



## “To Bind Up the Nation’s Wounds”

BY PAUL DEMING

It has been said that Abraham Lincoln thought his best speech was his second inaugural address, March 4, 1865—not the Gettysburg address. The country was nearing the end of a civil war that lasted four years in a greatly divided country. It was not to be a speech of victory. It was not a speech of second term promises. The speech was directed to one primary purpose which would become the phrase for which the speech was known: “To Bind up the Nation’s Wounds.”

As our forty-sixth President-elect makes preparations for his first inaugural address, there is a strange parallel to our sixteenth President’s burden to seek the re-unification of a greatly divided country. Lincoln spoke not of politics but of the war that had torn families apart, pitted brother against brother, and made party alliances more consequential than the hundreds of thousands of lives that had already been lost.

All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent

agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

**This is not about politics or about war. It is about healing. There has been a collective sigh of relief that the great turmoil and division that has plagued our country... might witness a shift in focus to the reconciliation that is desperately needed.**

But this is not about politics or about war. It is about healing. There has been a collective sigh of relief that the great turmoil and division that has plagued our country, especially in the last four years, might witness a shift in focus to the reconciliation that is desperately needed. I have seen, first-hand, family members, loved ones, and members of a greater religious community on different sides of a fence that

seemed to be turning into something akin to the demilitarized zone. We best not talk about politics or it might quickly dissolve into whose side God is on. Then we might be reminded that Joshua, when preparing for battle was nearing Jericho and came face to face with a man bearing a sword. He said,

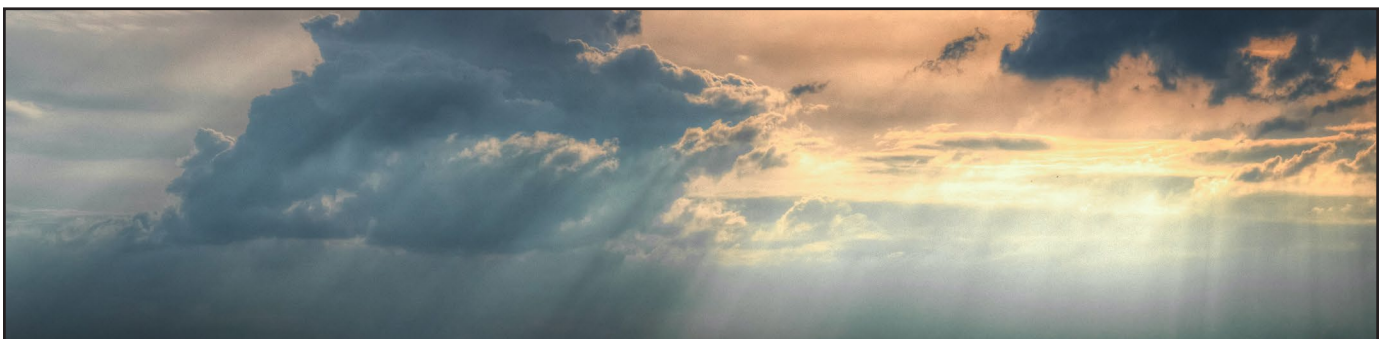
Whose side are you on, ours or our enemies?” “Neither,” he said, “I’m commander of God’s army, I’ve just arrived.” Joshua fell, face to the ground, and worshiped. He asked, “What orders does my Master have for his servant?” God’s army commander ordered Joshua, “Take your sandals off your feet. The place where you are standing is holy. Joshua did it (Joshua 5:13–15).

If we are to understand the spiritual sense of the Word, we often need to remove our reliance on the self-love and materialism that represent our lowest senses and can block us from seeing the truth—not if God is on our side but if we are on God’s side.

Certainly, Lincoln, was familiar with this passage as he remarked,

Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration,

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## Editor's Corner



### Discovering Pandemic Perks

It's hard to believe that we have reached the end of the unforgettable year 2020. No

one will forget this year or the things that happened to them while going through a global pandemic. It has forever changed us and is something that unites us all.

I attended Dr. Devin Zuber's online class "Swedenborg and Pandemic Theologies" that was offered this fall through the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) with about fifty other Swedenborgians from all over the world. In the last class we discussed vastations and how many of us felt as though we were going through one now. I certainly feel that way and have had that thought many times over the past many months. So much has changed, and several things will never be the same. It occurs to me that many of these things are not negative, but perks that we never would have found if we weren't forced to with the COVID-19 pandemic—the new order that this chaos is bringing to us.

*Virtual Education Offerings for the Planet* from CSS are certainly a perk that has come out of this situation we have all found ourselves in. It's a part of the virtual revolution that we are experiencing. We have discovered ways to be far apart yet closer than ever. We've never been able to spend time with our far-flung spiritual neighbors so often. The way we think about so many things has changed—and this has strengthened our bonds. Although Zoom fatigue is real and at times can be overwhelming let's look past the exhausting aspects and see the new opportunities

it has created: video worship services, virtual convention and camps, online courses and support groups—so many ways to connect that will outlive COVID-19 and continue to bring our heavenly community closer together.

What are some of the Pandemic Perks that you have discovered?

—Beki Greenwood

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## Letters to the Editor

Emily Woofenden's article (*The Culture Tree*, November 2020) brought to mind our current sensitivity to the problem of systemic racism. I found myself making a kind of hybrid of the cultural iceberg and the culture tree, with blatant racism being the tip of the iceberg and one branch of the tree, and the bulk of the iceberg being the whole root "system." This in turn called to mind Matthew 3:11, "Now the axe is laid to the root of the tree," and my own conviction that the root of racism is the toxic equation of power with privilege rather than responsibility on the one hand and the worship of money on the other, concisely labeled in our doctrines as "love of self" and "love of the world"—hell itself when they rule, heaven itself when they serve.

—George Dole  
*Bath, Maine*

## the Messenger

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## Letter from the President



### *The Year of the Spiritual World: 2020–21*

*Dear Friends,*

I am sending all of you this blessing of hope for this uncertain time. As it says in Jan Richardson's poem, it is not just for someday, but for this day. This is the hope of Christmas, and nothing can take that away, no COVID-19, no death, no separation from loved ones. It is with us every day, for we are a hopeful denomination.

We know we are created for heaven and we have been given the gift of bringing heaven to earth.

We know that we are tired, sad, and feeling a loss of control. And we know the Lord's Divine Providence is working for good in every aspect of our lives.

