



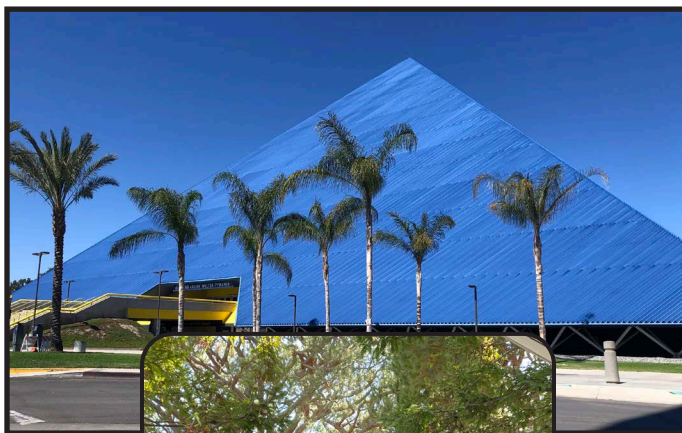
## Gardening and Fellowship: Convention 2022

BY BRITTANY PRICE, OPERATIONS MANAGER

**H**ave you ever met a celebrity in real life? It's a very strange experience when you see someone in-person who you have watched on TV, maybe an actor, sports star, or news anchor. You spend a moment looking at them for the first time with the sensation that you have actually seen them many times before. My first in-person Convention gave me that "don't I know you from somewhere?" feeling many times over. After working remotely for almost two years and getting to know everyone over Zoom, I finally got the opportunity to meet many of the "celebrities" from the Swedenborgian Church of North America that I have gotten to know on camera.

The 198<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America was held June 25–28, 2022 at California State University, Long Beach. After meeting virtually in 2020 and 2021 with success, the 2022 Convention Planning Committee recognized that we now had the ability to expand Convention participation to allow those who cannot attend in-person to instead attend virtually. We would offer *both* in-person and virtual events, and we decided to make this the First Annual Hybrid Convention for the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

The hybrid experience was created for both the Council of Ministers



**Above:** Palm trees around the Walter Pyramid at California State University, Long Beach

**Below:** Beki Greenwood and Brittany Price met in-person for the first time at Convention 2022!

(COM) meetings that convened right before Convention, and then later for Convention. My team (of three, including myself) had used the opportunity to provide an interactive hybrid meeting experience for the members of COM as a basis for providing the interactive hybrid meeting experience

for the business meetings in Convention. After two days of successful hybrid COM meetings, we were ready to take on the larger, and more unpredictable, audience of Convention. We had planted the seed of a successful hybrid experience for everyone. On Saturday, after the Convention opening worship service and ceremony, we established camera and microphone protocols for the livestreamed events, and we could see how the event was going to be a success, like a beautiful hybrid Convention garden all planted out, in nice, neat little rows. We thought we had thought of everything.

Unfortunately, like every attempt at gardening that I have personally ever made, things did not go as planned. The COVID-19 pandemic, while no longer posing the threat it once did, is still present in our everyday lives, and planted itself into Convention like a weed. Soon one of my team of three became sick, along with other attendees. All told, it is estimated that more than 10% of the attendees contracted COVID-19 on their trip to California, however no one was hospitalized to my knowledge, thanks to the 100% vaccination rate of the attendees. My team, now reduced to two, were helped by Rev. Kevin Baxter, and we were able to pull off both the in-person and the virtual pieces of the convention with only minor hiccups.

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## Editor's Corner



### Stepping Up When Things Don't Go to Plan

What an adventure. We knew that planning and executing a hybrid convention was going to be a task. We spent hours working on the logistics and details to make our convention available to anyone, anywhere who wished to participate. We are a small, far-flung community, but now we have the tools to bring everyone together and expand our reach. It is a priority to keep us moving in the direction of the future. We factored in all the details... apart from Covid taking down our key executor of the project.

Life throws us curve balls regularly, so troubleshooting on the go and

being flexible is something we all must be able to do. As *the Messenger* editor, I was supposed to be at convention as a photojournalist and reporter. However, after the first day I turned into the technology coordinator. We were fortunate that all the members of our Hybrid Convention Technology Committee (Alex Dyer, Brittany Price, Rev. Kevin Baxter, and Beki Greenwood) were physically present at convention. Having previously run a hybrid FNCA session in 2021, I was able to jump in and keep our virtual participants able to attend. We are so lucky that Rev. Kevin was there to make sure our audio, both in-person and online, was able to be heard. Audio is not my strong suit, and we would have been lost without his knowledge.

The other piece of this is the others who jumped in to cover for me! Each of us is just one person and can't be in two places at once. I am so thankful for the ones who took notice of me covering the technology and taking photos and sending them to me without even asking. Herb Ziegler, having been *the Messenger* editor for many years, saw right away that my responsibilities had shifted, and jumped in to take pictures without needing to be asked. He knew what needed to be done and just did it. Thank you to Herb, and all the others who have sent me their convention pictures: Rev. Jane Siebert, Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley, Pastor Robbin Ferriman, Holly Bauer, and Rebecca Moore.

I hope you enjoy this recap of our first hybrid convention and look forward to doing it again next year!

—Beki Greenwood

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## the Messenger

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Alex Dyer, Beki Greenwood, and Brittany Price getting excited for Convention 2022 to begin.



*Message from the President***Future, Past, and Present***The Year of Regeneration: 2022–23*

In my months-long discernment over whether to consider the presidency, it all shifted within a forty-eight-hour period when my psyche shifted from musing to enthusing. You see, having lived through eight presidencies since beginning seminary in 1981 at the Swedenborg School of Religion, I had always felt the presidency seemed too far removed from action on the ground to be a good spot for me.



But then I awoke one morning feeling strangely joyful—a quiet yet multi-layered joy that stayed with me all day and persisted into a second day. I suddenly realized the joy was arising from a sense that serving as president would reconnect in a direct way with the Great Challenge I loved so much in the seventeen years of congregational leadership before becoming dean of our seminary. Clarity had manifested. I notified the denominational nominating committee that I would accept the nomination.

Two foremost goals are effective loving support of our current church's ministries and building paths to new forms of ministry opportunities in specific and creative ways. We have some wonderful historic ministries on the ground with a special brand of Swedenborgian spirituality. They all need all the support we can give. We have a specific new opportunity in our current moment. As you can read in the ordination sermon on [p. 98](#) in this issue of *the Messenger*, I feel called to develop the realm of virtual communities. It is the new frontier with a far-reaching potential we've scarcely tapped. Few know that the first radio ministry in the United States was developed by a Swedenborgian in our denomination, Rev. John Stockwell. He saw the potential

before anyone else for the new technology of radio broadcasts. That was the first use of the airwaves that ultimately spawned the enormous highway of broadcast ministries that later included television and now internet broadcasting. Stockwell's Swedenborgian radio ministry could be considered the first virtual ministry in the sense that people over a vast geographic expanse could participate in the same spiritual experience in real time.

As a historian, I feel a real connection to those gone before who also lived their passion for the uniquely brilliant Swedenborgian movement, as my minister Rev. Thom Muller likes to call it. But it isn't just history. There's such a thing as a Swedenborgian spirituality of communing with angels, and I feel we are in the company of Swedenborgian angels such as John Stockwell as we continue to give heart and soul to the Swedenborgian vision. This is basic Swedenborgian spirituality. The interconnected energy systems of the Divine throughout every level of and order of being is akin to a unified field theory such that we are connected everywhere we wish to be. And I know our ancestors care about us and are supporting us.

Stepping into the duties of serving the Swedenborgian Church of North America as president really does feel like a certain kind of return to ministry "on the ground" as I said earlier, and perhaps something rather opposite than on the ground, too. May we stay committed as bearers of and believers in a vision of a divine power, presence, and providence of a reality that could be such good news for so many.

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

## Council of Ministers Report

BY REV. SUSANNAH CURRIE, CHAIR – COUNCIL OF MINISTERS

The Council of Ministers (COM) meetings for 2022 included in-person participants of twenty-one ordained ministers, five licensed pastors, and five guests. Virtual attendance was eight ordained ministers and four licensed pastors.

The Council of Ministers meetings began with an inspiring educational program based in nature, *Transformations of Growth in God*, where we looked at the life of seeds and plants as a guide to our various ministries. We embraced the cycles of life and the value of each stage of development through stories and truth-telling. Presenters were Rev. Susannah Currie, Rev. Shada Sullivan, Rev. Dr. Dave Brown, Rev. Sage Cole, and Rev. Rich Tafel.

The business meetings the next day included receiving reports from committees and boards, approving minutes, and using Nemovote for elections.

**Right:** COM Chair Rev. Susannah Currie with other COM members in front of the screen of Zoom participants.

**Below:** Rev. Shada Sullivan, and Rev. Youngmin Kim.



### The following were voted to the roll of former ministers:

Rev. Tomas Aquino – deceased  
 Rev. Dr. George Dole – deceased  
 Rev. F. Bob Tafel – deceased  
 Rev. David Sonmor – deceased  
 Rev. Anna Woofenden – severed by her own request

### The following licensed pastors were voted to be recertified for another two-year period:

Helen Barler  
 –Puget Sound, Washington  
 Paul Deming  
 –St. Louis, Missouri  
 Linda Callander  
 –Silver City, New Mexico  
 Karen Feil  
 –Chicago, Illinois  
 Lorraine Kardash  
 –Portland, Maine  
 Tassy Farwell  
 –Hillside, El Cerrito, California

The Plan of Ministry from Colin Amato was approved, and his ordination recommended to the floor of Convention.

The Vision of Ministry of Rev. Jay Barry was presented; he was voted to a one-year term of Authorized Candidacy, and will engage in four dialogues

### Ministry Milestones

**5 Years:** Rev. Shada Sullivan and Pastor Karen Feil  
**10 Years:** Rev. Jenny Caughman and Rev. Emily Jane Lemole  
**15 Years:** Rev. Sky Paradise and Rev. Jennifer Tafel  
**25 Years:** Rev. Nadine Cotton and Rev. Dr. Jonathan Mitchell  
**30 Years:** Rev. Eric Hoffman  
**35 Years:** Rev. Donna Sloan, Rev. Steve Pultz, and Rev. Jean Vidil  
**40 Years:** Rev. Paul Martin, Rev. Patrick Duvivier, and Rev. Christian Mania  
**45 Years:** Rev. Eric Allison  
**50 Years:** Rev. John Billings  
**55 Years:** Rev. Harvey Tafel  
**60 Years:** Rev. Dick Tafel

Election results were, secretary, Rev. Julie Conaron; new ExCom members-at-large Rev. Kevin Baxter and Rev. Donna Keane; new Committee on Admission to the Ministry (CAM) Chair, Rev. Junchol Lee; new CAM at-large member, Rev. Rich Tafel; Nominating Committee, Rev. Dr. Dave Brown; and Convention Preacher for 2024, Rev. Betsy Coffman. (Much thanks to Jennifer Lindsay for her assistance with voting!)

### The following ministers requested to be listed as retired:

Rev. Julie Conaron  
 Rev. Emily Jane Lemole  
 Rev. Catherine Lauber  
 Rev. Kathy Speas  
 Rev. Doug Moss  
 Rev. Thomas Noack  
 Rev. Steve Sanchez was voted as lapsed due to three years of non-communication

*Continues on page 81*



# Pre-Convention Meeting of the General Council

BY KAREN CONGER – RECORDING SECRETARY

The General Council met in person on Saturday, June 25, 2022 for their pre-convention meeting at the California State University at Long Beach. It was the first time since 2019 that the members had been able to meet in person, and it was wonderful to be together again in real time. This being the first convention with hybrid meetings in the history of the denomination, all but one person was able to attend the meeting, and one member attended virtually. Various reports were received, including those from the officers, the Operations Manager, the Chair of the Council of Ministers, and the ministry liaison reports that each council member submits once or twice a year.

We were also pleased to welcome



*Members of General Council, ExCom, and invited guests.*  
**Back row beginning at left:** Rev. Susannah Currie, Rev. Thom Muller, Kurt Fekete, Karen Conger, Stan Conger, Rev. Jane Siebert, Pastor Paul Deming.  
**Front row beginning at left:** Jennifer Lindsay, Herb Ziegler, Barb Halle, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Beki Greenwood, Rev. Betsy Coffman.

guest Rev. Rich Tafel to the meeting. A consultant hired by the denomination two years ago, Rich delivered a report on the pending sale of the New York New Church property. The ongoing litigation with the owner of the next-door property continues, but it appears

there is an ever-brightening light at the end of that tunnel. After the sale is completed, a trusteeship will be established with the residual to benefit the New York City area and beyond. In addition, Rev. Tafel delivered a report on the National Church and the Washington, D.C. Society advising that members of the Society believe that it is time the property should be sold as it no longer serves the mission. A loan from the Trustees of the Building Fund has served to accomplish some repairs on the tower, but there are still significant deferred maintenance issues pending. The General Council will be in discussion with all of the involved parties, including the Trustees of the National Church.



