



## Teens Find Their Foundations at Cedar Hill Retreat Center

BY KURT FEKETE

Ten teenagers from Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, New Jersey, Massachusetts, and Maine, along with one virtual teen from Quebec, attended the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) fall retreat at Cedar Hill Retreat Center in South Duxbury, Massachusetts. This was our first in-person SCYL retreat since December 2019. Seven of the teens were shuttled to the retreat by the caring and capable van drivers Heather and Jeff Oelker from Urbana, Ohio. At this retreat the teens looked at the theme “Foundations.” We discussed values, core truths and loves, living in worldly and spiritual community, the Swedenborgian concept of vastation and remains, and how the stream of Divine Providence flows through it all. Basically, we covered all the things we trust, or perhaps should trust, to discover, establish, and maintain the core foundational principles that guide and support our lives.

The teens spent three days together on a pleasant October weekend exploring, frolicking, cooking, and living in community. Rev. Kevin Baxter joined us Saturday morning and opened the retreat sessions with the gripping story of Moses, the Egyptians, and the ten plagues (Exodus 7–12). Kevin explained how this is a story of vastation, which he defined as the purification



*Nathan, Kristofer, Ronnie, Wyatt, and Ivy enjoy low tide at the beach on Kingston Bay.*

and emptying out when you realize that you are being controlled by something external or materialistic. “It involves a loss of identity, as we become enslaved by our desires. When you are controlled by the external you begin to feel an emptiness inside. You become like building bricks without straw and easily crumble and fall apart.” Kevin went on to telling the teens the good news. At the end there is a remnant left that Swedenborg calls *remains*. These remains are the seeds that exist which you can build on. We have these precious and beautiful remains inside us to remind us that we are spiritual beings filled with the Lord’s love and wisdom. Kevin ended his morning session stating that while we work on the outside in, God works on the inside out. He concluded with the provocative consideration, “We all go thru a collapse at some point in our life. What

if we looked at this collapse as a gift?”

After lunch, Kevin continued with an afternoon session on core values. He had the teens sort value statement cards into their four highest and four lowest values. From there, he had the teens share their results and attempt to write life value mission statements. This activity not only helped the youth identify what they value but also lead them into discussions about why these

values are important and, as a lead into the evening session, how they can be nurtured so that they flourish in their lives.

After an afternoon of combing the Kingston Bay beach for treasures and numerous rounds of Catch Phrase and Uno games, the teens and staff prepared and ate a delicious dinner before settling in for my Saturday evening session on “Transforming Values into Gifts.” I had the youth review their core values from Kevin’s afternoon session then asked the teens to try to identify one simple single word that represents their most critical core value. Next, we looked at a diagram of intersecting circles of love, talent, money, and world need, to help us uncover our heavenly occupation. To help guide us and bring us light, we read and meditated on a sentence from Swedenborg’s

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## the Messenger

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## Editor's Corner



### Dealing with Writer's Block.

I must admit,  
I am having a  
bout with writer's  
block this month.  
Usually, by the  
time it comes for  
me to write an ed-

itorial, something clear comes through  
to me. However, there are so many  
positive things and so many frustrating  
things that I am just struggling with  
committing to something—nothing  
is standing out. I am going to em-  
brace the writer's block and put a cou-  
ple things together that are on the edge  
of my mind.

I feel that we are all in a constant  
state of change at the moment. One  
minute we are going with the flow,  
and the next we have to roll with  
the punches. When I think about it,  
I wonder how much of it has always  
been this way, but with the past two  
years of maintaining the weight of a  
global pandemic on all of us, that our  
sensitivity to it is greatly heightened. I  
was hoping by now the pandemic roll-  
er coaster would have evened out. But  
it's still going strong. We were able to  
schedule our nine- and ten-year-old to  
get their vaccines, and it felt like such  
a weight lifted off—the next day we  
get the email that there is a case of  
COVID-19 in one of their classrooms  
(though not considered a close con-  
tact). It feels like the virus is just going  
to keep punching us until the last pos-  
sible minute.

November is a reminder to think  
about what I am thankful for. I am  
grateful for the strong relationships  
that the pandemic has brought forth.  
Like Swedenborg explains in *Secrets of  
Heaven* §842.3, the things that cling  
together poorly will separate, and the  
Lord will then arrange the others in

their place. The pandemic has given  
me some cause to be thankful, bringing  
me so much closer to many—including  
members of the Swedenborgian  
community. We recently had the fall  
General Council meeting, and I always  
leave this extensive meeting with a pos-  
itive outlook and a deep gratitude to  
all members. We are able to have con-  
versations, even the difficult ones, and  
come out with a sense of accomplish-  
ment, with no negative feelings towards  
varying opinions among the members.  
This group supports the many ways  
the members of the Swedenborgian  
community have been coming up with  
to maintain the distance between our  
churches and their members. I encour-  
age everyone to take advantage of the  
virtual options, even if it is just once in  
a while. It is guaranteed to make you  
feel more connected to the community  
at large, and worth the time. Embrace  
the options to strengthen our bonds.

Please continue to send me your  
letters to the editor, it's great to hear  
from you and another way to keep us  
connected.

—Beki Greenwood  
[Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org)



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## Letter from the President

*The Year of Providence: 2021–22*



Dear Friends,

In this time of Thanksgiving, I look back over the five and a half years as president and cannot find enough words to adequately thank all the volunteers who have said “yes” when asked to serve on committees and boards. Volunteers are the backbone of our organization.

Volunteers, blessed volunteers.

...from the Wayfarers Chapel Board struggling to raise \$7 M to restore the chapel, to the Fryeburg Fair volunteers baking pies and flipping hamburgers to pay the bills for their beloved church.

...from the Trustees of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies strategizing how to replace retiring Dean Jim Lawrence, to the officers of every church, camp, and association, all questioning how to adapt to the changes and future of religious institutions.

...from the Library and Documents Committee preserving our past, to the Website Redesign team creating our future.

...from the Retirement Committee helping to secure a good retirement for our ministers, to the officers of the Swedenborgian Church Youth League planning retreats and engaging our youth in spiritual discussions for their future and the future of our church.

...from members of General Council calling each church and camp to stay in touch and share what the denomination is doing and listening to concerns from our distinct groups located throughout the U.S. and Canada.

