfoot feet

moving and contemplative. We all departed the retreat with considerably more knowledge and understanding about the intricate and often misunderstood relationship between our faith and our scientific knowledge. The time spent with loving friends in

community helped us realize how critical and carefully balanced the relationships between love and wisdom truly are. ☸

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.

# North American Interfaith Network 2017

## Harmony: Journey to One Heart

BY REV. DAVID J. FEKETE, PH.D.

The North American Interfaith Network 2017 Conference commenced on August 6, 2017. It began with a moving “Bridging Ceremony.” This ceremony has been celebrated all over the globe, and was brought to us for the opening of NAIN 2017. We broke up into two lines at the left and right sides of the stage. One person from each end walked up the stage stairs and stood at either side of the stage. Each then received a carnation. Then the two walked toward each other and stopped about four feet apart. At this time, we bowed the *Namaste*, which is an ancient Hindi custom in which each person honors the spark of God in each other. We then met at the center and embraced. A bridge stairway was set up in the center of the stage, and, holding hands, we walked down the bridge stairway. This person was to be a new friend, and we were to get to know one another. All 160 of the registered participants in NAIN 2017 participated in this ritual.

As I and my new friend were talking, I mentioned I was a Swedenborgian minister. A First Nations individual overheard us and asked, “Was someone saying something about Swedenborg?” When I identified myself, he said, “I’ve been trying to connect with a Swedenborgian and the Swedenborgian Church. I’ve read *Heaven and Hell*.” He had visited the San Diego Church after its sale, and was disappointed to find no Swedenborgians there (the building had been sold by then). I referred him to the Wayfarers’ Chapel and gave him my card, inviting him to email me. We talked at length, sharing stories about Indigenous

Spirituality and Swedenborgian theology. I made my first of several significant connections.

We adjourned into the dining hall, and prayers were offered by two First Nations elders. The program listed only Stan Rodriguez of the Lipay Nation. After offering a prayer, accompanied by the rhythmic shaking of his rattle, Stan’s colleague smudged the room while Stan said another prayer. Both sung their prayers in their native tongue and stood away from the microphone. Photographs were prohibited as our Indigenous friends’ prayers were a personal gift from them to us.

After our meal, we were entertained first by the San Diego Interfaith Choir and then a solo singer-songwriter by the name of Karl Anthony. NAIN 2017 had begun!

**We talked at length, sharing stories about Indigenous Spirituality and Swedenborgian theology.**

Monday morning featured a panel Q and A with the NAIN Young Adult Scholars. The brilliant, accomplished, and articulate young adults included a Christian, a Muslim, an interfaith individual of Hindu and Sikh parentage, and a secular humanist—four women and one man. After answering questions from the moderator, the audience was invited to write down questions for the panelists. My question was for the secular humanist. I asked, “My ethics and values come from my faith tradition. As a secular humanist, where do you turn to for sources for your own ethics and values?” The audience all hmmm-ed. Her response disappointed me:

From interfaith . . . from my faith . . . from secular humanism . . . secular humanism is a faith . . . Why am I always put in the position of having to explain myself? . . . I believe in the innate goodness of humanity . . . that humans have the power to be good . . . I would very much enjoy dialoguing with whoever wrote this question.

I introduced myself after the panel discussion and said that I was available to dialogue, but she did not make herself available. The dialogue never happened.

Later, we boarded buses and were taken to a 1930s reconstruction of the first mission in California, called San Diego de Alcalá Mission. The Very Reverend Monsignor Dennis L. Mikulanis, S. T. D. (Doctor of Sacred Theology) taught us many interesting historical facts about the founding of California—and, in fact—of America. We learned the little-known fact that in 1602—when history books say that the first Europeans landed at what became Jamestown, Virginia—in fact, the Spanish Catholic Sebastian Vizcalino landed with three ships at what became San Diego and celebrated mass there. We were taught that America didn’t begin in the East by white Protestants and move west, that Catholic Spaniards were already settling the West while the other history was going on in the East. By 1776, thriving colonies had been founded in the West by Spanish Catholics. After our tour of the Mission, we were bused to Old Town San Diego for shopping and dinner on our own.

