



The Role of Truth in Spiritual Growth

BY JENNY MARTIN CAUGHMAN

Not one prone to quote the apostle Paul, I still find some of his writings insightful. One which I find particularly meaningful is from his letter to the Romans where he admits, “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (Romans 7:15). I believe he is expressing what most of us have experienced at some point in our lives, not understanding ourselves or other people. While recently reading Swedenborg, I acquired some clarity about myself and others, in terms of what both motivates us and what hinders us on the spiritual path.

In one of his most significant works, *Divine Providence*, Swedenborg describes human beings as having three possible levels of freedom: earthly, rational, and spiritual. Animals do not have freedom, as they are driven solely by physical desires, of which there are three: To find food and shelter, to procreate, and to avoid being hurt (*DP* 74:3). Our three levels of freedom are influenced by the desires that stem from our three levels of love: earthly, spiritual, and heavenly. Similarly, we human beings are gifted with minds which also have three levels, as explained in part three of *Divine Love and Wisdom*. “This means that we can rise from earthly knowledge to spiritual intelligence and from there to heavenly wisdom; and because of these latter two, the intelligence and the wisdom, we can turn to the Lord, be united to him, and therefore live forever” (*DP* 75). Swedenborg then goes on to explain, “This raising of our desires

would not be possible, though, if we did not have the ability to raise our discernment because we are rational and to do so intentionally because we are free.”

Why is it so difficult to grow spiritually, even when, through the gift of Swedenborg’s writings, we have an incredibly detailed road map?

So here is another example of that which is central to Swedenborg’s thought: While we are motivated by what we love, our understanding can be raised to a higher level. We start off by loving self and that which is worldly—physical things and matters held in esteem by worldly people, such as reputation and power. If we are to grow spiritually, we must “raise our discernment.” For this to happen we must first come to know about the spiritual, then be taught the importance of loving God and neighbor, and then come to truly love loving God and neighbor. This is the essence of the spiritual path. On this path we see that what we love can change as we are first exposed to the knowledge of a higher path, and then, by experiencing this higher path and consciously choosing not to engage in self-serving behavior for no other reason than it is bad to do so, we come to greater love of both God and our neighbor and thus grow closer to God. What we love can change, and this change begins in our understanding, by the *raising of our discernment*.

When I read Swedenborg, it all makes perfect sense—and I’m ready to jump on board and move on up to the Celestial Heaven! And yet I recognize, in spite of my reading of Swedenborg, this hasn’t happened. And, if we are honest, we will all admit that we don’t always love God, that we are all prone to selfish and worldly thoughts and behaviors. So what holds us back? Why is it so difficult to grow spiritually, even when, through the gift of Swedenborg’s writings, we have an incredibly detailed road map?

In addition to Swedenborg, one of my favorite spiritual teachers is Teresa of Avila, the sixteenth century Carmelite nun and the first female doctor of the Catholic Church. Teresa’s best-known book is *The Interior Castle*, in which she describes our souls as having seven layers, and she details the process of moving toward the center, where we find union with God. To progress on this path, we must pass through doors, and the three hinges of these doors are prayer, self-awareness, and humility. From my Swedenborgian lens, I understand prayer as consciously turning toward God; self-awareness as recognizing our actual intentions, what we truly love and therefore what is actually motivating us; and humility as recognizing that any good or wise thing we happen to do, think, or desire comes from God, not from us. I find self-awareness to be the most challenging of these three and will therefore use the remainder of this article in its exploration.

Continued on page 6

Contents

The Role of Truth in Spiritual Growth.....	1
Editor's Corner	2
Letters to the Editor and President	2
Letter from the President	3
Christian Response to the Attack on the Capitol.....	4
Year of the Spiritual World: Near Death Experiences.....	7
Mission of the Social Justice Committee	8
Called to Be Peacemakers	10
Pandemic Relief	12
Welcome A/V Consultant	13
Passages.....	14
Taekwondo	14
What's Happening.....	15
SAAR—Black History Month Series	16

Editor's Corner



A Full Year Later

This issue of *the Messenger* is so full, my space is limited. It's hard to believe it has been a year as your editor (and what a year it has been). I hope that all of you will continue to send me letters and articles, as regulars and new contributors. I truly feel as though this is what I am meant to be doing.

—Beki Greenwood

Messenger@Swedenborg.org

Letters to the President

Support of our American Neighbours

I am writing this letter on behalf of the board at The Church of the Good Shepherd in Kitchener, Ontario, and I believe my words echo the sentiments of our congregation, as well, based on their reaction to the letter written by NCCC, related to the insurrection on Capitol Hill, which was shared with them.

The purpose of this letter is to let you know that we are here, in support of our American neighbours, and we stand in solidarity with you. We were shocked by this event, and our hearts go out to you and to all Americans.

Furthermore, we commend you and your colleagues for speaking up and writing the letter to Vice President Pence and the members of Congress and the Cabinet.

Many of us watched the inauguration and did so with great hope and relief. The ceremony conveyed a promise of hope and of healing.

For me, the highlight of the inauguration was Amanda Gorman's recitation of "The Hill We Climb," particularly the final stanza:

We will rebuild, reconcile and recover
and every known nook of our nation and
every corner called our country,
our people diverse and beautiful will
emerge,
battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the
shade,
afire and unafraid
The new dawn blooms as we free it
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it
If only we're brave enough to be it.

We admire your courage in being a light.

—Christine MacTavish
Kitchener, Ontario

Letters to the Editor

Virtual Education Offerings for the Planet

I want to give a shout out about one benefit of the pandemic. I participated, along with a lot of other folks (nearly fifty!) in a Zoom course hosted by Dr. Devin Zuber through the Center for Swedenborgian Studies last Fall. This quality course was free and available to all. We read *Divine Providence* together. Professor Zuber arranged guest speakers, and the discussions were right on the money. In *DP* §50, Swedenborg states that in the spiritual world, time and space do not separate us, and right now I can see other folks, instantaneously, wherever they live—no separation! This Advent season, I watched Rev. Dr. George Dole on the transformation occurring in our world, speaking with his practical optimism and hope for peace. Perhaps more of you will join me this spring when Dr. Devin Zuber leads another course featuring *Heaven and Hell*.