We know this is a very dark time in our country, with this pandemic infiltrating every part of our lives and with voices and messages coming at us from all directions, trying to divide and separate us. And we know our Creator loves us so much; our Lord actually came to us as a baby and walked this earthly journey and knows the temptations and trials we go through. We know we have a personal savior we can depend on to always be right here with us.

And we know God is only love, and can only love, and nothing we do will change this love, and that gives us encouragement to face each day with hope.

With all the trials of COVID-19—affecting family gatherings this Christmas, burdening many with the pain of death of loved ones, eliminating joy filled traditional church services—may we feel the love of the Holy One in our hearts closer than ever. May we find something kind to do for someone else, even though we are separated. May we share the love this Christmas in new ways to connect our world and bring the hope we enjoy to others.

You all bring me hope for this day and this time,

—Rev. Jane Siebert

### **Blessing of Hope**

So may we know  
the hope  
that is not just  
for someday  
but for this day—  
here, now,  
in this moment  
that opens to us:

hope not made  
of wishes  
but of substance,

hope made of sinew  
and muscle  
and bone,

hope that has breath  
and a beating heart,

hope that will not  
keep quiet  
and be polite,

hope that knows  
how to holler  
when it is called for,

hope that knows  
how to sing  
when there seems  
little cause,

hope that raises us  
from the dead—

not someday  
but this day,  
every day,  
again and  
again and  
again.

—Jan Richardson,  
*The Cure for Sorrow*

# Applying the Science of Correspondences

BY DAVE FEKETE

One Sunday I consulted *The Revised Common Lectionary* to determine the weekly Bible readings for church, as do many Christians around the world. The passage that week was from Exodus, about liberating the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. I thought to interpret the passage in the light of Swedenborg's correspondences. In many places, Swedenborg interprets Egypt to mean memory knowledges. Following this line of thinking, I intended to discuss the possibility of becoming caught up in knowing alone, and thus enslaved in the lowest form of intellect. But when I researched the correspondences of Egyptian slavery, I discovered that there are different meanings in Swedenborg. The idea that Egypt means memory knowledges is not the whole story. So correspondences themselves now became my interest. This article is the product of my reflections on correspondences.

I think that correspondences can be problematic. I grew up with an understanding that correspondences were a kind of translation: this means that. My understanding was that in Swedenborg, the Bible is a set of fixed symbols. Each image in the Bible stands for some spiritual reality: this means that. For instance, the sun stands for God, or for love; the moon for truth; flowers for the beginning of regeneration or rebirth; a tree stands for a person; the leaves of a tree stand for knowledge; gold stands for celestial good; bronze for natural good; the earth stands for the natural person; the Holy Land for the regenerated person; and so on. I believed that part of Swedenborg's revelation was to explain what each thing in the Bible stands for. Swedenborg seems to say this in *The White Horse*. The idea

that a Biblical image corresponds to a spiritual reality is thus called "correspondences," because every Bible image "corresponds" to a spiritual reality—this means that. The first indication that my understanding needed modification came from Rev. Dr. George Dole. In an introductory class way back at the Swedenborg School of Religion, he told us to put aside our Orphan Annie decoder rings when we think about correspondences.

**In an introductory class way back at the Swedenborg School of Religion, he told us to put aside our Orphan Annie decoder rings when we think about correspondences.**

Swedenborgians can be rather tedious and simplistic in the way they approach correspondences. Some even call it the "science of correspondences" as if it were some empirical discipline one could apply to the Bible. This simplistic approach Swedenborgians sometimes use to interpret the Bible may have figured in Ralph Waldo Emerson's criticism of Swedenborg. Emerson wrote a lengthy essay called, "Swedenborg; or, The Mystic." Emerson praises Swedenborg lavishly in the beginning of the essay, only to turn almost angry with Swedenborg toward the end. One of Emerson's complaints against Swedenborg's system of correspondences is that symbols are too fixed to ideas:

This design of exhibiting such correspondences, which, if adequately executed, would be the poem of the world, in which all history and science would play an essential part, was narrowed and

defeated by the exclusively theologic direction which his inquiries took. His perception of nature is not human and universal, but is mystical and Hebraic. He fastens each natural object to a theologic notion;—a horse signifies carnal understanding; a tree, perception; the moon, faith; a cat means this; an ostrich that; an artichoke this other;—and poorly tethers every symbol to a several ecclesiastic sense ("Swedenborg; or The Mystic," p. 69).

(I was unable to find any references to ostriches or artichokes in Swedenborg.)

Emerson liked the idea of Bible symbols and nature corresponding to spiritual realities. What he didn't like is a formula that dictated what each symbol must mean spiritually. I don't like that either. And I'm not even sure that's what Swedenborg intended. Emerson's Swedenborgian acquaintances in the nineteenth century may have influenced his understanding of correspondences. And we still teach that method, today.

Consider what it could look like to try to apply Swedenborg's correspondences to liberation from slavery in Egypt. First, Egypt is usually associated with a certain kind of knowledge. Swedenborg uses the Latin word *scientia* for the kind of knowledge represented by Egypt. The green Standard Edition of Swedenborg's works translates that Latin word with the abominable English word, "scientifics." I'm not even sure that is a real English word. And it is a problem because it gives the impression that Swedenborg is talking about scientific things, which he is not. Another translation is "memory knowledge." That's a whole lot closer to what Swedenborg means, and you can see that it is not about science.

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## Science of Correspondences

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Finally, John E. Elliott has maybe the best translation: “factual knowledge.” So Egypt stands for factual knowledge.

In the *Arcana Coelestia* (*Secrets of Heaven*), Swedenborg talks about what enslavement in Egypt could look like. He says that we can get too tied up in factual knowledge, or in facts that we store in our memory. Facts are of all kinds. They are historical data, technology, literature; religious doctrines can be factual knowledge, too, and science. We start our learning by acquiring facts. Children memorize all sorts of facts, such as sports heroes’ statistics. For some reason, I memorized the heights of mountains (the Matterhorn is 14,780 feet high). Every Bible verse we memorize is factual knowledge. Every doctrine we learn is factual knowledge. Every homespun saying we learn is factual knowledge: “A penny saved is a penny earned.” The fact that Sir John Alexander Macdonald was the first Prime Minister of Canada is factual knowledge. Without these facts, we have no foundation for reasoning. We have no foundation for making decisions. We have no beginning in wisdom.