Tuesday morning I gave my presentation, “E Pluribus Unum: Plurality, not Sameness.” (Rev. Fekete’s talk

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## Interfaith Network

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will appear in the December 2017 *Messenger*.) In my talk, I emphasized that “Out of Many, One” does not mean everybody is the same. I used Swedenborgian quotes stating that perfection is in variety. I drew on Swedenborg’s idea of the Maximus Homo (“Grand Man”) to illustrate that a whole is more perfect when its constituent parts are distinguishably different. I also used the Israelite Tribal League period and Paul’s metaphor of the Body of Christ being composed of different gifts like the human body. I applied these concepts to interfaith/intercultural relations and then brought my point home by reflecting on the state of intercultural issues under the current presidency.

We boarded busses which took us to a Mormon temple. There, we were given an hour tour of the outside of the temple. No one was allowed inside. Our tour guide told us that only those who had made a covenant were allowed inside. When I asked what kind of covenant a person would make, our tour guide avoided specifics and changed the subject.

We next boarded busses to take us to The Seaside Center for Spiritual Living, a denomination of the New Thought movement. Rev. Christian Sorensen, the “preacher” there, bounded up onto the altar and told us about the history of the New Thought movement. He first talked about an eighteenth-century theologian named Emanuel Swedenborg, who he called the founding thinker of the New Thought movement. Rev. Sorensen came back to Swedenborg at least five times in the course of his hour-long talk. The essence of Rev. Sorensen’s talk is that all is God. Our task is to realize it. There can be only one problem for humanity: separation from God, or the imagined separation, since all is God.

Immediately following Rev.

Sorensen’s hour-long talk, Rabbi/Cantor Gabi Burrows began to speak. (One would have appreciated a break.) After the tour of the outside of the Mormon temple, and Rev. Sorensen’s talk, and having given a presentation earlier that same day, I was pretty much done. But, as we were bussed to our locale, we were pretty much a “captive” audience until the program concluded at 9 o’clock. However, I thought it worth the coin to take a cab back to the dorms.

The highlight of the whole conference for me was Wednesday morning’s workshop about art and poetry and the experience of religion. I thought that we were going to learn about poetry and art in relation to religion. Instead, we made art about religion. A large sheet of paper was spread on two tables put together. As meditative music played, we were instructed to make a design on the paper as we were “compelled” by an inner prompting. Our group leaders, Andre van Ziji and his wife Rev. Debrah Daya Friedland-van Zyl, instructed us to relax our critical mind, in fact, our mind. We were invited not to judge our artwork or that of others and simply express our hearts. In fact, Andre suggested we may wish to use the other hand than our dominant one, to get us out of ego (as a Swedenborgian, I thought of *proprium*). My design emerged. Andre, a poet himself, who had read some of my poetry before the seminar, invited me to write words, if I felt moved. I wrote,

MIND  
And the other  
Other  
Beloved other  
Be loved  
Love.

Then, we were invited to walk around the mural of selves and contribute to the design of the others at the table. I tried to integrate my designs with the designs that were already there.

This was a way of meeting others, in a way. I was surprised to be brought into a new, powerful state of being. It was beyond judgement and a holy place. The event remained with me throughout the conference, and is with me still.

We were bussed to a Mormon social hall for a box lunch. While we ate, we heard a panel discussion between an evangelical minister, Rev. Dr. Rick Love, and a Muslim Imam, Imam Taha Hussane, about interfaith between these two unlikely partners. What interested me most were four principles Rev. Dr. Love showed us by Power-Point that describe, “What Is an Evangelical”:

- The Bible is the highest authority for what I believe.
- It is very important for me personally to encourage non-Christians to trust Jesus Christ as their Savior.
- Jesus Christ’s death on the cross is the only sacrifice that could remove the penalty of my sin.
- Only those who trust in Jesus Christ alone as their personal Savior receive God’s free gift of eternal salvation.

After lunch we were bussed to Balboa Park where, after touring on our own, we had a pizza dinner. Evening entertainment was a preview of “The Interfaith Musical,” which was written by a member of the North American Interfaith Network who hopes to bring the play to Broadway. The end of the evening was a dance we were invited to join in that was created by a deceased self-appointed spiritual leader of the hippies who was not identified in the program, but mentioned that evening. I opted out of this experience, not feeling in the mood to chant fragments from Sufi poetry and Hindu Vedas.