I would also like to personally thank the Executive Committee of the General Council. Kurt Fekete, current vice president; Tom Neuenfeldt, previous vice president; Karen Conger, secretary; and Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer. They continue to give hours and hours of service to our Church. They each are given a \$4000 yearly honorarium, which by my calculations may be \$5 an hour. But the beauty and gift of each one is that no one is counting; they just keep giving their time. We have a close bond that has developed through working together and “volunteering.” I am given a salary, but again, one should never divide the salary by the hours. It is the joy of serving this church and the people I love.

I wish I could list you all and thank you personally in this space, and thankfully there are way too many who have said “yes” when asked, “Would you serve on....”

I honor you all with this quotation from Elizabeth Andrew: “Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart.”

Thank you,  
—Rev. Jane Siebert



# Peace Picnic Held at the Portland New Church

BY LORRAINE KARDASH

As we all know, a church is more than a building; it abides in each person to a greater or lesser degree. When a fire was deliberately set on the front of the Portland New Church, however, it felt to many as if the building was a living entity and that it had been wounded. Fortunately it was only wounded, as neighbors responded at 1:30 AM to call 911, and then throw buckets of water on the wall before the fire department arrived. When it was noticed that the “Black Lives Matter” sign was gone, and that the fire had been set next to it, we concluded that this may be a message given by the arsonist.

The building is used, and loved by many, including Alcoholics Anonymous groups, a children’s after-school art camp, yoga groups, a drumming circle, a Buddhist meditation class, and the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine (CHIME, an interfaith school), as well as our own Swedenborg Spiritual Community, and neighbors. As the West African drumming teacher, Namory Keita, stated at the picnic, “This is our home, whatever hurts our home, hurts us.” We had decided to hold the Peace Picnic to thank the neighbors, police investigators, and firemen who had saved our home.



*The Portland New Church suffered damage when a fire was set to the front of the church and their Black Lives Matter sign was stolen on Saturday, September 25, 2021. Pastor Lorraine Kardash reported, “Sometime in the middle of the night, someone started a fire on the porch near the Black Lives Matter sign. The sign was taken. Fortunately, the fire department was able to put it out before much damage was done to the inside and the sanctuary is fine.”*

Many people showed up in solidarity, including a rabbinical student, interfaith students, firemen, neighbors, representatives from several other churches, building users, friends, and family. We all enjoyed the good food, good company, drumming and dancing, and the knowledge that we stand together to honor and celebrate a growing and diverse community.

As work progressed repairing the damage and organizing the picnic, the support

of the neighbors, other churches, our community, and the denomination began coming in, I was reminded of the song “I’m Workin’ on a Building,” an old bluegrass song (author unknown).

Here is the verse:

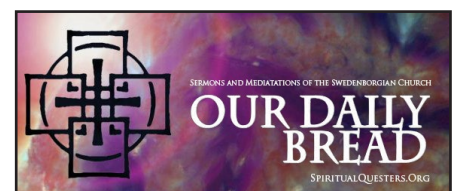
I’m workin’ on a building,  
I’m workin’ on a building,  
I’m workin’ on a building,  
For my Lord, For my Lord,  
It’s a Holy Ghost building,  
It’s a Holy Ghost building,  
For my Lord, For my Lord.

The work done on the building is beautiful, and our new Black Lives Matter sign, kindly sent by the denomination’s Central Office, is prominently displayed. 📶



Pastor Lorraine Kardash was ordained by the Chaplaincy Institute of Maine in 2006 as an interfaith minister, and consecrated by The Swedenborgian Church of North America in 2019 as a Licensed

Pastor. She serves at the Portland New Church, in Portland, Maine.



Our Daily Bread at [SpiritualQuesters.org](https://www.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.

## Teen Foundations

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*Heaven and Hell* §403, “Angelic life consists of worthwhile, thoughtful actions that are useful to others; all the happiness angels have is found in service, derives from service, and is proportional to service.” At the end of my session, I had the teens write their one-word core value and occupation on a paper plate that would be used in my Sunday morning session.

In the evening we devoured a large tray of freshly baked apple crisp and headed out on our traditional outing. We like to visit Alley Kat Lane on Saturday night where we can rock n’ bowl under the colored disco lights while enjoying some favorite tunes. We rolled a couple of rounds of candlepin bowling while leaving some time at the end to play games in the arcade area. The teens redeem their game cards for prizes at the end of the outing and it’s always fun to watch them delight in their “treasures” back at the retreat center.

Sunday morning after breakfast it was time for my second session entitled “Bringing Your Gifts to Community.” First, I had the teens wear their value and occupation plates that they made the previous night. Then, I started an activity based on *Heaven and Hell* §405,

Useful activities in the heavens occur in similar variety and diversity. The function of one individual is never exactly the same as that of any other, so the delight of one is never the same as another’s. Not only that, the delights of each function are countless, and these countless delights are equally varied, yet they are united in a design that enables them to focus on each other... These are all interconnected in such a way that they focus on what they can contribute to the other and therefore to all, with all mindful of the

individual members. They act as one because of this regard for the whole and for the individual.

I arranged the youth in a circle and gave them a ball of string.



**Above:** Another round of Catch Phrase? “Sure!” say Scout, Kristofer, Nathan, Ivy, Wyatt, Elliot, Ronnie, and Heather.

**Left:** Rev. Sage Cole and Kristofer enjoy watching Scout and Elliot work on their stream of Providence drawing.

Next, I asked them to compare their occupations and pass the ball of string person-to-person so that each member of the group was connected to another member in some way. An elaborate communal web was created where the talents of each individual benefited another person. For example, the “friendly website developer” connected to the “caring marine biologist” by creating an innovative social network for the biologist to communicate research news to the public. This activity illustrated how we are all joined together as, “There is one body, but it has many parts. But all its many parts make up one body” (1 Corinthians 12:12). Our individual interests, talents, and passions can form a networked society (heavenly community) working together in love and wisdom to achieve charitable use.

We were blessed to have Rev. Sage Cole join us for the Sunday afternoon session. Sage presented her session on Divine Providence. She played a video of a beautiful river and exclaimed, “Divine Providence is like a stream, a force in the universe, that moves all

of creation to a heavenly experience.” Then, she asked us to imagine what it feels like to be a water molecule in a flowing river. Teens responded very thoughtfully. Ivy pointed at the river on the screen and said, “See at that puddle by the rocks where the water is barely moving? I am there watching others in the stream wondering when it is my time to move quickly ahead.” Nathan responded, “I’m in the rapids. It feels like I’m in a group acting and moving fast.”

