



Acknowledging Indigenous People: Our Journey

BY ANDREW DODD

Last October (2022) was the 500th anniversary of Columbus setting foot on land that, to most Europeans, was a “new world,” but in reality, it had been already been inhabited for many millennia by diverse people and civilizations, with languages and cultural practices that deeply connected all life rooted in their home on earth to the celestial and spiritual realms.

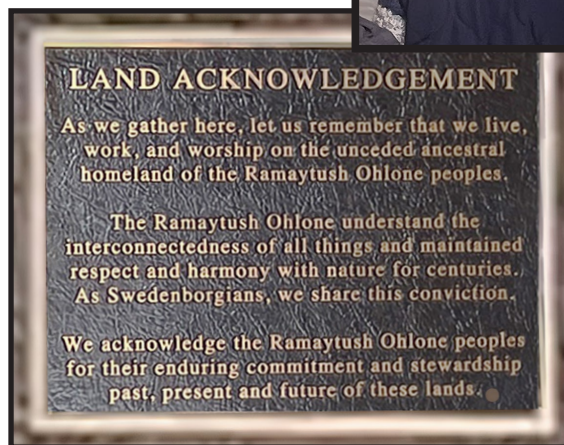
On Sunday, June 11, 2023, the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church dedicated a new architectural feature at its entrance—a plaque acknowledging that the land it stands on is the unceded ancestral homeland of some of those people. It reads,

“As we gather here, let us remember that we live, work and worship on the unceded ancestral homeland of the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples. The Ramaytush Ohlone understand the interconnectedness of all things and maintained respect and harmony with nature for centuries. As Swedenborgians we share this conviction. We acknowledge the Ramaytush Ohlone peoples for their enduring commitment and stewardship past, present, and future of these lands.”

The dedication was streamed live on the church’s Facebook page as part of the regularly scheduled Sunday Service at 11:00 AM local time. (Link: <https://tinyurl.com/SFSCnativeand>)

At the start of the event, Senior Pastor Rev. Lee spoke about why we are

doing this, as a reminder to us all, not only of the stewardship of the Ramaytush, but of our own stewardship of this land for the future as well. Council Secretary Laurie Carlson then read a statement of dedication



Blue, the last of the song keepers of his tribe, plays a sacred song.

Finally, he placed his hand on the plaque in a gesture of acceptance and blessing.

Wherever you live in North America (and many other parts of the world) the land on which you live and work was originally inhabited by people who learned to thrive in balance with the resources of the land, to cherish and worship in that place, and bequeath the sacred connection with that land to their descendants, only to be driven from it by European newcomers who mostly considered them less than human, and the land as a commodity to master, to own, and exploit for profit.

As Swedenborgians dedicated to regeneration as our spiritual path, we owe it to ourselves and our communities to face up to, admit, and to repent the legacy of that sin upon which

about the debt we here owe the Ramaytush, and with some quotes from Swedenborg about the importance of our neighbors and the multiplicity of heaven. Peggy Magilen, the musician’s fiancée, then told an indigenous story of how, to native peoples the land is like their body, a whole person, in which all parts are needed. The indigenous musician — Blue, the last of the song keepers of his tribe—spoke his blessing, and played a sacred song on flute, “The Light Never Goes Out,” to conclude and solemnify the occasion.

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Editor's Corner



Pockets of Joy

After dealing with some severe health issues this past fall, I have been turning my focus to things that truly bring me great joy. As Jonathan Van Ness from *Queer Eye* tells us, “You have to find those little pockets of joy, honey!” They’re so right. No matter what is going on in one’s life, you need to find those little places of happiness to get you through your days. I want to share a few of mine with you.