The conference concluded on Thursday. For me another highlight was the talk given by Rev. Dr. Michael Kinamon, former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the US. He pointed out that

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## NCC in the Middle East

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front page of every newspaper and the top of every evening news program on TV. We expected a fifteen-minute



*The delegation meeting with the President of Egypt made the front page of every paper in Cairo.*

meeting, but it turned into a two-hour discussion. The president spoke of the importance of freedom as a principle from God. I was struck by how much his view of freedom of the person resonated with Swedenborgian theology. He concluded by saying that the last time God revealed himself was through Mohammed (which Swedenborgians would not agree with.)

We also visited with our US embassy and held a “town hall” meeting with community leaders. Each speaker rose and yelled his opinion into the microphone, lecturing the room. At first, I thought they must be angry but came to understand that this was simply the cultural style. There was much talking with little listening, but the ability



*Inside St. Peter and St. Paul's Church in Cairo, which had suffered a terrorist attack in December.*

to express ideas somewhat freely was cherished by participants. Many of our meetings took place on September 11, and we had a bodyguard with a hidden machine gun traveling with us to protect us just in case.

The big takeaway for me in Egypt was the complicated nature of the church and their president and the rise of extreme forms of Islam that threaten civil society and the church. Just a week ago, a Coptic priest was stabbed in Egypt, and the church leaders report that the police and ambulance were slow to come to help. The priest died. The churches of Egypt need our prayers.

### Jordan

Amman, Jordan, was our next stop, a city originally known as Philadelphia—one of the seven churches mentioned in Revelation. We headed east across Jordan toward Israel. We paused at Mt. Nebo, where Moses saw Israel, but never made it there. The Jordan River, where Jesus was baptized, was our next stop, and we joined with a Swedish Lutheran team that took us for a walk through holy sites of the river. It was awesome to stand and look at Israel from this vantage point.

### Jerusalem

After stepping into the Jordan River, we made our way to the Holy City of Jerusalem. We were exhausted as we found our rooms in the lovely Notre Dame Center overlooking the Holy City. Our time in Jerusalem was packed with meetings. We traveled through the occupied section of East Jerusalem to Ramallah to meet with Christian leaders at the PLO headquarters. Speakers in this meeting complained of a gradual crushing of the Palestinians through the occupation, which marked its fiftieth anniversary. Christian leaders there asked

for the NCC to speak out more for the plight of Palestinians.

We then met at the Shalom Hartman Institute, where Rabbi Hartman shared profound insights. One thing he suggested was that Israelis no longer believe in peace, they only believe in security from attackers. At our next meeting, with the Israeli government, Israel's representatives echoed those sentiments and complained that the NCC was too critical of Israel, but not critical enough of Hamas (a Palestinian political faction) that has been tied to terrorism and is the governing organization of Gaza.

We then had a lovely lunch with the Patriarchs of the Christian Churches. Their biggest concern was two-fold: they felt Israeli was moving to become a Jewish nation where they would not be welcomed and they spoke about their concerns for the chipping away of church-owned real estate in the Old City by the Israelis.

That evening, we met with eight NGOs who told us about their work in Israel. The most startling was a former Israeli soldier who is part of a group called, “Breaking Silence,” and he told us of unethical behavior he and other



*Rev. Tafel with the other NCC delegates at a dinner in Jerusalem where eight NGOs spoke about their work on the front lines of Israeli-Palestinian tensions*

Israeli soldiers were asked to engage in against innocent Palestinians.

Though late in the day, we finally did get to visit the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the suggested location where Jesus was crucified and buried. The experience, which I imagined as a holy one, was fascinating but felt

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## NCC in the Middle East

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more commercial as hundreds of tourists vied to touch the stones. The holy sites of Jesus started being marked and protected around the third century, which is how these sites are identified today, but when you are there, you do question what happened there, though knowing that our Lord lived and grew up in the area was exciting enough.

### Bethlehem and Hebron

We left Jerusalem very late after our dinner to make our way to Bethlehem, which is in the occupied Palestinian section. Our host there was the Lutheran Christmas Church. Early the next day we traveled to Hebron to visit the largest Palestinian City. Hebron is the location of the tomb of Abraham and Isaac, and sadly like most of the holy sites, a place of massacres and murders through the years.