Sage concluded her session by having the youth draw a picture of their life as water from birth on the top of a mountain, to a small trickling stream, to a river finally moving to the sea. Some teens worked on their drawing quietly alone, some worked in pairs discussing the various aspects of their water journey. It was interesting to see and hear the different journeys when it came time to present. Some drawings were very technical where the water went through treatment facilities to get cleaned up. Some were very artistic with beautiful cascading waterfalls. Each picture illustrated a different life journey, and, like our own unique odyssey, all of the water paths meandered,

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## From the Social Justice Committee

## “What Does the Lord Require of You?”

BY AMANDA ADAMS RILEY

I purchased my first clerical collar for one reason, and one reason only, to wear it when I went to lobby. Presbyterians don't often wear clerical collars, just black Geneva gowns, and only during worship, if then. Growing up in the Presbyterian Church, there was never a question in my mind that my faith belonged in the public square as much as it belonged in my church and in my personal devotional time. For more than 200 years, Presbyterians have spoken publicly about what our faith means to us and what it means to us as citizens in this nation. The idea that there is a separation between church and state means to us, that the state cannot and should not regulate our worship, but it does not mean that we take off or separate our faith and beliefs when we enter the public square. We are expected to be faithful to the Gospel on Sunday mornings and the rest of the week as we move through the world as God's living, breathing gospel in flesh.

Growing up in the time of the “Moral Majority,” thanks to larger than life religious and political figures like Jerry Falwell, Sr. I frequently heard loud voices informing the world what Christians believed. However, what they espoused was not at all what my church taught and preached nor what I understood for myself when reading God's holy word. If Baptist Christians could be in the streets and in the halls of power bending the ears of elected officials, then why couldn't I do the same? In high school I learned that my denomination not only had an office in Washington, D.C. called the Office of Public Witness, but we also had an office in New York across from

**We are called to live out the Gospel in our daily lives, which includes our civic responsibility, and to show what the kingdom of heaven looks like.**

the United Nations. I remember being surprised and pleased to hear that our church was out in the world witnessing to the world what the love of God looks like in action. One of the great ends of the Presbyterian Church is the “Exhibition of the Kingdom of Heaven to the World.” We are called to live out the Gospel in our daily lives, which includes our civic responsibility, and to show what the kingdom of heaven looks like. We are to show this not just to our neighbors or in our own nation, but to the whole world. These offices and ministry are a natural reflection of that calling. The Presbyterian Church witnesses on the global stage through the United Nations offices as well as through the World Council of Churches.<sup>1</sup>

The ministry of public policy of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) is the Presbyterian Office of Public Witness and advocacy office of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). The purpose, history, and biblical foundation for this work according to the website is the following:

Its task is to advocate, and help the church to advocate, the social witness perspectives and policies of the Presbyterian General Assembly. The church has a long history of applying these biblically and theologically-based insights to issues that

affect the public—maintaining a public policy ministry in the nation's capital since 1946.

Reformed theology teaches that because a sovereign God is at work in all the world, the church and Christian citizens should be concerned about public policy. In addition, Presbyterian forefather John Calvin wrote, “Civil magistracy is a calling not only holy and legitimate, but by far the most sacred and honorable in human life.”

Ministry in Washington offers a chance to translate the church's deep convictions about justice, peace, and freedom from words into reality. The political process is where decisions are made that help or harm people; decisions that help to make the kind of world God intends.

Office of Public Witness staff members visit national policy makers and their staff, write letters, make phone calls, and occasionally testify before Congress or facilitate the testimony of church leaders. This involvement helps to clarify the moral and ethical issues at stake in public policy. The goal is to make clear to people in government what the General Assembly is concerned about, why, and what can be done to respond to those concerns.

By adopting a study entitled, “Why and How the Church Makes a Social Policy Witness,” the 205th General Assembly (1993) emphasized the importance of the church's social witness policies and programs. Along with affirming that God alone is Lord of the conscience, the study affirms “the responsibility and authority of the church to make a social witness policy which guides that witness. The church, if it is to remain true to its biblical

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.presbyterianmission.org/ministries/compassion-peace-justice/washington/>

## Social Justice Committee

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**Left:** Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley and Rev. Thom Muller on their trip to Tijuana, Mexico.  
**Above:** Children engaging in art at “Caravan” encampment in Tijuana, Mexico, 2018.

roots, theological heritage, and contemporary practice, must not fall silent. It must speak faithfully, truthfully, persuasively, humbly, boldly and urgently.”

In 1936, the former United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A. developed the Department of Social Education and Action. Presbyterians have always been known as political advocates; however, this new Department created the first organized national effort. Knowing the value of Washington representation, the Department hired Fern Colborn in 1946 to maintain an office and a secretary on Eleventh Street NW in Washington, D.C. This became the first Presbyterian Washington Office. Since then, the Washington Office has been led by several directors and many dedicated issue staff.

Throughout the Bible, scripture reveals God’s will to do justice. The Hebrew prophets continually remind God’s people “...What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). The prophets give specific warning to those who seek only their own well-being and ignore the well-being of the marginalized and oppressed. Israel’s failure to be just and righteous is clearly seen as disobedient to God and the reason for national decay and destruction.

Jesus frequently witnessed to the priority of the poor in the reign of God. He challenged the rich young ruler, he sharply criticized the

hard-heartedness of religious leaders, and he taught that those who reached out to marginalized persons were serving him (Luke 18:18–25, Matthew 19:16–24 and Luke 10:25–37). In addition, Christ speaks of the accountability of nations to do justice in Matthew 25 and states, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”<sup>2</sup>

Our world can feel like a complicated place sometimes, and it’s not always clear which path is the path that aligns most closely with the Gospel. I have heard followers of Christ advocate for and against war. I heard people of faith argue over issues including abortion and workers’ rights. I have always found great reassurance in the fact that my denomination has and has had clearly articulated, prayerfully reasoned, and theologically grounded statements on issues that arise in our public sphere. These give me something in addition to scripture to turn to when seeking to ground myself in faith.

