



The Holy City Descends on Teens at the SCYL Winter Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

As I pulled into Almont Retreat Center, the dashboard read December 27, 2017, 12:28 AM, -13 degrees Fahrenheit. I shut off the ignition in front of the porch to Heritage Hall. I sat for a moment and whispered a little prayer: “Lord, thank you for delivering us safely to this retreat. I pray this morning that the door to Pfister Lounge is unlocked and I pray that the heat is on!”

Over the next twenty-four hours, sixteen teenagers also braved the extreme frigid temperatures and made their way to Almont Retreat Center to attend the Annual Winter Retreat, a Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) event that has been attended by teenagers for over forty consecutive years. Our theme this year was “The Holy City,” which matches the final theme



The SCYL Winter Retreat group



Josh and Scout relax with some music.



Revs. Catherine Lauber and Jenn Tafel get some fresh air.

of our church’s seven-year cycle through the tenets of the Swedenborgian faith.

I opened the retreat sessions with a review of the places in the Bible

where we find writings about the end of times, the Second Coming and the New Jerusalem. We examined passages in Daniel and Matthew before turning to the reading of the Holy City in Revelation 21.

In the morning, Joey and Nathan plowed through the snow to the Craft Cottage to extract from high in the rafters the model of the Holy City that the SPLATz (pre-teens) created back in 2014. We looked at the structure of the City and learned about some of the features of the New Jerusalem. Rev. Dagmar Bollinger

overcame snowplow ice berms blocking her driveway and a dying car battery to join us later that morning to

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The Editor's Desk



What's in a Name?

The Swedenborgian Church has been inclusive and welcoming to the LGBTQ community for some time now, and as the editor of *the Messenger* I have welcomed articles from our LGBTQ ministers and members. It dawned on me recently, however, that I have been blind to an editorial prejudice that has prevented me from updating *the Messenger's* use of language to reflect this view.

I am a stickler for proper grammar, forms, and usage of language, even though I fall short by my own standards. (Ask the *Messenger* proofers!) As a result I pay (too much) attention to pet peeves in spoken and written language. Thus, in addition to the stock phrases that media personalities have eagerly adopted, like “boots on the ground” (meaning “there”), “unpack” (meaning “examine”), “at the end of the day” (replacing the older and little used now “when all is said and done” and meaning “finally”), and “what it is” (meaning “it is”).

In elementary school, I paid attention and learned my lessons well. So as

an adult, I cringe when I hear or read “snuck”; “I learned that “sneaked” was the only proper form, but I have not heard or read “sneaked” for years. I am careful to say, “I am going to lie down” and “I lay down yesterday,” but I am in the minority. Most people say “I am going to lay down now” and “I laid down yesterday.”

Which brings me to my awakening to a change in usage that makes good sense for a lot of reasons, even though it is technically incorrect according to all but the newest grammar guides. In editing *the Messenger*, I have often changed the plural possessive pronoun “their” for the singular possessive pronoun—either “her” or “his”—when it referred to an individual (or “they” to “he or she”). Easy enough, but when the pronoun referred to an individual of undefined gender (i.e., The photographer aimed his or her camera at me.), the correct form becomes cumbersome.

My well-learned lesson was to never say “their” when “his or her” was *correct*, and I have insisted on that until now. I have now changed my mind, but I am slightly behind modern, enlightened practice.

It finally dawned on me that insisting on the use of gendered pronouns is an affront to those who have the right to define their own gender or choose to not be identified by gender at all. And so, henceforth, I will stop gritting my teeth and embrace the use of “their” in

place of “his or her” and “they” in place of “he or she” in all cases, and I will not change the pronoun used by an author.

Finding a balance between editing for correct usage and taking into account changes in common usage and the reasons for them is challenging, but engaging the challenge makes *the Messenger* a better publication and me a better person.

—Herb Ziegler

Save the Dates!
July 1–5, 2018
Annual Convention
San Jose State University
San Jose, California

the Messenger

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Church Calendar

- **May 12, 2018:** General Council Spring Teleconference meeting
- **July 1–5, 2018:** Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention, San Jose, CA.

Letter from the President



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

Dear Friends,

There is a new word that I have been using that expresses the feeling when things seem to “work out” beyond expectation, like when it seems God has put in front of me exactly what I need.