—Deane Currie
Riverside, Rhode Island

the Messenger

© The Swedenborgian Church of North America

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

January/February 2021

Volume 245, No. 1, Whole Number 5461

Editor, design, and production: Rebekah Greenwood

Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith, Brittany Price, Herb Ziegler, & Trevor

Standing Committee for Communication and Information: Holly Bauer, Kevin Baxter & Val Brugler

Printing: Classic GraphX, Cambridge MA

Email: messenger@swedenborg.org

Editorial, Business, and Subscription Address:
The Messenger, Central Office

50 Quincy Street
Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: manager@swedenborg.org

Subscriptions: free online subscription at <https://swedenborg.org/subscribe/>. Printed and mailed to US address, \$25/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$40/year; single copies, \$3.00. Libraries & prisoners, free. Send check made out to "Swedenborgian Church" with "Messenger" on the memo line. Other requests, write or call Central Office.

Submissions are accepted at any time. Submissions must be received by the third Monday of the month to be considered for the next issue.

The opinions and views expressed are those of the authors, not of *the Messenger*, the Standing Committee for Communication and Information, or the Swedenborgian Church.

Letter from the President

The Year of the Spiritual World: 2020–21

Oh, Dear Friends,

As I write to you today as president of our denomination, it is hard to know what to say. By the time I write these words and you read them, who knows what will have happened in our world? How many more people will have died from COVID-19? Will there be another riot in our national capitol or state capitol? Will you or I get our vaccinations?

So, what do we do with this uncertainty? How are you faring? What keeps you awake at night? What does justice look like to you? Where do you find peace?

I found peace yesterday with this prayer from Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley as the Garden Church began four days of prayer and fasting during this weekend and leading up to the inauguration on January 20.

Dear God, We pray to you to help us accept the gift of peace you have given us. Guide us to let go of hatred and fear. Let us find peace within ourselves. Let that peace empower us and overflow from us to our neighbors. And as the Lord's Prayer says forgive us our own trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. Please lead us not into temptation. Lead us away from the temptation to fight, to seek revenge and to hold grudges. We pray that we become great peacemakers, that our love and forgiveness propagate, and resonate, throughout your kingdom. Amen.

And then today, I received a post from Rev. Gladys Wheaton, *Called to Be Peacemakers*, which she wrote for this *Messenger*. ([Page 10](#)) Rev. Gladys calls us,

*....to be at Peace,
at Peace with God,
at Peace with Nature,
at Peace with Each Other,
at Peace with Ourselves.
Called to Beloved Community,
Called to "Do Justice, Love Mercy, and Walk Humbly with our God,"
Called to Witness to the One God, the Divine Human God,
In Whom is the Trinity of Creator, Savior, and Regenerator.*

In the midst of this confusion, sadness, and longing, we are called to be peacemakers and to seek justice. We do this by living our faith, speaking our truth, and finding our own way to love one another as children of God.

We can do this. Amen

—Rev. Jane Siebert
#peacewithjustice



What is the Christian Response to the Attack on the Capitol?

Written January 8, 2021

BY RICH TAFEL

This past week in Washington, D.C. was definitely one of the craziest in the entire seventeen years I've lived in D.C. It only compares to the day that a plane crashed into the Pentagon and the Capitol was evacuated.

As you all know, this past Wednesday a group of home-grown terrorists tried to subvert our democracy by breaking into the Capitol to stop the counting of ballots from the Electoral College. We now know that their goal was to kill or kidnap our national leaders.

No one who follows current events, in the slightest way, should have been surprised. A few things that happened on Wednesday made it clear to me that something terrible was more likely to happen. First, when the leader of the Proud Boys (an alt-right militia) was prosecuted in D.C. court the day before, I knew this would rile up their fragile egos. Second—when it became clear that two Democrats, a Black minister and a Jewish man, had won two Senate seats in Georgia—power would shift from Republican control of the Senate to Democrat, desperation was sure to follow. Not only was this a threat to White supremacist thinking, but it also meant that the President could face punishment from Congress after he leaves office. The final straw was the President himself encouraging them to march to the Capitol to support Republican members who pursued a conspiracy theory about the election.

I decided to stay in D.C. to keep an eye on the church and because a member of the church has been ill and

would likely need to go to the hospital. My apartment is only five blocks from the Capitol, and I was walking on the street when throngs of the President's supporters were walking to the Capitol. They were followed shortly by dozens of police cars. I stopped in my local grocery store to stock up when word came that the city would have a curfew. In the supermarket were long lines of supporters and local Washingtonians—the tension, even there, was high.

American politics is a civil religion that provides a forum for us to work out our differences peacefully.

When I returned to my apartment, I watched online as the first protestors broke through the barricades. With the millions we spend on military and police and the obvious threat of that day, I was, and still am, stunned and furious that there was no plan to stop the attempted overthrow of our democratic system by this group. I live near a police station, and the sirens have not stopped for the past four days.

You have watched the scenes play out. American politics is a civil religion that provides a forum for us to work out our differences peacefully. The citadel of our nation is the Capitol. I never walk by it without being amazed. To see this group, who had broken through security, desecrating that sacred space, I felt violated and ashamed for our nation. I've spent countless hours in the halls of government and treasure our country. To see it overrun in this manner saddens me deeply.

The image of security with their guns pointed at a barricaded door will stick with me.

Worse, this terrorism came from within the nation. Our own President egged on this group of people with grand conspiracy theories. He lit the match. He is responsible.

As you know, I've been preaching for the past four years that the church would need to take a leadership role in creating a place for dialogue. We've held political dialogues in our church space. A year ago this Sunday, I warned that the President was represented in the Epiphany story as King Herod. This summer, I warned about his narcissism. There's nothing surprising in his inciting this riot.

As I watched the insurrectionists breaking into the Capitol, hitting police over the head and bashing journalists, you might expect I would be

Continues on page 5



Rev. Tafel, waiting in line to get into a grocery store on January 6 with protestors behind him, states, "The tension was incredible."

Christian Response

Continued from page 4

working out in my mind ways we can bridge the gap and come to a common understanding.

My true reaction may surprise you. I have to be honest—I wanted the police to use their rubber bullets on the crowd; I wanted them to release their tear gas; I wanted them to use their weapons if necessary. I know, not what you might expect from the pastor who has been providing trainings on creating peaceful dialogue.

However, for our democracy to operate we need order, truth, and justice. When you are dealing with criminals, you can forgive them their actions, but there must be justice. Evil only responds to punishment. (For anyone who thinks I'm ignoring early violence in D.C. this year, please check my sermons.) As I said this summer during the protests, once you engage in violence, you must face the consequences. Vandalizing stores is wrong, but it in no way compares to participating in a coup attempt at the center of the greatest democracy in the world. (Two unexploded bombs were also found downtown—unfortunately, I think there's more to come.)