But we can get stuck in facts. We can never progress beyond them. We can devote our lives to mere knowing, not even to independent thinking, still less to wisdom. We can also get stuck in factual knowledge that doesn’t help us spiritually. We can, for instance, devote ourselves to science, as Swedenborg did. He had a real psychic crisis when he tried to reconcile his interest in science with religion. He called scientific knowledge sensual. He had devoted his entire life to science. In his mystical vision, Swedenborg saw the room he was staying in crawling with frogs and slithering with snakes which signified his sensual, scientific factual knowledge. These facts

don’t tell us how to become spiritual. They don’t tell us what matters eternally, versus what dies with this world. They don’t lead us to heaven. Even religious doctrines can be mere facts. So liberation from Egyptian bondage means release from a craving for facts. It means drawing on inspiration, on intuition, it means figuring things out for ourselves, it means making choices from spiritually inspired wisdom. Swedenborg does say this, and says it extensively, in *Arcana Coelestia*.

That’s one application of correspondences. But it’s not all there is to it. Swedenborg uses the correspondence of deliverance from Egyptian slavery in a different general sense and in several specific senses that do not deal with factual knowledge at all.

**We can get stuck in facts. We can never progress beyond them. We can devote our lives to mere knowing, not even to independent thinking, still less to wisdom.**

One correspondence Swedenborg uses is general liberation from the slavery of sin. By this, Swedenborg means the very broad concept of becoming spiritual from our natal condition of natural and worldly life.

“Who caused you to come up out of the land of Egypt” means which led them. This is clear from the meaning of ‘causing to come up out of the land of Egypt,’ when those whose interest lies in external things and not in what is internal are the subject, as being self-led; for ‘the land of Egypt,’ when they are the subject, means slavery, while ‘causing to come up’ means leading themselves out of it.... In reference to the latter, those words mean being led by the Lord, thus being raised from the natural man to the spiritual man, or from the world to heaven, consequently passing

from slavery into freedom (*Arcana Coelestia* §10409).

A second correspondence for liberation from Egyptian bondage is deliverance from molestation from hell, which is a form of spiritual captivity.

Who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slaves” means deliverance by Him from hell. This is clear from the meaning of “bringing out” as deliverance; from the meaning of “the land of Egypt” as molestations by those from hell, dealt with in §7240, §7278; and from the meaning of “the house of slaves” as spiritual captivity, dealt with in §8049. The reason why “the house of slaves” means spiritual captivity and also hell is that being held captive by those in hell and being led by them is slavery, whereas being led by the Lord is freedom... (*Arcana Coelestia* §8866).

A third correspondence of deliverance from Egyptian slavery is liberation from falsity by Jesus’ incarnation in the world. Swedenborg explains this correspondence in a discussion of the three feasts that God instituted in the Jewish calendar.

Furthermore, the feasts which had been instituted among those people, three a year, are also said to have been instituted in remembrance of their deliverance from slavery in Egypt, by which in the spiritual sense is meant in remembrance of deliverance from molestation by falsities through the Lord’s Coming into the world (*Arcana Coelestia* §7093).

A fourth correspondence of deliverance from Egyptian slavery is acquisition of celestial good and truth after temptation.

“And afterwards they will go out with great acquisitions” means release, and that they will possess celestial and spiritual goods. This is clear from the meaning of “going out” as being released, and from the

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## Science of Correspondences

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meaning of “acquisitions” as celestial and spiritual good, for this is what those people acquire who suffer forms of persecution and undergo forms of temptation, oppression, and affliction or slavery, dealt with in this and the previous verse (*Arcana Coelestia* §1851).

A fifth correspondence of deliverance from Egyptian slavery is the second coming of Jesus into the souls of people of the New Church.

...by “visiting to visit you,” in the sense of the letter, is here signified liberation from slavery in Egypt, and introduction into the land of Canaan; but this is not the spiritual content of the Word, but the natural. The spiritual of the Word treats of the Lord, of His kingdom and church, and of love and faith; and therefore by “visiting to visit” in the spiritual sense is meant liberation from falsities, and thus initiation into what is of the Lord’s church and kingdom, thus the coming of the Lord in love and faith with those who will be of the new church (*Arcana Coelestia* §6895).

None of these five correspondences of deliverance from Egyptian slavery are about factual knowledge. They are variations on the general theme of liberation from slavery—which could mean a lot of kinds of deliverance. It means deliverance from all kinds of evil. This could mean deliverance from addictions to substances, or from unhealthy behaviors like argumentativeness, or from more serious sins like lying and addiction to conspiracy theories, and all manner of worldly attachments and sinful cravings. Liberation from slavery symbolizes all kinds of spiritual advancement, moving from one lesser state of soul to a more advanced one. That is what the Sunday benediction means, “May the Lord bless our going out and our coming

in.” Going out means going out of a lesser spiritual state and coming in means coming into a higher spiritual state. This is regeneration: going out of natural life and coming into spiritual life. This, too, is what liberation from Egyptian bondage corresponds to.

### Swedenborg gave correspondences for only Genesis, Exodus, and Revelation. We’re on our own for the other sixty-three Bible books.

Now, an unreflective application of Swedenborg’s correspondences could rest in the idea that slavery in Egypt means preoccupation with factual knowledge only. One could think that if Egypt means factual knowledge, liberation from Egypt is only intellectual. Overcoming addictions would not be in the story. Nor would the other ways of going out and coming in be considered. It would all be about knowledge and worse, about science, and that would be all there is to it. This is the kind of tediousness that made Emerson so mad at Swedenborg. Probably due to his encounters with members of the Swedenborgian Church, Emerson got the idea that Swedenborg’s system was that slavish. Emerson said that “The slippery Proteus is not so easily caught,” and I think a good reading of Swedenborg shows that Swedenborg doesn’t fix Proteus so methodically. Liberation from Egyptian slavery can also mean breaking the bonds of a slavish reliance on “the science of correspondences.”