I am writing this as we fly back from an incredible trip to Sweden designed as a cultural immersion class for our Swedenborgian seminarian students: Colin Amato, Cory Bradford-Watts, and Rachel Madjerac. (Master of Theological Studies student Jeffrey Adams joined the group.) Their professor, Dr. Devin Zuber, let me tag along, and I am forever grateful. I paid my way and thanks to many generous donors the students were able to travel on grants and gifts from their “Go-fund-Me” site. Thanks to you who helped.

There were multiple experiences of *God-dippity*, my new word, and I want to share one special instance.

Our first morning in Stockholm we visited the Sweden New Church, greeted by members Gustav Fornander, Eva Björkstom, Cathy Lamb, and Ulla Jansson. They guided us around their beloved church, built on correspondences and their love of God and appreciation for their countryman

Emanuel Swedenborg.

They have a soul-inspiring metal spiral sculpture that explains Swedenborgian concepts like love and regeneration, designed and built by Nils-Stue Jansson, Ulla’s late-husband. We were awed over the metal door of vines and branches created by Eva, along with a large diorama of Swedenborg’s garden that she also designed.



Door of vines and branches

And there was a nearly life-sized summer house in their courtyard.

They also shared their unique library full of treasures and preserved with care. As we left the library, they had a variety of books culled from their collection as duplicates. Being good Swedenborgians, we couldn’t resist and purchased a few. The book that caught my eye was an unobtrusive, small paperback, *The Bible That Was Lost and Found*, by John Bigelow.

During this ten-hour flight back from Sweden I have had plenty of time to read the seventy-four-page book I had been drawn to seven days before. God-

dippity has me so excited, I must share with you.

In it I found the conversion story from agnosticism to faith of the author, John Bigelow, (1817–1911), statesman, editor of the *New York Evening Post*, one of the founders of the Republican Party that helped secure the selection of Lincoln for President. He gives the full credit for leading him

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Above the door of the Sweden New Church

Old Swedenborgian Churches Guide

Congregations on New Paths to Spiritual Growth

Teachings Grew from 18th-Century Swedish Mystic

BY KEVIN EIGELBACH

This article first appeared on the WCPO Cincinnati website. It is reprinted with permission.

What does a church do when the traditional model of ministering to the neighbors and meeting for worship on Sunday, with the occasional potluck dinner, just isn't working?

That's the question two sister churches have asked themselves for the past few years, as they've seen Sunday morning attendance dwindle to fewer than a dozen.

"We haven't decided what we want to be when we grow up," longtime member Pete Toot said of the New Church of Montgomery. That's a bit of a joke, because the New Church is one of Cincinnati's oldest religious congregations.

It began in 1808 in the home of Adam Hurdus, on Front Street between Vine and Race Streets in Cincinnati. Hurdus built a parlor organ—the first in Cincinnati—to enhance the worship services.

Originally called the Cincinnati Church of the New Jerusalem, it was one of several churches that sprung up, initially in England, based on the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg, a Swedish mystic who had visions of heaven, hell, and angels—which he described in his book, *Heaven and Hell*, published in 1758.

He was a Christian who had some

surprisingly modern ideas. For example, he didn't believe God judged anyone, but that love of self or the world drives one toward hell, and love of God and of others toward heaven.

In 1819, the local congregation opened its first sanctuary on Centre Street (later Longworth Street) be-

to the denomination.

(In the past decade, those windows, which depict angels from the book of Revelation, have been exhibited at museums around the country, including the Taft Museum in Cincinnati in 2011.)

The New Church of Montgomery

moved to a new sanctuary on East Kemper Road in Symmes Township and stayed until 2010, when it was torn down after the congregation ran out of its endowment money, said Toot.

"It was a combination of ambitious programs and a board that was not willing to stand up and say, 'This is too expensive,' " he said.

Since then, the church has been selling its property to rebuild the endowment, he said; it still has four

half-acre tracts left. The endowment's not large enough to support a minister, he said, so he sometimes preaches or gets other ministers to fill in.

The Montgomery Church now uses the sanctuary of the Glendale church for worship, alternating Sunday mornings with the Glendale congregation.

Each congregation belongs to a different Swedenborgian denomination. The Montgomery congregation is part of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem, but the Glendale

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Pete Toot, a longtime member of the New Church of Montgomery, poses inside the Glendale New Church, along with a bust of Emmanuel Swedenborg, whose thoughts inspired the founding of both churches.

Photo by Kevin Eigelbach

tween Race and Elm, which seated 350 people. The congregation grew large enough to spin off two other Swedenborgian churches, including the one now known as the Glendale New Church.