## COM Report

*Continued from page 80*


regarding the four essential distinctions between General Church and Convention.

It was determined to ask the General Council of Convention to form an ad hoc committee to research and explore the perspectives of all stakeholders in the denomination on framing the rights and privileges of licensed pastors on COM and shape recommendations to the Committee on Amendments and, if appropriate, to the Structure Review Committee for any necessary

changes that need to be considered by the denomination. Kevin Baxter and Rachel Madjerac volunteered to serve on this committee.

It was voted that personnel supervision of *Our Daily Bread* be moved from COM to the General Council.

It was voted to recommend the Standing Resolution Welcoming the LGBTQ+ Community, with revisions, to the floor of Convention.

It was voted to adopt the Good Practices for Social Media for the COM. 



*The Council of Ministers meetings had delicious homemade snacks, treats, and individually wrapped communion bags served with cloth napkins and aluminum plates provided by Rev. Amanda Adams Riley from The Garden Church.*

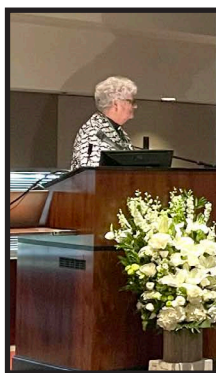
# Welcome and Opening of Convention

BY REV. JANE SIEBERT – OUTGOING PRESIDENT

We are here—can you believe it? Give yourself and everyone here a hand. And a hand for Brittany Price who has worked tirelessly and with deep dedication on her first in-person convention and her confidant, cheerleader, graphic designer and ever-ready partner, editor of *the Messenger* Beki Greenwood. This is their *first* hybrid convention, with all its additional things to prepare and plan for.<sup>1</sup> Give a hand to Alex Dyer for his work on this and keeping things going as we keep going.<sup>2</sup>

We have about the same number of virtual attendees as we do in person. This is remarkable, and makes it the best attended convention in many years. And give a hand to the planning committee, please stand, Kevin Baxter, David Brown, Dan Burchett, Jae Chung, Karen Conger, Susannah Currie, Alex Dyer, Kurt Fekete, Beki Greenwood, Jim Lawrence, Jennifer Lindsay, Connie McOsker, Jonathan Mitchell, Brittany Price, Amanda Riley, and Roslyn Taylor.

Now let us begin our opening “Rock It” presentation. Since this is my last convention as president, we are going to have fun with my favorite correspondence through rocks. Rocks represent natural truths, and they say if you



**Above:** Rev. Jane Siebert opens the 198<sup>th</sup> Annual Convention.

**Middle:** Rocks from around North America are presented.

**Lower:** Rocks placed at Wayfarers Chapel

hold a rock in your hand, you can feel the mountain it came from. I believe it and have felt it. Swedenborg wrote, “All things of nature are like sheaths around spiritual things... this is the cause of all the wonders and miracles in nature” HS §4524.

Many of you have brought rocks from the area you come from. There is a table in the display room with indelible markers for you to put the location or ministry your rock comes from. Then, remember and take your rock when we visit Wayfarers Chapel as they have a special place set for our rock garden to remind everyone of the prayers coming from all over convention for their big

restoration project.

Tonight, I have asked one person from each state and one from each camp or other ministry to bring their rocks to the stage and tell us why they chose this rock and how it represents their state, camp, or group and what it says to them.

I will start with the rock chosen by my home church in Pretty Prairie, Kansas. They chose from many and this one represented the variety in our congregation, some bring shining souls, some are our solid dependable members, and others are the questioners who ask – what kind of rock is this and what does it mean? The rock from Pawnee Rock, Kansas, came from the large hill protruding from the flat prairie upon which their town was named. It reminds us

to thank our Native American brothers and sisters for taming the land, watching over it, and teaching us how to care for it. For our land here where we are meeting, we thank the Tongva Nation.

I wrote this entry for our procession, to help us think about rocks as not just a rock, but a story of Opening of Convention 2022.

## “Rock It” Procession

Rocks relate to natural truths. Rocks have a lot to tell us about ourselves and about others.

Some have holes in them where they lost a part of themselves when life hit hard

<sup>1</sup> Little did we know at this point what all was in store and things we could not plan for. With the unwavering help of Beki Greenwood and Brittany Price, the 198<sup>th</sup> Convention was a huge success.  
<sup>2</sup> Which he had to do remotely due to falling ill after the COM meetings.



## Opening Convention

*Continued from page 82*

but they are still beautiful.

Some have had all their rough  
edges worn off  
from tumbling over and over in the  
stream of providence  
and are smooth and gentle from  
the ride.

Some have cracks where they  
butted up against another rock  
and were hurt in the process,  
but they are still strong.

Some have hidden beauty inside  
and we have to help them  
to crack open and see it.

Some are pretty on one side  
and not so much on the other.  
We need to be a little careful of  
people, I mean rocks like this.

Some are big and showy  
and they draw our attention  
and some need to be closely  
examined to find their gift.

Some have to be washed off  
because the dirt of life  
hides their inner treasure.

Some are tiny and easily  
overlooked.

Pay attention.  
You might miss the jewel.

Not one is just a rock  
if we take time and look closely.  
Every rock has a story.



*The rock presentation was followed by an Opening Worship Service organized by members of the host churches. The Convention Choir was led by Laurie Turley (above). Rev. Dr. David Christopher Brown from Wayfarers Chapel (right), and Linda O'Brien-Rothe and Peter Rothe from the Garden Church (below) participated in the worship service.*



A m a n d a  
Riley, Dell  
J. Rose,  
Shada Sul-  
livan, Rich  
Tafel, Ros  
Taylor, and

Thank you all  
for participating,  
and our thanks go  
out to more people  
who have worked to  
bring this conven-  
tion about: Roslyn  
Taylor has organized  
our worship services.

Worship leaders are Anna Woofenden, Amanda Riley, Dave Brown, Dan Burchett, Jonathan Mitchell, Jae Chung, Robert McCluskey, SCYL, and the Children. Kurt Fekete and Charlie Bauer are leading the SCYL teens, Holly Bauer is in charge of the children's program, Tassy Farwell is the Convention assistant, Laurie Turley is our choir director, BJ Neuenfeldt is our accompanist, and Emily Woofenden is the virtual help desk.

We have seventeen volunteers offering to share their wisdom and truth through our keynote address and Mini Courses. Rebecca Esterson as keynote speaker, and Mini Course leaders: Colin Amato, Kevin Baxter, Dave Brown, Sage Cole, Paul Deming, Sue Ditmire, Renée Machiniak, Robert McCluskey, Jonathan Mitchell,

Ken Turley.

Our hosts and volunteers are from the Garden Church, the Agapao Church, and Wayfarers Chapel.

And we thank the many donations from around the continent that help keep costs down and support our youth to attend Convention. We are trying to keep ahead of the list with our posters and if you donate during convention, please add your name. All donations during convention from the Silent Auction in the display room, offerings, etc. will be divided equally between the Garden Church Meals Program and the Wayfarers Chapel Restoration fund. Our treasurer, Jennifer Lindsay, will accept donations at any time. 📺

View the entire Welcome, Opening Worship, and Keynote Address: <https://youtu.be/AyOzgWFHoRk>

## Keynote Address

## Images of Infinity in the Cosmic Garden

BY DR. REBECCA ESTERSON

INCOMING DEAN OF THE CENTER FOR SWEDENBORGIAN STUDIES

Many of us travelled a long way to be at Convention this year. We came by train, bus, and car. On the other hand, many of us travelled shorter distances to be with the community virtually, having travelled from the kitchen to the living room, or from the living room to the back porch. All of us, however, made a journey of intention, in spirit, to be present for this time, to be together. These are troubled and troubling times, and it is important to be together to find fellowship and perspective. What a blessing!

I drove to Convention, from Northern to Southern California, with my fellow pilgrims Debbie and Dru, and we had an enjoyable trip. Along the way we enjoyed three of my favorite things: beautiful scenery, good conversation, and plenty of coffee. But another reason I was grateful for the drive involves something of a confession: I have a terrible fear of flying. Like most phobias, it isn't a rational fear and there's really nothing anyone can tell me, or anything I can tell myself, about the safety of air travel that will lessen my fear. I experience it as a physical reaction, as though it were written into the code of my DNA. As soon as the wheels of the plane take off, I go into a panic. I sweat, my heart rate rises, I look around in confusion at the other passengers and the flight crew, none of whom seem to share my sense of acute danger and wonder at how our experiences of flight can be so different. But I can't think myself out of it. It is though my body has a kind of consciousness of its own, a firm and stubborn belief that it belongs on the ground, no

matter what my brain tells it. As far as my body is concerned, the sky is a place of death and danger, the ground is the place of life and stability, peace and sanctity. When I land, I want to press my forehead against the ground and thank the Lord for the steady earth. My fear of flying is not logical, and it has been the source of significant obstacles. But it has also provided occasions of insight, or at least a particular vantage point from which to contemplate being and existence.



While many who count themselves among the spiritually oriented might look to the sky, the air or the stars, for inspiration, I look to the earth. I look out and down and wonder at the weight of our bodies against the face of this earth. There is belonging here with the creeping things, the flowing water, the majestic landscapes. My greatest experiences of gratitude and

awe come, not from gazing into space, but from experiences of groundedness. Earth is where I want to be. I am only half-joking when I tell my kids space travel is the one profession that I forbid them to consider.

As Swedenborgians, we tend to view the sun as a model for Divinity, the one true source of light and heat, love and wisdom from above. Swedenborg describes the sun in heaven as the aura, or emanation of God, and the sun of our world as the emanation of that sun. The sun often features, therefore, in our metaphors for Divinity, its relationship to the moon, the clouds, the planets, figure in our theological models for the interplay of forms of truth and love. However, for our time together this evening, I wonder if you might engage me in a thought experiment suggested by this attraction to the earth that my fear of flying has encouraged. In what ways might the earth correspond to God? What do her features and forces tell us about divinity, or about forms of love and wisdom?

Whether or not you share my preference for earth over sky, I invite you to a reflection on what it means that we are tethered this way. I invite you to pause for a moment and notice how the weight of your body is held by the earth. We are conditioned to think of our weight as a troubling feature, something to be assessed and resisted, lightened by sheer force of will, as though we could shake it off and fly free. Let go of those conceptions for a moment and imagine that your attraction to surface of our planet is a gift of belonging. You belong here in the fullness of

*Continues on page 85*



## Keynote Address

*Continued from page 84*

your weight, alongside the trees that sway and the animals that run. Feel the weight of your form grounding you. Now notice the chair that you sit on, or the floor below you, which pulls and hugs. Look down and notice it's color and texture. Imagine what might be just below the floor, perhaps another room is down there, a basement filled with things for another day. Go deeper still, in your imagination, through the boards, concrete, wires and pipes and visualize yourself in the earth, with the soil. Imagine being able to see the incredible energy of the soil, the magical process of decaying bodies of plants and animals being reformed into nutrients which infuse the soil with vitality and potential. As you go into the earth you might encounter created beings still living, root systems and wiggling forms. The crust of our planet is about twenty miles deep, on average, but no human has ever seen more than 8 miles down. We can study lower layers of our planet through the patterns of seismic waves and speculate about the contents of what lies below, though much mystery remains. Such studies suggest that below this thin layer of earth and ocean, this crust, there is a large mass of material called the mantle which extends another 18 hundred miles down. As we move through the mantle we encounter mostly solid rock, some layers burning hot, some layers icy cold. There are also layers that are more fluid, which allow for the movement of the tectonic plates above, bearing our land and our seas. If we were to go further still we would encounter what scientists call the outer core and the inner core of the earth. Here the temperature reaches that of the sun, about 10k degrees F. So that, astonishingly, while surface creatures soak up the sun's rays above, there is another parallel source of heat under their feet. The inner core,

the ball at the center, is a little smaller than the size of the moon, and is a solid mass of mostly iron. It is heated well beyond melting point but lies under so much pressure that scientists believe it must be formed into solid crystals, or a single crystal, floating there in the middle and rotating at its own pace, distinct from the rotation patterns of the earth as a whole. The outer core, on the other hand, which surrounds this iron ball, is not solid, but a liquid formed of heated metals, its movements fluid and flowing. Like the tides of the oceans on the earth's surface, the liquid metals in the outer core are pulled by the gravitational forces of our moon, and experience tides (there are fluid tides in the center of the earth). These "Earth tides" as they are

**But here is the great and holy paradox that our tradition, in the wisdom of our ancestors, teaches us: while this planet may be temporary, it nevertheless contains the infinite because it contains life.**

called, create our planet's electric currents which are responsible for the geomagnetic field. This field, which gives our planet its magnetic poles, radiates from the core out into space where it meets the sun's energy and protects our atmosphere from powerful solar winds. These tides, these currents, these magnetic energies are what allow our planet to form a protective ozone layer, giving us the movements of air and water in which we live and thrive in an ecosystem of unimaginable beauty and diversity. So that as we sit and stand here presently, we have all of this below us and around us, a gift of energy and space and life.