Hebron itself was a ghost town. The streets are patrolled with check points. There was a deep sadness there—a place nicknamed ghost town. Six hundred Israeli settlers, mostly fundamentalists, had built modern settlements overlooking the ancient city. They literally threw their trash down onto the streets of Hebron which has a net over the street to catch the trash. After touring and meeting community leaders,



*Rev. Tafel with Paula Dempsey, the Alliance of Baptists, and Jackie Dupont-Walker, the African Methodist Episcopal Church.*

we made our way up a hill to a Palestinian meeting space where we met Irra Essa, a Palestinian civil rights advocate. He had just come out of the jail for PLO prisoners. He told us of his struggle to use non-violent action to attain equality for Palestinians. As he spoke, we heard explosions as the four hundred military police fired stun guns into a protest.

Back in Bethlehem, we met up with Rev. Mitra Raheb, a leading Christian Palestinian, who gave as a geopolitical view of what was going on. He asked us for “Ps”: Prayers, Peace Building, Policy, Pilgrimage. That evening we met with Christian leaders of the Bethlehem area. They told us of frustration with the occupation by Israel but also fear of radicalized Muslims in the area.

A Christian mayor of a town near Bethlehem told us that the world sits on the chair of Palestine. If the chair is stable the world will be stable. If the chair isn’t stable, there will be no peace in the world.

As we left Bethlehem, we passed beautiful graffiti murals on the walls dividing Israel and Palestine.

In every location, I shared that I represent the Swedenborgian Church. Most hearers assumed that meant I was Swedish Lutheran, and one monk stood up at an event to tell me his own outreach to the Lutherans. No one that I met had heard of our church. I developed a lovely bond with my travelers, and we did have in-depth theological discussions on our long bus rides and dinners, and they were quite



*Paintings line the wall that now divides Israel and Palestine.*

curious to learn more about our faith. One colleague confided a dramatic spiritual experience she had had on the trip, saying, “I knew that you, as a Swedenborgian, would understand mystical transcendence.” Also, my role as convener of the Muslim-Christian dialogue meant a lot

to those we met, particularly Muslim leaders. We were asking them to look out for Christians as we were promising to do the same back in the United States for Muslims.

I think we all left the trip a bit humbled by a situation that feels like it is getting worse by the day and will lead to a crisis. However, I did feel we were



*Thanks to access given by fellow delegate Archbishop Vicken Aykazian, Rev. Tafel was permitted to touch the site of Jesus’s birth.*

spiritual diplomats tapping into the most powerful force in the world: the love and power of the Lord. It was an honor to represent our church in this capacity. Let’s hope the Lord guides all of us and our Swedenborgian

Church to the leadership role we can play in crafting peace in the world as the New Jerusalem continues to unfold.

You can view a video of the visit at <https://tinyurl.com/yd6rxqeh>.

Rev. Rich Tafel a convener of the NCC Muslim-Christian Dialogue. He is the minister of the Swedenborgian National Church in Washington DC.

## Book Review

## Growing up in the Shadow of Apartheid

*In the Shadow of the Dragon's Back: A Young American Girl in South Africa During the Early Years of Apartheid* by Rachel Odhner Longstaff (Culicidae Press, 2017).

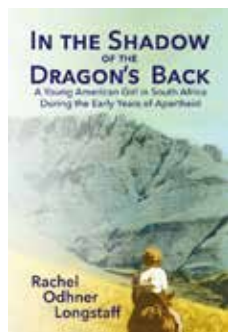
REVIEWED BY JIM LAWRENCE

Rachel Odhner Longstaff's mesmerizing reflection upon her youth sprouting up as a white Swedenborgian minister's daughter in South Africa weaves interconnected journeys of a girl, a family, a church, and a nation during the now infamous social context known as apartheid. Her father's new pastoral assignment in Durban commenced in 1948, the same year that apartheid (Afrikaans for apart-hood) was inaugurated with all its increasingly harsh laws. The family adventured from a staid and state-ly Philadelphia suburban world to one both newly exotic and troubled.

Contemplating anew from four decades' distance the social and spiritual spaces she inhabited there, *In the Shadow of the Dragon's Back* refers to a prominent topographical feature of the author's childhood now transformed as metaphorical muse for those complexly resonant times.