In 1997, I had the pleasure of attending our church’s national assembly

as a youth advisory delegate. In the role of youth advisory delegate, I was given voice and vote in our committee meetings and voice on the floor of the plenary sessions. We took many votes that summer that I still remember to this day. One of the votes that I will not soon forget was around late-term abortions. I remember how charged this vote was, and I remember wondering why anyone outside of our church would care at all what the Presbyterian Church had to say about this issue. When I asked, I was reassured by the commissioners around me that it was indeed the case that politicians in Washington D.C. and elsewhere would pay close attention to the decisions that we made. The reason being, that our denomination represents a portion of the voting public as well as being an ethical and moral compass for the nation. The Presbyterian Church U.S.A. has a long-standing pro-choice history as a denomination. That summer we did vote in-line with our historic standing as a church. And later that year our nation’s congress did not ban the procedure.

In December of 2018, our president at the time was talking extensively about a “caravan” at our southern

<sup>2</sup> Office of Public Witness, Compassion, Peace & Justice Ministry of the PCUSA Website.



## Social Justice Committee

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border. At the same time my Presbytery (geographic region of churches), which has been involved in ministry with immigrants, migrant workers, and refugees for many years, planned a trip down to the border to visit the encampment, provide witness to the larger church about what we witnessed, and offer some art to the children and pastoral support to those waiting for asylum at our border. Rev. Thom Muller joined me at the border for the trip. It was a blessing to see first-hand what had been covered extensively by our media, and what we saw was so much more than the coverage afforded us. The same week I returned, a local religious social justice group called on clergy to convene outside the courthouse in downtown Los Angeles to call for the release of asylum seekers being detained there. Once again, I donned a clerical collar and joined a colleague in the streets to reflect on our faith and what it meant in that day and time.

Each year a group of Christians gather in Washington, D.C. for an annual event called Ecumenical Advocacy Days.<sup>3</sup> In April of 2019, I had the pleasure of attending this event. Nearly 1,000 Catholic and Protestant Christians gathered from around the nation to call with one voice for one particular issue. In 2019, the focus was on immigration and voting rights. We spent a long weekend in lectures and panel discussions and then on Monday headed to Capitol Hill to meet with our own representatives and senators.

<sup>3</sup> <https://advocacydays.org/>



*Rev. Dr. Sunny Kang and Rev. Dr. Amanda Adams Riley, Los Angeles, California, 2018*

We met in constituent groups, so I got to connect with people from a variety of Christian traditions, who were taking their faith to our publicly elected officials.

This past month I received a plea from a clergy colleague, the rabbi at the Temple in San Pedro, California to sign a letter in support of calls

for a police accountability committee for a local police department. Officers in the department had recently painted swastikas on impounded cars. This was following an officer involved in the shooting death of a young Black man in December 2019, which despite calls from the family, community, and Black Lives Matter–L.A., did not result in any additional oversight for the department. Since the shooting death of Christopher De’Andre Mitchell in 2019, Black Lives Matter (BLM) has been a persistent presence at the city council meetings at the request of the Mitchell family. Due to recent threats of violence against BLM activists, in addition to the anti-Semitic vandalism of vehicles, clergy presence was requested at the meeting. I am the executive presbyter for my Presbytery and was present for the meeting to bear witness with our siblings in Christ as they called for accountability of the police department.

If the idea of carrying your faith out into the public square appeals to you, join us to learn more about what that looks like. Starting in January, the SJC invites you to a series of online Zoom events titled “Spirit in Action: Civic Engagement and Religious Life.”

Rev. Dr. Amanda Adams Riley is co-chair of the Social Justice Committee and co-pastor of The Garden Church in San Pedro, California.

## Save the Dates

### *Spirit in Action: Civic Engagement and Religious Life*

January 31, February 28,  
March 28, April 25,  
and May 23.

7:30–9:00 PM ET  
(4:30–6:00 PM PT)

Online on Zoom

We all want to help our neighbor and help make the world a better place through useful action. But sometimes it is hard to know how to have a meaningful impact. Ours is a tradition that encourages people of faith to be active and conscientious citizens.

In this upcoming five-part series we will explore this aspect of the Swedenborgian tradition, as well as concrete ways to be civically engaged. It is co-sponsored by Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism, the Swedenborgian Church of North America’s Social Justice Committee, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, and the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL).

We have been grateful to make a connection with the FCNL, a non-partisan Quaker organization that provides guidance and training for people wishing to engage with their civic process on a variety of issues from a faith-based perspective.

The series will open the week of Swedenborg’s birthday with a lecture on Swedenborg’s own civic engagement and Swedenborgian theological considerations on this topic.

Stay tuned to the next issue of *the Messenger* for more details.



## Teen Foundations

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twisted, backtracked, and traversed various environs and terrain.

Later, we were free to play and recreate. We threw the Frisbee around the spacious Cedar Hill field, played Spike Ball, revisited the beach, and played more games. Some of us just relaxed and read or enjoyed a much-needed nap. Jeff took the opportunity to visit Plymouth Rock, which is just a short drive away from the retreat center. Sunday evening, after dinner, we enjoyed a closing communion worship service led by Rev. Sage. Oliver blessed us with his talented guitar playing and I presented a closing message instructing the teens to let their light shine after sharing a reading from Luke 11:33–36 where Jesus said, “No one lights a lamp and hides it. No one puts it under a bowl. Instead, they put a lamp on its stand. Then those who come in can see the light.” After the service, we had our brownie sundae movie night before we wearily shuffled off the bed.

The van with the teens from the

Midwest departed at 5:00 AM to drive straight through to get everyone home in time for school and work on Tuesday. Elliot, Zsa Zsa, and I worked on cleaning up the retreat center before we locked up and departed ourselves. After a brief stop at Howland Landing Park, the site of our past beloved Blairhaven retreat center, we left Duxbury feeling physically drained but connected in community and spiritually fulfilled. I am extremely grateful to our session facilitators, Rev. Kevin and Rev. Sage, along with drivers and support staff Heather and Jeff. We all benefitted a great deal from this time together in person and learned how very important community is to each and every one of us. As we return to the stresses and challenges of our daily routines, we can draw strength from this time together and remember the words of Emanuel Swedenborg in *Secrets of Heaven* §687, “No angel or spirit can have any life unless he is in some society, and thereby in a harmony of many. A society is nothing but a harmony of many, for no one has any life



Midwest van riders (back) Jeff, Ivy, Scout, Oliver, Ronnie, Nathan, Kristofer, (front) Heather, and Wyatt.

separate from the life of others.”