The problem with a slavish dependence on the science of correspondences is that it does violence to Bible stories; it tears them apart. For me, interpreting a Bible passage begins first with prolonged meditation on the Bible passage. I let the story speak to me, inspire my thinking. I ask questions

like, “What is a leading theme in this story?” or “What’s this story about?” or “How do the characters interact with one another in this story?” or “What is the emotional/spiritual center of gravity in this story?” and/or “How do these themes relate to my life experience?” I find that the Bible speaks to me more when I meditate on the story and open my mind and heart to influx, than it does when I dismantle the story and reassemble it according to the science of correspondences. I may or may not consult what Swedenborg has to say about the imagery in the story. Remember, Swedenborg gave correspondences for only Genesis, Exodus, and Revelation. We’re on our own for the other sixty-three Bible books. And if we want to use Paul, we’re clean out of luck. I do consider Bible stories in the light of general principles of Swedenborgian doctrine such as regeneration, or uses, or heaven and hell, or the emotional life called lusts or affections in Swedenborg, or God’s relations with humans, or the life of charity, or any of the other general principles in Swedenborgian theology. Swedenborg writes that when a person devoutly reads the Bible, God enlightens the mind and kindles the heart with warmth. Does God do this when we take the story apart and reassemble it according to the kind of factual knowledge we might find in *The Dictionary of Correspondences*?

So, I do not use, nor do I think it appropriate to use, the “this-means-that” method of Bible interpretation, which some people call applying the science of correspondences. My Orphan Annie decoder ring is now only a cast-off collectible relic. I think that the internal sense is largely what happens in a person’s heart and consciousness when she or he meditates on a story from the Bible. This, I believe, opens the soul for influx. But attacking scripture with facts stored up in the memory, as I

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## The Year of the Spiritual World

# Our Revival from the Dead and Entry into Eternal Life

*from Heaven and Hell, §445 – 449, George F. Dole translation*

BY EMANUEL SWEDENBORG

When someone's body can no longer perform its functions in the natural world in response to the thoughts and affections of its spirit (which it derives from the spiritual world), then we say that the individual has died. This happens when the lungs breathing and the heart's systolic motion have ceased. The person, though, has not died at all. We are only separated from the physical nature that was useful to us in the world. The essential person is actually still alive. I say that the essential person is still alive because we are not people because of our bodies but because of our spirits. After all, it is the spirit within us that thinks, and thought and affection together make us the people we are.

We can see, then, that when we die, we simply move from one world into another. This is why in the inner meaning of the Word, "death" means resurrection and a continuation of life. The deepest communication of our spirit is with our breathing and our heartbeat; thought connects with our breathing, and affection, an attribute of love, with our heart. Consequently, when these two motions in the body cease, there is an immediate separation. It is these two motions, the respiratory motion of the lungs and the systolic motion of the heart, that are essential ties. Once they are severed, the spirit is left to itself; and the body, being now without the life of its spirit, cools and decays.


After this separation, our spirit stays in the body briefly, but not after

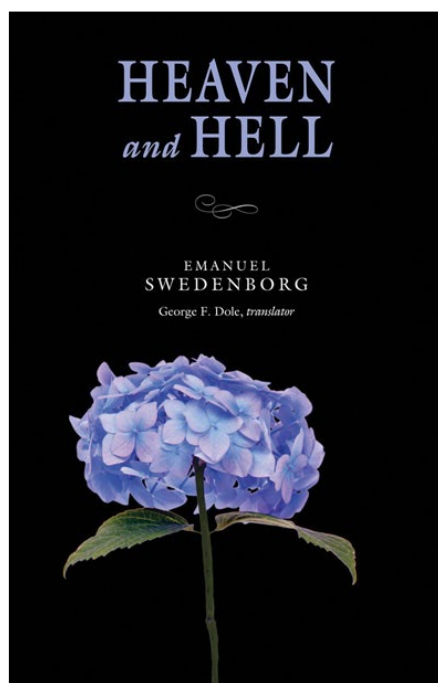
the complete stoppage of the heart, which varies depending on the cause of death. In some cases, the motion of the heart continues for quite a while, and in others it does not. The moment it does stop, we are awakened, but this is done by the Lord alone. "Being awakened" means having our spirit led out of our body and into the spiritual world, which is commonly called "resurrection."

**We can see, then, that when we die, we simply move from one world into another. This is why in the inner meaning of the Word, "death" means resurrection and a continuation of life.**

The reason our spirit is not separated from our body until the motion of the heart has stopped is that the heart answers to affection, an attribute of love, which is our essential life, since all of us derive our vital warmth from love. Consequently, as long as this union lasts there is a responsiveness, and therefore the life of the spirit is [still] in the body.

I have not only been told how the awakening happens, I have been shown by firsthand experience. The actual experience happened to me so that I could have a full knowledge of how it occurs. I was brought into a state in which my physical senses were inoperative—very much, then, like the state of people who are dying. However, my deeper life and thought remained intact so that I could perceive and retain what was happening to me and what does happen to people who are being awakened from death. I noticed that my physical breathing was almost suspended, with a deeper breathing, a breathing of the spirit, continuing along with a very slight and silent physical one.

At first then a connection was established between my heartbeat and the heavenly kingdom, because that kingdom corresponds to the human heart. I also saw angels from that kingdom, some at a distance, but two sitting close to my head. The effect was to take away all my own affection but to leave me in possession of thought and perception. I remained in this state for several hours. 



# Kurt Fekete Appointed Vice President

*An Announcement from the General Council*

We are grateful to Kurt Fekete for his willingness to take on the responsibilities of vice president in addition to being Youth Director. (The previous vice president, Tom Neuenfeldt, stepped down due to family obligations.) He was unanimously approved by the General Council at our November meetings, and will serve until elections in 2021.

Kurt Fekete was born and raised in a Swedenborgian family, where his mother, Joyce, loved talking with him about their religion. He grew up in a Detroit suburb, attending Almont summer camp, and going to youth retreats. Kurt loved science when he was in high school and graduated from Wayne State University with a BS in Chemical Engineering. As a young adult, while working as a chemical engineer, Kurt continued to love learning about Swedenborgian theology and being active in the Swedenborgian church. He attended the Royal Oak Church and was a board member of

the Almont New Church Assembly. Kurt was instrumental in launching and leading the young adult group known as Transitions as a volunteer for fifteen years from 1989 to 2004. Kurt's first and greatest love was always volunteering at youth retreats, first as a van driver and dorm supervisor, then as a session leader, where he delighted in discussing theology with teenagers. He left his career in chemical engineering to become the Youth Director for the Swedenborgian Church of United States and Canada. Now in his nineteenth year serving the youth of the church, he still absolutely loves leading retreats and summer camps. He continues to find joy in both sharing our uniquely meaningful theology and learning about spirituality from the adolescent perspective. He resides in Maine with his wonderful wife, Shelley, whom he met at a youth retreat, and his two insightful teenage daughters.

