



An Interview with the Founder of *Deborah's Tree*

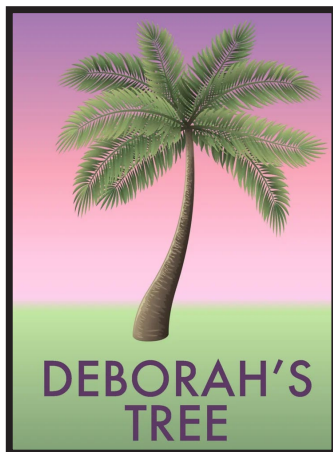
BY JIM LAWRENCE WITH ROSLYN TAYLOR

Introduction

Rev. Roslyn Taylor (ordained in 2018) has led a house church ministry for the better part of two decades in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. Most recently she has initiated a non-profit organization called *Deborah's Tree*, which in the words of its website, “provides spiritual resources and educational materials in a variety of media within the Swedenborgian theological and spiritual movement, focusing primarily on the work of female authors, scholars, clergy, and artists. It serves the Swedenborgian movement worldwide by bringing balance through lifting up the voices of Swedenborgian women.” The many branches of *Deborah's Tree* have been growing with voices, activities, and contributions. For readers of *the Messenger*, I held the following conversation with Rev. Taylor to bring greater awareness to this organization's life and work.

Jim Lawrence: What is *Deborah's Tree*, and why is it named *Deborah's Tree*?

Roslyn Taylor: *Deborah's Tree* is a ministry that I started as a “pandemic project.” It's a non-profit religious



organization that aims to promote the work of female Swedenborgian and New Church scholars, writers, clergy, and artists through our website (www.deborahstree.org), social media, and events. Our board consists of Pastor Robbin Ferriman, Rev. Julie Conaron and myself, our IT Consultant is Liz Kufs, and we have several volunteers from within the wider Swedenborgian/New Church faith community, who generously share their talents with us.

The name comes from the Biblical Deborah, a female prophet and judge who guided the Israelite nation while seated under a palm tree. She led them into a successful battle, which ensured peace for forty years. A whole chapter in the Hebrew Scriptures (Judges 5) is dedicated to “The Song of Deborah” about her success and leadership. From

the imagery of Deborah sitting under her tree, we envision Swedenborgian women sitting still under our collective palm tree, speaking our truth together from our own female perspectives. The description of “Deborah, the great mother of Israel” rising up, and her orders to “Awake, Deborah! Rise up! Rise Up! Break out in song!” inspire us to actively arise and

wake up and sing our own song. Our intention is to actively live our own spirituality and to share joyfully what we have learned together, both within our global Swedenborgian community, and within the wider female spirituality community.

JL: What programs and activities does *Deborah's Tree* offer?

RT: Our Spiritual Inspiration program consists of fortnightly Excerpted Inspirations, monthly Spiritual Quotes, and weekly Spiritual Reflection videos. The Excerpted Inspirations are nuggets of a spiritual nature from literature mostly by female authors, or by male authors who write about strong female characters. The Spiritual Quotes are from the Word, Swedenborg, and other wisdom

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Editor's Corner



The Life of Religion is to Do Good

What we love constitutes our life, and whatever we love we not only do freely but also think freely. So we

say that life is doing good things because doing good things is inseparable from thinking good things. Life \$1

I've been reflecting on my work on *the Messenger* over the last three years. It still feels like I am the new editor, but this issue will make number thirty-two that I've created for you. How is that even possible? I love what I do, and for me it feels like the best possible way that I can be of use to our church. I often feel like it is what I am meant to be doing. I give a lot of my time to working on the things that I love. Being of use to the church is just one of those things.

One of the other ways I like to be of

Church Calendar

- **July 1–5, 2023: Annual Convention,** Bridgewater, Massachusetts
- **July 22–30, 2023: Almont Summer School,** Allenton, Michigan
- **July 29–August 13, 2023: Fryeburg New Church Assembly,** Fryeburg, Maine
- **August 24–27, 2023: Gathering Leaves,** Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania



My partners in planning, super moms Nicole (left), myself, and Rachele (right).

use, it to use anything within my skill set to help with activities that my children are involved in. This year I took on helping plan a large basketball tournament that supports the youth basketball programs here in my hometown. Due to the pandemic, this tournament hadn't been able to happen since 2020. Most of the people who had been involved in the planning previously had kids who aged out, so we practically had to start fresh. Since I have over twenty years of event planning experience, I felt that I needed to step up and help. How different could planning a five-day basketball tournament be than planning a wedding or a two-week camp? And it really wasn't. (Honestly, it was almost easier since there were no dietary needs involved!) So, I teamed up with two other super moms and we organized and successfully brought back one of the largest fundraisers in the town. It was an exhausting learning experience, but we were doing good—and that felt good.

the Messenger

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

Church related or not, when I am using my skills, and feeling useful, it feels good and right. Living a life of religion by doing good.

I invite you to share things that you do that make you feel that you are living a life of use outside of church.

—Beki Greenwood

Messenger@Swedenborg.org



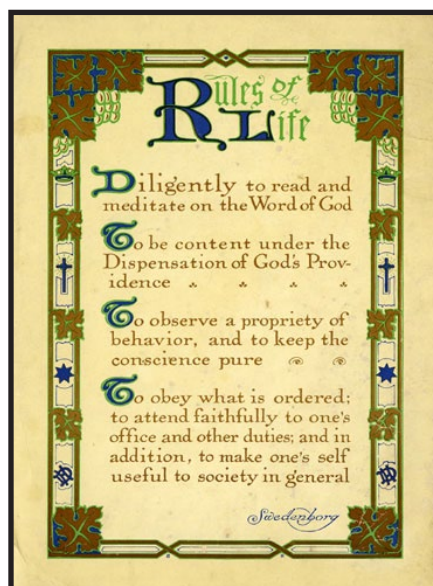
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*Message from the President***How Do We Practice?***The Year of Regeneration: 2022–23*

New inquirers into the Swedenborgian movement often ask what the spiritual practices are. How should I meditate or pray? What kinds of ritual should I build into my lifestyle? What are the dietary guidelines? Throughout the long beginning of the Swedenborgian movement across 150 years or so, the primary spiritual practice specific to Swedenborgianism involved study and discussion groups of Swedenborg's writings along with going to church. Starting in the seventies, however, new approaches to spiritual practice evolved in a distinctive fashion. This was the time of the Western cultural revolution with the rise of applied psychologies, Eastern religion meditation practices, spiritual pilgrimages, communitarian movements, and numerous new religions emphasizing radical lifestyle commitments.