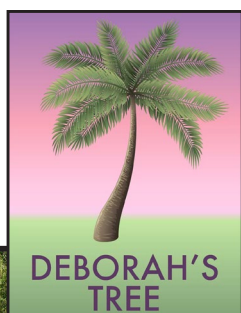
Kurt Fekete is serving as both the vice president and the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church. He loves staffing youth groups, retreats, and camps, where he finds delight both in sharing our uniquely meaningful theology and learning spirituality from the adolescent perspective.

### SCYL Winter Retreat

December 27–30, 2021

Almont New Church Assembly,  
Allenton, Michigan.

Teens ages 13–19 are welcome.  
[kfekete@hotmail.com](mailto:kfekete@hotmail.com)



Rev. Julie Conaron (Treasurer), Rev. Roslyn Taylor (President), Liz Kufs (Webmaster)

## Deborah's Tree Has Launched

[www.DeborahsTree.org](http://www.DeborahsTree.org)

The launching of the new non-profit ministry, Deborah's Tree, was celebrated on October 3, 2021. Partnered with the Lord's New Church in Huntingdon Valley, Pennsylvania, the mission of Deborah's Tree is to preserve and promote the work of female Swedenborgian authors, scholars, clergy, and artists, and to contribute to the women's spirituality movement. Deborah's Tree also offers women the opportunity to connect with other Swedenborgian New Church women, and others, involved in the Swedenborgian and any spirituality movements, through online and in-person events. Rev. Roslyn Taylor

envisioned Deborah's Tree as a traditional faith community within the Swedenborgian movement, taking its name from the Biblical prophet, Deborah, who sat under a palm tree as she provided spiritual guidance. The Board of Directors consists of Rev. Roslyn Taylor (President), Rev. Julie Conaron (Treasurer), and Rev. Alison Moore (Secretary).

You can find contributions from women in the Swedenborgian Church, and others, at [www.deborahstree.org](http://www.deborahstree.org), as well as past and future events which are open to all. Please send items or links for the website to [hroslyntaylor@temple.edu](mailto:hroslyntaylor@temple.edu).

# Called Together in Service

## *The Fryeburg Fair Booth*

BY LEONE DYER

All churches have their core members. And like most Swedenborgian churches, their core members are the ones who do everything to keep the church running. When the time comes around for the largest fundraiser, the core members fall into place doing what they have always done to get the task completed. We know these members—they play the organ, make coffee, sit on the board, teach Sunday school, shovel the walkway before church starts, and usher during the service. These members are always available and always willing to serve. Now imagine your fundraiser lasting nine days, with several weeks' worth of preparation and countless hours after the activity has ended. It is exhausting and taxing on the core members of the church.

The Fryeburg Fair, the largest fundraiser for the Fryeburg New Church, is a massive undertaking each year, and more so during COVID-19. Fryeburg, Maine, is a small farming community of 3,500, and the first week of October each year, approximately 225,000 people descend on the village for the week-long agricultural fair. The Fryeburg New Church's largest fundraiser is a nine-day marathon (we are allowed to be open one day before the fair opens to help feed the vendors), of grilling hamburgers, hotdogs, homemade chili, and pies. There are weeks worth of prep before the starting



**Above:** Dale Heath and Debbie Urgese making apple pies in the church. (Did you know it takes two bushels of apples to make forty pies?)



**Left:** Pies on display in the fair booth window.



**Right:** Jenny Huang-Dale takes part in the many hours of cleaning needed prior to opening of the Fryeburg Fair.

**Finally, brothers and sisters, be joyful! Work to make things right with one another. Help one another and agree with one another. Live in peace. And the God who gives love and peace will be with you. (2 Corinthians 13:11)**

day and at least a week's worth of clean-up upon its closure. Volunteers make this fundraiser possible.

The Fryeburg Fair booth is successful because of our core members. They give hours upon hours of their time filling in when they can are overextending themselves because the tasks must be completed. But, beyond the

twenty-something core members, volunteers are the extended and absent members of the church. Each year they give their time because this was their grandmother's church, or they attended Sunday school as a child and have

always considered it their church. In total, fifty-six volunteers contributed to the success of the 2021 Fryeburg Fair season. Many came to the booth to work before or after their professional jobs, or rushed home each night to grade papers, do laundry, pack lunches for the next day, or fall

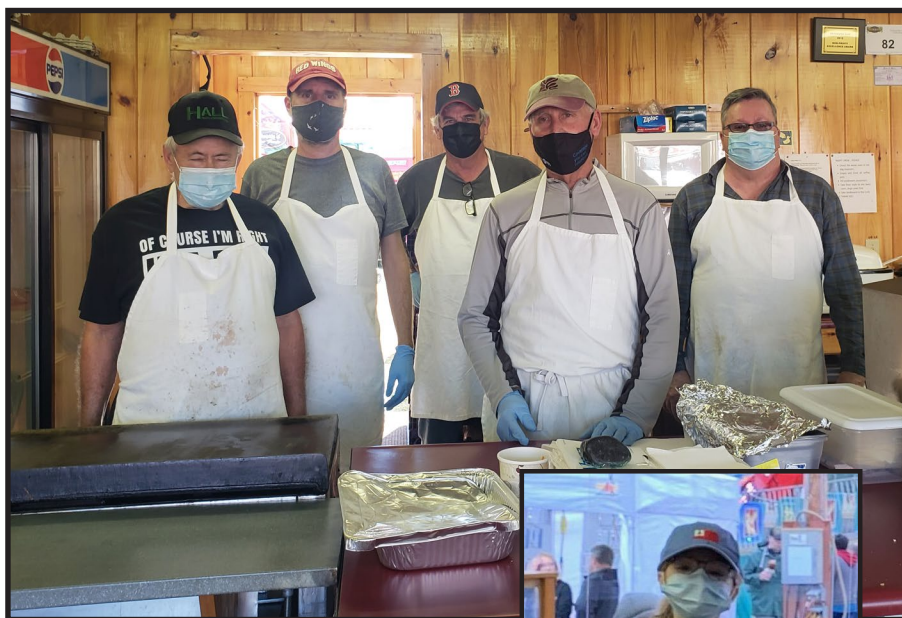
into bed after closing the booth at 9:30 PM to return to the church kitchen at 7:30 AM to make chili. Some signed up for one shift and stayed all week. Others had the luxury of placing their life on hold to be at the Fair for fifteen hours every day.

Why do we do this? We love the church. It is the common theme of our stewardship.