*Welcome Kurt,  
you have already fit right in!*



Kurt (lower right) and his family from left:  
Zsa Zsa (13), Shelley, and Ava (17)

## A Perfect Gift for the Holiday Season

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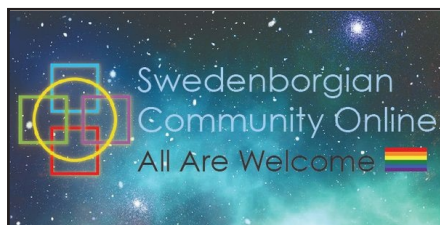
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### Science of Correspondences

Continued from page 158

think is the case in a slavish application of the science of correspondences, might not. ☒



Rev. Dr. Dave Fekete is a proud graduate of Urbana University, Harvard University, and the University of Virginia. Having served as the president of the Edmonton

Interfaith Center for Education and Action, he has attended and presented in numerous international interfaith conventions. He is on the Academic Senate, D.Min. Program Committee, and is associate faculty at Saint Stephen's College.

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## The New Church— A Spiritual Climate Change?

*More Online Learning from the  
Center for Swedenborgian Studies*

We are excited to announce the second *Virtual Education Offering for the Planet* from our Center for Swedenborgian Studies. This is a free online learning initiative for the Christmas season.

### The New Church—A Spiritual Climate Change?

Wednesdays, December 2, 9, & 16  
at 7:00 PM EST.

#### Talk One:

*The Message Distilled*

#### Talk Two:

*The Threat of World Peace*

#### Talk Three:

*Clowes's Clues to Church Growth*

Led by Rev. Dr. George F. Dole, Professor Emeritus at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies.

Each session is sixty minutes, with the first part devoted to a talk delivered by Prof. Dole and the remainder of the hour to a general conversation in a question and answer format between participants and Professor Dole. The talks will be recorded so as to be available also for viewing at a later time.

Professor Dole says of this series of talks and discussion, "I've been working on the assumption that the last judgment is coming out of the closet these days, that hidden evils are being brought to light where they can be dealt with, and that recent events have put this together with the increasing pressure toward globalism and the desperate resistance to it. I now see Swedenborg 'turning global,' the clearest first sign taking shape when he



began work on Exodus (see, *Secrets of Heaven* §6627–6633) and lays an emphasis on 'the doctrine of charity.' In dialog with Swedenborg, I also see NASA astronaut Edgar Mitchell as having had a genuine theophany experience while in outer space and the global reaction to the George Floyd video as an awakening of a new level of consciousness. And I also see traditional churches rethinking themselves as they keep losing ground, and I find myself opening to new ways of rethinking the Swedenborgian movement as a center for research and development for a transformation of consciousness." ☒



Pre-registration is required.

Participants limited to forty.

Contact

Alex Sicular:

[asicular@gtu.edu](mailto:asicular@gtu.edu)

## Books

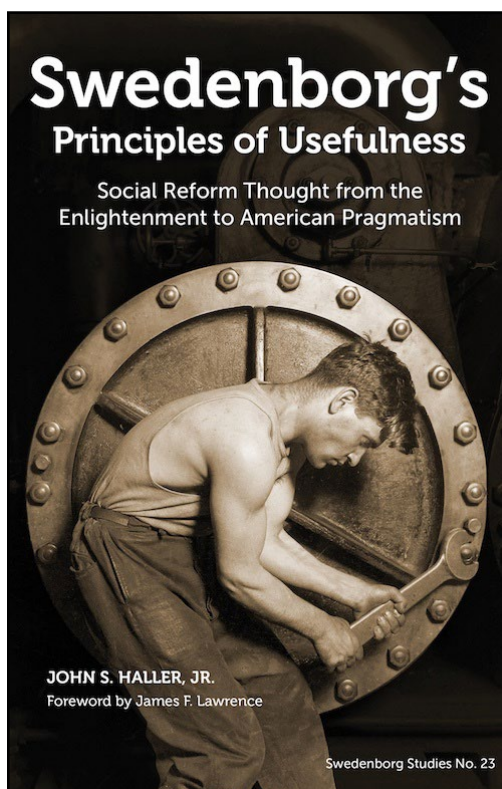
# Swedenborg's Principles of Usefulness

*Foreword, Reprinted with Permission from the Author*

BY JIM LAWRENCE

John Haller persuasively demonstrates how Swedenborg's concept of usefulness played a profound yet previously undetected behind-the-scenes role in shaping American social reform movements and in also shaping American Pragmatism. First, usefulness provided critical perspectives for Ralph Waldo Emerson, William James, and Charles Sanders Peirce, the most important early architects of this distinctive American contribution to world philosophy; and second, it contributed in surprising ways to numerous evolving arenas of social reform in the widening wake of this *can-do* school of thought. Haller illuminates how Swedenborgian aspects of pragmatism have manifested themselves up through the first quarter of the twentieth century in American philosophical thought, social reform movements, economic theories, and the fields of psychology and spirituality.

As a distinguished historian of ideas in nineteenth- and twentieth-century American studies, Haller has an impressive publication record of discovering and interpreting Swedenborg's complex reception in the United States during that period. His adept study contributes toward shaping what has become a revolutionary project in understanding Swedenborg's reach, a project that has continued to grow in scholarship over the past three decades as studies of his influence have become a veritable cottage industry. *Swedenborg's Principles of Usefulness: Social Reform Thought from the Enlightenment*



*to American Pragmatism* might be one of the most, if not *the* most, important studies yet offered, as it insightfully frames a complex web of conversations and grounded movements that have been enlivened by the principles expressed through Swedenborg's concept of usefulness.

Recognized as one of the most beloved aspects of his spiritual philosophy, the concept of usefulness is as profound as it is rare as topical vocabulary in the history of Christian thought. Carrying a large cargo in Swedenborgian thought, usefulness performs an integral role in divine functioning on the one hand, and it serves as a primary method and practice for personal spiritual development

on the other. As a scientist turned theologian, Swedenborg worked in ways that were not common in the history of Christian theology. Because of his long first career in natural philosophy, which we would today refer to as theoretical and applied natural science, Swedenborg abides in a minor category of religious thinkers who also made historically significant contributions to the scientific community; and since he made notable advances in both fields, he can arguably be identified as foremost in that category.