In 1902, the Glendale congregation paid Louis Comfort Tiffany, creator of Tiffany lamps, to make seven huge stained-glass windows for the Montgomery congregation's new sanctuary in Walnut Hills. That building was torn down in 1964 to make way for Interstate 71, and the windows sold

Old Swedenborgian Churches

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congregation is part of the General Church of the New Jerusalem, which split off in the late 1800s in a dispute, in part, over the authority of Swedenborg's writings.

The Glendale church was built in 1861 by former Cincinnatians who moved to the suburbs. The congregation has never had more than about thirty members, but it has this going for it: There's no debt on the building, said the church's "very, very part-time" pastor, Clark Echols, whose day job is as a mental health counselor.

Opening that building to community groups is part of the Glendale Church's reimagined vision for itself. In addition to the Montgomery congregation, yoga instructors hold classes there, nonprofits use it, and another small church rents it on Saturday nights.

The Glendale congregation also actively promotes the building for weddings, sometimes with Echols officiating. In 2016, about eighteen weddings were held there, he said, but he'd like to double that.

"So many people want a spiritual ceremony, but they're not connected to a church," he said, and many churches will only let members use their buildings.

The congregation has also discovered that people are interested in their own spiritual development, but not necessarily in organized religion. So for the past ten years, it has been hosting ninety-minute, small group studies that require just a six- to eight-week commitment.

The church's new model involves helping people grow spiritually through small groups and influencing the culture by having the community at large use the building. Echols is very excited about it, he said, but not every member is.

"The problem is that it's such a radical change of mission . . . it's difficult for all of us to welcome," he said.

On Monday nights, the Montgomery congregation invites people in to watch "Swedenborg and Life," a live YouTube show with more than 40,000 subscribers. It's put on by the West Chester, Pennsylvania-based Swedenborg Foundation, of which Toot is a board member.

He's been going to the church since the 1970s and he keeps on because it's a welcoming place where he can have discussions about "serious issues at most any level," he said.

About four years ago, the Montgomery congregation took a look at "what other churches are doing when they're not being a traditional church," Toot said.

The congregation decided to pursue three initiatives: feeding the hungry, ministering to the lonely/elderly, and teaching the illiterate. So far, it's done more feeding the hungry than anything, usually working through existing groups like Matthew 25: Ministries.

It's hard to get people to come to church, Toot said, but it's easy to get them to do charitable work. A typical church service draws eight people, he said, but usually twenty-five or more will help out with a charity event.

"The work attracts people," he said. "They will get together to help each other much more than listen to theology."

Wherever they volunteer, the members also share the "unique and positive writings of Swedenborg, in hopes that it will open others up to their own spiritual path, whether or not they choose our church," said Maggie Panyko, the chair of the congregation's board. "We aren't pushy." ☪

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Central Office Manager

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. . . just friendly." The people she has met thus far have "a different attitude than I encountered in the corporate world . . . in a good way!" She loves working in Cambridge, right next to Harvard Square.

Samantha shares her home with her ten-year-old son, Noah, who possesses an unusual penchant for a child his age: He is a gourmand! Samantha says, "It's my own fault, but he is a foodie. He will no longer eat kids' meals. He eats sushi and seafood that I won't even try." He is an adventurous eater who loves to order tempting, exotic fare in restaurants. For example, he recently ordered roasted duck over a bacon and butternut squash risotto with an orange soy reduction (and ate the whole thing). Samantha is pleased with his newfound pleasure, glad that he emerged from the "picky eater" stage early, but realizes that a cheap MacDonald's dinner for a night out is now out of the question.

In her spare time, she likes to go to dinner and the theater with friends, write and sing, and, with her son, visit museums and attend his swim team events.

Samantha has begun her work for Annual Convention in San Jose and has been advised by Renée and Katie that there is a lot of work to do there for the operations manager. She said, "I am looking forward to matching faces with the names I have been learning in my new position."

If you need information about anything concerning the Church or the 2018 Annual Convention in San Jose, give Samantha a call at 617.969.4240 or drop her an email at manager@swedenborg.org, and be sure to introduce yourself and share with her your connection with the Swedenborgian Church. Samantha would love to hear from you. ☪

Did Swedenborg Study Kabbalah?