Yes, the booth's purpose is to raise money to keep our church heated, pay our minister's salary, and all the other expenses a large building requires. But there is a beauty of unity when a group of people shares space for hours for several days. Connections and reconnections form when our core

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## The Fryeburg Fair

Continued from page 130

members stand beside a volunteer who has never stepped into the Fryeburg Church. Or two strangers realize their parents attended Sunday school together in the fifties. Or core members work together for the first time, acknowledging their talents that they had not recognized before. For the core members of the church, it is refreshing to see different faces, new energy. It is reassuring that the extended or absent members know that the church is cared for and watched over. So, what is really happening is we are forming a tighter church community—the core members, the absent members, and the people who are not members. We are practicing, trying out living heaven on earth. We are united. And it all comes together because we have been called together to be of service. 📺



**Above:** Bob Berg, Kurt Fekete, Steve Taylor, Rev. Dr. Gard Perry, and Brian Baker are part of the lunch crew that served burgers, hot dogs, chili, pies, and a lot of laughs.

**Below:** Zsa Zsa Dolley gives a double thumbs up while working at the counter.



Leone Dyer wears many hats at the Fryeburg New Church. She is the chair of the Board of Trustees, Fryeburg Fair Booth coordinator, and A/V chair. Lee, and her husband Dan, enjoy

hiking in the White Mountains of Maine and New Hampshire.

## Technology User Group Meeting

Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>  
at 6:00 PM ET

Do you ever find yourself wishing for a platform to discuss church technology issues with your peers? Join Ben Phinney, our A/V consultant, over Zoom to do just that!

Since January, Ben has been helping people plan and troubleshoot technology upgrades at their churches. One resource he's noticed that people haven't been taking advantage of enough is each other. Any issue or upgrade you are working on, chances are there is another church out there that has already gone through it. It takes a village, as they say, and it's always helpful to know you aren't alone in your struggles.

While Ben is usually an information resource himself, here he seeks to facilitate a conversation surrounding technology at the church rather than strictly being the answer guy. RSVP to Ben at [AskPhinney@gmail.com](mailto:AskPhinney@gmail.com) for more information and how to join in the conversation. All are welcome to participate, whether you need help or have some of your own tips to offer. 📺



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!**

*"Everyone is created to live forever, and everyone is created to live forever in a blessed state. This means that everyone is created to go to heaven. Divine love cannot do otherwise than intend this, and divine wisdom cannot do otherwise than provide for this."*

~Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence* §323

# Brief Biography of Wesley Norton Gray

*Founder of the Wesley N. Gray Legacy Trust*

BY KEVIN BAXTER

Wesley Norton Gray, was born on June 16, 1846, in Concord, Maine. He had a difficult start to life as he lost his mother around the age of five and then his father followed five years later. Two of his siblings, a brother and sister, lived in Massachusetts. Much of his family had moved to the Boston area. It is assumed that he went to live with his brother, however, by the late 1850s, Wesley had moved to Barnstable on Cape Cod with his sister (Vesta Ann Gray Hopkins) who had recently married. He would end up living near her and her husband for much of his life. While on the Cape, he finished at the Barnstable Academy (Barnstable High School). In June of 1863, Wesley enlisted in the first Cavalry, which is not a surprise given his feelings about equality. In 1865, when the war ended, he returned to Massachusetts with the rank of first sergeant.

It is not clear if, following the Civil War, he went to live with his brother in Boston or with his sister in Barnstable, but by 1867 he was living with his sister and her husband in Stoneham, Massachusetts, and was an apprentice mason. While there is some debate on exactly when, some report that he purchased a roofing business in 1869, which he quickly grew. He had an excellent reputation and was considered a leader in his community. His business was well-known throughout the area. As one of the largest holders of real estate, he was a regular attendee at town meetings and was very vocal.

He married his first wife, Isabella L. St. Clair in 1875. The wedding was performed by the Rev. James Reed, the second pastor of the Boston Society of



the New Jerusalem. What is a bit confusing from church records is they state he joined the church in 1886. He grew up an ardent and faithful Methodist and was a member of the Methodist church in Stoneham, which means his love affair with the New Church clearly started a decade or more before he joined the church (in those days, you could not be a member of two different churches). Later in his life, members of the church recalled, he would sit atop houses waiting for materials, reading copies of Swedenborg's writings that he would keep in his pocket.

Isabella died in 1897 after years of illness. He quickly got remarried to Margaret Ryder, who passed away two years after their marriage. In 1907, he married Mariette Ryder Bailey (Margaret's sister). A newspaper that covered the wedding reported that Wesley had a dazzling event with electric lights and Chinese lanterns, all of which he installed himself, with caterers from

Cambridge and music from his Edison record player. The Rev. James Reed also presided at these two marriages.

He was a very active member of the Boston Church. In those days, commuting from Stoneham took a great deal of effort, but he regularly attended. He was a member of the church's men's group, and when the Rev. Samuel Warren could no longer teach adult Sunday school, he took over until just months before his death. He was also a frequent delegate to the state association meetings as well as to the national conventions.

Nationally, he sat on the Board of Home and Foreign Missions for over a decade. His local activities too reflected his passion. He and the other members of the Boston's men's group founded the Lynn Neighborhood House, whose primary mission was to educate the children of immigrants who had come to the United States to work. During the early twentieth century, forty percent of Boston's residents were immigrants. The Lynn Neighborhood House is now known as the Gregg Neighborhood House after one of the founding directors, Grace Gregg—who joined the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem in 1913.

He was a member of several fraternal organizations including King Cyrus Lodge AF & AM<sup>1</sup> and the Knights of Honor. As an avid fan of music, he and his wife hosted many Chautauqua<sup>2</sup>

*Continues on page 133*

<sup>1</sup> "Ancient Free and Accepted Masons"

<sup>2</sup> Chautauqua was an adult education and social movement in the United States, highly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Chautauqua assemblies expanded and spread throughout rural America until the mid-1920s. The Chautauqua brought entertainment and culture for the whole community, with speakers, teachers, musicians, showmen, preachers, etc.



**Wesley N. Gray***Continued from page 132*

alumni events and had instrumentalists from Boston play at several events. Influential in getting the railroad station in Stoneham, he rubbed elbows with many connected industrialists at church. He was also a member of the Stoneham Board of Trade and appointed by the Town of Stoneham as an overseer of the poor. He was dedicated to his community.