In Swedenborgianism, renowned psychologist Wilson Van Dusen's popular writings highlighted practices for personal experience as he encouraged people to become mystics. Peter Rhodes in the General Church developed a popular group practice structure for spiritual growth called AIM that integrates Swedenborgian ideas with weekly exercises done by the whole group. Retreat center programs focusing on practices emerged, especially with the Stonehouse in Seattle and Temenos near Philadelphia. More recently, the *Journey* program focusing



on living skills launched in the General Church, and David Millar in the Australian church has designed and initiated Logopraxis as a specifically Swedenborgian spiritual practice.

I've enjoyed working with Swedenborg's mysterious "Four Rules of Life" as a basis for spiritual practice. They are mysterious in the sense that they became part of New Church history because Swedenborg's eulogist at his memorial service, his young colleague from the Royal Academy of Sciences, Samuel Sandels, claimed to have seen

them scribbled in several places in his notebooks, but no one else has ever seen them. Nonetheless, they have become part of Swedenborgian lore.

The four rules are usually given in this way:

- To often read and meditate on the Word of God
- To submit everything to the will of divine providence
- To observe in everything a propriety of behavior and to keep your conscience clear
- To discharge with fidelity your functions of employments and to make yourself in all things useful to society

As a spirituality studies professor at Pacific School of Religion who has taught the history of Christian spiritual practices, I realized that Swedenborg's Four

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Dear Martha: Letters to My Church

BY SAGE COLE

In March 2022, I declared a New Church Jubilee at the Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel, feeling a call I could not ignore to re-evaluate how we were and were not living into the fullness of Swedenborg's vision of the new church. This led to a sabbatical during which time I wrote a series of letters to my church, i.e., all of you. Needing to ground what I wanted to share in real life, and real relationship, I composed these letters to Martha Richardson one of the beloved matriarchs of the Fryeburg New Church, allowing the love I feel for her, and I know she feels for me, and that I pray and hope we all share, to guide my words. Martha and I have shared them and now I share them with all of you. I pray they may be received in the same spirit of love and hope that they were written. —Rev. Sage Cole

“Dear Martha: Letters to My Church” is available in full at: <https://revsage.blogspot.com>

Dear Martha,

I hope so much that this letter finds you well, and that sitting down to hear from me is making you smile. I know that your health is up and down and that you may not be here on this physical plane of existence all that much longer. In some ways I fear addressing this letter to you, like I am tempting fate just a bit. Will I complete it in time for you to read it? In time for you to respond?

But I've decided that you would agree that in the scheme of eternity it doesn't really matter all that much. That one way or another, if I write you a letter, you will read it. Whether you are here in this world sitting in your recliner on Stanley Hill or gallivanting about in heaven, you will get the message. I know this because I *know* that

you love me, and I *know* that love is stronger than death.

I believe that a lot of other people love me Martha, but with you I know it. There is something that we have shared, a common presence, an unconditional acceptance, an honesty. Your willingness to ask me how it was facing life in the small town of Fryeburg, Maine, as a single lady pastor, gay divorcee, living alone in that huge parsonage, and your loving confidence that I would find the love, the connection that I yearned for. And your willingness to be honest with me about the joy and confusion of your own walk through life, the imperfect perfection of the journey.

I feel a desire, a need, a calling, to report in completeness what I have experienced over these last tumultuous years, within which God ordained I would enter mid-life, while raising small children, in the middle of a Global Pandemic while serving a church that is near death.

Martha, I know you know me, and I know that you love me, and our shared knowing is grounded in our common enterprise of being the church together. I am writing this letter to you Martha because I need to say some things to you and to our church. I need to share some things that I have come to know, that have been exalting me, and weighing on my heart and that there hasn't been space to share in the current structure of this organization, in the forms of expression available to me.

I need to write this letter to you, maybe in the same way we needed

Jesus to be here in the flesh. I need to share some things that have been going on with me. Some spiritual regeneration things. From many perspectives Good News things but from the inside, things messy and scary and uncertain. I feel like I am seeing and experiencing things about myself, about the world, about creation and existence itself that I haven't known before and more importantly that I haven't lived before. I am feeling real love Martha, like I have never known before. And I am seeing, painfully, how much not-love, I and my friends, and my family, and my church and the world are living in, and it is breaking my heart open to the point where I am not sure if this process will end in regeneration or mental breakdown.

So, I'm scared Martha. And I'm excited. And I think you will understand. I am writing this letter to you first, and then with your permission I plan to share it with our larger church family.

Martha I am aware that in addressing this letter to you I am right from the get-go breaking one of the first cardinal rules of ministry etiquette; to single out or favor any one member of the church. This is a no-no.

I want to take my boys down to Plymouth, Massachusetts, and have lunch with one of the members of a church that Ted used to serve, who has made her way up to Cambridge several times to attend our Taizé services at the Swedenborg Chapel, who I have now befriended. She's so kind and we want to take the boys to see Plimouth Plantation, and maybe eventually I'll convince him, but he feels it is complicated, that it would break this ministry etiquette rule of not favoring a member of the church.

I totally understand the foundation

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Letters to My Church

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of this rule of course. It's a good rule. As a new pastor you don't want to have the old pastor of a church maintaining strong emotional bonds with those who are now your parishioners. That can be very messy. But rules or no, while this letter is really for the whole of my church family, it's helpful for me to address it to you because I don't want what I have to say to float away from the earth into preachy theoretical concepts. I want to speak directly to you and through you to my church. My church is not a set of by-laws or theological suppositions but people, fleshy people like you Martha who try to love one another and God and this *thing* we define as church that we do together.

I feel a desire, a need, a calling, to report in completeness what I have experienced over these last tumultuous years, within which God ordained I would enter mid-life, while raising small children, in the middle of a global pandemic while serving a church that is near death.

Martha, it has been a time. And I am changed. Like our fair seer Swedenborg, I feel compelled to share "What I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have felt." I feel moved by the invitation of the latest great one of our tradition the Rev. Dr. George Dole who reminded us in what would be his farewell address "The New Church," submitted to *the Messenger* just six days before he made his full transition into the spiritual world that there "can be no pretense in the new church, no external that is at odds with its internal."

As you know Martha, one of the essential messages Swedenborg sought to convey about the new church was that this would not be about a new form of understanding or practice or dogma, but a new way of living life. That becoming a member of the new church

would be an inner experience of coming into the light, living with integrity, authenticity, where our internal experience and external expression would be unified, where what is internal is exposed for all to see.

There is a kind of exposure happening all over the place in our world at this moment, as we create Facebook pages, and as influencers video tape and expose a version of their life, an edited version certainly, but with much more information and detail than we ever would have known about another person before.