BY REBECCA ESTERSON

Comparison of Ideas

Many readers of Swedenborg's biblical commentaries and theological works, from Immanuel Kant to Moshe Idel, have drawn a connection to Kabbalah (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kabbalah>) based solely on similarity of content. And the comparisons are indeed compelling. Lists of similarities between Swedenborg and Kabbalah most often cite: 1) the tradition of uncovering multiple layers of meaning in the biblical text, found, for example, in Swedenborg's *Secrets of Heaven*; 2) Swedenborg's interest in the mystical significance of individual Hebrew letters; 3) the connection between earth and heaven mediated by the flow of influx; 4) the marriage relationship within the Godhead, or the uniting of "male" and "female" divine attributes; and finally and most frequently 5) *Adam Kadmon* of Kabbalah and Swedenborg's *Maximus Homo*: that the realm of the Divine takes the shape of a human body.

To this list, I would add sets of similarities depending on which kind of Kabbalah is in question. The early modern Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper and Franciscus Mercurius van Helmont similarly allegorizes the life of Christ as it relates to individual spiritual progression. *Macroprosopus* and *Microprosopus* of the *Kabbalah Denudata* compare nicely with Swedenborg's interpretation of the Divine *Esse* and *Existere*. Another overlap with Christian Kabbalah is in what Elliot Wolfson terms "hypernomianism": that biblical laws, such as those concerning dietary restrictions or ritual



sacrifice, possess "an enduring spiritual value but that their practical application is limited to a specific time in history."¹ Hasidic Kabbalah is strikingly similar in a number of ways: its interpretation of biblical themes and figures as symbols for

elements in the individual's internal, psychological world; the language of microcosm and macrocosm to explain the relationship between human and divine worlds; the idea of *avodah begashmiyut*, or worship through mundane activity; and the concept that the angels are directly affected by the rituals and text study of earthly humans.

To these sets of similarities, we can

... Swedenborg's reliquae, or remnants of holiness buried in the souls of individuals, are represented in the Bible by the number ten

add curious details, such as the fact that in both the *Zohar* and in Swedenborg's *Arcana*, priests are symbols for divine love; or that Swedenborg's *reliquae*, or remnants of holiness buried in the souls of individuals, are represented in the Bible by the number ten, recalling the ten *Sephirot* and the *nitzutzim*, or sparks of divinity buried and hidden in earthly vessels, from Lurianic Kabbalah.

With any such comparison, the differences are as significant as the similarities, and for all of the points listed

above we could elaborate important distinctions. For example, the Christian Kabbalah of Kemper, while alike in allegorizing the life of Christ, differs in its pervasive reliance on Trinitarian theology (Swedenborg consistently denounced the orthodox doctrine of a trinity of three divine persons). Hasidic commentaries are alike for their internalizing hermeneutic but differ in their regular reliance on word play and skilled manipulation of the Hebrew language for doing this, which is something Swedenborg's limited knowledge of the language prevented him from doing even though he venerated Hebrew as a most holy language, closest to that of the angels.

Comparison is seductive, as the more sober proprietors of theory and methodology would remind us, and the recognition of patterns is not to be trusted as evidence of contiguity. Wouter Hanegraaff and Friedemann Stengel are two contemporary scholars who firmly downplay such similarities in their discussions of Swedenborg's possible relationship to Kabbalah, insisting that other explanations can nearly always be found.² Swedenborg's *Maximus Homo*, for instance, can be explained by his dedicated and lengthy study of human anatomy. That the organizing structure of the heavens is in the image of a human body suggests that his religious imagination simply borrowed from his intricate knowledge of the body's organs and systems. The *Zohar*'s "Primordial Man," according to this argument, is not the same

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1 Elliot Wolfson, "Messianism in the Christian Kabbalah of Johann Kemper," in *Millenarianism and Messianism in the Early Modern European Culture: Jewish Messianism in the Early Modern World*, edited by M. D. Goldish and R. H. Popkin (New York: Springer, 2001), 145.

2 Wouter Hanegraaff, "Swedenborg, the Jews, and Jewish Traditions," in *Reuchlin und Sein Erben: Forscher, Denker, Ideologen und Spinner* (Jan Thorbecke Verlag, 2005) and Friedemann Stengel, *Aufklärung bis zum Himmel: Emanuel Swedenborg im Kontext der Theologie und Philosophie des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011).

Swedenborg and Kabbalah

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figure. To take similarity as evidence of influence is what Jonathan Z. Smith calls the confusion of homeopathic and contagious magic.³

While comparison is not reliable proof of influence, for the reasons stated above, it does reveal elements of the shared hermeneutical horizon of these deeply spiritual and deeply textual traditions. For this reason, those interested in Swedenborg and in other forms of Jewish and Christian mysticism continue to find studies based on comparison useful.