All of this, of course, is temporary. Our planet was born about four and a half billion years ago, they say, and in the blink of an eye, in another four and

a half billion years by some estimates, after the water has vaporized and the magnetosphere of our planet decays, our sun will die out and whatever remains of earth will be set adrift.

But here is the great and holy paradox that our tradition, in the wisdom of our ancestors, teaches us: while this planet may be temporary, it nevertheless contains the infinite because it contains life. There is eternity here, in our weighty bodies, and in the bodies of every created thing that walks on the shell-surface of planet Earth. We are born and we die, but we are also eternal and infinite. And this isn't simply a teaching about the afterlife. Our planet contains the infinite and eternal right here and right now among the living. How can this be?

In his genre-defying book *The Worship and Love of God*, Swedenborg retells the creation story of the cosmos in terms scientific, poetic and deeply devout. In it, he imagines our planet earth at precisely the stage between its formation and the emergence of life on its surface. Having solidified into a mass of particles that spiraled out from the sun, a crust has formed on its surface, like an eggshell. Scattered on this shell he imagines seeds of every living creature, plant and animal, the potential for infinite varieties of life lying in wait. And in this pregnant moment, he writes, the earth contained eternity within it, time stretching backwards and forwards indefinitely. "Thus the present contained the past, and what was to come lay concealed in each [seed], for one thing involved another in a continual series; by which means this earth, from its continued *beginnings*, was perpetually in a kind of birth, and, as it were, looking to that which was to follow; while it was also in the *end*, and, as it were, forgetful of what was gone before" (*Worship and Love of God* §15). It is as if new forms of time and space, infinity and

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eternity, were born in a single moment on the surface of our planet because of this potential for life.

In the works *Divine Love and Wisdom* and *Divine Providence*, this theme of eternity in the pregnant present is explored theologically. We read that there are two core features of the Divine, one contained within the other like our planet's inner and outer core. Divine Love at the center and Divine Wisdom surrounding it, constitute the very essence of God, and these are reflected in the two related qualities of infinity and eternity. We read in *Divine Providence* §48: "What is intrinsically infinite and intrinsically eternal is the same as Divinity."

Of these two, infinity (which concerns space) and eternity (which concerns time), let us consider infinity first.

Swedenborg writes that we see an image of the infinite in the variety of everything created. Even within a given species, no created thing is like any other created thing, however much they reproduce. He uses the example of fish, and suggests we imagine that a given species of fish were to reproduce to its fullest capacity for a hundred years. They would surely fill the universe, he writes, and still no two would be exactly alike. Their variety can never be exhausted or even diminished. Variety in creation is truly infinite. This is true also of the human face, which, we read, is uniquely suited to figuring the infinity of the Divine. The variety of forms and expressions in the human face are themselves like a mirror, reflecting the infinite variety in God's own face. "We can see an image of what is infinite and eternal in the variety of everything in the fact that nothing is exactly like anything else, and nothing can be to eternity. We can see this in the faces of all the people

there have been since the beginning of creation, and from their characters as well, which are reflected in their faces" (*Divine Providence* §56).

**We are as diverse interiorly as the species of our planet. When we behold the beauty and variety of our world, we are, in a sense, looking in a mirror.**

This leads us to a consideration of eternity. If we were to pluck one fish from our universe of fish, she would contain within her the property of eternity, simply by the fact of her having come from her parent fish who came from their parent fish back through the generations and evolutions, and by the fact of her having the capacity to reproduce infinite numbers of generations into the future. Whether or not she lives to produce offspring, her body will go on to replenish her native habitat with nutrients and she will supply future generations of diverse species with the capacity for life. She is herself an image of the eternal, stretching backward and forward in time. This week at Convention we will have the opportunity to visit the Garden Church in San Pedro (a church that's a garden, a garden that's a church). While there you might enjoy images of eternity in a number of ways. You might see their composting bins, where death passes into life, decay transforms into fertilizer, realizing right there the promise of eternal life. And if you pick up and hold just one seed from the garden you will have in your hand a container for and image of the divine, infinite and eternal, entirely unique and also entirely interconnected.

The planet, or the garden, which is a microcosm of the planet, tells us something about the nature of Divinity and the nature of our inner being. All of these forms of infinity and eternity in

the natural world around us are also present in the forms of love and wisdom within us from God. Our loves and wisdom, like the Divine Love and Wisdom of our source, are both infinite (in variety) and eternal (in that they can bear fruit endlessly). Swedenborg writes that this applies to every element of our desires, perceptions, and ideas. Our inner world is like the fish of the sea, or the seeds in a garden: totally unique, beautiful, and holy to the core. There is nothing we can do to remove this quality of the divine from within us. We are as diverse interiorly as the species of our planet. When we behold the beauty and variety of our world, we are, in a sense, looking in a mirror, "The fact that the universe consists of constant useful functions produced by wisdom under love's initiative is something all wise people can contemplate as if they were seeing it in a mirror" (*True Christianity* §47).

This has implications for how we understand the oneness of God. We read in *Divine Love and Wisdom* §155 "diversity arises from the fact that there are infinite things in the Divine-Human One." God is One, but God is not one thing. God is one, but infinitely so, containing infinite things. And creation is the expression of this infinite oneness. The diversity expressed here on the surface of our planet is the embodiment and incarnation of God, the image of God, what Swedenborg calls the "distinguishable oneness" of the Divine.

But our reverie is interrupted. This thought experiment considering how earth corresponds to Divinity stops at the inevitable point when we acknowledge that our planet is not always so beautiful. How can this planet be a model for the Divine, you might ask, when it also witnesses the annihilation of diversity, war and decay, ecological disaster, hatred, destructive greed, violence, and suffering? All of this is also

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permitted by the dynamic interplay of gravitational and magnetic forces that give our atmosphere its stability. Evil lurks under our precious ozone. We are provided life by precisely those forces that our life goes on to destroy. Can this also be the image of God? These are the questions raised by such radical immanentism,<sup>1</sup> and these are the questions raised by the urgencies of our time.

The French philosopher Emmanuel Levinas is a helpful interlocutor when considering these kinds of questions, questions about the brutality of our world, and questions about infinity and encounter.

Levinas lived through the atrocities of the second World War, as a Jew and as an enlisted member of the French army. He witnessed human nature in its most destructive forms. Though he survived, held as prisoner of war, many of his family members were brutally murdered by Nazis, and for the remainder of his lifetime, his work as a philosopher and Jewish educator would be deeply informed by this encounter with extreme malevolence. In his magnum opus, *Totality and Infinity* he reflects on the effects of war in suspending morality, that war dupes us into a misguided sense of our own moral advantage, or the moral advantage of people with whom we identify. Both sides in a war such as the one he survived see themselves as guided by ethical intentions, yet, ironically, war has the effect of destroying our very ability to act independently as moral agents. Instead, we are compelled to act for the sake of some totalizing framework. Key to what he calls this

“totality” is valuing what is the Same over and above what is Other, what is different. Totality values of sameness. Totality, Levinas will argue, is not just a problem of wartime, but is at the heart of a fundamentally flawed way of conceiving of Self and Other that characterizes Western thought. All of Western philosophy, Levinas argues, has misled us into centering our epistemologies around knowing the Self. Our relationships to other beings, in this perspective, are framed according to how much we recognize ourselves in other beings and other things. Successful relationships, according to this view, successful reasoning, successful living, all depend on knowing the self. Such a perspective finds happiness in



recognizing ourselves in other people and in seeking to be with people who are like us, it values sameness over difference, at any cost.

Levinas suggests a reverse perspective, a phenomenology of exteriority, in which we sacrifice the need for sameness for the value of otherness. He suggests that we only come to know ourselves through our encounter with *the otherness of Others*, and that the encounter with something entirely outside of ourselves, the absolutely Other, is revelatory. The *truth* is revealed to us through the encounter with the Other. And while totality is the end goal of war, relationality is the only thing that can restore peace.

Here is where he brings in the concept of infinity. Infinity is the opposite of totality. When we encounter the otherness of the Other, the foreignness of the face of someone different from us, for instance, we encounter the infinite, the beyond, the whole. When we see the face of the Other as absolutely Other, rather than seeing them as a version of ourselves, we see infinity. This kind encounter, and no other, invokes responsibility for the Other, our neighbor, and compels us to ethical action.

Swedenborg puts it this way: “Feeling the joy of someone else as joy within ourselves—that is loving. Feeling our joy in others, though, and not theirs in ourselves is not loving. That is loving ourselves, while the former is loving our neighbor. These two kinds of love are exact opposites” (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §47).

In other words, if we only want for other people what brings us joy, we don’t really love them or want what’s best for them, and we will not act in their best interests, but ours. We must cultivate a love that decenters the self, decenters the familiar, that can expand to include forms of joy, ways of being, that are different from what we already know.

Issues of otherness and totality carried specific cultural and political implications in the middle decades of the twentieth century, when powerful forces worked to eliminate racial or ethnic difference through genocide, eugenics, segregation, and other means. But they are no less relevant today, not only in the ways the effects of these events persist, but also in new forms of polarization. Many of us experience extreme forms of totality in our discourses today. We are divided into camps of like-minded people who have become skilled at villainizing the other rather than seeing the wellbeing of the Other

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<sup>1</sup> Definition of immanentism: any of several theories according to which God or an abstract mind or spirit pervades the world.

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as our moral responsibility.

Here is where looking earthward for models of Divinity might benefit us. Ours is a moment that requires an eternal and expansive God. A God that is an ecosystem of infinitely diverse elements. A living God. A God in whom there is vitality, multiplicity, difference. Swedenborg writes, “Every one [unum] is formed from the harmony of many; and the one is such as the harmony is; nor can there ever be an absolute one, but only a harmonic one.” God is the Harmonic One. And we encounter God in the full range of the chords, the full spectrum of the rainbow. Pick your metaphor. God is the all of it, infinite and eternal.

If Levinas is right, if we encounter the infinite in the otherness of the face of the Other, the diversity of life forms on our planet are a sign, a divine revelation, an apocalypse. The awe and beauty that difference can inspire is a holy thing. We stand on holy ground.

If Swedenborg is right, this feature of life on our planet features on every level of reality, heaven itself is perfected the more diverse its inhabitants. We do not lose our identifying features, our differences, at death’s door. Our uniqueness is eternal in that sense also. We have in our Swedenborgian heritage a view of a heaven of infinite variety. Not even the angels can comprehend all the different ways love and wisdom can be expressed, Swedenborg suggests. Rather than being absorbed, or unified into some spirit or substance of sameness, we imagine a spiritual world where difference is a holy reality, and the harmonies it creates are

unimaginably beautiful.

I’d like to conclude with some thoughts on how this relates to the churches and communities within our denomination. Many of us gathering here this week for the 198<sup>th</sup> Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America come with a bundle of concerns about the future of our various communities and organizations. This is a challenging time for any church, for reasons related to the pandemic, a growing cultural uneasiness around organized religion, or the distractions and business of modern life. Some of our churches struggle with building maintenance, burnout of leaders and core members, or other things. I know many of you share my deep affection for the churches in our organization, the people, the buildings, the traditions, and the sustaining teachings. It is easy to be fearful in the face of an uncertain future when you love something so much.

But I learned something important about loving a church when I was asked to be a part of the visioning process for the Garden Church at its inception. I remember distinctly the ways that Rev. Anna Woofenden, the church’s founder, wove in the idea of impermanence. This church would be temporary. It might last a year, it might last 500 years, but it would not be around forever. A garden is never a permanent thing. It is much easier to acknowledge the fleeting nature of a garden than a church building, so this was integrated into our conception of what this church would be. When the time came, it would be like compost, fertilizer for the next useful thing, but in a different form. To be sure, our intention was that it would grow roots and

live a long useful life. But it would be temporary. I struggled with this idea, as someone with an affection, especially for stone churches, with their pretense of fixity, their iron gates, their organs that echo from generation to generation. A garden would have none of this. It would have plants that would grow and die, feed and be fed. People would come and go, too, some of them unrooted, unhoused, reminding us that we are all nomads, really. It would be a sanctuary to impermanence. But all of it would contain the infinite. All of it would participate in the eternal. It would be infinite and eternal, not because it would resist decay, but because it would be alive. And it is alive, eternal and infinite, like you and me.