It has been a time. And I am changed. Like our fair seer Swedenborg, I feel compelled to share "What I have seen, what I have heard, and what I have felt."

This movement towards exposure, towards truth-telling, while sometimes (maybe oftentimes) shallow, seems to me to be in line with what Swedenborg prophesied was going to come to be. And it is a movement that I feel compelled to take part in, and that I feel is vitally needed in the collective enterprise of being the church that we are engaged in. That the only way to reclaim the truth of our oneness, of the common life that we share, is to be more honest in sharing the diverse ways we experience this oneness. That keeping things hidden or believing that there is one certain way of being that we are all meant to conform to is totally off base in our efforts to enter the new church.

What is becoming clearer to me is that everything is the same at heart. That "life," that which pulses through the universe, that which lives between us as love, is in its essence one substance, a substance that is filled with potentiality and power and relationship and creativity and love. That this

is at the heart of all of the universe and all people, that we are each simply the most externalized form of this larger power, cells in a larger organism, totally at one with the whole. That we each carry an essential sameness, and the differences that we experience, that we often see first and focus on are only the most external level of things, hardly real at all.

Martha, I believe we have known, and continue to know each other on this most essential level. I believe you are one of the wise ones, who has known and loved most if not all of the people and life that has intertwined with yours in your journey of life on this essential level. Sure, you have rolled your eyes, you have been furious, and off put, and deeply confused, but only at the actions on the surface, never degrading the ultimate value and worthiness of anyone.

I'm writing to you Martha because I am coming to awaken to this essential oneness, this realm of love and aliveness that is always okay. This beating heart of "life" within which there are no such distinctions. Where all of the labels, all of the stories of distinction, of past and future, of right and wrong, holy and profane, fall away, and I'm just this being alive, awake, free, free to respond to the moment in freedom as I wish.

In the beating heart of life, I'm no longer Sage Cole, no longer minister or white lady, no longer an American Citizen, or a member of Gen-X, no longer someone who is educated, or someone having a bad hair day. I could add so many adjectives to this list of descriptions and roles that I use to define who I am, descriptions my sense of self seeks to hide from and descriptions my sense of self seeks to take pride in. And yet there is a growing awareness in me that none of these descriptors are solid, they don't fully describe or effect who I essentially am. Should just a

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Letters to My Church

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few circumstances change, or a zombie apocalypse unfold, all of the measures by which I judge my value and the value of others, what and who is useful, who deserves respect, would all change in an instant. The framework of my self-understanding would totally collapse and need to be rebuilt for different circumstances. What a wonder that we can do that! And when our sense of self is in this process of being rebuilt, what still essentially remains?

My sense of self has been collapsing Martha, over these last three years. My confidence in the way I believe things “should” be done has gone right out the window. All my righteousness, all my surly critiques have exploded in the face of what is. My mid-life turn towards the downward slope of this ride of life, COVID-19, and being charged with spiritual leadership of a dying institution has left me with not much to hold on to. And I believe I am not alone. I believe many others are coming to see that the stories we tell about ourselves and each other, the categories we draw, are really quite malleable, only powerful because we believe in them so strongly, like the believing little children that power Santa Claus’s sleigh.

I am becoming aware that I have been controlled by a whole slew of

beliefs and stories that are not real. That are not only not real but incredibly violent and destructive to my well-being and the wellbeing of all those with whom I am in a relationship. I am also becoming aware of how the church structure that we belong to and serve, while not central to perpetuating these false and violent narratives, doesn’t always contradict them either, is often instead complicit.

Martha as my experience of God has deepened and grown, I want everything I do to be grounded in the truest, fullest, most expansive view of the Holy I can muster, and I fear that too many of the narratives of our church organization are pointing to smaller versions of God that I now see as obstacles to real spiritual growth, for myself and I imagine for others. I fear that our theology, as expansive and transformative as it can be, is held back in chains, in structures too small, beliefs and practices ineffective at conveying the fullness of the power, the abundance and the rebirth that we are invited into.

So Martha, and all of you, my beloved church family, I offer up my words to you as they are, seeking to speak the truth I have come to know to the best of my ability, hoping that in being honest about my story you might see the holiness of your story more clearly, that I might help point the way to the Holy City that I want so much to gather in with you. Love, Sage ☸

Message from the President

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Rules encapsulate two important practices rooted in a far-back history that have become newly popular in our time: Lectio Divina and the Ignatian Examen. The Four Rules lend a wonderful framework for translating these popular practices into a specifically Swedenborgian spiritual practice.

Over some months of trial-and-error practice, I shaped a daily spiritual practice that has turned out to be the most helpful practice I’ve ever attempted. In case it might be of interest to readers, I have written about the background of the mysterious Four Rules and about their use as a daily prayer practice, which you can find here: <https://swedenborg.com/daily-spiritual-practice-based-swedenborgs-rules-life/>

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

Rev. Sage serves as pastor and director of Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge,



Massachusetts. In 2018 she cast a vision to create The Helen Keller Center for Spiritual Life at the Chapel. Sage lives in Boston, Massachusetts with her husband Ted and their two sons Theo and Zach.

Convention Keynote to be Delivered by Rev. Sage Cole

Saturday, July 1 at 7:30 PM ET

This event is planned to be live streamed for remote viewers

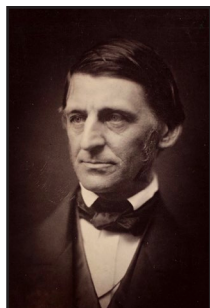
This year’s keynote speaker is Rev. Sage Cole, the founding visionary for the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center at the Cambridge Swedenborg Chapel adjacent to Harvard and Radcliffe where Helen was a college student. While at Radcliffe, Helen wrote a thesis paper she continued to develop after graduation that became her book, *Optimism*. Rev. Cole will bring a message of vision and hope that is inspired by the journey of this creative project. ☸