A second research path for assessing whether Swedenborg studied Kabbalah is historical evidence of contact with kabbalistic sources. We will now consider what forms of contact we know of and will reflect on Swedenborg's place in the troubled history of Jewish/Christian relations in light of the evidence.

Probing His Historical Context

Scholars have identified two potential avenues for the influence of Kabbalah on Swedenborg. The first is the atmosphere at Uppsala University in the eighteenth century and Swedenborg's close relationship with his brother-in-law in whose home he lived for six years, Professor Eric Benzelius, who was integral to the university's acquisition of kabbalistic texts and teachers. The term "philosemitism" has been rightly problematized by today's historians of early modern Europe⁴, but it nevertheless describes something of the fervor of Protestant Hebraism that characterized Swedish universities in the early modern period.

Rabbinic studies and Kabbalah were an integral part of the curriculum at Uppsala while Swedenborg was a student there, and converted Jews such as Johan Kemper were recruited to Uppsala by royal decree to teach Kabbalah



and produce commentaries in Hebrew. One recent discovery in this vein is a dissertation by Uppsala professor Daniel Lundius, bearing Swedenborg's signature on the cover page. Lundius's dissertation gives a general overview of Kabbalah, describes the functions of the various *sefirot*, and references the *Sefer Yetzirah* as well as mystical *Bereshith* and *Mercabah* literature. Susanna Åkerman-Hjern, who made the discovery, notes two Latin phrases in the dissertation which resemble important terms in Swedenborg's later theological writings: *influxum Divinum* and *arcana Dei*. She concludes from the Uppsala evidence that a "soft but definite" influence is present.⁵

Second, scholars point to the diffusion of kabbalistic thought among intellectuals in England, France, Sweden,

and Germany with whom Swedenborg had either direct or indirect contact—Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz being the most significant. Of this connection, James Lawrence writes,

[T]he reception of Kabbalah into serious conversations in Early Modern and Modern theosophical currents created a broad intertext among philosophers with religious commitments—especially those interested in the nexus of metaphysics, natural philosophy, and theories of representation in images, mathematics and language.⁶

Swedenborg kept notes on philosophers who were of particular interest to him, and the only instances of the word "Kabbalah" that we have in his own handwriting are from three direct quotations by Leibniz and Hugo Grotius, which Swedenborg copied into his unpublished notebooks. Nevertheless, attempts at determining a direct line of influence are frustrated by the fact that Swedenborg never directly references in his writings a single kabbalistic source, text, or teacher; and we know of no source in his personal library.

As we wade through what evidence we can gather, a picture emerges of a man who would have been familiar in his early university years with Jewish mystical thought as interpreted by converts and Christian Kabbalists as well as through the mediated influence of western philosophical and theosophical currents of the day, but beyond that we know very little for sure. The particulars of how Swedenborg was influenced and which of his ideas might justifiably be credited to Kabbalah remain consigned to the art of speculation. Swedish historian and comparative literature scholar Martin Lamm describes the many analogies of thought between Swedenborg and

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3 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 21.

4 See, for instance, Eliane Glaser, *Judaism without Jews: Philosemitism and Christian Polemic in Early Modern England* (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

5 Susanna Åkerman-Hjern, "De sapientia Salomonis: Emanuel Swedenborg and Kabbalah," Paper presented at the annual academic symposium of the European Society for the Study of Western Esotericism, The Visual and the Symbolic in Western Esotericism (Szeged, Hungary: July 9, 2011), 5.

6 James Lawrence, *And Speaking of Something Else: Biblical Allegoresis, Swedenborg, and Tradition* (PhD dissertation, Graduate Theological Union, 2011), 167.



Closing Worship with Jenn and Catherine

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present her two-part session, “The Significance of the Second Coming in Today’s World.” Dagmar began with a review of the traditional Christian view of the Second Coming, the return of Jesus Christ. The second part of her session was a viewing of an *Off the Left Eye* video on how the internet is like Swedenborg’s heaven (<https://tinyurl.com/y7mo9txc>).

During Rev. Catherine Lauber’s second session the following morning, the teens took a closer look at the St. John’s Bible. They delved into selected individual illustrations in small group breakouts and shared their insights.