Swedenborg demonstrated his earliest prowess in mechanical engineering, which lends itself to understanding how to build a machine to actually work and perform a use, or something that is good and needed. His subsequent accomplishments in mathematics, astrophysics, metallurgy, and cognitive and neurological anatomy, along with his ongoing slew of inventions, continued to establish that Swedenborg instinctively focused on "how things work." Marveling in delight over concrete results when things actually work, he not only became a believer in the value of use as a guiding principle, but he also became fulfilled emotionally and spiritually by the goodness he experienced as a result. Swedenborg is distinctive in that he sought a metaphysics for theology: he wanted a cosmos that works as functionally as would any mechanical science, his earliest love. The empirical results demonstrated through a thing's usefulness played a striking role

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## Principles of Usefulness

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of necessity for Swedenborg's theological universe: the only reason why anything exists is that it provides a use; in other words, usefulness is intrinsic to purpose, which itself is the force for being.

So when turning to theology and an overarching philosophy of the divine life well past the mid-point of his own, Swedenborg carried through with his focus on how to make love and wisdom practically effective for people both individually and as a society. Usefulness became the measuring instrument that completed his trinity of heart, head, and hands, but he expressed this in his own attuned way of how success looks and feels. Following Swedenborg's lead, the philosophy of American Pragmatism essentially operates under the perception that *when something actually works*, one recognizes that a love for good has propelled it and that there is truth surely in it.

We can imagine three arenas of discourse central to a study of Swedenborg's concept of usefulness: how it functions within the Swedenborgian tradition, how it manifests in the larger context of historical Christian theology, and how it plays on the vast canvas of a broader cultural reception. John Haller tackles the third discourse in a manner hitherto never attempted—or even comprehended—either inside or outside Swedenborgianism.

As for the first arena, it is quite fascinating to see the gradual growth of usefulness inside the Swedenborgian tradition. Though Swedenborg had begun preparing in 1761 a separate volume focused primarily on usefulness, he stopped work on it and instead incorporated a fulsome discussion of the subject in *Divine Love and Wisdom* (1763). Despite the fact that he discusses usefulness in more than a hundred passages throughout his writings,

Swedenborg did not feature such terms as *uses* or *usefulness* in the book titles, chapter titles, or section headings of any of his published works. In fact, the first few subsequent generations did not seize upon usefulness, at least in print, with any particular emphasis. Other Swedenborgian concepts, such as the reality of the spiritual world, the inner sense of scripture, and the Second Coming having already occurred, were far more dramatic in the immediate religious social situation in which the earliest Swedenborgians found themselves. The Swedenborgian tradition, therefore, started a little slowly in recognizing the profundity of Swedenborg's discussion of usefulness.

In the longest running early Swedenborgian journal, *The Intellectual Repository*, a few articles shaped the initial conversation on usefulness near the end of the eighteenth century, emphasizing the concept's philosophical and metaphysical foundations. This pattern of there being a modest quantity of published discourse on Swedenborgian usefulness continued into the nineteenth century, even though it is now clear that its oral usage began to rise significantly in sermons and the spiritual life of the church. There would later appear two books on the subject: B. F. Barrett's *Ends and Uses* (1887) and John Bigelow's *The Useful Life: A Crown to the Simple Life* (1905).

In the latter quarter of the twentieth century, though, the doctrine of usefulness spiked to the forefront of spirituality discourse among Swedenborgians. A 1981 article turned pamphlet (*Uses: A Way of Personal and Spiritual Growth*) by the American psychologist Wilson Van Dusen struck a chord and rapidly progressed into a runaway favorite among the Swedenborgian branches. Implementing usefulness as a spiritual growth method is now at the forefront of Swedenborgian practices, and the overall concept of usefulness competes

with that of correspondences as the most beloved of Swedenborgian ideas.

As for the second arena, it is quite provocative and even perplexing that *usefulness* does not appear as important terminology among any prominent theological writings in Christian history. Whether considering the categories of common topics, the schema of fields, or the “systematics” of any particular major theologian from late antiquity to the present (from Origen to Wolfhart Pannenberg), you won't find the doctrine of usefulness explicitly framed except in Swedenborg. Even zeroing in on the subfield of practical theology—the skill-building and performance disciplines in theology that include preaching, teaching, worship, pastoral care, social outreach, ethical living, and spiritual practices—which one might identify with various particular *uses* of Christian theology in practice, the vocabulary of usefulness is absent and the philosophy of usefulness as a “way” is missing.

Finally, as for the third arena, up until John Haller's book, the larger philosophical and cultural engagement with Swedenborg's concept of usefulness was likewise mute. This welcome volume, however, explores some undiscovered country and reports his findings. For both Swedenborgian and American studies alike, this book tells stories and builds perspectives that will prove without a doubt to be very *useful*.



*Swedenborg's Principles of Usefulness* by John S. Haller, Jr. can be purchased here: <https://swedenborg.com/product/swedenborgs-principles-of-usefulness/>



Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence served for seventeen years in congregational leadership and twenty years as the Dean of the theological school.



As we come to the end of 2020 (many are saying, *finally*), please consider a financial gift to The Swedenborgian Church of North America. We promise to use the funds wisely and judiciously for a variety of purposes.

The General Council just approved the budget for 2021, and we would like to share with you how the funds are used.

**32% Grants to Ministries:** assistance for minister's salaries, mission work and new ideas for social outreach.

**12% Central Office:** part-time office manager, part-time financial manager, costs associated with running Central Office.