I'm sad to tell you that I believe we will experience bombs and assassination attempts in the future. I sure hope I'm wrong. 9,000 members of the National Guard are arriving in D.C. at this moment. How sad that our city has to have a military presence.

I will be watching closely and demanding justice for every person who broke into the Capitol until all of them are prosecuted. Like a child, or a criminal, these people must experience consequences for their actions. Further, I hope that the political leaders who aided and abetted this insurrection all face some punishment as well. They knew better and perpetuated conspiracy theories on the crowd.

All of this raises the question, "What is the role of the church and our church?"

As someone who has been deeply involved in American politics for the past thirty years, I can say from firsthand experience that many of the groups who call themselves Christian are not followers of Jesus. Many have welded together a Christian fundamentalism with nationalism to create a false faith of Christian-nationalism. This has nothing to do with Christ. It has everything to do with evil hellish narcissists.

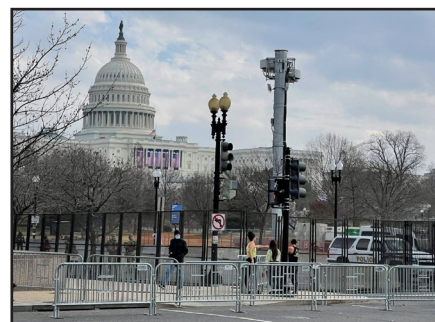
Our call to forgive should not be confused by ability to seek justice for evil actions. Our church teaches that love must be married to the truth.

The day of the attack on the Capitol was Epiphany. Epiphany is when things are revealed. Our own teachings remind us that before good can be done, evil must be revealed. If Wednesday offered that revelation to us, we may learn and grow. If we remain blind to what's happening, I fear much greater evils will occur.

Our own tradition offers a unique understanding of what we are seeing. It explains that the old church based on false teachings and fake compassion will die away and a new church is being born.

Another theological concept in our faith is the concept of vastation. It means that everything falls apart. As humans we start as babies, grow into adults, and slowly our physical bodies give out as we transition to heaven. As spring turns to summer, to fall, to winter, we experience decay. All systems, political parties and even churches go through this cycle. We shouldn't be wed to what was before but expect things to evolve, grow, and even die.

The old church is dying away. What grows up in its space is part of



January 15, several barriers remain around the capitol leading up to Inauguration Day.

the Lord's plan. We call this period the New Jerusalem and the time of the Holy City. My vision for the Church of the Holy City is that we can be a place in our nation's capital to provide a sanctuary for the birth of this newly evolving Christianity that lives out the teachings of Jesus.

There are many good Christian groups seeking to tie themselves into the true message of Jesus. It is important it remain clear that the Church of the Holy City will continue to be a place where diverse people with diverse views get to share them openly. We will continue to do that. We will remain a place for people of good faith to share why they believe what they believe and learn from each other.

This desire for pluralism should not be confused with our inability to speak the truth to conspiracy theories. Our call to forgive should not be confused by ability to seek justice for evil actions. Our church teaches that love must be married to the truth. Our democracy is fragile—it only works when people of good faith seek to resolve their differences in a respectful and democratic manner.

I'm looking forward to working with each of you to find new ways our church can be of service to the Lord in resolving our differences peacefully. ☒

Rev. Rich Tafel is a national leader in the intersection of faith and politics. He serves as pastor at the Church of the Holy City, located in the heart of Washington D.C., a few blocks from the White House.

Spiritual Growth

Continued from page 1

The challenge of self-awareness necessitates that we, in the immortal words of Gene Rodenberry, “Boldly go where no one has gone before.” Self-awareness requires that we see ourselves as we truly are, not as we wish that we were or as we want others to see us. Based on our personalities and upbringings we are prone to avoiding different aspects of ourselves as well as past and present experiences, and there are countless self-help books which address the challenges of intimacy, vulnerability, and working with the effects of trauma. Many of these involve recognizing some truth we have spent much of our life denying, ignoring, or fleeing. As Swedenborgians, we know that truth matters. Why then do we avoid the truth? One powerful reason is that we are acting from one of our earthly desires, shared by our animal friends, the avoidance of being hurt.

I believe that all of us, at some point in our lives, have been hurt. No matter how good our parents are, or were, we are all human, we all make mistakes. The reality is that if we live with other human beings we will eventually be hurt. Clearly some people have had significantly rougher paths than others, experiencing childhoods involving intentional or unintentional pain inflicted by their parents or others close to them, or else some other emotional or physical trauma, but nobody gets through life scar-free. And we have learned that the healing of such scars requires, in some fashion, both acknowledging what happened and finding a way to express and process the feelings that accompanied the experience. When we combine this reality with the basic, fundamental desire to avoid feeling pain, to evade being hurt, we have a problem.

I firmly believe this is one of the primary reasons we avoid seeing the

truth—because the truth, about ourselves (self-awareness) or someone (such as a loved one or a person in power) or something (such as a beloved community, organization or company) may be uncomfortable. The truth might be extremely scary or painful, and we’re not sure we can handle that, or we’d just rather not go there. Or else recognition of the truth, combined with our morals or values, may require action which would be quite disruptive to our lives. If we recognize we are in a harmful relationship, or a relationship that is hurtful to our children, what changes would we have to make? As a country we see this right now as we struggle to recognize the impact of racism, injustice, and the pervasiveness of White privilege in our society.

I believe that all of us, at some point in our lives, have been hurt. No matter how good our parents are, or were, we are all human, we all make mistakes.

Jesus tells his disciples, “if you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free” (John 8:31–32) but as a friend of mine used to say, “It’ll make you miserable first!” The reality is that the truth is often uncomfortable, or scary, and at times incredibly painful. But what is the alternative? The alternative is a life based on falsities, which, Swedenborg tells us, is the life of hell. The way out of hell is a commitment to that which is good and that which is true, a commitment to the Lord. If we are to grow spiritually, if we are to find greater, lasting happiness, it will require that we embrace truth.