It was so nice to have Rev. Renée Machiniak join us in the afternoon to lead a summary session on the Holy City. Renée first had the teenagers



Ivy and Jack are excited for the next session.

share all that they learned over the course of the retreat. She listened carefully and gave everyone a chance to ask questions while she clarified the meaning of the Second Coming from her perspective of Swedenborg’s writings.

Then she shared what she finds most essential about the descent of the Holy City from God. She highlighted freedom and choice in the New Age. “It is now possible to experience true temptation as a primary function of regeneration.” And in the words of Emanuel Swedenborg, “Conscience is the presence of God with humankind.”

Riley Tishma participated in the Exodus to Independence ceremony for our eighteen-year-old teens that are exiting the SCYL and moving into adulthood. The ceremony led into a beautiful closing worship service led by Rev. Jenn Tafel and Rev. Lauber with the traditional yule log burning, followed by communion.

Everyone had a fantastic time at this



The Holy City New Jerusalem built by Splatz in 2014



Wyatt, Mary, and Joey enjoying the snow

retreat, and we all look forward to seeing one another at our next gathering in the spring. ☪

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.



From the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg

If we want to be set free, we have to recognize our faults and regret them. We recognize our faults when we learn what sorts of things are wrong, see them in ourselves, admit them, take responsibility for them, and criticize ourselves for them. When we do this in front of God, we are recognizing our faults. We regret our faults when, once we have admitted them and asked with a humble heart for help in giving them up, we stop acting on them and start living a new life in harmony with the rules of kindness and faith.

—*The Heavenly City* §159–161

SCYL Officer Elections for 2018

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2018 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) elections of officers and the chaplain took place at the Almont Winter Retreat. The results are as follows:

- President: Scout Steinhiser
- East Coast and Service Officer: Freya Montesanto
- Midwest and Fundraising & Finance Officer: Joey Kalinowski
- Canada and Public Relations Officer: Peyton Proudlove
- West Coast and Activities Officer: Gillian Harnadek
- Editor, *Clear Blue Sky* (CBS) and Communication Officer: Ava Dolley
- League Chaplain: Rev. Renée Machiniak

There are some officer changes here in 2018 as we welcome in our new teen league administration. Our 2017 president, Riley Tishma, has aged out of the SCYL and cannot serve another term. We pray for her success in the coming year as she transitions to adulthood and moves on to our young adult group, Transitions.

Freya Montesanto returns for another year of service as our East Coast and service officer. We love Freya's quiet and thoughtful nature as well as her attention to detail and her artistic talent.

Scout Steinhiser moves in as the new SCYL president. This is Scout's first year as an officer, but she

is no stranger to the SCYL. Scout has been actively involved in youth activities since she was very young. She has always attended as many summer camps, retreats, and annual conventions as she was able to. Scout is talkative, determined, and has a great



2018 SCYL officers, Gillian, Scout, Freya, Joey, and Ava (not present, Peyton)

sense of humor. She will make a great president.

Joey Kalinowski begins his second year as an SCYL officer. Everyone loves Joey. He is funny and quiet, but when he speaks, everyone listens.

Gillian Harnadek is also new to the SCYL officer team. Gillian is our West Coast and activities officer, and she enjoys attending retreats, annual conventions, and Almont Summer Camp. Gillian is very friendly, and will be a great resource at Annual Convention 2018 in San Jose, California, where we hope some new teenagers will join us.

Ava Dolley is another new face to our group of officers. Ava is our *Clear Blue Sky* editor. She is very intelligent and loves learning and expressing her interesting and often controversial point of view. These

are positive skills for our new editor to bring to our social media presence.

We are so happy that Peyton Proudlove is returning to serve as our Canada officer. Peyton is from Alberta and enjoys attending Paulhaven Summer Camp. She has attended retreats in

the past and was at Annual Convention 2017 in Philadelphia. We welcome her wonderful spirit to our officer team.

We welcome Rev. Renée Machiniak back into service as League chaplain and say goodbye to Rev. Jennifer Tafel after her service of one year as SCYL Chaplain. Jenn does so much for the SCYL, and will continue to serve the youth whenever she is able. She is always willing to do whatever is needed at retreats and con-

ventions, and the teens enjoy her excellent sessions and worship services. We can always count on Jenn! Renée generously gives as much of her time and energy to the youth of our church as she can. Renée has so much knowledge and love to give to the young people. It is wonderful to have her serve as our chaplain for this year.