Virtual Education Opportunities

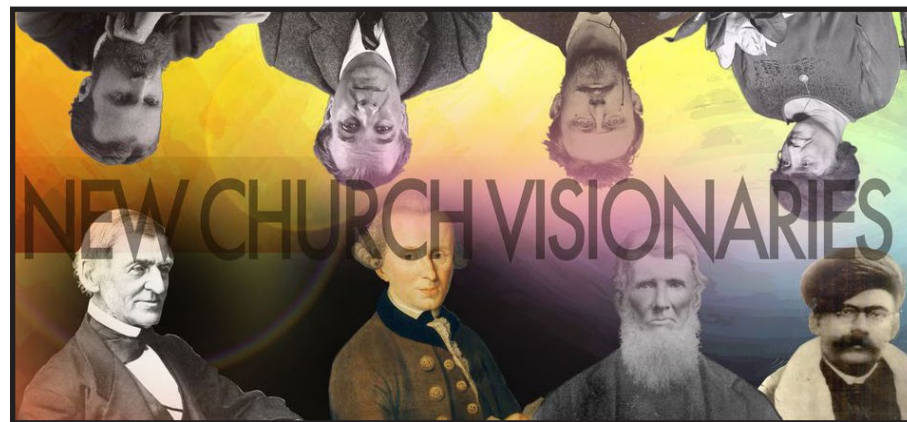
Lecture Series: New Church Visionaries

Join us as we continue our seven-part journey to learn about some of the greatest visionary minds of the New Church lineage. The influence of Swedenborgian ideas and spirituality has been one of enormous diversity and dynamism. This free online lecture series is offered by the Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center, an initiative of the Cambridge Society of the New Jerusalem at Swedenborg Chapel, with generous financial support from the Massachusetts New Church Union.

**Ralph Waldo Emerson with
Rev. Robert E. McCluskey
April 7 at 7:00 PM ET**



Our third lecture will be offered by Rev. Robert E. McCluskey, who will be discussing Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882). A well-known American essayist, lecturer, philosopher, abolitionist, and poet, Emerson was a leader in the creation of the transcendentalist movement of the mid-nineteenth century. He was seen as a champion of individualism and a prescient critic of the countervailing pressures of society. His ideas were disseminated through dozens of published essays and more than 1,500 public lectures across the United States. Harold Bloom described him as “the prophet



of American religion.” Although he traveled extensively, this “Sage of Concord” spent most of his life in the greater Boston area.

In 1826, Emerson was introduced to Swedenborg through Sampson Reed’s *Growth of the Mind*. Much like William Blake before him, Emerson maintained an abiding, if ambiguous, relation to Swedenborg’s ideas for the remainder of his life. Moving between high praise and harsh criticism, Emerson demonstrated his own principle of individualism, freedom, and the dynamic nature of thought and learning. As he famously noted, “Foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds.”

Rev. McCluskey’s lecture will briefly examine Emerson’s life and consider his philosophy and works. He will then turn to Emerson’s connection to Swedenborg. Here the concepts of correspondence, influx, freedom of thought, and the primacy of personal experience over doctrine, will be examined. The presentation on three works of Emerson: *Nature* (1836), *The Transcendentalist* (1842), and *Representative Men* (1850).

The Reverend Robert E. McCluskey holds two degrees in philosophy: B.A. (UMass, Boston) and M.A. (New School for Social Research, New York City), with a focus on Greek philosophy, modern idealism, existentialism,

and hermeneutics. He is a graduate of the Swedenborg School of Religion and was ordained into the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 1984. He has pastored churches in Portland, Maine, and New York City, and served on the denomination’s Social Justice Committee. He also served for eighteen years as representative to the National Council of Churches, with specific attention to the work of social justice and religious freedom. He currently administers rites and sacraments at Wayfarers Chapel near Los Angeles.

Please visit the Swedenborg Chapel Facebook page for information on how to attend these lectures via Zoom: <https://www.facebook.com/CSNJsc/>.



Upcoming Lectures All at 7:00 PM ET:

- **May 5:** Dr. Devin Zuber on Ivan Aguéli
- **May 19:** Dr. Carl von Essen on William James
- **June 2:** Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence on John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed)
- **July 7:** Dr. Rebecca Esterson on Immanuel Kant

The Year of Regeneration

Regeneration: The Great Becoming

Adapted from *Theology for Theo-Therapy: A Swedenborgian Perspective*

BY CALVIN TURLEY, EDITED BY JIM LAWRENCE

Our regeneration is the Omega Point of creation. The goal toward which all creation moves is us. That's a big statement, but Swedenborg famously claimed, "The Lord's divine providence has as its end a heaven from the human race" (*Divine Providence*, §27–45). That we might find joy, meaning, purpose, and usefulness in our life with others is the very reason anything (and everything) exists.

Regeneration is not a smooth and straightforward process, however, due the critically necessary creation feature called free will. Without free will, love is a meaningless word. Free will means that all kinds of destinations might be outcomes due to choices we make. Some systematic choices lead to destinations quite far off the mark from the goal of creation. This drama of the wide range of what we can become should be a cause for hope rather than anxiety because the enchanting key of free will unlocks the true grandeur of creation. The possibilities for becoming are infinite.

When Swedenborg was still working as a philosopher of nature and science and long before his first spiritual theological work, he marveled at the design of creation. He saw evolution as the form of all becoming with successions in series and degrees opening up new spaces and capacities for further

becoming. Other than God, everything else *becomes* over time and over a long process. In his science philosophy tour de force *First Principles of Natural Things* (1733) that gained him wide recognition in Europe, Swedenborg remarks that nothing becomes immediately and all at once what it *can* become, except the Infinite itself" (*First Principles*, v. 5, 1). Making regenerated human beings through the free will process requires some long and hard doing. Gradual processes provide the way for spiritual development and actualization.

"When we have been regenerated, we have a new will and a new intellect."
True Christianity §601

This process of becoming is not simple at all, but rather must occur on a great many levels and is a successively progressive becoming because the job is so big. The Swedenborgian "three Rs"—repentance, reformation, and regeneration—emerged in Swedenborg's later spiritual writings as the spiritual transformation process that must be repeated again and again in our daily living. Swedenborg began his long succession of spiritual books with this big picture of a long unfolding when he began with Genesis 1 and revealed the inner sense meaning of the six days of

creation. The journey through the six days of regeneration involves "regenerating" many dimensions of our inner and outer selves (see *Arcana Coelestia*, §7–66). Each "day" is a stage of spiritual development: the process of becoming a regenerated being involves getting our loves right, our speech right, and our actions right.

The creation process is all about a skillful and creative community of love called heaven. The greater our sense of belonging to the heavenly community, the greater becomes our awareness of our personal distinctiveness. We are each one of a kind. Our "becomingness" creates new life because we add functional value to the family of God.



Rev. Dr. Cal Turley (1919–1984) pastored Swedenborgian churches in Portland, Oregon, and Seattle, Washington before completing a doctorate at Claremont School of Theology, after which he became professor of pastoral care and counseling at the Swedenborg School of Religion in Newton, Massachusetts. He also maintained a psychotherapy practice and served as President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. This article has been adapted by Jim Lawrence from language and ideas contained in Prof. Turley's doctoral dissertation, "Theology for Theo-Therapy: A Swedenborgian Perspective."