The Garden Church reminds us that all our churches are gardens, and that all of us, individually are also churches and gardens. Temporary in one way, and eternal in another way. Dying and living. And it calls us to ask two questions: Where is your church most alive? This is where people will encounter the eternal. How does your church celebrate plurality or welcome and care for the stranger? This is where people will encounter the infinite.

Life and encounter, these are gifts we can cultivate, and tend like a vegetable patch. And we need reminding, always reminding, of what we have been told for over two thousand years “where two or three gather in my name, there I am in the midst” (Matt 18:20). Where two or three gather, there can be life and encounter. In these alone will we realize the promise expressed in Genesis 22, that we might multiply like the stars of heaven and like the sand on the shores of the seas. (Genesis 22:17). ☸



## Did You Notice Doves on Some of the Name Tags?

What did they mean? Jane’s doves were placed on the name tags of those who were part of the Convention Planning Committee!





# Report on Business Meetings of Convention

BY KAREN CONGER – RECORDING SECRETARY

The first business session of the 2022 convention meetings convened at approximately 9:00 AM PT on Sunday, June 26, 2022. Included amongst the business transacted were the acceptance of the report from the Council of Ministers, which authorized the ordination of Colin Amato, and the acceptance of Rev. James (Jay) Barry as an authorized candidate for ministry within the General Convention. Rev. Barry is currently a priest in the General Church.

Also, a document entitled “Welcome and Support of All People in the LGBTQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer, Plus) Community” was presented to the Floor and later voted on and passed overwhelmingly to become Standing Resolution 16. This Standing Resolution is available for reading on the Church website ([swedenborg.org](http://swedenborg.org)). It was emphasized that though the document has become a Standing Resolution, “*The SCNA respects the judgment of those who make decisions for its constituent bodies and lends its support to them as they discern*

*whether to become LGBTQ+ Embracing and will offer resources and guidance to facilitate the process.*”

Various reports were given and accepted including the following: from the editor of *the Messenger*, *Our Daily Bread*, the Swedenborg Foundation, the Social Justice Committee, Feed and Be Fed, and others. John Titus rose to announce that the city of Urbana, Ohio, has been officially designated as the 145<sup>th</sup> International City of Peace. All those interested in more information on this process were invited to contact John Titus.

Elections were held for the several offices as printed in the March issue of *the Messenger* and the were duly elected (see list on right).

Several people were recognized for their years of service on various committees, as well as on the General Council, and finally, Rev. Jane Siebert, for her six years of outstanding service to the denomination as the president.

Many folks were recognized for all their work in organizing this year’s convention, including the good people at Wayfarers

Chapel and at the Garden Church, all the local volunteers, and volunteers from other associations. Next year’s convention will be held at Bridgewater State University, with Council of Ministers meetings beginning on Wednesday, June 28, the opening of convention on Saturday,

## Election Results

### Vice President:

Kurt Fekete

### Recording Secretary:

Karen Conger

### Treasurer:

Jennifer Lindsay

### General Council Lay Person:

Pastor Paul Deming (1<sup>st</sup> term)

### General Council Lay Person:

Emily Woofenden (1<sup>st</sup> term)

### General Council Lay Person:

Kelly Kennedy  
(to fill an unexpired term, ’23)

### General Council Minister:

Rev. Sage Cole (1<sup>st</sup> term)

### Standing Committee for

### Education & Spiritual Resources:

Rev. Julie Conaron

### Standing Committee for

### Education & Spiritual Resources:

Rev. Junchol Lee

### Standing Committee for

### Communication & Information:

Rev. Kevin Baxter

### Standing Committee for

### Financial Accountability:

Rev. Rachel Madjerac

### Standing Committee for

### Financial Accountability:

Rev. Lisa Solwold

### Standing Committee for

### Nominations:

Tammara Mounce

### Center for Swedenborgian Studies

### Board of Trustees, Representative

### Class:

Dr. Lewis Shaw



**Above:** Rev. Jay Barry speaks about his decision to become a candidate for the ministry. **Below:** Members of the LGBTQ+ Standing Resolution committee.

July 1, and a wonderful Forth of July celebration in store for all! The last business session closed at noon on Tuesday, June 28, and there was a celebration honoring Rev. Jane Siebert that evening. 🏡

# Center for Swedenborgian Studies Annual Meeting

BY TOM NEUENFELDT

The Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) held its Annual Meeting on June 26, 2022, at California State University, Long Beach, during the annual convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. The meeting was called to order by Tom Neuenfeldt, acting Vice Chair.

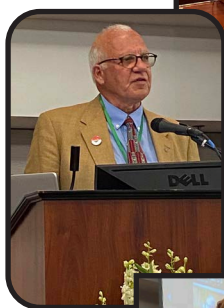
The minutes of the June 28, 2021, meeting were approved.

Tom gave a hearty thanks to Rev. Jenny Caughman who was chair of the Board of Trustees for the past six years. A warm thanks was then given to Rev. Jane Siebert who graciously stepped in to act as chair upon Rev. Caughman's resignation.

Also, an extraordinary thank you was expressed to Jim Lawrence who leaves the seminary after twenty-one years to become president of the denomination. As Rebecca Esterson steps into the position of Dean of the CSS, Tom stated that we are so very pleased to have her leadership to take



*Above: Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence gives his outgoing dean's report. Left: Tom Neuenfeldt Below: Dr. Rebecca Esterson presents Dru Johnson the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies.*



us into the future. She is a strong advocate of Swedenborg, and a well-recognized member of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU).

In his outgoing dean's report, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

briefly outlined his twenty-one years in Berkeley. Fifty-seven students have completed programs and are working in the world. Our school is well established in the GTU, the largest theological consortium in North America and we have restocked our intellectual capital of scholarly leadership.

In her incoming dean's report, Dr. Rebecca Esterson spoke with enthusiasm about the school's future. She reflected that every seminary is rethinking theological education right now. We need to continue supporting our traditional education programs and to also think outside the box towards the future.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay gave the financial report. All the CSS endowment is invested in the Common Fund. With the CSS faculty reducing from three to two with Jim's retirement, the 2022–23 budget

is projected to carry a surplus. Jennifer added that all the support and positive thoughts received from our spiritual family across the continent are greatly appreciated.

Dean Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence conferred the Certificate of Swedenborgian Studies on (Mark) Dru Johnson upon completing all the necessary course work.

Elections for the "At Large" class of Trustees were held. Those elected were Karen Conger for a four-year term, Rev. Kathy Speas for a three-year unexpired term, Pastor Tassy Farwell for a two-year unexpired term, and Tom Neuenfeldt for a one-year unexpired term. ☛

## Convention 2022

*Continued from cover*

The Convention's programming took place under a giant blue glass pyramid that was quite striking against the sky. The food was very good, both catered and in the dining hall! The beds in the dormitories were quite

high, which led to some creative ways various attendees figured out how to leap into bed at night. More than anything though, at Convention there was fellowship. The kind of fellowship that you try to recreate in a virtual experience but just isn't quite the same. For even though I have seen all these people on camera for many months,

nothing can replace the experience of seeing everyone in person.

We plan to take what we have learned and to build on it to create an even better experience for all attendees next year. Thank you for attending both virtually and in-person. We look forward to offering another hybrid convention in 2023! ☛



# Celebrating Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

BY REV. JANE SIEBERT

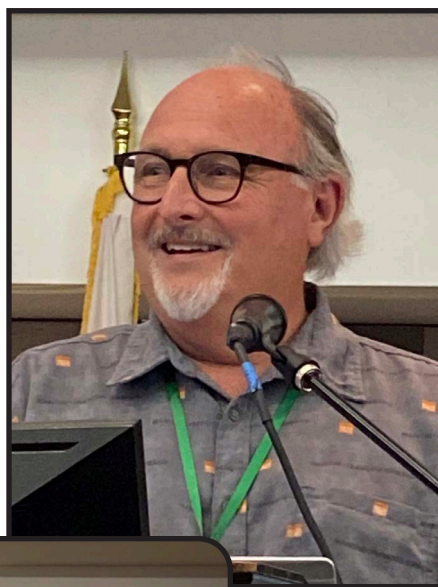
**W**e surprised him! Rev. Dr. James Lawrence is stepping down as Dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies after twenty-one years of powerful leadership to take on the helm as president of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

To honor him several important friends stopped by via Zoom to say hello and congratulations:

**Dr. Bill McKinney** was president of the Pacific School of Religion (PSR) when we moved from Boston to Berkeley. He facilitated our integration and welcomed the Swedenborgian House of Studies (SHS), as it was called in 2001, with support, friendship and curiosity. He commented often on the bright, energetic and open Swedenborgian students that were a benefit in classes and on the campus.

**Rev. Dr. Rachel Rivers** worked alongside Jim in Berkeley to encourage the move across the continent and make sure it was a sound decision. Rachel was instrumental in the decision to move as she served on the Swedenborgian School of Religion (SSR), as our seminary was called in Boston, and the new SHS board.

**Rev. Kim Morrow** was the first Swedenborgian graduate from the new seminary in Berkeley. She helped move the library into its new home, not a minor feat with 25,000 books, periodicals and manuscripts. After her ordination (2003) she continued to work at SHS and created an inviting space for the three initial students and many more to come.



**John Titus**, representing the many board members that worked with Jim over the years, was with us in-person.

He emphasized Jim's ability to bring people together and get good work done while having fun. Jim was a good friend to everyone.

**Herb Ziegler**, entertained us with a slide presentation of Jim over the years. He captured the many stages of Jim's changing facial hair while showing us the joy that shines from Jim's face as he shepherded our seminary for twenty-one years.



in the first class of M.Div. students to arrive to participate in the pilot

education program in 2001, along with Rev. Kathy Speas and Rev. Alison Lane-Olsen. None of the previous professors moved to Berkeley, so Jim's first hurdle was to bring in professors and develop the program, class by class, while students pursued their learning journeys. Kevin was ordained in 2004, along with Kathy, Alison, Rich Tafel, and me (Jane).

**Rev. Dr. David Brown** graduated in 2006 and went back virtually



to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies to complete a Doctor of Ministry this year. He attested to the thriving D.Min. program at the Pacific School of Religion that Jim has fostered and is the main professor. He draws students from all faith traditions across the globe.



**Rev. Thom Muller** is now minister of the church that Jim attends, Hillside Community Church in El Cerrito, California.

Thom was ordained in 2016 and spoke personally about early interactions with Jim when he was only nineteen and not sure about his path in life. Tom attended Bryn Athyn College and then moved across the continent to attend CSS.

We all applaud Jim for the successful seminary he fathered and turn our support to Dr. Rebecca Esterson as she takes on the role of dean and continues to teach at the Graduate Theological School. 🙏











## Convention Worship Service Sermon

BY REV. ANNA WOOFENDEN

I am spending every free moment I have out in the garden these days. My spouse can tell you that as tired as I am at the end of a long workday, you will find me out planting seeds until it's too dark to see and up early with our daughter in the backpack, watering the tiny little sprouts, to assure them coming up and being cared for.

I find God in the garden, peace in the garden. There are moments where it is certainly that Garden of Eden kind of peace. Time set apart, as separate, to fill me up. But much more often, it is that Holy City kind of peace. It's the peace that is found in and amongst all the realities of the world. Aware of the demands on my time and energy, present to the suffering and pain in the community, aware of neighbors walking by. It's the peace that is not as the world gives, received right here, in and amongst that of the very earth.

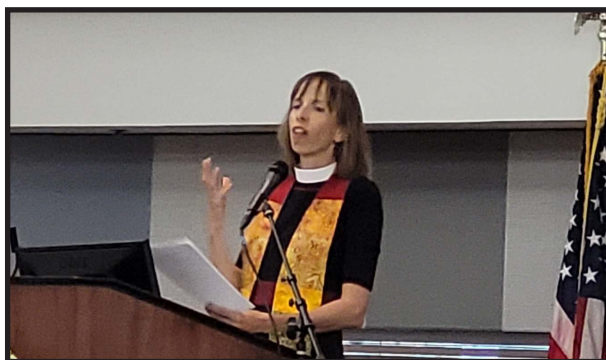
I long for peace. Peace inside my own being. Peace that comes because there is justice and goodness in the world. Peace that is, well peace. I'm sure I'm not the only one in this room whose heart yearns for a world filled with peace.