Please join me in congratulating all of our 2018 SCYL officers and our new league chaplain. We have a great team of teens leading the SCYL this year. They really care for our church and for their teen community. I welcome their dedication to the SCYL and their efforts to help the League continue to grow in love, wisdom, and action. I am blessed to be working with this team of talented individuals, and I hope that you get a chance to get to know them all better. ☩

Kurt Fekete, is youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.



League chaplain, Rev. Renée Machiniak

Swedenborg and Kabbalah

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Christian kabbalist Pico della Mirandola, all the while conceding that “We are unfortunately faced with the more or less impossibility of establishing by which route the doctrines of the Kabbalistic philosophy have reached him.”⁷

A study of Swedenborg and Kabbalah nevertheless has its place. Just as we must clarify what comparative and historical studies cannot tell us, we must also ask what they can tell us. In this case, the study draws out elements of cultural negotiation or a history of mutual assimilation and antagonism between Jews and Christians. Given the environment of his upbringing and his professional activities, Swedenborg was embedded in an amalgam of conflicting views regarding the wisdom to be mined from Jewish sources and the perceived ignorance of Jews themselves. Currents of hermeticism, neoplatonism, Hebraism, and Kabbalah swirled between thinkers and movements in eighteenth-century Europe, and these currents clashed in some cases with tides of Christian orthodoxy and conventional stereotypes of Jews. Swedenborg, in the very ambiguity of his relationship to Jewish mysticism, embodies the tension between creativity and destruction that this environment conditioned.

While Swedenborg’s work, for all the reasons stated above, shared meaningful hermeneutical horizons with Kabbalah in its various forms, it also drew from Augustine, Luther, and others on old stereotypes of Jews as literalists. And like so many Christian Hebraists before him, his work created opportunities for boundary-crossing between Judaism and Christianity, while simultaneously putting up walls. Exploring

Dr. Esterson to Present at Conference

Over 10,000 people gathered for the annual joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) and the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL) this November in Boston. This is one of the world’s largest annual gatherings related to the academic fields of religious and biblical studies, and features more than 1,200 academic sessions and workshops. The Center for Swedenborgian Studies was represented at the gathering by professor Dr. Rebecca Esterson, who presented as part of a panel on Jewish-Christian Dialogue and Sacred Texts. Her paper was titled “What Do the Angels Say? Scripture, Identity, and the Ascents of Emanuel Swedenborg and Baal Shem Tov.” Find out more about the AAR (<https://www.aarweb.org/>) and SBL (<https://www.sbl-site.org/>) on their websites.

Professor Esterson will present on this research at the upcoming conference in Berkeley on “Phenomenology in Dialogue: Religious Experience and the Lifeworld.”

If you’d like to know more about Dr. Esterson’s paper, email info@css.gtu.edu.

the contours of the reading and misreading that occur between Jewish and Christian sources over the centuries reveals a discourse that belies any understanding of these as two distinct traditions, even when—or perhaps especially when—the commentaries themselves insist on such a distinction.


In those moments when Christian and Jewish sources resemble each other, a study of comparisons can provide a narrative, not of origins but of memory—or what Harold Bloom calls “belatedness.” Latent or forgotten strategies in one tradition are triggered by

something when in the presence of another tradition. Like Swedenborg’s *reliquiae* (remnants) or the *nitzutzim* (sparks) of Kabbalah, fragments of a shared heritage are discovered in hidden places, even if the shells that contain them are potentially destructive.

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This article first appeared at the Swedenborg Foundation website, <https://tinyurl.com/yeh48u4s>.

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⁷ Martin Lamm, *Emanuel Swedenborg: The Development of His Thought*, translated by Tomas Spiers and Anders Hallengren (West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1999), 284.

Passages

Deaths

Jean Margaret Graber, 71, passed away suddenly on November 19, 2017.

She was born in 1946 in the Meade area of Kansas to Gene and Velma Harris. At the age of six, Jean contracted polio and spent several weeks in an iron lung. Although she faced life-long medical challenges and physical limitations because of polio, Jean always said her parents expected the best from her, so she lived her life to the fullest.

After graduating from Meade High School, she wanted to attend college. Her dad and a local mechanic specially equipped a car to enable her to drive, like other students. She attended

the Institute of Logopedics and Wichita State University. Jean accepted her first teaching position at Kingman Elementary as a Title I reading and math specialist.

In her first semester of teaching, another teacher introduced her to his cousin, Curtis Graber. They were married on July 25, 1969, and moved to his farm near Pretty Prairie. For thirty-eight years, she drove each day from Pretty Prairie to Kingman.