"As long as we are alive in this world, we are held midway between heaven and hell and are kept in a spiritual equilibrium there, which is free choice."

True Christianity §475



SATURDAY, JULY 1ST – WEDNESDAY, JULY 5TH 2023

Dear Swedenborgian Church Friends and Colleagues,

We are rapidly preparing for a wonderful annual convention in the Boston area from July 1 – July 5 that will be hybrid in format again. We are planning both a wonderful in-person setting at Bridgewater State University and will provide robust tech support for virtual participation in key happenings. Co-hosted with the Massachusetts New Church Union (MNCU), the in-person setting is only a few minutes from two of our historic and beloved churches—Bridgewater and Elmwood. The third church in the MNCU, the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, has been working on the new Helen Keller Spiritual Life Center, and in celebration of this project our convention theme this year is the visionary concept of “The Practice of Optimism” that comes from Helen’s own spiritual writing.

We need your help in underwriting expenses. We all know about

inflation. Costs continue to rise. Yet we very much wish to keep registration fees as low as possible, subsidize costs for the youth to participate, provide great music, and give you the best virtual convention experience that we can. Live streaming our Mini Courses, worship services, ordination service, and business meetings has generated a more full-bodied sense of presence and connection throughout our spiritual family.

When you donate to the 2023 Convention your money will go to:

- Keeping the cost of attending convention as low as possible for all
- Scholarships for children and youth and underwriting other expenses to enable them to attend
- Supporting the music program
- Supporting the technology needed for a hybrid convention

We will most gratefully recognize all givers!

There are several ways to give. Instructions and links can be found at swedenborg.org/donate:

- You can donate online with a credit card by clicking the PayPal button (no PayPal account necessary)
- You can use the QR code at the end

of this letter to link directly to the PayPal account.

- You can use Zelle to transfer money directly from your account to the Swedenborgian Church of North America at accounting@swedenborg.org.
- You can donate with a check made out to “Swedenborgian Church of North America” with “Convention 2023” in the memo. You can mail your check to:

**Central Office
Swedenborgian Church
50 Quincy Street
Cambridge, MA 02138**

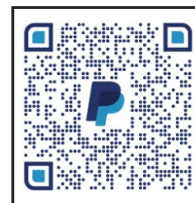
Please email Operations Manager Brittany Price at manager@swedenborg.org with any questions. Thank you in advance for your donations and support for a special Convention.

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence,
President, Swedenborgian Church of North America

—Rev. Susannah Currie,
Chair, Council of Ministers

Registration for Convention will open in early spring. Please visit swedenborg.org for updates as they become available.

Open the camera on your phone and scan this QR code to easily donate via PayPal.



What's Your Story?

Sermon from January 1, 2023

BY GORDON MEYER

Have you made any New Year's resolutions? I like to play around with words, and I got to thinking about the word "resolutions." If we take the first syllable away, we have the word "solutions." Isn't that what resolutions really are? They are solutions we use to deal with a problem we've identified about ourselves.

Resolutions can be revolutions. Revolution can be radical change, but it is also repetition; things that keep coming around. They revolve. What do you keep doing you wish you could quit doing?

Revolution also means to revolt. Making a resolution to revolt against something can lead to revelation. Trying to quit something can lead to new understanding.

That's a revelation. It's also how temptation works in us. We are presented with choices and are tempted by those choices. If we simply give in to temptation, we learn nothing and we don't change. We keep on becoming the kind of person we have been.

But choices can change us. We make choices all the time. Our New Year's resolutions are intended to help us have the determination to make better choices. Each choice we make is like a sentence in the book of our life. The sentences fill up the pages and the pages make the chapters and one day we will leave these bodies and this earth, and we will have written our life story. This is our book. Every one of us is writing his or her life story.

We are writing the books that the Bible refers to in Revelation. Our lives are called a book. Depending on how well our book matches up with God's Book of Life spoken of in Revelation, we either enter into eternal life with

God or cast ourselves out of heaven into eternal darkness and death, called the lake of fire. Note that no one throws us out of heaven. *We jump* into the lake of fire. (So be careful about telling someone to go jump in the lake.)

We have already chosen our place in eternity by the time we reach this so-called judgment. We make the choice while we are living here on the earth, writing our book.

We have already chosen our place in eternity by the time we reach this so-called judgment. We make the choice while we are living here on the earth, writing our book.

You've probably heard the phrase, "write your own ticket." We all do that. The book we write is our ticket. Our destination is written there by the way we live.

William Bruce, one of my favorite commentators on the Bible, writes in his commentary on Revelation, "The human mind itself is a book in which every thought, word, and action is written.... As an active power, the mind is just what it has become by the use or abuse of its faculties. Affections and thoughts are not things laid up *in* the mind, but states and forms *of* the mind itself.

These are capable of being modified or changed during the life of the body. After death they become fixed, as if crystallized. This is the book of life that is opened at the judgment, and from the records of which we are said to be judged."¹

Our minds are becoming crystallized. It is difficult for someone whose mind is set in this way to change themselves. The more we practice the actions of such a mind, the more rigid they become.

This is why it is so important to examine ourselves and find the false ideas we use to justify evil actions. Evil actions grow out of loving ourselves more than others. This is basic Swedenborg.

The disciple Peter was changed by his contact with the Lord. When the Lord renamed Simon, Peter, he was calling him a rock. Eventually Peter became a rock star in the Christian world, but initially, he was just a rock, a pretty dense rock.

Peter was so convinced of his true faith and devotion to the Lord that he swore he would never deny him. We all know what happened. Faced with the possibility of suffering along with him at the time of Jesus' arrest, Peter denied him not once, but three times. So much for being a rock. He crumbled.

The rooster crowed and Peter saw in the light of the dawning day what a chicken he really was. He was devastated by his lack of courage and saw that he really had little faith. What did he do? He changed. He didn't change himself. He let the Lord lead him and change him. He became the rock the Lord intended him to be, and in the scriptures, he is the disciple who represents the good and truth of faith, what a rock stands for.

We can't change ourselves, but it needs to seem to us that we are changing ourselves while actually the Lord is changing us. We think we are writing

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¹ *Commentary on the Revelation of St. John*, by Rev. Wm. Bruce, 2nd Ed., London, James Speirs,

What's Your Story

Continued from page 26

our own book, and in one sense we are. We decide what goes into the book. But the choices we make depend on our relationship with God.

If we are turned to God, he writes on our souls, and our books are love stories. But if we turn from God, he cannot write in our books because we have turned them away from God and hidden them from him, or tried to.