The old hymn "It is well, with my soul" has been one of the soundtracks to my life as of late, re-focusing me and bringing me back to my breath.

Do you know it?

When Peace like a river  
attendeth my way, When sorrows  
like sea billows roll Whatever my  
lot thou hast taught me to say, "It is  
well, it is well with my soul."

It is well, it is well with my soul. Words I long to say, long to feel, and yet so often, are elusive. I long for that



river of peace, a flood of peace so powerful and so strong that it soaks the deserts of struggle and overflows through the valleys of pain.

There is so much going on in the world and often in our lives that is oppositional to peace. Rather than rivers of peace, it seems that there are often tsunamis that breed anxiety, and wrenches us with pain, and overcomes us with frustration and overwhelm and fear.

In the past weeks and months, and well, years, I, like many of you, have found the world a trying place. Many of our current events hit close to home and have left me raw and tender in a way that I could only go inwards for a while. There have been times when seeing the big picture, looking for ways to be part of the solution, climbing my way back to hope were not there for me.

In those moments when I couldn't see the big picture and couldn't hold *all* the pain, I found God inviting me inward, to tend to my own little garden, to invite that tender care of my soul. The Spirit has been beckoning me to breathe in and out and at times to shrink my world down so that all I needed to do in that moment was to be present to what was right in front of me.

There have been times where I all I

can do is to hold and rock my precious little daughter on my lap, wishing I could wrap my arms around her and keep her safe forever, never having to send her out into a world where the color of her skin makes her a target for violence rooted in White supremacy. All I can do was rock my daughter and wonder about the country that her body and my body

and your bodies will be living in and all the implications for so many. All I could do is to rock my precious little one, and think about how many people are struggling right now to feed their precious little ones, and how churches and communities we love are wrestling with questions of inclusion, and how so many are grieving the loss of loved ones due to gun violence, and how so many parents around the globe are trying to protect their children in war zones.

All I could do is rock and hum:  
*Peace like a river attendeth my way.*

Rocking back and forth I knew, and I know, that this was just my tiny, little, zoomed in part of the world right now. And I know, and we all know, that there are vast struggles and suffering and injustice and pain in the world. Each of us walk at different intersections where our own personal circumstances and experiences come up against that which is going on in the world around us. We all can know and feel, wherever we are this day, that there is such a deep need for peace. How humanity longs to be able to say, collectively, "it is well, with our souls."

So often I, and maybe you, look for ways to change the external circumstances, in order to bring that peace. And while we absolutely need to stay

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## Convention Sermon

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engaged with the work to bring about a more just and generous world each and every day, I think Jesus is clear in our gospel reading and throughout scripture that it's not a solo job and it's not something we can just make happen by sheer force of will. We are being offered a peace that is not dependent on our current outside circumstances or the world around us, but instead calls us to create the world that can embody that peace.

It's peace that's not as the world gives, it's a peace that is a little bit more like heaven, here on earth, in and amongst the struggles of the world. It's a Heavenly City kind of peace.

Our well-worn beloved, reading from the Book of Revelation offers us this image of the heavenly city, the New Jerusalem. An image that guides us and draws us forward in the Swedenborgian tradition.

We remember that in this heavenly city, the tree of life that stood in the Garden of Eden in Genesis is found to be growing on both sides of a river that flows from the throne of God. The garden that was there in the beginning home of humanity is again a shared dwelling place where God and God's people are together in mutual relationship. The tree of life offers fruit for every month. All kinds of food for all kinds of people. Even the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the nations. And then there's the river of the water of life, renewing and giving life to everything around it.

This is not the pristine Garden of Eden, that which is set apart, perfect, this is the Heavenly City, where there is no temple, because God is everywhere, right here, in it with us. This is the tree of life that feeds us wherever we are.

The Heavenly City that is a little bit more like heaven, right here on earth, in and amongst the pain and suffering

of the world, is drawing us and calling us forward into a new way of being, of seeking peace. It is a peace that is not just passively received, but actively sought and claimed. Believing that, no matter how hard things are, God's peace, God's presence, the kin-dom of God is possible, here and now.

When we consider the circumstances of the author of this powerful hymn, Horatio Gates Spafford, we learn that he wrote these stanzas in the wake of unspeakable tragedy. Indeed, the story has it that they came to him on the very spot where his four daughters were lost to a shipwreck, after he had put his family on a ship after losing everything to a devastating fire.

This peace he describes is not one that comes in the absence of pain and suffering and grief and fear. All is not well with his soul because everything is pristine and perfect. In fact, it is just the opposite.

**God, this is so difficult, I need that peace like a river and the presence of God so close that I can believe that peace is possible so that I can continue to show up to the world around me.**

Instead, these words were written and every time they have been sung since, as a statement of faith. As a longing, desire, belief, and even demand. God, this is so difficult, I need that peace like a river and the presence of God so close that I can believe that peace is possible so that I can continue to show up to the world around me.

The promise in the Gospel is that peace is not only ours to be embraced in some far distant future, but is already ours. Even now. There is no magic formula for receiving it, yet I wonder if each of us have stories of how peace has come, even in, or especially in, the middle of trying times. Peace is there,

when we pause long enough to recognize it, when we open ourselves and remember that the Holy Spirit is on the job.

This peace at first glance may seem personal and individualistic, yet it so often seems to be the first step is to find that place of peace that is beyond what the world gives, in our own tender hearts. Hearts that as they are cared for, can be vessels of peace in the world. In the Swedenborgian tradition, we often talk of the microcosm and macrocosm, operating by the same principles. We each are a church in miniature, while being part of larger bodies and communities, of faith and in the world as a whole. Or as Dr. Esterson said last night, "We are all churches, we are all gardens."

And so, the question that sits with me today is, how is God drawing you forward and tending your garden? And how is that part of this bigger work of bringing a more heavenly way of being, here on Earth?

And where are you, are we, situating our garden? Are we trying to stay back in the pristine and set apart Garden of Eden, ignoring the needs of others around us, blocking ourselves off from the pain and suffering in the world? Or are we willing to show up honestly and vulnerably in and amongst the realities of this world, seeking the peace of the city and looking to see how our own inner peace-seeking can happen and be part of the bigger work the Lord is doing to bring the Heavenly City, to us, right here, right now, in the midst of the chaos and pain of the earth.

What might the world look like if each heart, one by one, were being healed and mended and woven back together with this peace of God that's beyond what the world gives? Might we see our broken, healing, peace-soaked hearts gathering, one by one, by two, by three, as this peace of God is received and shared and finds a way

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## Convention Sermon

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to be lived out?

In our gospel reading, Jesus talks of this peace that he will leave with us. This peace that we reach for today. Jesus first promised it as he was gathered in that upper room, around the table where he points to the bread as his body, God's love here with us, the wine as his life-filled blood, the Divine Truth that is so needed in the world. Jesus is in that upper room with his disciples, preparing them for what the world will look like without him there.

Preparing them to know how to be in relationship with him, even after his crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. Jesus is in that upper room, teaching his disciples, and teaching us, laying out the map for how Emmanuel, God, would continue to be with us.

Jesus told them, and tells us, that it will be through the Holy Spirit, the advocate, that Jesus will continue to be present. When Jesus meets his frightened disciples after his resurrection, when he walks through the walls and shows up and breathes this Holy Spirit upon them just a week or so later, it will be with a greeting of peace. The Greek word for peace is *eirênê*, but scholars believe this is surely a translation of the traditional Hebrew greeting *shalom*.

Shalom signifies more than the absence of conflict; it is a profound and holistic sense of well-being. It is the kind of peace which the world cannot give, but can only come from God. This gift of peace accompanies the gift of the Holy Spirit, which Jesus breathes into his disciples as he sends them out into the world. The same Holy Spirit that Jesus promised in that upper room, that Jesus breathed onto those early disciples, this is the peace, my friends, that is available to us here and now today.

And this peace that Jesus promises

as he takes leave doesn't mean everything gets magically better in our lives and the world around us. This is a peace that is not found outside of the struggles of the world. In fact, it seems to be specifically designed to be found embedded in it. This is the kind of peace that draws us forward into the works of justice, that fuels us to do the work of reconciliation, that reminds us daily that without justice, there is no true peace.

The gift of peace, in the collective, comes when we are living and being and choosing to be a beloved community, to live in the way of the Heavenly City, the New Jerusalem, to be part of that new way of life that God offers us. When we are living into God's vision of a more holy way of being, here on earth.

And, dear ones, the world needs this Heavenly City. The world needs us to keep working for, being, nurturing, and midwifing this new way of being in our world. And the church, wherever and however it shows up in the world, is needed, now more than ever.

And this peace, this promise of being part of ushering more peace, is always an invitation to all of us, whatever contexts we might be in.

We gather here this evening, whether we're here in this space or participating virtually, because we know what those early disciples knew, we can't do this alone. Humans are not created to do it on our own. Something powerful happens when we take ourselves, in our strengths, in our weaknesses, in our questioning and doubts, in our wisdom and faith, and we come together with other people.

Something happens when we commit to being part of communities that are striving to follow the Lord and walk in the way of the Heavenly City.

In just a bit we'll have the opportunity to share in Holy Communion together. To take the bread and the cup that the Lord offered to his disciples



*Rev. Shada Sullivan offers up communion at the Convention Worship Service.*

in that upper room and told us to "do this in remembrance of me."

This is the same evening that, just before this teaching, Jesus has washed his disciples' feet and told them this is how they will show love to each other. Jesus gathered around the table with all different kinds of people and reminded them that to follow him means being in it together and that the Lord will continue to be with us. The example of what community can look like that Jesus gave us in that upper room continues to call us forward as we discover what it means to be faithful, to be the church, to be part of that heavenly city, here and now.

As we share in this sacred meal, we have an invitation to recommit ourselves to the way of the heavenly city, the way of love and justice and peace.

It's a commitment that bares returning to and renewing on a regular basis as we consider the work still before us: combating the pervasive structural power of evil in the world, reconciling racial and ethnic divisions, healing the deep wounds etched into the body of Mother Earth, restoring broken and abused lives. Living in the way of the Heavenly City is no small thing and oh how the world needs more of it. And each of us, as part of God's Garden, need to reach our roots down deep, planted by that river of the water of life, soaking up that peace like the river.

I go to the garden, not because it gets me away from the struggles of the

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# Swedenborgian Church Children's Ministry Meeting

BY REV. KIT BILLINGS

President Rev. Kit Billings opened the meeting at 11:10 AM PT. Our SCCM secretary and treasurer were unable to be present. In addition to the president's report, Rev. Kit also gave a summary of the treasurer's and secretary's



work over the past months. He shared that the officers of the SCCM have focused on three goals for the coming year. First, looking toward mindfulness and meditation practices for children, working closely with Sarah Valley, who is an online teacher of such skills for both children and adults. The goal being for Sarah to teach adult parents and Children's Ministry leaders in our denomination the skills and knowledge we need to foster mindfulness and meditation in our children's lives. Sarah Valley offers Zoom based tutorials for adults, several books, and YouTube videos as resources. She has

nine such videos posted in YouTube at no cost. Kit met with Sarah in a Zoom meeting following convention in Long Beach, and he found her to be an excellent, open-minded teacher who showed the kind of spiritual substance we need as beginners of mindfulness-meditation knowledge and skills.

Second, to continue working with the Central Office in creating a children's ministry webpage within our denominational website, which will offer resources and links for parents and teachers focused on biblical and New Church theological and spiritual beliefs foundational to New Church education—the goal being to fulfill our SCCM Constitution, Article 3.<sup>1</sup>

**1 ARTICLE III. Purpose.** The purpose of SCCM shall be to encourage, support and promote awareness of, and creative responses to, the needs of children and their families for spiritual health and regeneration, according to the life and Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ as these are revealed in their deeper meaning by the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. To fulfill its purpose, SCCM will work in collaboration with the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) and EDSU with the aim of helping to prepare children (and their families) for the eventual transition into youth, young adult and finally adult levels of participation within the Church. It is intended

Examples of online resources to offer are the Anita Dole Bible Study Notes (available at the [Swedenborg Foundation](#) for free in PDF format), *Five Smooth Stones* created by Joyce Fekete and Betty Hill, the *Sower Notes* located at [www.swedenborgdigitallibrary.org](#) and the General Church's "The New Church Vineyard" online Sunday School resources located at [www.newchurchvineyard.org](#). We also plan to have a link on our webpage for the free online Bible research site at [www.biblegateway.com](#).