One of the paradoxes of the spiritual life is that by turning away from our self-centered concerns we, in fact, find greater happiness, joy, and peace. Yet

for many, this is counter-intuitive, and so they continue looking for love in all the wrong places—through worldly paths found in amassing possessions, wealth, power, or reputation; they continue to be driven by worldly thoughts and desires. And yet even our culture knows this happiness is superficial, and so we include on the nightly news a human-interest story, we value movies such as *It’s a Wonderful Life*, and we cheer when good triumphs over evil. First, by what we’re taught (it’s more important to be kind than to be right), and then by experience (I thought I was going to help them, but I was the one who was helped), we can gradually learn the importance and value of caring for others. We can come to understand how it is love of others and commitment to something bigger than ourselves which truly gives lasting meaning to our lives. As we move past a literal interpretation, we gain a glimmer of understanding to some of Jesus’ more confusing words, such as those from the Gospel of Mark: “For those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake, and for the sake of the gospel will save it” (Mark 8:35).

Swedenborg teaches that the essence of God is divine love and wisdom, which we experience in this life as goodness and truth. Those who consign themselves to hell are those who embrace evils and falsities, and those who enjoy the joys of a heavenly existence are those committed to a life grounded in goodness and truth. This is true because we were created in the image and likeness of God, thus we were created to embrace and embody love and wisdom, goodness and truth, and to the extent that we dare to recognize and work through and with our fears and pains, we will, eventually, be rewarded by greater peace and joy.

Let me close by a final quote from *Divine Providence*, which I believe

Continues on page 9

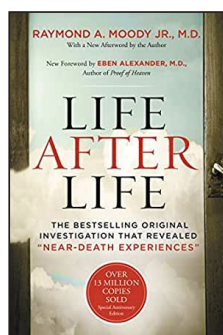
The Year of the Spiritual World

Near-Death Experiences and Swedenborg's Spiritual World

BY JIM LAWRENCE

Swedenborgians have taken more interest in the emerging field of near-death studies than most religious bodies not because Swedenborgians are foremost in belief of an afterlife but because the developing picture of what happens spiritually with physical death aligns more closely with the theology of Swedenborg than it does with other Christian movements. In fact, the psychiatrist who performed the first qualitative research study of people claiming to have had unusually vivid and visionary experience at the point of clinical death also saw similarities between near-death experiences and Swedenborg's discussion of what happens to personal consciousness when the physical body dies.

Coined by the psychiatrist Dr. Raymond Moody, in his 1975 bestseller *Life After Life*, near-death experiences (NDEs) became an ever-widening research field involving clinical study of people reporting often extraordinary experiences at death's door and even beyond the point of death in terms of bodily function. Over the ensuing forty-five years, the field of NDE studies has amassed many dozens of books and websites exploring this substantial body of contemporary testimonies of experience (see Near Death Experience Research Foundation <https://www.nderf.org/>). In the final chapter of *Life After Life*,



Moody identifies four literary sources in world spirituality aligning with his incipient research. One is Swedenborg.

In near-death experiences, there are often encounters with what might be called angelic figures. There is a powerful sense of being connected and is the opposite of feeling alone.

Swedenborg's most focused writing on what specifically happens at death occurs in his own bestseller, *Heaven and Hell*, in a sub-section entitled "Awaken from Death," which might as well be dubbed "The Swedenborgian Book of the Dead." Four characteristics share similarity across Swedenborg's writings and contemporary near-death experiences.

The first is a seamless transition at death to a spiritual consciousness that retains self-identity endowed with sight, hearing, touch, speech.

Years and years of daily experience have witnessed to me that after separation from the body, the human spirit is a person and is in a similar form. I have seen this thousands of times, I have heard such spirits, and I have talked with them even about the fact that people in the world do not believe that they are what they are, and that scholars think people who do believe are simpletons. Spirits are heartsick over the fact that this kind of ignorance is still common in the world and especially in the church (*Heaven and Hell* §456.1).

The second similarity is the experience of being met and absorbed by a brilliant light—not a blinding light but one endowed with sense of aliveness and presence unlike anything in the physical world.

The light of heaven has within it intelligence and wisdom, and that light is the intelligence of truth and the wisdom of good from the Lord that appear as light before the eyes of the angels. This has been given to me to know by a living experience. I was taken up into a light that sparkled like the light radiating from diamonds, and while I was kept in it, I seemed to myself to be withdrawn from bodily ideas and to brought into spiritual ideas and thus into those things that belong to the intelligence of truth and of good (*Arcana Coelestia* §4413).

And this characteristic is also common in near-death experiences. In both bodies of testimony, non-verbal communication occurs with this light that results in perceiving matters with a profundity and a fullness surpassing what we experience here.

A third similarity is being greeted by loving beings. In near-death experiences, there are often encounters with what might be called angelic figures. There is a powerful sense of being connected and is the opposite of feeling alone. Swedenborg writes,

The first experience, being taken out of the body, is like this. We are brought into a particular state that is halfway between sleep and waking. When we are in this state, it seems exactly as though we were awake;

Continues on page 9

From the Social Justice Committee

Background of Convention's Social Justice Committee's Mission Statement

BY ROBERT MCCLUSKEY

The Social Justice Committee would like to share with *Messenger* readers some of the thinking behind its current Mission Statement, hoping to shed light on the church's role in society.

Mission Statement

(adopted July, 2019)

The Social Justice Committee believes that bringing awareness and action to humanitarian issues is essential in carrying out our Lord's commission to us as stewards of all peoples. The prophets of Scripture, our teachings of the larger neighbor, and our own by-laws, challenge the church to fulfill its prophetic role. With this as our foundation, the Social Justice Committee will seek to express a spiritual perspective on contemporary issues, voice its convictions on ethical and moral issues in our nation and our world, and provide relevant Swedenborgian thought for use by individuals and churches. We will periodically update Convention through its website and *the Messenger*.

Biblical Foundation

1. The **Law** commands us to care for the orphan and widow, to welcome the foreigner and the homeless; to provide for those who are vulnerable and in need.
2. The **Prophets** admonish us to do justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God; to prefer mercy over sacrifice, compassion over ritual.
3. **Jesus** tells those who claim to love him to feed his sheep; to cross the

road to help the other, the stranger, the foreigner; to give of ourselves for the least of our brothers and sisters.

Doctrinal Foundation

Swedenborg's description of the Holy City New Jerusalem has much in common with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s vision of the "beloved community."