**8% Youth Work:** retreats, attendance at conventions, part-time youth director salary

**8% Leadership:** president (only full-time employee), travel, secretary, treasurer, and vice president honoraria

**6% The Messenger:** part-time editor salary, subsidized subscriptions

**6% Convention:** room & board for ministers and General Council, subsidies for children, children's program, subsidize lower costs for all attendees

**5% Council of Ministers:** chair Council of Ministers part-time salary, convention and peer supervision retreats, chair Committee for Admission to the

Ministry part-time salary

**5% Retirement for Ministers:** subsidizing retirement funds paid by churches for ministers

**4% Our Daily Bread:** part-time salary for editors, IT support

**3% Swedenborgian Community Online:** part-time salary for lead minister, equipment

**1% General Council:** all volunteer, meeting expenses

**10% Miscellaneous:** other committee meetings

On behalf of the General Council and all involved in a variety of volunteer leadership positions, thank you for your gift. Your support shows that you appreciate our efforts and the work of your denomination. ☦

*Be sure to watch the whole Annual Appeal video at our YouTube page here:*

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=irCONmScZLQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=irCONmScZLQ)

Rev. Jane Siebert, *President* • Kurt Fekete, *Vice President* • Karen Conger, *Secretary* • Jennifer Lindsay, *Treasurer*  
 Rev. Susannah Currie, *Chair COM* • Rev. Betsy Caughman, *Ohio Association* • Rev. Jenny Coffman, *Members At Large*  
 Stan Conger, *Pacific Coast Association* • Lon Elmer, *Mid-Atlantic Association* • Beki Greenwood, *Massachusetts Union*  
 Barb Halle, *Illinois Association* • Carl Helm, *Kansas Association* • Susan Hulcher, *Western Canada Conference*  
 Rev. Thom Muller, *Pacific Coast Association*

## Nation's Wounds

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which it has already attained. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has his own purposes.

In several news stories and various interviews broadcast recently, I noted one mother's comments that she could not let her children see the vitriol and animosity that had erupted from protesters showing up near some of the polling locations. It occurred to me then, as it does now, that children, by simply being present, can remind us how childish our actions can be. Recently someone made an obscene gesture to me, for causing his car to slow down, and I noticed he had his grandchildren in the car with him. What do we say to them? My thoughts turned to how Jesus cared for the little ones when he said, "Woe to the one who causes one of these little ones to stumble..." (Matthew 18:6). Jesus knew that offenses would come. It is that same passage (Matthew 18:7) where He says, "Woe to the world because of offenses! For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!" Lincoln quoted that same verse in the inaugural when he addressed the pinnacle of racism and man's inhumanity to man, slavery, and its toll on the heart and soul of the nation.

Acts of hatred—are what turn us away and make us look downward only, toward bodily and earthly concerns, or in other words, toward the things of hell. This happens when

we send charity (kindness and goodness towards the neighbor) into exile and extinguish it, which shatters the bond between the Lord and us. Only charity, which is love and mercy, maintains the bond (*Secrets of Heaven* §379).

**We must remove our sandals. If our lowest senses incline us to despise those who disagree, to hate those who oppose us, and to crave the destruction of some, we have become our own enemy...**

Lincoln saw something in his second inaugural words that our President-elect must sense even now before that day in January arrives. How can we begin to calm a restless nation, still reeling from the effects of daily deaths due to the COVID-19 virus, still challenging the science of mitigation efforts—such as wearing masks—still suffering from a damaged and bleeding economy, and still sensing the anger of those with differing opinions and political persuasions? A great healing must come. It must begin within each of us. We must remove our sandals. If our lowest senses incline us to despise those who disagree, to hate those who oppose us, and to crave the destruction of some, we have become our own enemy and we must remove those ideas and falsities that block our own spiritual healing. In his book *New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings*, Swedenborg wrote,

If we despise our neighbors or regard people as our enemies for merely disagreeing with us or not showing us reverence or respect, our life is a life of self-love. If for similar slights we hate our neighbors and persecute them, then we are even more deeply entrenched in self-love. And if we burn with vengeance against them and crave their destruction, our

self-love is stronger still; people with this attitude eventually love being cruel (§68).

Our spiritual healing begins with looking inward and upward and asking, as the great Psalmist before us did,

Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my anxious thoughts; and see if there be any hurtful way in me, and lead me in the everlasting way (Psalm 139:23–24).

I suspect that Lincoln would have agreed with Swedenborg's words: "Being reconciled with our brother or sister is turning our backs on hostility, hatred, and vengeance. We can see that this is turning our backs on these evils because they are sins" (*Life / Faith* §73).

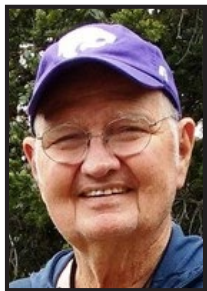
Ronald White, Jr., professor emeritus of American Religious History at San Francisco Theological Seminary, described the day of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address as windy and raining in his book, *Lincoln's Greatest Speech*. He points out that as Lincoln stepped out onto the portico of the Capitol building, by some miraculous timing, the wind and rain stopped, and the sun's rays broke through the clouds. As if by divine providence, a stillness fell over the crowd as he began to speak. Lincoln's words were not the celebratory words some had encouraged him to say, but instead were much needed words of healing and a profound call to do the right thing as a nation. His summation then, is how this great speech and timely message will be remembered, and hopefully, what we can prayerfully keep in our hearts as we hope for peace in the coming days with the transition in leadership of this great nation:

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the

Continues on page 166

## Passages

### Deaths



**Vernon Kraus, Jr., 76**, entered fully into the spiritual world on November 12, 2020, at Wesley Medical Center, Wichita. He was born August 14,

1944, in Kingman, Kansas, to Vernon Joseph and Helen Maxine (Cole) Kraus.

Vernon was a fifth-generation Swedenborgian and his ancestors were instrumental in the founding of the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church, 133 years ago. Vernon served the church all his life and was president of the board for many years. He was always the fixer-upper and his woodworking and craftsman skills will be evident in the church for many years to come.

Vernon graduated from Pretty Prairie High School in 1962 and Fort Hays State University in 1967. He was the Industrial Arts teacher at Pretty Prairie High School for thirty-two years. The condolences from former students have flooded in for Linda, his wife of fifty-five years, and children, Rick and Karen. Vernon delighted in his seven grandchildren and one great-granddaughter; they each carry forth a special gift of having Vernon as grandpa. Vernon was also an avid farmer and loved caring for the land.

Many of you will remember their daughter Paula, who died in 2016 from ALS. She spent two summers in Boston as assistant to director Muff Worden to help prepare for conventions and assist in the Central Office. Paula remained active in the Swedenborgian Church and they attended the D.C. Church of the Holy City while they lived there. It is a comfort to know Vernon and his

beloved daughter are sharing the wonders of heaven.

### Confirmations

We are happy to announce that on November 9, 2020, **Roxanne Grace Sperry** of Halifax, Nova Scotia, was confirmed into the faith and life of the Church of the New Jerusalem.