And third, in cooperation with Pastor Karen Feil of the Chicago Swedenborg Library, we plan to further research and hopefully use the online [www.powtoons.com](#). Powtoons is a simple cartoon video production platform to create ten introductory animated lessons on core Swedenborgian beliefs and teachings, suitable for

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gral to the purpose of SCCM that it seek to build the foundation for life-long commitment to the goals of building the New Jerusalem in hearts and minds, and in the world.

## Convention Sermon

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world, but because it brings me back to that which is true. That God is here with us and always, always, always drawing us, encouraging us, calling us into the way of love and peace.

I go to the garden because those tomato seeds that I planted in the cold of February are now gorgeous little plants and the raspberry bushes that we got last year have come back and are covered in luscious leaves.

I keep planting tomato seeds, not because it can solve the deep issues of food insecurity in our world, or even

my neighborhood, but I keep planting them because it keeps me connected to the work of God, here and now, in and amongst this world. It's as close as that deep breath, the pause before we speak. It's that which fuels us to keep going and that which tells us when it's time to rest. We keep actively pursuing these pockets of peace not merely for our own need, but because when we're finding that peace of God within us, that is what enables us to continue to be part of God's bigger work of peace in the world.

In the garden, I find the Holy Spirit, the advocate, the counselor, the comforter is always with me. This same

Holy Spirit that is with each of you, dear ones. And who will never leave you, and in and amongst all the realities of the world, the Holy One giving us peace and calling us all to co-create the more just and generous, loving and peaceful world that we all long for.

And so, we long, we demand, we recommit, we pray, that we will always be able to sing,

When Peace like a river attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll  
Whatever my lot thou hast taught me to say,  
"It is well, it is well with my soul." 🎵

Convention Worship Service and Communion can be viewed in its entirety here: <https://youtu.be/ANYewqqsgX0>



## Ordination Worship Service

# "Take Only a Staff for the Journey"

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

Packing for a trip can stress out even the hardy. There's only so much we can pack in anticipation for everything that we may need: a clothes strategy, work items, a laundry list for multiple contingencies. We're often frantically checking details dashing out the door: where's my ticket! Oh, good, right here. Medicine! Got it. Wallet, glasses, all the miscellanea I have thought might be good to bring. Everything packed? Hooboy.

How much more difficult such preparations would be if we were told to prepare for an open-ended and very long journey to places unbeknownst to us. Imagine the boundless list of contingency items to have at the ready. In Mark's gospel Jesus tells the twelve disciples to prepare for just such a journey, but helpfully he also makes their trip preparations easy: they are to take nothing but the clothes on their backs and a staff. Everything else they might need will be provided by the One whom they serve and by the people whom they will serve.

So why does Jesus then specify this one additional item and make such a big point of bringing nothing else except a staff? Correspondences reveal the answer. A staff in the Biblical Word is a walking stick that corresponds to the power of divine truth. A good walking stick supports the body just as spiritual wisdom upholds our entire structure for salvific living, and a good staff propels walking just as wise love supplies vital force.

We are now engaging a decisive pivot point in the history of our church



in a very particular way. In those earliest Biblical times, the disciples were for the most part on foot. Walking around to spread ideas and discourse via individual conversations and speaking to larger groups, they grew by legion. The first significant shift in communicating spiritual discourse comes a millennium later in the early modern period with the invention of the printing press. This provided a ministry tool that could take the message to masses. The printing press provided only a phenomenal exponential increase in reach but one with a failsafe consistent method for keeping proper form to message.

Religion historians always identify the Gutenberg printing press as pivotal to the Protestant Reformation because the changemakers could communicate in this newly efficient dynamic form throughout large regions via mass produced broadsides, leaflets, pamphlets, and yes books. Swedenborg himself relied *wholly* on the printing press. He never gave a public talk about his new Christianity. Swedenborgians took the hint and published at a phenomenal per capita rate, and as one wag put it, Swedenborgians appeared to believe in

salvation by publication.

Today, we're into another fundamental revolution in communicating: the internet and virtual gatherings. The largest church in many American denominations is their online church. People can pop in from several time zones and be right with one another, increasingly mirroring the spiritual world of instant presence across space produced merely through the desire of imagination for presence. One click, and you're there with like-minded souls.

How should we pack for a journey in this new opportune moment? Let's return to Jesus's instruction: the sole packing item we need is the power of spiritual truth. Though the Swedenborgian vision overlaps with the spirituality of loving and wise people of all persuasions in many ways, there is yet still today revelatory vision in Swedenborgianism with liberative power that is quite frankly still vastly underutilized and unknown by very many. The power of Swedenborg's revelatory vision has not waned a bit, and much of its promise is still yet to fully unfurl.

The three powerful upholding forces of spiritual truth empower our walking stick still today. The first is the metaphysical love basis of any God notion. God is love, many say that, but Swedenborg helps us to see that *love* is God. Love is the substance of all being, and ethical and tough love is the force evolving this cosmos of meaning and purpose. Far more than a poetic emotion, love is all there is. Had we but the vision, we would see concretely that

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## Take Only a Staff

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love is the first cause of all being and is a constant force from the center outward in all directions. Anything we might call evil or horrible is distortion and misuse of the power of love, and all spiritual work in the church and in our lives is all about growing in love. When we know this deep in our bones, we are upheld by the most powerful walking stick in the infinite cosmos.

The second spiritual principle enlivening our walking stick is the knowledge that all of life is flowing in from a more senior dimension that may be invisible to the physical senses but is nevertheless the most real dimension. We call it, in our tradition, the spiritual world. The architecture of Wayfarers Chapel—in which we are now worshipping—conveys this revelatory knowledge through the ascendant use of glass. Sitting here right now in this sanctuary we see through the walls to a surrounding reality that holds us in our contemplation of the divine immensity. This Swedenborgian architecture teaches that the spiritual dimension is both vast and *right here* in our personal contemplation. God is in us even more than we ourselves are in us, and so we sit in a sacred space right now that evokes the spiritual knowledge that “God’s circumference is nowhere, but God’s center is everywhere.” This walking stick knowledge of the spiritual dimension relates to everything we see and touch and can help people gain profound appreciation of the actual reality system in which they are being formed.

Lastly, a most powerful and precious spiritual principle the Swedenborgian Church offers to seekers everywhere is that we live to eternity. Our formation now is a forever now that never



*The Ordination Service was concluded with a traditional candlelight ceremony.*

ends. This is not a hopeful wish, but rudimentary knowledge in Swedenborg’s most powerful published walking stick, his runaway bestseller, *Heaven and Hell*.

What can be better Good News, beloved, than the walking stick of this spiritual vision and knowledge? That love is not only the source but also the force of all that is; that an infinite spiritual dimension extends beyond and within our immediate sense of being; and that we’re only still beginning an eternal journey that becomes ever more fabulous as we become ever more skillful with the first principle: that love is the only force of God, and that as we become wiser lovers with God in this love operation, we discover and live into an open-ended journey that takes us powerfully into all the profound experiences loving and living with all levels of the neighbor (and yes that includes social justice down here).

New ways of communication and gathering and being together are opening in our virtual moment for creating new spaces infused with the Swedenborgian vision—a reach into new spaces not merely for broadcasting content, but for gathering places with shared adventures in meaning and purpose in newly arising interactive and relational communities.

It is a good time to enter the ministry—an opportune time. If you pack right, Colin (and all of us), it will be an abundantly blessed journey. ☪

## SCCM Meeting

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both children and adults, to engage the modern world’s interest in learning by way of simple animation. The delegates of Convention who attended our SCCM Annual Meeting offered the idea that it would be more manageable to produce two such videos to begin with and evaluate their effectiveness and if deemed of use then to plan on creating eight more such videos as a goal for the coming year. There are both free and monthly charge options for using the Powtoons online video production website, with the basic fee option beginning at \$20/month. The delegates voted to support either approach deemed most useful to our officers after further research is completed. The SCCM officers will report on the outcome of all three of these goals at next summer’s convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

Kit also shared two other goals for the coming year. One is for the SCCM to share grief and bereavement resources and links within the SCCM webpage(s) for parents and children, due to the ongoing need for such resources and to express our compassion for those dealing with child loss, especially given the serious, ongoing societal problem of mass shootings of children going on in America. A final goal is for us to express our support for including education about Convention’s meaningful history regarding African-American clergy ordained by Convention, mostly in the late 1800s and early 1900s, as well as for us to express our support for the LGBTQ+ community active in our world today.

Elections were held for all four officer positions and the outcome was for Rev. Kit Billings to serve another year as President, Pastor Kelly Milne to serve as Vice President, Bev Titus to serve as Treasurer and for Rev. Carla Friedrich to serve as Secretary. ☪



## Message from the Ordinand

BY REV. COLIN AMATO

**H**ere we all are! It's great to see everyone here. I'd like to invite you to turn in your program to the scripture reading that you see. Isaiah chapter six, verses 1–13.

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. And they were calling to one another: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty; the whole earth is full of his glory." At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook, and the temple was filled with smoke. "Woe to me!" I cried. "I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty." Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. With it he touched my mouth and said, "See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin is atoned for." Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" He said, "Go and tell the people: Be ever hearing, but never understanding; be ever seeing, but never perceiving. Make the heart of this people calloused; make their ears dull and close their eyes. Otherwise, they might see with their eyes, hear with their ears, understand with their hearts, and turn and be healed." Then I said, "For how long, Lord?" And he answered: "Until the cities lie ruined and without inhabitant, until the houses are left deserted, and the fields ruined and ravaged, until the Lord has sent



everyone far away and the land is utterly forsaken. And though a tenth remains in the land, it will again be laid waste. But as the terebinth and oak leave stumps when they are cut down, so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.

When I was seven years old, my mother who, as you heard, she has taught me everything that I know, it was her habit when I was a small child that we would almost every Sunday, routine, go to different churches around the San Francisco Bay area. Which, as you can imagine, there are a lot of different churches in the San Francisco Bay area. We went to many—I have faint, flickering memories of some of these churches, but one in particular that I could not wrestle out of my memory although it seemed like pure fantasy, was a church where walking past brick, into a small courtyard with a garden, and a pool of water, and then entering into a sanctuary where I perceived with my seven-year-old eyes tree branches holding up the sanctuary. Thinking that it was a good service, not really remembering

much else beyond that point but feeling like it was a special place. We departed and life, as it does, rolled on. But I could never shake this image of this sanctuary with tree branches. It wasn't until fast forward (I will be coming back into the middle part of the story) into after I had met this group called Swedenborgians, and

then discovered that there was a church in San Francisco for Swedenborgians, that I went there in my mid-20s and walked into this sanctuary... tree branches. It was the sanctuary in my memory. I turned to my mother, and I said, "I swear I have been here before," and she said, "Oh yeah, I took you

here when you were seven," as if it was just another one of the many stops on our tour together as I was growing up.

For me, being called to the ministry has been not only a search within, in forming relationships with many of you, all of you that I see here tonight, but Divine Providence or, as Carl Jung might say, Synchronicity, meaningful coincidences. Those things that just happen and you look back and you go, "Wow I know I have free will but jeez it just really seems like I'm being pulled, tugged, moved." There's a pattern here whether the times are good or whether the times are bad. There's a purpose behind it, in retrospect. We may not be able to see it in the present. We may not know where the future leads, but we certainly can look back and see that pattern. That has been true for me.

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*Colin Amato and his mother Tamra  
before Ordination outside of  
Wayfarers Chapel*

## Message from the Ordinand

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After growing up, moving past being seven, I found myself in high school which I think is very normal for many teenagers, and maybe the teens in the sanctuary tonight can relate to this, you start to really question and rebel and doubt the things that your parents have taught you about, really important things including religion.

I was raised a Roman Catholic and in high school I thought I had it all figured out. I'll just read these books. This theology doesn't make too much sense to me, I'm going to reject it, there's a bunch of other religions to look into, why spend my time just fixated on one? Throughout my high school career, I read about many different religions. I've read the scriptures of these different religions... I was that nerdy high school kid that had the Dao Tai Ching and the Upanishads under my arms, and each day was a new book (for those who know me well I have a habit of doing this, "What book does Colin have today?" is a question that I'm asked), and I would read these things, and I came out of it with a broad appreciation for the world traditions, but in all honesty I felt lost. I could see the thread of divine wisdom throughout these various scriptures but still I didn't know where I was going to land personally.