1. A new age of **freedom and rationality**, along with new duties and responsibilities: acting as if of ourselves, according to reason, to do good. Compassion is the end, prudence is the means (*DP* §71 ff.).
2. **Distinct unity**: a vision of a society united not by coerced uniformity, but by respect and celebration of diversity and differences. "A form makes the one more perfectly as the elements entering into it are distinctly different and yet united" (*DP* §4.4).
3. **Genuine worship** is charity: spiritually useful service to the neighbor (*AE* §325; *AC* §7038).
4. "**The neighbor** to be loved is not only people individually, but people in their group relationships. The larger the group, the greater our responsibility to it. Our community, our country, the fellowship of nations are larger neighbors; also our church and all other churches constituting the Lord's kingdom on earth. So again is the Lord's kingdom in heaven; and our highest neighbor is the Lord himself" (*BOW* §176; cf. *NJHD* §91–96).
5. "**Goodwill and faith** are transient and exist only in our minds unless,

when an opportunity occurs, they culminate in actions and become embodied in them.... On this basis one can clearly see that goodwill and faith are not goodwill and faith before they exist in actions.... Goodwill alone does not produce good actions; even less does faith alone produce them. Good actions are produced by goodwill and faith together" (*TC* §375–377).

6. The inter-relatedness of the **spiritual, moral, and civil realms**: "There is civic good, moral good, and spiritual good.... A person who possesses spiritual good is also a moral person and a civic person; but a person who does not possess spiritual good may appear to be a moral and civic person, yet is not so (*Doctrine of Life* §12–13; *DP* §322.2). Further, the heavenly life is not a life withdrawn from the world. "...to receive the life of heaven a person must live in the world and engage in its business and employments, and by means of a moral and civil life there receive the spiritual life" (*HH* §528 ff.).
7. **Religious pluralism**: an openness to religious diversity, confident of the one God moving through all religions; a rejection of Christendom and conversion, and the embrace of interfaith fellowship (*DP* §326.9).

General Convention Foundation

1. **Standing Resolution #1, Objective 2** (adopted July 3, 1986)
Doctrine and Life—Bring doctrine and life together constructively. We will support this being done in a way

Continues on page 9

Social Justice Committee

Continued from page 8

that allows them to challenge and enrich each other and that encourages the diverse activities of Convention to express Convention's purpose consistently.

This objective rests in the principle that doctrine alone, like external worship alone, does not make the church, but a life according to it. It looks toward a rejoicing in the fact that there are some of us who start from the books and some of us who start from involvement with people. For doctrine and life to come together, these need to be experienced as complementary, rather than competitive approaches, each acknowledging its own incompleteness and therefore its need for the other. Like the first objective, it assumes that *the church cannot find an inner or spiritual well-being without trying to contribute to the spiritual well-being of the world in which it is living, and it further assumes that this contribution will not be made by conforming to that world but by seeking to understand and live our own distinctiveness.*

2. Standing Resolution #1, Objective 2, Strategy E (adopted July 3, 1986)
Accept and fulfill our responsibility to *express a spiritual perspective on contemporary issues in local, national and global affairs.*

3. Standing Resolution #9 (adopted July 2, 1982)
“It is recognized that it is the responsibility of the church to *voice its conviction on ethical and moral issues that arise from time to time in our nation and in our world.*” ☩

The current members of the Social Justice Committee are Barbara Boxwell, Lori Gayheart, Rev. Robert McCluskey (chair), Dr. Page Morahan, and Rev. Shada Sullivan. The Social Justice Committee members will be providing regular updates to the *Messenger* readers. See [page 16](#) for the upcoming Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR) Black History Month program.

NDE and Swedenborg

Continued from page 7

all our senses are as alert as they are when we are fully awake physically—sight, hearing, and strange to say, touch, which is then more exquisitely keen than it can ever be during physical wakefulness. This is the state in which people have seen spirits and angels most vividly, even hearing them and, strange to say, touching them, with hardly anything physical interfering. It is the state described as being taken out of the body and not knowing whether one is in the body or outside it (*Heaven and Hell*, §440).

A fourth similarity involves flashing through a life review. The experience of looking backwards to see the journey to the present is a common experience in NDEs. It seems to always result in deep perception of key lessons from one's earthly life journey. Some have described the experience as watching almost instantaneously something of the whole of their life, but with a loving presence helping them to seeing something important to learn. Swedenborg very much affirms that the most important experience after awakening in the spiritual world involves sorting out one's spiritual center of gravity. He writes,

We may also gather something important from this what is meant by our “book of life,” mentioned in the Word. It is the fact that all our deeds and all our thoughts are written on our whole person and seem as though they are read from a book when they are called out of our memory. They appear in a kind of image when our spirit is looked at in heaven's light (*Heaven and Hell* §463).

One of the most impressive features of near-death experience testimonies, from the standpoint of research, lies in the striking high incidence of similarity across such a diverse cross-section of

Spiritual Growth

Continued from page 6

sums it all up beautifully: “Heaven is union with the Lord. Our nature from creation enables us to be more and more closely united to the Lord. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the wiser we become. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the happier we become. The more closely we are united to the Lord, the more clearly we seem to have our own identity, and yet the more obvious it is to us that we belong to the Lord.” (DP 27)

May we recognize the truth and value of Swedenborg's words. And may we, guided by the Lord, be strengthened by the companionship, guidance and support of those we love, seek to travel in and with the flow of divine providence, and in so doing find both greater freedom and joy in service to the world. ☩

Rev. Jenny Martin Caughman is a Convention minister currently serving a United Methodist Church in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. She is chair of the CSS Board, serves on General Council and has a keen interest in spiritual formation.

humanity that spans cultures, ages, and prior religious (or lack of) beliefs. That preponderance of similarity lends support for the proposition that these experiences point to objective realities as much as they also hold subjective interpretations of their experience. Swedenborg subtitled his own bestseller, *From Things Heard and Seen*. ☩

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence has served for nearly twenty years as the dean of the theological school. He saw Swedenborg's name for the first time in 1976 while reading *Life after Life*, which unleashed the modern study of near-death experiences.



Called to Be Peacemakers

BY GLADYS WHEATON

What does it mean to be called to be peacemakers? It means that we are,

Called to Beloved Community,
Called to “Do Justice, Love Mercy,
and Walk Humbly With Our God,”

Called to Witness to the *one God, the Divine Human God, in whom is the Trinity of Creator, Savior, and Regenerator.*

Notice that all these calls are relational. We live this life in relationship with all of Life (i.e. All of Creation and with All of the Creator, especially His/Her *Divine Human Expression* of the *Divine Self*).

We are called to be at Peace,
at Peace with God,
at Peace with Nature,
at Peace with Each Other,
at Peace with Ourselves.