The things we write on our own are stories filled with deceit, revenge and spiritual death. No angel wants to read them, and they are shunned in heaven. If we have written such a story when we enter the world of spirits and encounter the angels who come to greet us, we find ourselves in a world in which we cannot be happy, a world so foreign to us that we can't even breathe the air. We turn and run and dive headlong into the lake of fire.

When I was a kid, my family spent the summers at our little cottage on Porter's Lake in central Wisconsin. We had a short dock jutting into the lake where we parked our rowboat. It was a small lake. There were no motorboats allowed. It was primitive. I loved it. I used to go out on that dock at night and look up at the stars. There were millions of them, thick through the center of the Milky Way. We can't see that scene living in the city.

In scripture stars represent ideas, thoughts. Those stars in the Milky Way were like the millions of individual thoughts that run through a human mind in a lifetime. Those thoughts are what form our minds.

When you are out on your dock, gazing into your nighttime sky, which stars are the brightest for you?

Remember the bumper sticker that said, "Don't believe everything you think!"

There are evil spirits with us all the time, trying to get us to write nasty

Deborah's Tree Interview

Continued from cover

traditions. Four female Swedenborgian clergy are in a rotation to provide short Spiritual Reflection videos. All aspects of the program are posted on our website, our Facebook page, and on Twitter. According to our online analytics, engagement with all three is consistently growing. We love it when our Swedenborgian friends share our posts to their own social media!

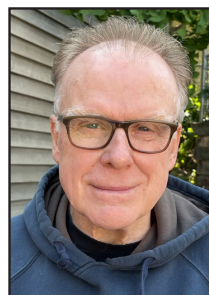
things in our books. God's angels are there, too. They want us to write love stories, because that's all they will read. What's your story?

In the book of Revelation, the seer John is commanded by the Lord to write what he sees. Why does the Lord want it written? William Bruce says that "Writing is confirmation. What is written is settled and fixed."

When we leave this world, we lay down our pens. The writing has been done. What we have chosen to relate to in this world is what we continue to relate to in the spiritual world.

We do this by writing a love story with our lives. Nothing else will suffice. We must write about loving God by showing that love to our neighbor. Our actions write the story.

Go forth and write your story so that when it is finished and your book is closed on this earth and opened in the world of spirits, it will be angels, not devils, who clamor to read your story and welcome you into their community with open arms, surrounding you with God's love. ☸



Pastor Gordon Meyer is the Licensed Pastor at the Virginia Street Swedenborgian Church in Saint Paul, Minnesota.

We've also started a blog, "The Women's Companion to *Conjugal Love*." Four female editors are tackling the task of condensing the work of the women who completed a critical reading together of Swedenborg's book *Conjugal Love*, also known as *Marriage Love*, and shared their responses to the text as women in the twenty-first century. Coming soon is a podcast in which we plan to have women discuss topics of interest to the Swedenborgian/New Church community. The blog is also shared on social media, and the podcast will be as well.

In addition to our ongoing online activities, we have been holding hybrid in-person events twice a year with the Lord's New Church congregation in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. We are very blessed to have had them partner with us, in support of our mission to lift up the voices and work of Swedenborgian women. The first event was a Launch Brunch at their lovely property, followed the next month by an art exhibit and talk by Eleanor Schnarr. We've also held an online presentation about Logopraxis by Rev. Sarah Walker from Australia, a Silent Retreat and a (non-silent) hybrid Day Retreat about Responding to *Conjugal Love* in the twenty-first century. In addition, the *Deborah's Tree* community is always invited to attend the hybrid monthly Saturday Brunch, with a speaker, held by the Home Church in Bryn Athyn. I am happy to extend that invitation to all Swedenborgians who might want to attend! Just contact me at hroslyntaylor@gmail.com.

JL: Are there any group discussion spaces in *Deborah's Tree*?

RT: We do not have any dedicated online group discussion spaces at present for *Deborah's Tree*. However, we do interact with each other as a community, online and in person. Discussions can emerge from comments on our

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Virtual Education Offerings for the Planet

Seeing Rainbows: Queer Swedenborgians and Queering Swedenborg

WITH DR. DEVIN ZUBER

Tuesdays, from 3:00 – 5:00 PM PT

April 11th – May 16th

This six-part free public seminar is built around of a set of interrelated questions. How can we constructively read the eighteenth-century theologies of Emanuel Swedenborg in ways that are affirming and supportive of LGBTQ+ persons? Where in Swedenborg might we find places for queer folk to feel themselves supported and spiritually at-home? To query and “queer” Swedenborg requires, firstly, firmly situating his ideas of gender and sexuality within their eighteenth-century contexts that gave shape and rise to his theology. Secondly, the seminar aims to recover a surprising, untold story of how Swedenborg’s ideas about gender and sexuality came to be subsequently received by writers and artists, some of them queer, in ways that were often unconventional (and non-heteronormative). Here, we will attempt to trace a lineage of “queer readings” of Swedenborg in figures such as the Romantic poet (and painter) William Blake, in novels by the French author Honoré de Balzac (particularly his gender-bending *Seraphita*), in work by the American feminists Margaret Fuller and Julia Ward Howe, as well as in the regionalist fiction of the lesbian writer Sarah Orne Jewett. We will also nod towards Swedenborgian resonances in more recent, contemporary queer aesthetics, such as in Tony Kushner’s *Angels in America*. The seminar features some guest scholars who are experts on the history of sexuality and queer theory;



we will also be engaging in conversation with contemporary LGBTQ+ Swedenborgians whose ministries lie at the intersection of queer identity and theological concerns.

Please note: this seminar is not an exercise in debating what Swedenborg said (or didn’t) about homosexuality, gender, or otherwise. Those who are interested in such a debate should seek it elsewhere. This class will engage practical and constructive theologies that are affirming of the experiences of those in the LGBTQ+ community and allies, through a full-spectrum lens on Swedenborgian theology and history.

Virtual Educational Offerings for the Planet

In the fall of 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, CSS launched a new collaborative online learning initiative. These learning modules are a form of massive open online courses aimed at bringing scholarly and educational resources about Swedenborg and Swedenborgian theology to our broader, global, and increasingly

interconnected communities. Our Virtual Education Modules are free to take and participate in, although pre-registration is required for access to webinar and course materials. To date, CSS has provided seven such Virtual Education Offerings for the Planet and engaged with hundreds of learners on topics that have ranged from climate change to biblical exegesis, from angels, aliens, and apocalypse, to the reception of Swedenborg in the arts and literature. Attendees have zoomed in from Europe, Asia, Africa, and from all over North America. Come join our global conversation!