At the conclusion of high school, the last text that I read was the Qur'an. For reasons that were probably more wisdom-based, or up here in the head, comparing the theologies, it made sense to me at the time. So, at the age of seventeen I converted to Islam, and I

was a Muslim for about six years. Fascinating experience! I felt that I had finally arrived at a place where intellectual discussion could happen. Where there was no room for doubt or questioning of the core tenants of the faith and I felt welcomed as a convert... or at least, I felt welcomed at a cost. That



*Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Thom Muller, Ordinand Colin Amato, and Rev. Rich Tafel waiting for the ordination service to begin.*

**I could not fully, unedited be totally who I am. That means being a spiritual person and also being someone who is in this natural body.**

cost, my friends, is that for those six years I could not fully, unedited be totally who I am. That means being a spiritual person and also being someone who is in this natural body. Someone who identifies as a gay man. So, I suppressed that for those years. Suppressing that love even though it was something that was billowing up inside of me, burning, yearning to be let free. I had satisfied that wisdom part of my journey, I felt, but where was the love? Where was the love being truly expressed? So, when I decided to come out publicly, I could not stay in that tradition. I once again found myself lost.

Now during this time, my mother was reading books by this guy named Emanuel Swedenborg (interesting timing) and meeting people named Wilma Wake, who had this online church; Sherrie Connelly, who had this beautiful little library ministry in Vallejo, California. She would say, "Yes, I'm reading these books and I'm meeting these wonderful people. You should check this stuff out." And I would say to her, "No! I'm on my own trajectory here." She was respectful of it, but she would seed me with these things throughout those years. Coincidence? I don't think so.

Finally, in this other moment of being lost and confused she mentioned it again. "You know there's this guy Swedenborg?" So, I finally read *Heaven and Hell*

and *Presence of Other Worlds* by Wilson Van Dusen, and oh my! That was it. That was it. Words cannot fully express the impact that it had on me, and I thought, "Who is this person?" Then found out there was a church, and lo and behold, there's a local church in the San Francisco Bay area—Hillside. So, we went. Well, first I did research on the denomination, and I couldn't find anything that made me think that I, as who I am fully, would not be accepted into this church or this congregation. In other words, I felt like I could be myself and when I arrived there was this gentleman named the Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence giving a sermon. And the sermon was unlike anything I had ever heard before.

I still remember it to this day: David slaying Goliath, getting the stones, throwing them, and slaying Goliath. The stone right in the forehead and

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## Message from the Ordinand

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I thought, okay I'd heard this story many times before... but here was the nuance. He mentioned this word "correspondence" and unpacked it in a way that I was yearning for. It was mind-blowing. From that point forward I knew, okay, I have found a place here. I found a safe place here, and the journey just continued from that point. But I will confess my first draw into Swedenborg was largely again, very much up here, with the wisdom. "Oh, I can study this theology it's really fascinating let me just get all these books. Hey Jim, let me have my own set of The Green Thirty! You know I'm a brand-new member, but I want those thirty volumes."

I just started reading, and reading, and reading. I felt that I wanted to go to seminary. I knew that I wanted to do this. I knew I wanted to study religion alongside psychology and counseling, and so I did. Then I was asked by amazing people, "well you know what is it that you want to do with this. You want to join this church? What do you want to do?" It was a question that was difficult for me to answer at first because I knew I was helping others suffering, but that spiritual component was still uncertain. How to actually live that? How to express that with others?

I graduated seminary right before the pandemic. I was very tired; I had been non-stop grad school for five years—two masters degrees, I was burnt out. I just moved into my own home, so I felt like a really responsible adult at this point. No roommates, just me and a cat in a house in Vallejo, I was by myself, and I thought that was fantastic. I'll live as a hermit for a while. Yeah, I'll see my patients, I'll feed my cat, I'll talk to people, but I'm going to really enjoy just not having very many extroverted connections for



*Above: Laying on of Hands from Rev. Thom Muller, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Rev. Rich Tafel, and Rev. Jane Siebert. Right: Rev. Colin with the teens from the SCYL*



a while. Seemed like a good idea at the time and then the pandemic happened and suddenly we were all forced into this period of very intense introversion.

In that moment it was something like we see in Isaiah, the reading that we just heard and read together, being in this place, this darkened place, and suddenly having an experience that erupts before you that is uncontrollable, undeniable, changes you. It was at that time that my mother became very ill and almost passed at that time during the pandemic. Very scary for me, and never been in a situation like that before. In that moment I felt very, very alone in my darkened house with my cat. I felt truly like Jonah in the whale. I felt like it was just me paying attention to the phone, obsessing about whether she was going to make it through. Trying to keep, you know, reaching out as much as I could but I

really felt like I was breaking, and this is what Swedenborg talks about with vastation. Sure, I had read it conceptually. Vastation, that's a thing, right? But until you experience that, it isn't real until you have it well up in you. I thought to myself, everything is over. What am I going to do? How can I function? In that darkness, I swear to you that I heard in that darkness and silence a voice that said everything will be okay. It wasn't my own though I'm a very imaginative person, but it was genuinely a voice other than myself, and as I was praying and visualizing my mother in the hospital, I thought of her parents.

My grandfather was a doctor, and my grandmother was a nurse, and I imagined them coming to her in the hospital and standing with her. Again synchronicity, or providence,

unfolds here because two independent events occurred: one while I was unpacking my books in my new home and coming undone, I discovered a small photograph of my grandparents that just appeared in my house. Maybe it was nestled in a book somewhere, I have many, and on the floor there they were. After I had just been thinking about them; and when my mother was released from the hospital, independent of this story, she told me that in her scariest moments in the hospital she saw her parents standing next to her at her bedside. When I showed her this picture, I said I don't know where this picture came from, she didn't even recognize the picture. It is these experiences, it's this gnosis, this direct knowing, it was in that moment that I knew for myself that even in the darkness of suffering here I am, I'm helping people

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## Message from the Ordinand

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with severe mental illness questioning struggling with their sexual orientation, gender identities to be accepted, and I had the privilege of not facing the level of suffering that I had only heard or read about. And yet here in this moment, lived it, we made it, and the voice was right—everything will be okay.

Looking at the passage in Isaiah it seems rather bleak. “For how long Lord you’ve purified my lips” and now I’m going to speak to a people that are going to probably just blow me off, right? And it’s rather bleak. Well, it’s just all going to be devastating, but when we read this correspondentially, when we read this with correspondence, this is the point of vastation. When we may have our doubts about where we’re going in life, what am I going to be doing? Me as a minister, what is that going to look like? I tell you truly, from this experience that I’ve described, from that point, and then the outpouring of support from many of you in this room tonight, signified to me that not only would things be okay, but that I could go forward as a minister with the intention of helping others, guiding others, as I have been guided, mentored, and supported.

So, it is an honor to be here in this sacred space and as I start my journey as a Swedenborgian, unknowingly at the age of seven, with a sanctuary with tree branches. Here I’ve come full circle in a sanctuary with tree branches. Synchronicity? It’s Divine Providence for me and I see it that way. So, I want to thank you all so much for being here, I look forward to this being the beginning, just the beginning, of this next step in our collective journeys together. Thank you. 🙏

Watch the entire Ordination Service on our YouTube page here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IF9Cj1M3u0s>

## The Secret Life of a Seed

*Convention’s Children’s Program*

BY HOLLY BAUER

The Convention Children’s Program 2022 theme was The Secret Life of a Seed. We had three children in the program ranging in ages from 9–11. Connor, Maudie, and Teagan learned about a plant’s life cycle: seed, germination, leaf growth, flower, and fruit. They also learned the correspondences of this process: idea/dream, goal/objective, collection of knowledge, delight of talent, and use. We talked about their goals: to learn taekwondo, help save the environment, and connect more with nature. They even wrote a song (entirely by themselves!) about the process. For their worship service, the children sang the song they wrote and shared their seeds. Maudie also performed an interpretive dance of the life of a seed while the congregation sang The Garden Song. After the service, we went to the Japanese garden on campus to enjoy some flowers and trees, although the kids most enjoyed seeing the koi fish! 🐟



**Above:** Connor Robbins, Maudie Baxter, and Teagan Robbins enjoy the Koi Pond inside the Japanese Gardens on campus. **Right:** Teagan and Maudie perform their original song “Material Seed.”

### Material Seed

BY TEAGAN AND MAUDIE

(Oh..) Your dreams start off small,  
like a seed

(Oh, will it grow? Oh, might it grow?)

I want my dreams to grow

The objective, the objective

(I have one big objective)

The objective is to germinate

(Oh, germinate, oh, germinate)

It might take a while to get to that goal

(But my patience and my motivation  
will help me along the way)

Although we may come across errors,  
I have faith in myself

(Oh, it has grown, oh, it has grown)

From a dream to a goal. From a seed  
to a sapling

(Although we may come across errors,  
I have faith in myself to complete)

Once everything has come together  
my flowers start to bloom,

I have finally achieved what my seed  
wanted

My fruit has finally come, my flowers  
have already bloomed

I’ll finally show others what I have  
groomed



## Swedenborgian Church Youth League

## clear blue sky

1981  
october

\*CBS logo from 1981

CO-EDITORS JULIEN BILLINGS AND ZSA ZSA DOLLEY

**C.B. What?***Why Is It C.B.S?**Your questions answered.*

BY REV. DR. DAVID FEKETE

It was summer of 1973, and at the national Swedenborgian Convention in Edmonton, Canada there were about five or six teens. There was no League Journal then, the previous one having lapsed due to dwindling numbers and apathy. It didn't look like the youth league was going to survive. I got elected president that year, and, as I was hitch-hiking around the USA and Canada, I also tried to collect the names and addresses of other leaguers. I only got a few, because there were only a few. But that year at Convention, we decided to start up the League Journal again. We brainstormed for a while about titles for it. We wanted something hopeful and optimistic. We wanted something that would reinforce our desire to revive the league. Out of my mouth burst the phrase, "clear blue sky!" That title was agreed on, and I drew the artwork for the first cover. It had a human head with a rising sun behind it. It seemed to capture our vision of a renewed teen movement in the Swedenborgian Church.

Now, I see with gratification the significant numbers of teens, and transition age, and others these young adults are caring for. It is as if our dreams of 1973 are being realized. The Swedenborgian Church is a special place with ideas that are precious, sensible, and much needed in today's society. You are the future of the Church. In a few short years, you will reach maturity and participate in the life of your churches, even assuming leadership roles in your respective churches. Best wishes to you. Keep in your minds the rising sun, where the Lord dwells, and walk into the clear blue sky of life and love.

**SCYL Teens at Convention**

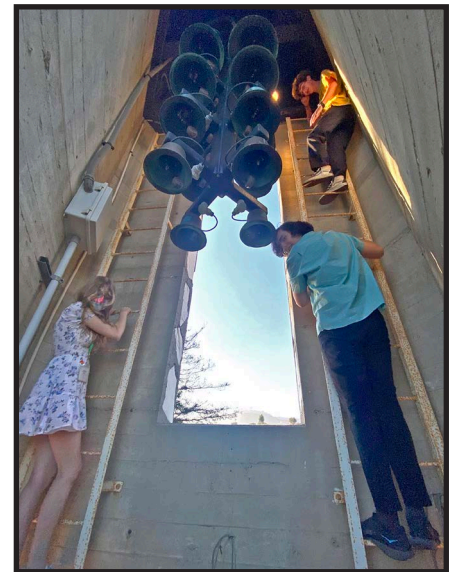
BY ZSA ZSA DOLLEY

Late at night before Convention started, I landed at the Los Angeles International Airport. I was driven to California State University, Long Beach where I would be staying for the next five days.

The next morning, I met most of the teens at lunch. We ate together and then explored the campus before meeting up in a common room to introduce ourselves to the rest of the teens and start discussing the upcoming events of Convention. Later that night we went to the Pointe Pyramid for the opening of Convention and a few of us, including me, presented rocks to the congregation representing different things. Mine represented the state of Maine.

The next day we began to plan out our SCYL teen worship service and assigned roles for each teen. We finished off that day attending a heartfelt worship service and communion.

In the morning, we continued work on our teen service until it was time for our first outing. We went to Wayfarers Chapel to get a tour, eat dinner, and attend the ordination service. Our ride there on a school bus was bumpy yet scenic, taking us all through Long Beach. When we got there, we were amazed by how beautiful it was and it only got better as the sun set and it illuminated through the Chapel. We teens were allowed to climb up the tall bell tower on a small spiral staircase inside. When we got up there, we could look



Zsa Zsa Dolley (left), Wyatt Steinhiser (top right), and Oliver Hamilton (lower right) climb the Wayfarers Chapel Bell Tower between rings.

out and see the Chapel and also all the way out to the Pacific Ocean. We had to get back down quickly though as the bells rang every fifteen minutes and would be incredibly loud! The ordination service was beautiful and the candles we lit at the conclusion of the service reflected on the glass creating a hundred little stars.