Dear Sisters and Brothers in the New Jerusalem Way of Being, learning to live that Way of Doing,

I found myself horrified at the attack on the Architectural Seat of our Government, which included attacks on each other as well. It made my hope for Beloved Community in this country seem to be very far off, maybe impossible.

The visual of the event was very shocking and yet not completely surprising. It was to me the crescendo of twelve years of hostile rhetoric and behavior on the part of members of our Central Governing Body which had been building all of that time, especially the last four years; and also which had been echoing in various other local governing bodies as well throughout the country.

It was a culmination of the clash between those who see themselves as being, “the only ones who know what is

right and what is wrong,” and who see the other as the Devil. I think this is called demonizing.¹

Another way of describing this attitude is “playing the blame-shame game,” which involves zero/sum thinking, (something is either all or nothing). The question that arises in the middle of all of this chaos is about whether or not there is a pathway-through-the-morass to cooperative functioning.

Let us desire as much Peace for others as we do for ourselves; and remember that in order to do this we have to confess the times we fall short and ask for help and wisdom about how to do better, and then act on the guidance.

I believe there is. It is called “Non-Violent/Compassionate Communication,” developed by Dr. Marshall Rosenberg,² a clinical psychologist, who was working with the Los Angeles, California, school system in the sixties to help reduce violence in the schools. The framework of understanding, and social practice that was produced from it, brought a marked difference in school body behavior. Later refinements of the practice were introduced to various trouble spots around the world and brought surprising improvement in those circumstances. I, myself, have personally experienced this. I have also done some coaching

¹ Recently I heard some new ethnic epithets connected to demonizing coined by Dr. Cornell West. To learn more about Dr. West, visit his website: <http://www.cornelwest.com/>

² Here is a link to Dr. Rosenberg’s book: <https://www.nonviolentcommunication.com/product/nonviolent-communication-a-language-of-life-3rd-edition/>

and teaching of this earlier on.

I find it very compatible with Scripture (not only Christian) and the Heavenly Doctrines because it encourages us/one to see all human beings as valuable and worthy of respect as persons; it recognizes certain commonalities such as certain basic needs (e.g. spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical); such that when these needs are not met, either by one’s own efforts, or with the assistance of another, this lack is the foundation of all clashes between beings, human or animal. When needs are met, there is peace. A summary statement made by Marshall was, “*Violence is the tragic result of unmet need!*”

When I heard this, I thought, “Is there a common, basic, foundational need that we all have?(!)”

What I have discovered is that it is the *need for positive regard as a human being from other human beings as well as oneself*. When these are missing, *there is no peace!*

Other basic needs can be addressed, like food, clothing, and shelter, etc., but the person is not at Peace unless the very basic one is being met at the same time.

So, this brings me to the recent conflagration.

What I see and feel is a foundational *hunger* in this country (and elsewhere) which is a hunger for general respect as a human being along with particular respect for the particular human being that one is. These things are evidenced by practices of and experiences of racism, classism, sexism (both genders and dual gender persons), regionalism, etc., with their accompanying marginalization, including a tendency to dismiss as unimportant others various differing concerns; or to give them

Continues on page 11

Called to Be Peacemakers

Continued from page 10

a ranking of importance that negates the importance for someone else.

There are many persons, as well as groups, in this country who are gravely disappointed in the central government as well as their local governments with their unwillingness to address the citizens' needs, beginning with the fundamental one cited above. The result is they are consistently left impoverished by being left underserved instead of being helped to become or continue to be significant contributors to the general wellbeing of their communities. These persons also routinely experience marginalization accompanied by name calling (i.e. demonizing). These "put-downs" damage persons/peoples' lives on all levels, spiritual, emotional, intellectual and physical, and rob them of their peace.

I believe the above described dynamic, along with the extreme highlighting of the discouraged persons' discontent on social media, and the encouragement to demand, in extreme fashion, attention to their belief that they had been marginalized with respect to their voting efforts, provided the impetus for what we witnessed last week. They were just not going to accept that any longer.

This brings us to another aspect of all of this, the question of "How do we deal with violence non-violently?" It begins with attitude. If force is necessary to prevent harm, especially to persons, we need to have a protective plus preventive orientation. Anything else comes from a demonizing attitude which will not meet anyone's needs. This is especially true when these derogatory approaches are practiced routinely, resulting in the official ignoring and total disregarding of reasonable laws, resulting in the promotion of unreasonable laws instead.

So, my plea here is that we who are

encouraged, yea, admonished by our teachings to look beneath the surface for underlying meaning in any circumstances, not let ourselves merely react according to our likes and dislikes, our prejudices and habitual reasoning practices, which may or may not be rational.

But let us ask ourselves why some persons are so angry as to vent their anger in public destruction of property, and disregard the safety of others, along with willful disregard of the Constitution and risk "inciting to riot?"

And when it comes to the legal judging of behavior, let us "judge righteous judgement" (i.e. just because we don't like someone's views or attitudes, give them a larger legal sentence that fits their legally defined crime to make an example of them or to use a legal excuse for revenge).

These are the things that have been going on in this country for a long time; and there are particular persons who have been singled out for this kind of treatment for a long time, especially persons who belong to various minority categories. They know it is not just or legal, so why should they try to be legal? This kind of treatment tempts people to undesirable behavior.

However, let us remember those who have persevered in keeping their humanity in spite of severe suffering because they knew that their *peace came from the Prince of Peace, and so did their humanity, and so does ours.*

So, let us also remember the Scripture that "All have sinned and come short of the Glory of God"; and the Scripture that says, "Let whoever is without sin cast the first stone"; and the Scriptures tell us that God made us *all*; and thereby, let us respect what God created, including ourselves.

Also, remember, the Golden Rule applies in small aspects as well as large.

Therefore, let us desire as much Peace for others as we do for ourselves;

and *remember* that in order to do this we have to confess the times we fall short and ask for help and wisdom about how to do better, and then act on the guidance. This is real repentance *which leads to regeneration.*

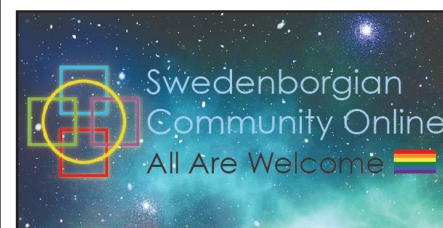
And consider, one more thing, this title quote, "Religion without Regeneration: Root Cause of Human Degeneracy." This is the title quote from an unpublished manuscript of the Rev. Samuel O. Weems, pastor and founder of The North Cambridge Community Church (Swedenborgian), my grandfather.