Following her retirement in 2005, Jean assisted in forming the Central Kansas Post-Polio Survivors Support Group. The group's mission is to provide support, stay informed, emphasize the importance of vaccination, and to leave a legacy for coming generations—educating them about polio

and related disabilities. She was featured in a recent article in the *Wichita Eagle* (<https://tinyurl.com/y9yabv63>).

Jean was active in the New Jerusalem Church as Sunday school superintendent and a member of the Women's Study Group. For over 25 years she wrote and directed Christmas plays for the children of the church.

Jean is survived by her husband, Curtis; sister, Sue Harris; children Debbie Adams and Ron Graber; four grandchildren and six great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by her son Alan Graber, and brother-in-law Kenton Graber.

The funeral was held at the Pretty Prairie Middle School Auditorium, with Rev. Jane Siebert officiating on November 25, 2017. ☪

Letter from the President

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out of spiritual bondage to Emanuel Swedenborg.



Reproduction of Swedenborg's garden house, L to R: Jane Siebert, Jeffrey Adams, Colin Amato, Rachel Madjerac, and Cory Bradford-Watts

The back cover states, "...this is a personal testimony to Emanuel Swedenborg, whose revelations made it possible for the author to discover the true meaning of the Bible. It is a story of spiritual progress—a faith regained."

Having just visited the mines in Falun, where Swedenborg served as Assessor of Mines, seeing the original sealed papers for his ennoblement in

the House of Nobles, hearing new information about his time at Uppsala University, and visiting his grave in the Cathedral in Uppsala, I came to realize all that Emanuel had left behind to follow the Lord's instructions after his spiritual experience. He was real to me in a new way, and my appreciation for his gift to the world expanded. And then this little book, as a testament to all that have been able to "enter into the mysteries of faith with intelligence." found its way into my mind. It all came together for me.

I remembered my first unveiling of Swedenborg's *Secrets of Heaven* within the Bible some forty years ago. I had been struggling with the Bible for some time, questioning the image of God in the Old Testament, which demanded over and over in battles that all the men, women, children, and animals be killed. How could this be a loving God? I was headed for the same "open sea of disbelief" that John Bigelow described in his book. For me the truth was opened one regular Sunday morning as I attended adult Sunday school at the New Jerusalem Church

in Pretty Prairie, Kansas. We were studying the *Dole Notes* (Book 2, Exodus 17) and, God-dippity, I was at a place I could receive the inner meaning of the story of the Amalekites in Deuteronomy 25:17–18 as they waited to ambush the Israelites and why they all had to be routed out and killed. It is one of the many stories of our psychological struggles. The Amalekites are those difficult bad habits that attack from behind when we are tired and discouraged. They were attacking me, and I had to fight them with God's help. The scales were removed from my eyes, Swedenborg's writings opened the Word, and I couldn't get enough.

My "God-dippity" experience this time in Sweden was like a rebirth of my enthusiasm and love of the Arcana and the Bible, with a new respect and honor for this man that left fame and fortune to follow the Lord's leading to open the Word and make "the Bible that was lost, found again."

May 2018 be a "God-dippity" one for all of you and our remarkable Swedenborgian religion.

—Rev. Jane Siebert

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.

Meet Samantha Johanson, Operations Manager at the Swedenborgian Church

BY HERB ZIEGLER

Following the stellar tenure of Renée Helenbrecht as operations manager of the Swedenborgian Church and the remarkable work of Katie Pruiett as acting operations manager (on short notice) when Renée moved on in her career, the Search Committee of the Church offered the position to Samantha Johanson. She stepped into her new position in November, learning the ropes from Katie. She has been learning the names of committees, members, and churches while keeping the daily tasks of the office on track.

Samantha is a native of the Boston area, having grown up in Everett, Massachusetts. She matriculated at Westfield State College, a small school in Western

Massachusetts before settling in Danvers, on the North Shore of the Boston area.

Her major in college was broadcast journalism, but Samantha embarked on a career of marketing and administration in addition to some freelance writing. She worked in the Graduate Admissions Office of Endicott College, helped the Panera Bread company find visibility in New England as a marketing specialist, and did marketing for an architectural firm. While in college, she spent two summers as an intern at Disney World.

Samantha has settled in and continues the tradition of knowledgeable, effective, and hard-working operations managers. She said in our interview, "I am enjoying meeting a lot of different people. Everyone has been helpful, kind . . .

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Swedenborgian Church operations manager, Samantha Johanson