He entered fully into the spiritual world at the age of 73 on January 4, 1920. His funeral was conducted by the third pastor of the Boston Society, the Rev. H. Clinton Hay. Wesley and many of his brothers and sisters are buried in Woodlawn Cemetery in Everett. He was remembered as a man who was quick to volunteer and donate to the church. Even in death, his will left money to establish the Wesley N. Gray Fund, from which Probate Court of Suffolk County carved out the Boston Society Wesley N. Gray Trust due to the Boston Society leaving the Massachusetts Association.

As Wesley Gray was near death, he remarked, "I think I shall be very busy in the other world." Given his industrious life and service to his denomination, church, and community, we can be sure he is. ☛



Rev. Kevin Baxter serves as minister at the Church on the Hill in Boston, Massachusetts and is the camp director at Almont New Church Assembly.

The information for this article was

gleaned from, the *New-Church Messenger*, the Stoneham Independent, U.S. Census Data, and other resources from [www.ancestry.com](http://www.ancestry.com). As often happens, several sources disagree about exact dates, but the basics were all in agreement. Special thanks to Jill Baxter for the help with research.

## The Gray Fund is Accepting New Grant Proposals

The Wesley N. Gray Fund disperses grants to Convention-recognized organizations for "such church and missionary uses preferably in Massachusetts, then in the United States of America, Canada, and the whole world as it seems to them most deserving and most useful towards the growth of the New Jerusalem Church." Recent Gray Fund grants have included:

- The Fryeburg New Church for purchase and installation of new technology to livestream worship services and other church events online
- The San Francisco Swedenborgian Church for funding a lecture series
- The New Church of South Africa for translating *Heaven & Hell* into Sotswana and Sesotho, two closely related South African languages.

Gray Fund grants are given only to organizations, not to individuals, although they may support the work of an individual on behalf of the

organization. They also very specifically may not be used for repair or maintenance of facilities, as a "reserve fund" to be tapped in order to protect current assets, or for staff salaries. They may, however, be used for staff expenses related to the programming or mission of the organization.

Grants are for a maximum of \$3,000 and are limited to one request per year per organization. Proposals should include the amount requested, a detailed description of the project, a budget indicating a breakdown of expenses, and any other grants or anticipated income for the proposed programs. ☛

**Please submit all requests for grants to the secretary:**

1798 Scenic Ave.  
Berkeley, CA 94709  
Email: [resterson@gtu.edu](mailto:resterson@gtu.edu)

### Trustees:

Rebecca K. Esterson, Secretary  
Herb Ziegler, Treasurer  
Nancy Little, Trustee

## Saving Your History

*Continued from page 136*

make note of any large purchases such as an organ, property, buildings, etc.

- Arrange them by date and bind or put them in a binder.
- Keep them with your archive. That is what you have now, an official archive of the organization or your family.
- A bonus item, if you find one, is any previously written history notes on the organization. They are a treasure. Check with your

historical society and see if they have any items or information. Ask someone with back issues of *the Messenger* for a copy of any articles about your church or association or check the yearly journals for reports.

- Don't forget about the Ladies Aid or Women's Auxiliary records. They may be the only records of female participation before the 1980s. And any Sunday school records, New Church League Records, and the more recent NCYL records. ☛

If you have any questions or ideas, please email Sue at: [SueDitmire@gmail.com](mailto:SueDitmire@gmail.com)

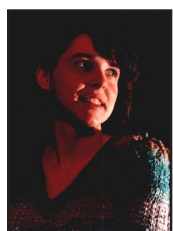
## Passages

### Deaths



**Rev. Alison Clair Southcombe, 57**, of Atherstone, England, passed into the spiritual world on the morning of September 30,

2021, following a brave, long battle with cancer. Alison was ordained in December 2017, within The General Conference of the New Church. She became the Minister at Purley Chase when David Gaffney retired and has since been a very valuable member of the church. With her amazing willpower and bravery, she fought to the end and was still doing good work up until a couple of weeks before her death. She will be dearly missed but we take comfort in the knowledge that she is now in the warm loving embrace of our Lord. We send our loving thoughts and prayers to Lee and Alison's family and friends. "It is written of the angels of heaven that while we on earth are thinking of death, they, who know nothing of such things, are thinking of resurrection and new life."



**Wanda Jane Foster Mikuchonis, 56**, went to be with the Lord on September 3, 2021, after a ten year struggle with a traumatic brain injury from a horse accident in Gatesville, Texas, in September of 2011.

Wanda grew up in Halifax, Massachusetts, with a passion for horses. She was a kindred spirit to the family cats, and dogs, Tippy and Daisy Mae. She loved reading, drawing, coloring, long family walks, swimming, and climbing trees. Everything nature, everything beautiful, that was our sister Wanda.

Wanda enjoyed attending the camps in summers at both the Swedenborgian New Church's camp Blairhaven in Duxbury, Massachusetts, and the Fryeburg New Church Assembly as a teen in Fryeburg, Maine. She went to Halifax Elementary School, and Silver Lake Regional Junior High School in Pembroke, Massachusetts. She then attended Silver Lake High School in Kingston, Massachusetts, as well as some high school in Reno, Nevada (where her sister Karen lived) then a partial year of high school at the Academy of the New Church Girl's School in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania.

Wanda joined the Army Reserves and then enlisted full-time, serving almost seven years of active duty. She was stationed at Fort Sam Houston, San Antonio, Texas; Nuremberg, Germany; and finally Fort Hood, Killeen, Texas. She was trained in the U.S. Army as a Pharmacy Technician. Later she attended college at Temple College in conjunction with Tarleton State University to study AutoCAD in Temple, Texas.

In Germany, she loved the Volksmarches, the cross-country skiing, shopping at the Christkindlmarkt, creative story writing, and photography. She also spent time with her uncle Richard Alden Foster's family.