A discovery late in life of photographic negatives taken in those years by her deceased older brother helped to stimulate the birth of this volume so lushly illustrated with Pehr Odhner's crisp black-and-white photographs. An avid amateur photographer, Pehr's bountiful illustrations open windows with the text revealing ambience and mood both innocent and ominous, and they evoke a depth in the stories whose brevity belies the profundity of the volume.

The twenty-two chapters unfold their interwoven stories chronological-ly, with the first twenty covering the



family's arrival with the author as a pre-school child and continuing through the first dozen years of apartheid until 1960 when all the Odhner children returned to the US. The final two chapters follow the author's life through her university years at Northwestern University, where she continued to immerse herself in African history and culture studies, and her later career as a librarian. The conclusion reflects upon a return visit to South Africa in 1991 that coincided with the final dismantling of apartheid.

Especially effective is the unceasing crossing between the often creative and happy family and church life and the looming social tensions that grew year upon year with apartheid's litany of controlling laws. The family's empathy and friendships with native Africans vie with anxiety and alarm over the ever-present police-state scrutiny of the church's activities. Every chapter registers both worlds: Christmas cookies are baked amid the promulgations of the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act; mountain hikes are undertaken while teachers are silenced and university employees arrested; delightful music and singing lessons are sounded as the Natives Laws Amendment Act that severely prohibits public movements by Black Africans becomes law.

Longstaff ably assists readers to enter the complexity of contradictions—beauty and humiliation, privilege and disenfranchisement, black and white. The space created is ever timely, fruitful for contemplating an outsized scale

of life on history's backdrop. The metaphor supplied by the flat, serrated mountain range that looks like a dragon's back is quite apt, as is the shadow it casts. ☪

James F. Lawrence, D.Min., Ph.D., is dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California.

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## Seeker's Companion to the Gospel of John

*The Seeker's Companion to the Gospel of John* is newly available at no cost. It is written by Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D., primarily for the growing number of spiritually-minded individuals who know little about the Bible or Christianity. There is also much material that persons in the church will benefit from and be inspired by. It is an excellent study guide for church adult educational groups or for outreach.

*The Companion* illuminates John's Gospel section by section, sometimes verse by verse. It contains a glossary of key terms such as Samaritans, Dead Sea Scrolls, Gnosticism, Passover, and Last Days. There is also a section that describes how Catholics, Lutherans, Swedenborgians, and Evangelicals interpret certain key verses from John, such as, "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

*The Seeker's Companion to the Gospel of John* is also formatted as an eight-week course, with each week dedicated to a topic such as "Gospel Claims about Jesus' Identity."

Both editions of *The Seeker's Companion* are available from Rev. Fekete by email. To receive your free copy, please email Rev. Fekete at [revdrfekete@gmail.com](mailto:revdrfekete@gmail.com). ☪

## Passages

### Deaths

**Ronald Francis Thompson**, 78, of Hillsboro, Kansas, died October 19, 2017. Ron was born on July 30, 1939, in Goodman, Missouri, the son of Jesse Woodrow LeRoy and Grace Mildred Mitchell Thompson. He married Colleen Kay Tomlinson on May 5, 1959 in Eureka, Kansas. They divorced, and he later married Patricia Joan Holt in Pretty Prairie, Kansas. They later divorced.

He is survived by daughters, Vickie Schroeder and Gale Walker; stepdaughter Suzanne Gardenhire; brothers Wesley and Steven Thompson; sisters, Rose Mary Lamson and Georgia Kay Gillean; six grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren.

He was preceded in death by his brother, Kenneth Leon Thompson; sister, Shirley Jean Schuenemann; and stepson, Stephen Holt.

### Job Posting: Wayfarers Chapel

*Continued from page 144*

### Equal Employment Opportunity

Wayfarers Chapel is an equal opportunity employer. Employment with Wayfarers Chapel is governed on the basis of merit, competence, and qualifications and will not be influenced in any manner by race, color, religion, gender, national origin/ethnicity, veteran status, disability status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, mental or physical disability, or any other legally protected status.