Dr. Devin Zuber is the George F. Dole Professor of Swedenborgian Studies at CSS in Berkeley, California, where he also serves at the Graduate Theological Union as chair for the Department of Historical and Cultural Studies. He has published widely on art, literature, and Swedenborg’s influence on the nineteenth-century. Before moving to California, Devin taught at universities in Germany, and has held fellowships or visiting professorships at the British Library, Stockholm University’s Department for Aesthetics and Culture, and the Rachel Carson Center for the Environment (LMU Munich). He also serves the Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco as a ministerial assistant and is an ordinand for ministry with the Swedenborgian Church of North America. 📍

To register, [click here](#) or email info@swedenborgianstudies.org

Deborah's Tree Interview

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Facebook posts, blogs, and YouTube videos. Individuals can post their own material or questions on our Facebook page and stimulate discussion that way. The podcast will offer an opportunity for guests to share their perspectives and thinking. Of course, as you can imagine, discussions happen at our hybrid events, often quite lively and even impassioned!

JL: Is Deborah's Tree only for women?

RT: No! Our mission is to promote the work of female Swedenborgians for the benefit of *all* Swedenborgians, and for all people involved in the women's spirituality movement. Men, and persons who do not identify as female, have attended all of our events, except the Silent Retreat, and have interacted with us on social media. Our focus is on lifting up the voices of Swedenborgian women, so we are limited to women in that sense, but we want those voices to be heard by everyone.

JL: How can people get involved with and possibly support Deborah's Tree?

RT: There are several ways for people to get involved with the *Deborah's Tree* community. By contacting me at bro-slyntaylor@gmail.com, they can be added to our email list to receive our monthly newsletter, and notifications about upcoming events. Visiting our website and interacting with us on social media are both great ways to support us and strengthen our community. Those simple actions help us become more of a visible presence online, and thereby help us get the voices and work of Swedenborgian women out into the public domain. Sharing their talents by contributing to the programs at our hybrid events, volunteering to

A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another (John 13:34–35).

As I shared previously (January/February 2023 issue of *the Messenger*), taking a faith formation class in seminary, I learned about “Engaged Spirituality” that originated from the late great Buddhist monk and peace maker Thich Nhat Hahn. Applying this to Swedenborgianism, Engaged Swedenborgianism challenges us to develop our faith by engaging in both personal and social transformation, since as the Lord (and Swedenborg) teaches us, we really cannot do one

help edit the “Women’s Companion to *Conjugal Love*,” selecting and displaying our Spiritual Quotes, or letting us know about Swedenborgian women whose work could use some promotion, are all wonderful ways to get involved and offer support. Financial support is also very helpful! It’s easy to donate through the *Deborah's Tree* website, at <https://www.deborahstree.org/donate-and-volunteer>. 📧

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is the Director of the Doctor of Ministry Program at Pacific School of Religion and President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Rev. Roslyn Taylor is a minister with the Swedenborgian Church of North America, living in Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania. She facilitates the Home Church in Bryn Athyn, recently founded the *Deborah's Tree* ministry, and has provided music for worship services in several different contexts.

Social Justice Committee

Engaged Swedenborgianism and Beloved Community

BY DRU JOHNSON

without doing the other.

To attempt social regeneration without personal regeneration would be a nonstarter—without doing the work of regeneration personally, we lack the awareness of our own shortcomings and the need for the inflow of divine goodness and truth to bring to the table of social change. Similarly, personal piety is meaningless if we do not apply it to our social connections and society. We see this in the “new commandment” the Lord Jesus (a.k.a. Rabbi Yeshua) and it is here in the difficult work of our social and societal regeneration that the rubber meets the road.

The Lord, Rabbi Yeshua, was especially clear that bigotry doesn’t exist in what he called “The Divine Realm” (a.k.a. The Kingdom of God or The New Jerusalem) and the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King and others have called “The Beloved Community.” Rabbi Yeshua made a special point to identify himself with the dispossessed—those the entrenched powerful reject. Today we are called to dismantle both the personal and societal implicit biases and bigotry we have picked up from family and society that harms people of color, women, LGBTQ, the disabled, and the poor. Engaged Swedenborgianism is all about building beloved community. 📧

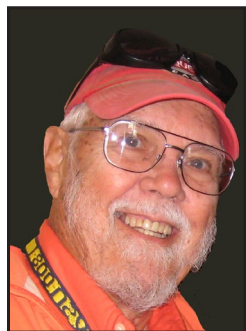
Dru Johnson (they/ them) is a graduate of Pacific School of Religion and The Center for Swedenborgian Studies in Berkeley, California. Dru was especially excited to hear his mentor, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, use the phrase “Engaged Swedenborgianism.”



Passages

Deaths

Rev. Richard “Dick” H. Tafel,



Jr., 86, entered into the fullness of the spiritual world on October 13, 2022, in Naples, Florida, near his long-time home in North Fort

Myers, after suffering for some time with Parkinson's and advancing dementia. Dick was born November 13, 1935, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, to Rev. Richard H. and Corinne B. Tafel, his father having served as minister to the Swedenborgian church in Philadelphia. Many of us remember both Dick, Sr. and Corinne fondly. Dick grew up in Narberth, Pennsylvania, with younger brothers Harvey and Jonathan. Harvey also entered the Swedenborgian ministry and retired after long service at Wayfarers Chapel, and Jonathan has had a career in higher education.

Dick graduated in 1957 from Dickinson College with a degree in philosophy. Unable to choose between seminary and law school, he sailed for a year with the Merchant Marines on an oil tanker between Baltimore and Texas. He then enrolled in the New Church Theological School, located at that time in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and Andover Newton Theological School, where he earned a master's degree in divinity. He was ordained into the Swedenborgian ministry in 1962 and took the pastorate of the Cincinnati church. At that time the church was located in the Avondale area and they were facing their property being taken under eminent domain for the construction of I-71.

Dick shepherded a move out to the northern suburbs, where the congregation had temporary quarters in a home for four years. Land was acquired and a new building was completed in 1968 on Kemper Road in the City of Loveland. This was a move to a completely new area, and the start of a transition in the make-up of the congregation. Under Dick's pastoring the transformation was successful. Dick not only oversaw the construction and physical moves but was instrumental in introducing new programs. From 1969 through 1972 a team ministry experiment was conducted with Dick's cousin Rev. F. Bob Tafel sharing the pastorate. A teen coffee house program provided a place where area teens could gather on Friday evenings. In 1972, an outdoor wedding chapel was built and a thriving wedding ministry developed. In 1979, a new Swedenborgian camp program was begun "Beside the Point" at Rocky Fork Lake, where inner-city kids and church kids spent a week or two together each summer.