While in the Army, Wanda married Mike Mikuchonis in Texas, they had one son, Ryan. They made their home in Killeen and loved their twenty-seven-acre property on Shell Mountain in Gatesville, Texas, where they built deer stands and hunted White Tail deer and wild pigs. They worked by hand clearing trees and brush off the land and dug a water line for their future home. Mike was a veteran, served in Desert Storm and went to be with the Lord after a long battle with cancer when their son, Ryan, was fourteen, before they could build their home on the property. She later had their dream home built, worked and hunted on the

property with Ryan and father-in-law, George. Her tenacious spirit hardly kept her down. She devised a way to feed the deer that would come to the bottom of the hill from up at the house, using PVC pipe and feeding deer corn through the pipe where it would travel downhill for 300 feet to where the deer would eat it. It wasn't uncommon for her to replace a four-by-eight sheet of water damaged plywood in 100-degree temperatures on her house which the contractor had failed to finish. She and Ryan took in horses during an extreme draught one time because the property had a natural tank in the valley. She loved her cats and her dog, Icy. She worked as Pharmacy tech at Fort Hood and later worked in Copperas Cove making award plaques and then at Walmart in Killeen.

She loved crafting, creative writing, traveling, hiking, photography, and long talks on the telephone. She would take trips with Ryan to Massachusetts to visit family, and to New Hampshire, Texas, New Mexico, and Colorado—calling up family members to share her travel excitement. She fell in love with Ruidoso, New Mexico, after visiting her sister, Dawn, and wanted to move there before her accident left her disabled.

Wanda is survived by her son, Ryan Mikuchonis, and daughter-in-law Tiffany Mikuchonis, her sisters Karen Coffelt, Dawn Foster, and Hope Foster, niece Chrystal Foster; brother Kenneth Foster and sister-in-law Diana Foster, step-nephew Mario Tavares, and niece Alicia Foster; uncles George, Andy, and Robin Gaul, and Donald Foster and his wife Jane Foster, as well as numerous cousins in the Foster and Gaul families. She is predeceased by her husband, Michael Mikuchonis, father-in-law George Mikuchonis, parents Beryl Gaul Foster and Rev. Theodore Theberath Foster, grandparents Rufus and Martha Gaul, and uncle, Richard Alden Foster. ☪



## What's Happening

## Gathering Leaves 2022 Update

Subsequent to the sad news that the Director of Purley Chase, Rev. Alison Southcombe, passed into the spiritual world on September 30, 2021, plans for Gathering Leaves 2022 at Purley Chase have now been set aside. Alison's passing is a huge loss for Purley Chase and for the General Conference in the UK. Alison had participated in Gathering Leaves 2017 in Ontario, Canada, and was leading the Gathering Leaves Committee. The conversation has begun for finding a location for 2022 in the USA.

Please contact Rev. Roslyn Taylor [hroslyntaylor@temple.edu](mailto:hroslyntaylor@temple.edu) or Rev. Jane Siebert [president@swedenborg.org](mailto:president@swedenborg.org) if you would like to serve on the Steering Committee for Gathering Leaves 2022.

# SAAR Fall Movie Series

*Fridays at 7:30 PM ET*



November 12

### *Miss Evers' Boys*


Based on the true story of the  
U.S. Government's 1932 Tuskegee  
Syphilis Experiment.



December 10

## *The Long Walk Home*

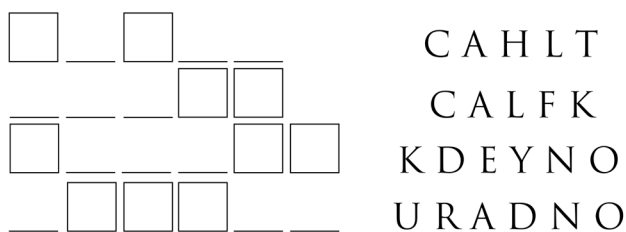
Inspired by actual events  
surrounding the 1955 Montgomery  
Bus Boycott.

Join us for our next thought-provoking Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism movie watch party series. The movies will be shown at 7:30 PM Eastern Time on two more Fridays. After each movie watch party, we will have a time of discussion with question prompts to get things going. Please contact Terrie Crenshaw with any questions or issues logging in: [terriecrenshaw@yahoo.com](mailto:terriecrenshaw@yahoo.com)  
Zoom Link Meeting ID: 896 0534 9511 Passcode: SAAR2021 



SwedenborgianCommunity.org

With broadcasts every Thursday & Sunday, *Spiritual Sunshine: A 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.



*The only way I can stop telling Thanksgiving jokes is to do it:*

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

**Answers to the October Jumble:**  
Grain, Forge, Taunts, Saliva  
At the end of his term, the tri-athlete councilman said,  
"I can't wait to run again"

## Saving Your History

*For Your Church, Society, Association, or Family*

BY SUE DITMIRE

*In preparation for the sale of the building, Sue took a recent trip to the New York City church in Manhattan to recover all the church records that had been stored there for decades (some of which were from defunct societies in the metropolitan New York City area, as well as New Jersey). After her experience there, Sue decided to provide some guidance in saving your history, whether it's your church, society, association, or family. As a self-taught historian, Sue has years of experience in tracking down information, and she is relentless. The Library and Documents Committee is blessed to have her!*

—Nancy Little, Chair  
Committee on Library and Documents

### Sue's Tips for Saving your History

#### First Step

- Gather all the record books or journals you can and any correspondence, flyers, newsletters, etc.
- Buy archival boxes as you can within your budget. Place the oldest items in the first boxes you get. Sort the items into periods of time.

- Keep the items in a dry place, with the least amount of temperature change possible. (Definitely not in an attic or basement.)

#### Second Step

- Collect all the pictures that you can find and ask people to look through their pictures at home, that show the groups' different activities.
- Next time you have a gathering, lay the pictures out with pen and paper next to each one. Ask people to identify the people in the picture and name the event or activity and the approximate time period and what they remember about it. An educated guess is a place to start on older pictures.
- Buy an archival photo album and put the pictures in it with the old-fashioned corner tabs. Next to the photo, put your identification information, even if it is a guess—a guess now is better than a guess ten years from now.
- Keep it in the same dry place with stable temperature as the archival records above.

#### Third Step

- Meeting notes, records of baptisms, confirmations, weddings, and funerals.
- If you don't have a journal where you are keeping them, start one now.
- If your meeting notes are typed or printed, gather them and put them in order, again, ask people to check through their old papers and see if they have any at home. When you feel you have collected as many as possible, you may consider having them bound or hole punch them and put them in a binder.
- You can probably guess where you should keep them.

#### Fourth Step

- With apologies to all the wonderful treasurers, you don't need to keep every treasurer report for your archive. Keep a yearly report, particularly if there are investments involved. Write out specifically the designations on funds that were given for a specific purpose and who gave them. Also,

*Continues on page 133*