Amen and thank you for listening. ✚



Rev. Gladys Wheaton is in her forty-first year of ministry, during which she has served on a variety of boards and committees within the denomination. She was one of the first three

women ordained after Dorothea Harvey and the first African American woman to be ordained in the Swedenborgian Church. Rev. Wheaton has held four pastorates across the country and is currently Pastor Emerita of both the Newtonville New Church and the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem in Massachusetts.



SwedenborgianCommunity.org

With broadcasts every Thursday & Sunday, Swedenborgian Community Online is your affirming, interfaith community—with a presence on YouTube, Facebook, and your favorite podcast platform. We seek to uplift God(dess) in all people's diverse ways of living.

Denomination Offers Pandemic Relief Grant Funds to Qualified Individuals

BY KAREN CONGER

It's a privilege for me to address the readers of *the Messenger* to advise that the Executive Committee of the General Council of the Swedenborgian Church in the U.S. and Canada has authorized a limited number of one-time grants per household for pandemic related relief. The text of the policy appears below. As the Lord's divine providence continues to unfold may we be aware of God's presence with us. Blessings!

Pandemic Relief Grants for Individuals

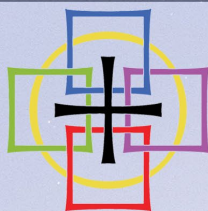
- To commence in early winter 2021, in honor of Emanuel Swedenborg's Birthday.
- Requests to be received by the President of General Convention, preferably through a recommendation from a Minister or Licensed Pastor.
- Notification of the grant program to be communicated to Ministers and Licensed Pastors for recommendations.
- Up to \$500 one-time grant per household for pandemic related relief. Grants shall be initiated by church members who are 18 years or older and actively involved with a Swedenborg Church Society, Camp, or Association/Conference.
- The President of General Convention will present the requests with attribution as to the person or household making the grant request on an as needed basis to ExCom for confirmation.
- Donations to the fund to be requested starting in January from individuals who may have the capacity and willingness to assist in this effort. Donations to be matched dollar for dollar up to \$10,000 in total contribution from General Convention.
- Employees of General Convention and members of General Council are explicitly excluded from consideration of a grant request.
- Grants will be available through 2021 Convention or until the available funds are fully expended.

Donations have been coming in and we are pleased with the generosity of associations, societies, and individuals. We already have promised donations from: Ohio Association, Illinois Association, Pretty Prairie Church, Urbana Church, Korean Church, seven ministers, and six individuals, to be matched by the denomination up to \$10,000.

Interested parties should email Rev. Jane (president@swedenborg.org) directly with their name, the name of the minister/pastor/church leader they worked with, the amount they are requesting, and their address. All requests will be totally confidential. Ministers, pastors, and church leaders are also included if financial help is needed.

Thanks to the Executive Committee and All Members of General Council

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*



Swedenborgian
Church
NORTH AMERICA

Welcome to the New Audio/Visual Consultant

A Message from the Standing Committee for Communication and Information.

We are pleased to introduce you to Ben Phinney, who has been contracted to be an online Audio/Video Consultant. His job will be to address and assist churches in developing their skills and resources for sharing worship services to major online platforms. If your church is interested in learning how to create or improve online services and other offerings, you should reach out for assistance. Please read the following message from Ben. We look forward to hearing from you!

Some of you may know me already, as I am no stranger to the Church. I grew up going to, and I am a confirmed member of, the New Jerusalem Church in Bridgewater, Massachusetts, and spent summers attending the Blairhaven Youth Camp in Duxbury, Massachusetts, and the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) in Fryeburg, Maine. I also have served on the denomination's Library and Documents Committee, and I am still an active member of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. And covertly, I've been the super-secret digital link checker for *the Messenger* each month.

Today, I live with my wife and cats in the suburbs of Portland, Maine. Even before the pandemic, I had been using tools online to connect with others virtually. I, like my brother and sisters, am a huge nerd. Unlike them though, my nerdiness includes a weekly Dungeons and Dragons campaign that I play virtually with friends in Rhode Island and Indiana. Who knew we'd be trend setters? One unexpected silver-lining of the pandemic—it has allowed me to get more involved with music. I now regularly contribute guitar parts to a virtual band, and I composed several pieces of music for the FNCA's virtual session last summer.

I am a librarian by trade, which I believe will be of great value in assisting churches in the current environment. Working as a librarian has given me a lot of experience helping others adjust to new technology and has made me an expert in customer service and the user experience. There is a lot of

overlap in the discussions that libraries and churches are having on how to modernize their services to their members. Libraries have been talking about how to reach beyond the physical building long before COVID-19 happened.

I enjoy demystifying technology for others and have worked on numerous projects that I believe have uniquely prepared me to be your Audio/Visual Consultant. At the SAILS Library Network in southeastern Massachusetts, I worked on numerous similar projects, like transitioning to a new online catalog system, migrating to Gmail, and integrating automated patron notifications. Later, at the Seekonk Public Library, we were always changing and updating the library's technology; so helping our patrons adjust to these changes became a regular part of my day.

The primary task I'm here for is to help our churches either begin or improve live streaming their services to their congregations and others. In a broader sense though, I want to help you use technology to reach your congregation during the COVID era. There isn't a one-size fits all approach to any of this, so we may also talk about social media strategy, web design, or something else entirely. It may be the case that live streaming might not be the right solution, so we can get creative and have some fun figuring out a better option.

If you need my assistance, you can reach me by email at AskPhinney@gmail.com to get the conversation started. I hope to find multiple avenues



Ben Phinney and his wife, Jessica Bian

to reach out and assist our churches over the next few months, possibly through social media, online training sessions, or even additional articles in *the Messenger*. It will be exciting to see how my role evolves to better assist everyone. I look forward to meeting and working with you all.

—Ben Phinney 



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!

Click the YouTube logo above to subscribe!