Per the church board's request that he be involved in community service outside the church, Dick joined the Montgomery Community Fire Department as a volunteer, serving there for twenty-three years and rising to the rank of Assistant Chief. He also was certified as an EMT and volunteered on the Blue Ash-Montgomery Life Squad.

Dick served in numerous denominational roles, including Chair of the Council of Ministers and President. In 1990 when he took office as President, he and his wife, Linda, relocated from Cincinnati to Fort Myers Beach, Florida. In 1995, he started the New Church of Southwest Florida and enlisted a network of local businesses to support community outreach ministries including an after-school program

for latchkey kids, a local thrift shop, and a food pantry. A federal grant was obtained to provide staffing for the after-school project. The Christmas Eve service on the beach under the stars was a popular long-running program.

Dick also worked for some years in real estate and served as Chaplain of the Fort Myers Beach Fire Department. After retirement, while the church continued under successive ministers, he continued to help out when needed, but discontinuation of the federal grant program had led to reduced church activity, and eventually, an inability to engage clergy led to its eventual closure. Dick and Linda had moved to North Fort Myers, away from the beach, but remained active in the church. They rejoined the Cincinnati church when it began offering online services during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Dick is survived by his children, son John (Jungae), daughters Gretchen Simard (Bob Koning) and Beth (Ricky) Rush; grandchildren Ashley (Shihan) Wijeyeratne, Lauren (Nate) Mayo, Garrett Simard (Cassidy Lukaart), Austin and Adam Pegouske, Sophia Rush, step-grandchildren Matthew and Trey Rush; great-grandson Wade Mayo; wife Linda and brothers Harvey (Mareta) and Jonathan (Sandy). He was preceded in death by his parents. Per his wishes, his body was donated to the University of Miami Medical School. A Celebration of Life is being planned, tentatively for later in 2023.



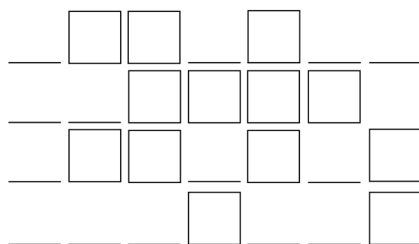
What's Happening

2023 Annual Convention

The Practice of Optimism

Bridgewater, Massachusetts
July 1–5, 2023

Several events will be livestreamed for anyone to view. Follow our [Facebook page](#) or subscribe to our [YouTube channel](#) to join us!



D C O I H R S
L T S I U P
G B I A N E O
G P N L T I A N

My pogosticks are all rusted. I guess it's time for some:

Friendly Game Corner

No Cost Family Games for All Ages

BY TREVOR "THE GAMES MAN"



Geography

A thinking game for dinner, the living room, or waiting anywhere for just about anything.

OBJECT: To have spelling FUN!

RULES:

1. Each player in turn must say a geographical location that starts with the last letter of the one the previous player said.
2. No repeats.
3. It has to be a real geographical location: town, state, region, country, continent, planet, solar system, galaxy, river, mountain, forest, park, any place that has an actual known name... it just has to be a real place, no fictional locations.
4. No helping unless a player asks. Then, other players may give hints (for M: "a really big river in America" or "the planet nearest the Sun"), but any place names said out loud, even out of turn, count as being used are no longer admissible under Rule #2 above.

HINTS:

- A. Always have an A ready. You'd be surprised at how many place names end with A. Also, bonus points if you come up with an A that doesn't end with A.
- B. N, E, W, and S and easy: North, South, East, or West Anywhere.

TREVOR "The Games Man" is a certified New Games Leader & Cooperative Play Specialist, Professional Stilt Walker, and full-time entertainer.

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

SWEDENBORGIANS IN ACTION



AGAINST RACISM

Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR)

SAAR has a biweekly email newsletter that provides education around issues central to antiracism, ideas for actions to take, and inspiration to keep at it long-term. Email Rev. Shada Sullivan, revshada@gmail.com to join the email list.

Previous issues of the SAAR Newsletter can be found on our website: swedenborg.org/community/diversity-equity-inclusion/swedenborgians-in-action-against-racism/

Did you know the Swedenborgian Church of North America has a YouTube channel? *Click the YouTube logo above to subscribe!*



About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born January 29, 1688, in Stockholm, Sweden. Although he never intended a church denomination to be founded or named after him, a society was formed in London fifteen years after his death. American groups eventually founded the General Convention of Swedenborgian Churches.

As a result of Swedenborg's spiritual questioning and insights, we as a church exist to encourage that same spirit of inquiry and personal growth, to respect differences in views, and to accept others who may have different traditions.

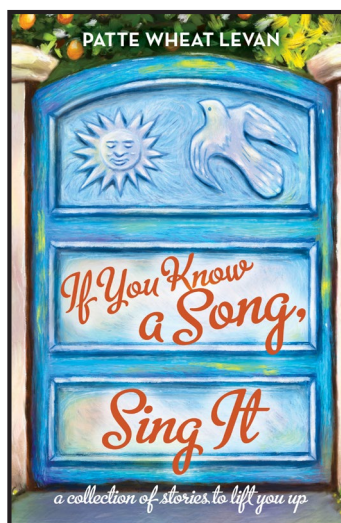
In his theological writings, Swedenborg shared a view of God as infinitely loving and at the very center of our beings, a view of life as a spiritual birthing as we participate in our own creation, and a view of scripture as a story of inner life stages as we learn and grow. Swedenborg said, "All religion relates to life, and the life of religion is to do good." He also felt that the sincerest form of worship is a useful life.

Books

Hope, Healing, and the Power of the Human Connection

New book by former *Messenger* Editor Patte Wheat LeVan

Humans need connection, and in a digital world, meaningful connections are harder to come by. Accomplished author Patte Wheat LeVan presents a tool for recalibration. *If You Know a Song, Sing It* is a moving collection of essays first published in *the Messenger*, the national publication of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, and three memoir pieces published in the *Chrysalis Reader*, a yearly anthology published by the Swedenborg Foundation. Inspiring hope, healing, spiritual growth and worthwhile experiences with our family, friends and communities, LeVan's message is both philosophical and funny, illustrating the humorous side of the human condition in all its complexity.



If You Know a Song, Sing It is available for purchase online at [Amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com).

About the Author

Patte Wheat LeVan is a writer and editor. She is the author of *Three for a Wedding*, which was made into the movie *Doctor, You've Got to Be Kidding!* by MGM studios, as well as *By Sanction of the Victim*,

which was nominated for a Pulitzer Prize in 1976, and *Hope for the Children, a Personal History of Parents Anonymous*. *Hope* received the Janusz Korczak International Literary Competition Honorable Mention Award in 1980. 📧

Contact: patricialevan2@gmail.com