This was accomplished by means of a Zoom meeting, with the Rev. Dr. Reuben P. Bell officiating, and the Rev. Dr. James Lawrence in attendance.

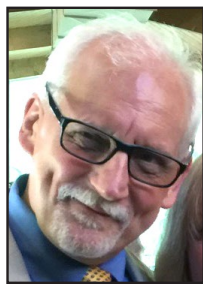
In a truly unique manner, in many ways analogous to what we know about life in the spiritual world, three people in three distant places, in two countries—Nova Scotia, Maine, and California—came together in a single moment to experience and share this spiritual milestone in Roxanne's life.

Congratulations to Roxanne! ☦

### Nation's Wounds

*Continued from page 165*

work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations. ☦



Pastor Paul Deming is serving as Licensed Pastor at the Church of the Open Word, Garden Chapel in St. Louis. He has been playing and writing music since he was nine years old. His song "From the Rising of the

Sun" was published by Integrity Music in several languages and has appeared in several hymnals in the United States.



Did you know the Swedenborgian Church of North America has a YouTube channel? Virtual content that has been created, including the 2020 Convention and the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism program, can be found here for viewing at anytime!

Be sure to click here to [subscribe to the Swedenborgian Church of North America's YouTube Channel](#), or email [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org) for the link.

## SWEDENBORGIANS IN ACTION



## AGAINST RACISM

### Opportunities to Engage with Anti-Racism

To be effective and to create change, within individuals and our society, anti-racism work needs to be an on-going project. There are now a couple ways to engage with this work in our denomination. *Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism* is a biweekly email newsletter that provides education around issues central to anti-racism, ideas for actions to take, and inspiration to keep at it long-term. (Email [revshada@gmail.com](mailto:revshada@gmail.com) to join the email list). *Manifold Angels* is a Facebook group where folks can gather to share resources and provide encouragement and accountability to and for each other as they continue anti-racism work in their own lives and communities. (Search Manifold Angels and ask to join.)

## What's Happening

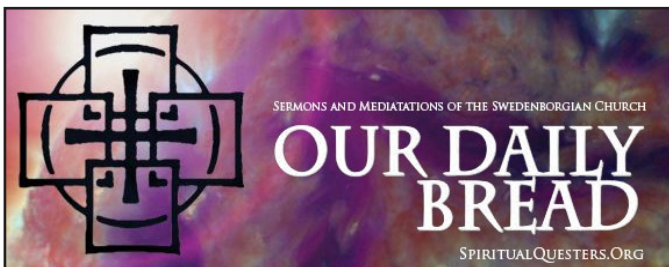
### Name That Church!

We've recently acquired several photos of churches likely dating back to around 1910. We need your help identifying them. Do you recognize this one? Send an email to [Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org) and let us know!

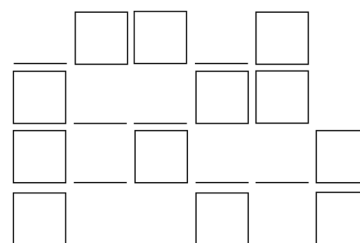


### Name That Church—November

Thanks to Richard Russo from Frostburg, Maryland for identifying this church as the former Church of the New Jerusalem in Roxbury, Massachusetts!  
[www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections-access/gusn/195162/](http://www.historicnewengland.org/explore/collections-access/gusn/195162/)



Our Daily Bread at [SpiritualQuesters.org](http://SpiritualQuesters.org) is your resource for recent sermons, meditations, reflections, lessons, interviews, and original content from within and beyond the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



A Y R V G  
E I B N R  
C U K U T N  
I T N A E G

At this time of year, there is nothing worse than

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Jumble by Jason Greenwood  
 Answers will be printed in the next issue.

**Answers to the November Jumble:**  
 Basic, Alone, Brutal, Armory

When asked what type of community they wanted to live in, the couple said,  
 "I love the farm life, but I think I need to move somewhere a little more  
 "Urbana"

*"Little children... are in peace because  
 they are in innocence, and because they  
 are in peace they are, in their whole  
 nature, full of play."  
 ~ Heaven and Hell #288*

Calligraphy Quotes by Myrrh Brooks  
[@myrrhbrooks](https://www.instagram.com/myrrhbrooks) on Instagram

### Get the Messenger by mail

- US Address – \$20/year\*
- Canadian Address – \$30/year
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\*Subscription prices will be going up January 1, 2021  
 Visit the website for details or to subscribe to the online version of *the Messenger*: [swedenborg.org/the-messenger/](http://swedenborg.org/the-messenger/)

### 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.

## Fall 2020 General Council Report

BY KAREN CONGER, *Recording Secretary*

The General Council met by Zoom November 6 and 7, 2020, for their fall meeting. All of the members were in attendance for four hours on Friday and an additional three hours on Saturday, with one member present for the Saturday meeting only due to employment responsibilities. As well as hearing reports from all of the officers, committee chairs, the Council of Ministers' chair, and others, the members delivered their liaisons reports from all of the ministries in North America. Various appointments were made, including that of Kurt Fekete as vice president to complete the unexpired term of Tom Neuenfeldt, who resigned due to the call of increased family responsibilities.

One of the positive aspects of meeting by Zoom has been the opportunity for ministers to report in person on their mission churches. It was a pleasure for the General Council to hear from Rev. Jonathan Mitchell, reporting on the Garden Church, in San Pedro, California; Rev. Carla Friedrich, reporting on the Church of the Southwest Desert, in Silver City, New Mexico; and Rev. Young-Min Kim,

reporting on the Korean New Church in New York, New York. In addition, Rev. Robert McCluskey joined the meeting to update the General Council on the Social Justice Committee.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay presented the proposed 2021 budget, which projects a \$48K+ surplus, largely driven by the fact that our recent annual convention was held virtually, as well as many other meetings that have been held virtually instead of face-to-face.

Other discussion points included the fact that Convention's Bylaws and Constitution do not allow for virtual voting at business sessions of the General Convention; therefore, all terms of office in Convention were extended by one year. In addition, an ad hoc committee chaired by Kurt Fekete has been formed to develop Social Media Best Practices for the denomination and that process is underway.

We hope that it will be possible to meet face-to-face for the annual convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, as had originally been planned for 2020. If the pandemic has not eased by next summer however, other plans will be made similar to those implemented for convention 2020. ☒