Passages

Deaths

Betty L. (Bergmann) Hill, 98, entered the higher life on December 17, 2020, in South Haven, Michigan. Born June 23, 1922, Betty was the daughter of Charity and Vincent Bergmann, sister of Carolyn Bergmann Judson, wife of John (Jack) Hill (d. 2003), and mother of Doug Hill, Marjory Hill Leas, and Amy Hill Reiher. Betty was active throughout her life in the New Church, at the Lakewood Society in Cleveland, and the Church of the Holy City in Detroit, where she taught Sunday school for many years. She helped author and illustrate, along with Joyce Fekete, several Swedenborgian publications for children, including: *Five Smooth Stones*, *The Rainbow Key*, and activity booklets to accompany the *Dole Notes* lessons. She was accomplished and prolific in the home arts as well as knitting, needlework, quilting, drawing, painting, puppetry, and miniature making. Her legacy of creativity and Swedenborgian life are carried on in her children, seven grandchildren, and nine great-grandchildren, several of whom are active at the Almont New Church Assembly and in the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL). There will be a time of remembrance for Betty this summer at the Almont New Church Assembly. ✚



Taekwondo Leadership Program at the Korean New Church

BY YOUNGMIN KIM
AND MARIE DOYLE

The Korean New Church (KNC), located in Manhattan in New York City, started the Taekwondo Leadership Program (TLP) in March 2019 as part of the church mission program. Taekwondo is already a well-known marital art to the public and practiced in 320 countries around the world.

We train participants spiritually and physically through the TLP and offer introductions about the Swedenborgian Church. I would like to share this article by Ms. Marie Doyle who has been an excellent participant of our program.

My name is Marie Doyle. I live in New York City. I arrived in New York in 1990 as I am originally from France. I have worked within the hotel industry and currently am in real estate leasing. I do not have a particular fitness background. I began learning ITF (International Taekwon-Do Federation) Taekwondo several years ago. Taekwondo means “the way of the hand and foot.” The fitness and self-discipline develop a positive mental attitude. Taekwondo leads to meditation and philosophy to develop self-reliance. I was very

happy to learn that the Swedenborgian church offered WT (World Taekwondo) Taekwondo classes.

I was introduced to the Swedenborgian Church in New York City, through a friend who mentioned Taekwondo classes organized by Pastor Youngmin Kim. I then met Pastor Kim in the late summer of 2019. He greeted me warmly and I joined the Taekwondo leadership program class—this is when I also began learning about the Swedenborgian Church.

The classes are held at the church twice a week. During this time of pandemic, we are able to train in limited numbers at class. We have been able to learn in safety. Recently, Pastor Kim and I were awarded the red belt—we celebrated a great achievement! The training at the church is exceptional. It is really an honor and a privilege to be instructed by Master Lee.

I also celebrate learning more and pioneering the unification of WT and ITF Taekwondo as well as getting to know about the Swedenborgian Church. I'm grateful to have met Pastor Kim, Master Lee, J. H. Kim, and all my class companions. ✚



Follow
the Messenger
on Facebook!

facebook

What's Happening

Scholarships to Bryn Athyn College and the Academy of the New Church Girls School available for Female Students

Bryn Athyn College scholarships are available to women attending Bryn Athyn College who desire to become New Church teachers and declare education as a major or minor or as an interdisciplinary degree. They are also available to female students at Bryn Athyn College who have a 3.0 GPA and are studying religion as a major, minor, or interdisciplinary degree, or are in the MA in Religious Studies program, or are international students. Women who are attending Bryn Athyn College and earning a Master's degree and have a GPA of 3.0 or higher are also eligible. Scholarships are available to female students who exemplify the teachings of the New Church, and who are attending, or would like to attend the Academy of the New Church Secondary School (Girls' School) in 2021–2022.

Applications for Bryn Athyn College are encouraged by February 1, 2021. To apply, call Sarah Wong at 267-502-6085, send an email to ancdaughters@gmail.com, or visit www.brynathyn.edu.

Applications for ANC Girls' School are due March 1, 2021. To apply, send an email to ancdaughters@gmail.com.

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 and let us know!



SWEDENBORG FOUNDATION

Join Us For A Virtual Gathering with the Swedenborg Foundation & offTheLeftEye Featuring Our Very Own Curtis Childs & Dr. Jonathan Rose!
Sunday, February 21 at 3:00 PM MT

RSVP to Tim Bilger tbilger@swedenborg.com
 or 610-430-3222 x101

You will be sent a zoom invitation and link to our event following your registration. Others are welcome to attend so feel free to offer our information to register!

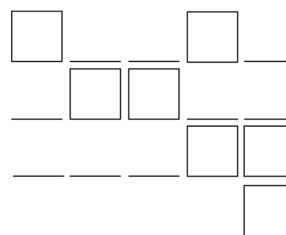
Annual Convention

June 26 – 30, 2021

The Convention Planning Committee has been meeting regularly to start working on this year's plans. It is still too soon to know if we will hold an in-person (Bridgewater, Massachusetts) or virtual event, but we will continue to keep everyone as updated as possible.

Name That Church—December

Thanks to Jim Lawrence from Berkeley, California, for suggesting this church may be the First Society of the Swedenborgian Church in San Francisco! We are still looking for confirmation, keep the guesses coming.



U S E M O
 E Y W R A
 R W D N A
 N K L A B

*Instead of "New Year, New Me," I'm going to adopt
 "New Year,*

"

Answers to the December Jumble:

*Gravy, Brine, Untuck, Eating
 At this time of year, there is nothing worse than "Being a Turkey"*

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.

Black History Month Series

Our Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR) planning group is proud to announce a series of stimulating and educational events in observance of Black History Month

Recent events have been shocking and distressing to many in our country and around the world. Our understanding of history shapes how we interpret the present and how we envision the future. Join Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism in February for a series on Black History and the importance of knowing the real story of how we got to where we are today.

There will be three weeks of offerings. Starting February 9, we will be sharing online lectures and/or readings via email and on the Swedenborgian Church of North America's Facebook page, followed by an optional, weekly, discussion on Zoom led by Rev. Shada Sullivan of The Church of the Holy City, Wilmington, and others.

Our topics are:

February 15: History of Voting Rights

February 22: The Economics of Racism

March 1: Jim Crow Systems, Mass Incarceration, and the Militarization of Policing, featuring

guest speaker Dr. Nancy Davis, former trainer for the Chicago Police Department and Associate Professor at DePaul University.

You can register two ways:

1. Email manager@swedenborg.org by **February 9** to receive an email every Tuesday in February with the program materials and a link to register for the Zoom discussion the following Monday, or
2. You can visit our [Facebook page](#) every **Tuesday in February starting on the 9** where we will be posting the program materials along with a link to register for the Zoom discussion the following Monday.

Material will be emailed and posted on the Swedenborgian Church Facebook Page on Tuesdays. Discussion dates will be on the following Mondays at 7:00 PM ET: February 15, February 22, and March 1. Participation in the discussions is not a requirement to participate in the program.

We hope you can join us! 📺