The next day we watched the children's program and continued work on our service but stopped our work for a couple more outings. A few other teens and I found that there was a bookstore close by and walked there to look at

*Continues on page 105*



## Clear Blue Sky

Continued from page 104

**Right:** Trent Carson, Ellie Barnaby, Zsa Zsa Dolley, and Nora Barnaby. **Below:** Julien Billings, Oliver Hamilton, Wyatt Steinhiser, and Molly Moore



some clothes and accessories. Later, all of us went to the beautiful Japanese gardens. There were big Koi fish in the pond, and they swam right near us. Some teens even put their hands in the water to touch them.

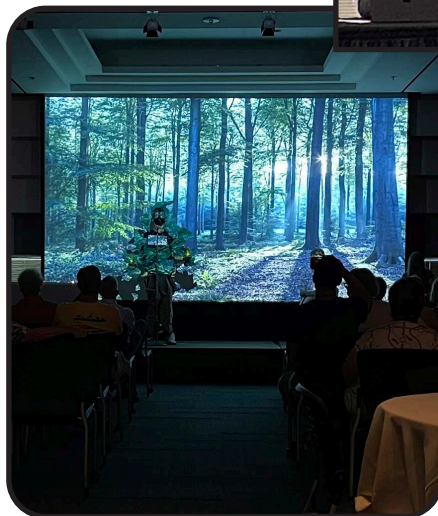
Next, we met up with everyone else to go to the Feed and be Fed Farm where we walked around and even picked our own oranges and lemons to eat. Then, we made our next stop at the Garden Church. We were taught about what they do and the plants that they grow for their members and the community. We helped make goodie bags for the homeless as a service project at the end of our stay. Then we traveled back to the campus and rushed to eat dinner and get ready for our service that we were to present to the congregation that night.

We based the worship service on a quote from *True Christian Religion* §741,

The angel rejoiced to hear this, and said, "All the gardens in our heaven are representative forms or models of the origins of heavenly blessings. The reason why you exclaimed, 'It is heaven itself laid out before us, 'is that an actual inflow of

these blessings lifted your minds. People who are not open to that inflow only see these garden paradises as a forest. People who love being useful are receptive to this inflow; people who love glory apart from usefulness are not."

One of the teens (Oliver) wandered around in a forest looking for their use and stumbled upon the rest of us doing our use in a garden paradise. We dressed up a teen (Trent) as the Tree of Life, from Revelation 22 to be in the forest. The wanderer ended up finally finding their use at the end when he played the piano and he saw the garden. The final evening of Convention concluded on the fourth-floor patio where we celebrated with a pizza party and games.



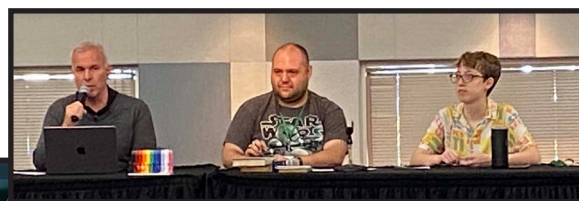
## Participating in a Mini Course

BY JULIEN BILLINGS

Rev. Rich Tafel and Rev. Colin Amato invited me to join the panel for the Gender, Sexuality, and Swedenborg Mini Course and it was an amazing experience. We each shared our input on things like "Would Swedenborg be accepting of LGBTQ people?" and "How old were you when you came out and what was your experience like?" I'm so happy that people felt comfortable enough to learn and ask questions.

Being a part of something that wasn't directly tied to the SCYL was a bit odd, but I welcomed it. Having three generations on the panel was really cool because you could see the subtle differences in our answers, and hearing everyone's stories was very meaningful and brought us together. If I got the chance to do something like this again, I'd absolutely love to and would jump at the opportunity. ☰

The Gender, Sexuality, and Swedenborg Mini Course by Rev. Colin Amato, Julien Billings, and Rev. Rich Tafel may be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/LLeUzjMm9ZA>



**Above:** Julien Billings as a panelist in the LGBTQ Mini Course.

**Left:** Trent Carson as the Tree of Life.

Then Convention was officially closed and the next day we checked out and left the campus. Overall, this Convention was so much fun, and I am sure that I can speak for all the teens in saying that we can't wait for the next one. ☰

Follow SCYL Clear Blue Sky on Instagram: [instagram.com/scylclearbluesky/](https://www.instagram.com/scylclearbluesky/)



# Touring the Garden Church and Feed and Be Fed Farm

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

This year, in-person convention attendees were treated to two outings. Not only did we enjoy dinner, a tour, and an ordination service at one of the most beautiful churches and locations in North America, but also two bus loads of Swedenborgians took San Pedro by storm as we got to tour The Garden Church and Feed and Be Fed Farm.

The busses in turn went to each location. Peter Rothe gave a wonderful tour and presentation at Feed and Be Fed farm letting all enjoy fresh oranges and green beans on the adventure—and boy it was hot! Hard to believe that the plants can survive and bear such delicious fruit in that kind of heat.

At the Garden Church, Rev. Dr. Amanda Adams Riley gave us an introduction to the mission of the church and all they do for the community. Linda O'Brien-Rothe gave a tour of the gardening area, and all came together to put together meal replacement bags for local unhoused community members.

Follow the Garden Church on facebook: [www.facebook.com/gardenchurchsp](https://www.facebook.com/gardenchurchsp)



**Feed and Be Fed Farm Images:**  
Peter Rothe (upper left) explains each garden and their individual needs at the Feed and Be Fed Farm.



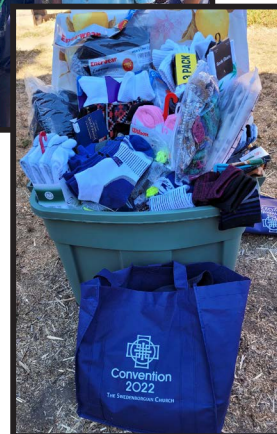
Oliver Hamilton and Wyatt Steinhiser pick fresh oranges to share with all who couldn't reach them.

Deane Currie marvels at the size of the trees.



**Garden Church Images:**  
Mary the Dino greets all who enter the Garden Church with pride.

Two different bus loads of Swedenborgians went to both the farm and the church. Each bus posed together at the Garden Church.



Swedenborgian Churches and Convention attendees were asked to share socks with the Garden Church as they are one of the biggest needs in the unhoused community. There was an overwhelming response from all the socks that were gathered from around North America!



## Mini Courses

# A Variety of Mini Courses and Ways to Participate



Rev. Rich Tafel's Mini Course for all (images above), "Translating at Babel: Church Leadership in the Public Square," received a standing ovation and may be viewed here: <https://youtu.be/W-UXhoike0I>

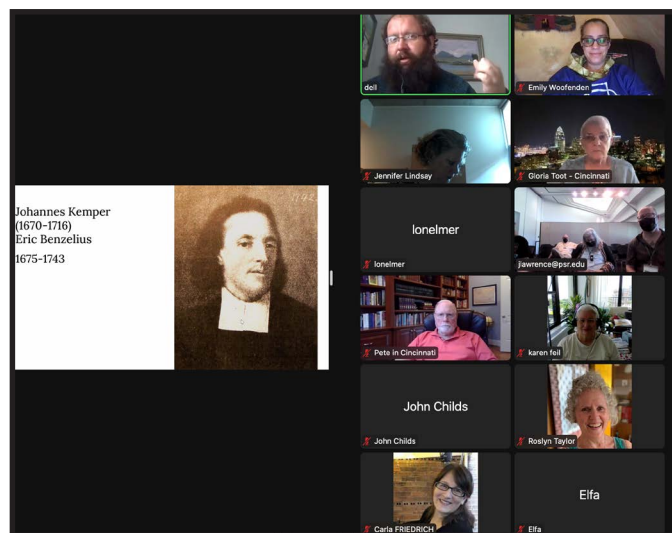


In-person Mini Courses were offered in a variety of locations: Sue Ditmire (above images) gave her discussion on the "Black Church History in Convention" at her display table, while Rev. Dr. Dave Brown (upper right) offered his outside on "Is Heaven a Frequency?" Other in-person courses were offered by Rev. Roslyn Taylor and Rev. Ken Turley (right) on "Music and Video in Worship" and by Rev. Robert McCluskey on "The Life of Religion: The Challenge of Doing Good."



"Gender, Sexuality, and Swedenborg" a Mini Course by Rev. Colin Amato, Julien Billings, and Rev. Rich Tafel was well received and could have continued for another hour! View it here: <https://youtu.be/LLeUzjMm9ZA>

Other livestreamed Mini Courses were "Church Strategies to Reach People: Lessons Learned from the Art of Reaching Course Told from Four Perspectives" by Rev. Shada Sullivan, Rev. Rich Tafel, Pastor Paul Deming, and Pastor Robbin Ferriman: <https://youtu.be/dmvdDz5sOEg> and "Feminine Swedenborgian Spirituality by Rev. Roslyn Taylor: <https://youtu.be/nHiSjFKS3pE>



Zoom only Mini Courses were given by Dell J. Rose (pictured above) on "Swedenborgian Millenarianism after 1757," by Rev. Kevin Baxter on the "Three Essentials of Church Governance," and by members of the Social Justice Committee on "Climate Care." 🌱



Subscribe to our YouTube Channel! Find videos of all livestreamed events:

2022 Convention Playlist

<https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLOerLzeZwLa7wmKaQmibfk00FMxM3qsG3>

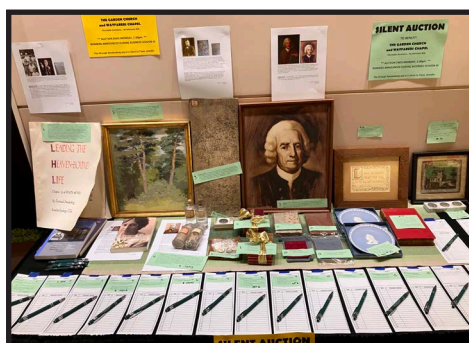
## Silent Auction Benefits Two California Churches

BY BARB HALLE

Eighteen unique, and mostly antique, items were offered up from various sources as a fundraiser during the recent annual convention at California University, Long Beach. Rev. Jane Siebert spearheaded this project, and she and Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence found several most interesting items to be donated for the auction from the Central Office's storage area at Cambridge Chapel and the Center for Swedenborg Studies library.

### Some auction items included:

- A large calligraphy work of a major passage from *Heaven and Hell*, created by Rev. Bob Kirven in 1977, using the then new translation by Rev. Dr. George Dole
- An original framed painting by Alice Archer Sewall James (daughter of Rev. Frank Sewall) along with a copy of *Stay By Me, Roses*, a biography of Archer James authored by Dr. Alice Skinner
- Early photostats bound in an intriguing way of a manuscript (unpublished in Swedenborg's own life) known as the summary spiritual sense of Prophets and Psalms
- A small collection of items brought



- back from the Holy Land by Rev. Theodore F. Wright, the founding pastor of the Cambridge church and a long-time professor at the theological school in the early twentieth century when archaeology of the Holy Land was becoming the rage
- A framed watercolor in browns and tans of the most famous portrait of Swedenborg
- Framed matted original calligraphy (ca. early 1980s) of a popular line from Swedenborg (*Divine Love and Wisdom* §47) made by Rev. Dr. Robert Kirven who often did his own translation of Swedenborg
- Two mint-condition Wedgwood commemorative plates made for Swedenborg's 1988 Tercentenary, commissioned by the Swedenborg Enquiry Centre in Australia

- A framed antique section of wallpaper produced in 1654 and installed in the house in which Swedenborg was born. The provenance appears valid as explained on the back
- First edition (1879) of Henry James, Sr.'s Society: *The Redeemed Form of Man and the Earnest of God's Omnipotence in Human Nature*. The chapters are all written as if they are letters to a friend
- Marble paperweights bearing a metal stamp of the new Convention emblem, ca. late 1980s
- A variety of books, some miniatures and in multi-volume sets, including a set from the Philadelphia New Church Tracts & Publishing Society
- Swedenborgian logo lapel pins

Nearly \$800 in auction proceeds will be shared between The Garden Church and Wayfarers Chapel, hosts of this year's convention, from the generous bidders of this summer's auction. Much appreciation goes to Jane and Jim for these collections and their descriptions. Also, many thanks to all those who participated in this event. Congratulations to those who were the recipients of a wide variety of Swedenborgian-related treasures! 📖