### To Apply

Please send a cover letter, resume, and three references to the Board of Directors via Shelley Dolley: [sdolley@gmail.com](mailto:sdolley@gmail.com). The application deadline is November 20, 2017. ☪

Ron worked for over thirty-five years at Vektek in Emporia and also owned a welding shop in Americus. He served in the National Guard for nineteen years. Ron was a faithful attendee at Camp Mennoscah for many years, where he was always willing to help out and join in the discussions. He loved the Bingo game on Saturday night and especially fixing the Sunday morning breakfast for the women.

Ron donated his body to medical research at the University of Kansas Medical Center. A memorial service was held on October 23, 2017 at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Marion, Kansas. ☪

### Letter from the President

*Continued from page 135*

others, a place to open ourselves to interior reflection as God helps us to see where we need to grow, a place where God stirs our souls to remember we are not alone, and above all where we go to find a community where we can belong.

Within General Convention we are looking at membership and what is involved in belonging. We want a membership formula that welcomes, includes, and builds people up. We do not want a membership that excludes, creates barriers, or drives people away.

As we are going through this process, I invite you to have these discussions within your societies. Put yourself in the pew or chair or bench as a newcomer. What would you like to see and feel? How would you like to be treated? What would help you to feel like you want to belong? What would bring you back? What do our camps have to teach us?

Thank you all for your work at our camps, ministries, retreats and churches. Let's all work together to bring a bit of heaven to earth.

—Rev. Jane Siebert

### Interfaith Network

*Continued from page 139*

interfaith works well until hard justice issues are brought up. We can love our sisters and brothers of other faiths easily, until, for instance, Palestine is mentioned. Or issues surrounding LG-BTQ. Or issues of re-distribution of wealth, which requires taking something away from someone and giving it to someone else. Then, interfaith is difficult to practice. A panel discussion followed this brilliant lecture.

The conference wound down with several talks. One of note was that of an ordained Catholic Bishop, Dr. Jane Via. Obviously, she is in a splinter group of Catholicism. I wasn't clear by whom or how she was ordained. But, clearly, her journey brought excommunication on her and her group from orthodox Catholicism.

Following her talk, a certain Rev. David Fekete, Ph.D., and Mr. Shiraz Kanji gave a presentation about the city of Edmonton, where the North American Interfaith Network 2018 will be held. Rev. Fekete and Mr. Kanji are co-chairs of the NAIN 2018 planning committee.

We heard from Dr. Larry Greenfield, Executive Director of the Parliament of the World's Religions, scheduled for November, 2018, in Toronto.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Albert, our host for the conference, formally ended NAIN 2017 by extinguishing the electric "candle." He preached about how fantastic we all are, the presenters were, and the conference was, in which so many different religions gather in "Harmony, Journey to One Heart." ☪

Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D., is minister of the Edmonton Church of the Holy City. He represents the Swedenborgian Church at the National Council of Churches.



### 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.

## Wayfarers Chapel Seeks Director of Finance and Administration

The Wayfarers Chapel seeks an experienced leader for the full-time position of director of finance and administration. This person is the co-leader, along with the director of ministry, of the organization's staff. The directors comprise the leadership team and report to the Chapel's Board of Directors.

The stunning Wayfarers Chapel has walls of glass, nestled in a grove of redwoods on a cliff overlooking the Pacific. The Chapel is a national memorial to Emanuel Swedenborg, and is an affiliate of the Swedenborgian Church. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places and locally known as The Glass Church, it is in high demand as a wedding destination and is always bustling with activity. This unique, sacred space is in need of skilled leadership.

### Responsibilities and Duties

The director of finance and administration is responsible for leading, executing, and enhancing all financial and administrative functions in the operation of Wayfarers Chapel. The director

- Manages all financial and accounting activities
- Supervises the administrative office,

including the bookkeeper, the administrative assistant, the Visitor Center supervisor, and the buildings and grounds supervisor

- Manages all human resource activities
- Encourages and supports career development of self and others
- Conducts regular staff meetings as part of the leadership team
- Manages Board of Director relations

### Qualifications and Skills

- High energy level, maturity, and integrity
- Critical thinking skills with strong problem solving and conflict resolution skills
- Bachelor's Degree or higher
- Experience supervising employees
- Experience in HR
- Experience in accounting and finance
- Knowledge of QuickBooks Pro software

### Benefits

- Medical and dental insurance
- 403b with matching contributions
- Life insurance
- Salary: \$75,000.00 /year

*Continues on page 143*