My Kids and their Friends

I have two amazing kids, Serena (7th grade) and Nate (5th grade). My husband and I were blessed with awesome

children. They are both bright, active, and truly kind and caring people. They are amazing friends to their friends. Each of my kids have a group of friends that are so fun, and they do so much together. When schools reopened after the pandemic, we made the choice to drive our kids and others to school instead of taking the bus. We are fortunate to live close to both schools in our town, so this is a reasonable thing to work into our days. We’ve been calling it the “Friend Bus.” I love these rides home from school with my middle schooler and her friends. Middle school is tough, and our conversations about “how was the day” and “what’s the tea?” brighten up my day. They feel I am a safe space to talk it out. Even the tough conversations. One of my daughter’s closest friends has even started calling my home workspace “her therapist’s office.” These kids bring daily happiness to my life, and I hope I can continue to be a support like this to them for many years.

My Cats and Cat Videos

I don’t know how anyone can live with out animals (besides those with allergies). The only time I have not lived with a cat (or several) was when I was in a college dorm. In my early twenties, the cat distribution system delivered me Xander and Amber—both found me in parking lots of two separate workplaces at two different times, and they were by my side throughout my young adulthood. Our current cats, Lily and James, joined us about five years ago after Amber crossed the rainbow bridge. They are a bonded pair of littermates and bring so much joy to our household. Unlike my old cats, these little furry angels entered our lives as *our* cats, not just *my* cats. They comfort all of us daily, and completed our family when they joined us. Because of our love of cats, my daughter and I share cat videos with each other throughout the day. If

the Messenger

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you ever need a good laugh, I recommend going to watch a few. I even recently shared with her my favorite *vin-tage* YouTube cat video, [Stalking Cat](#), and explained to her it was the cat video that started my love of cat videos.

RuPaul and Queer Eye

I fell in love with Drag Queens about twenty years ago when my restaurant coworkers (who since then are truly my forever friends) and I would often go to Diva’s Night Club—the drag shows started at midnight. [Jujubee](#) was the first queen I ever saw perform and that was it. Jujubee later

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Message from the President

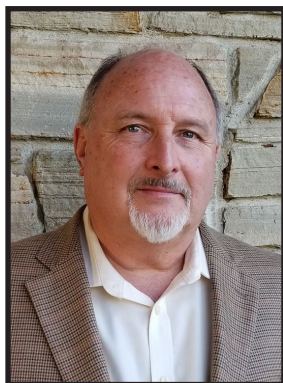
How We Gather in the Summer: Past, Present, and Future

The Year of Spiritual Uses: 2023–24

Still basking from our annual denominational convention at Bridgewater State University, I'm in a reflective mood about our tradition of our large denominational gathering every summer. Especially I've been musing about how we gather. Save for 1984 when we met at a large church camp owned by the National Council of Churches, we have gathered on college campuses for fifty-seven years.

There's scarcely anyone still active who remembers any other way that we've had convention, but there was a very long time before a college campus was ever thought of as the site for our summer convention. Starting in 1817 with our very first convention, and continuing for 150 years, we gathered at our largest churches. People apparently stayed with folks whom they knew or in hotels, and the convention gathering did not last as many days as it does now. A small shift in this pattern began in the 1940s that concentrated out-of-town convention goers in one large hotel that could also be the site for many of the meetings. The sites still concentrated where we had our largest urban churches to accommodate some of the services and meetings and to provide a church setting.

Our recent pattern of college campuses began in 1966 when a smaller town church, Church of the New Jerusalem in Urbana, Ohio, hosted the summer convention using Urbana College as the hotel, so to speak. That college campus experiment performed beautifully in terms of cost and convenience of ample meeting spaces, and a game changer had



been born. While in Urbana, the convention accepted the invitation from Rev. Dick Tafel, Jr., for the next year to be in the new suburban Cincinnati church (the classic former church with the famed Tiffany angel windows had been taken by eminent domain for a freeway). With enormous, large tents set up around its spacious acreage for meetings and using local hotels for hospitality, 1967 would be the last convention before the new pattern would become set. In 1968 the Detroit church hosted convention at nearby University of Windsor, and we were off and running.

I first attended convention in 1982 following my first year in seminary and have never missed one. Being on so many college campuses over time bestows a certain distinctive "Convention convention" experience, to be sure. Though the convenient advantages provide solid reasons for this way of gathering, I've often been in earnest conversations discussing the pros and cons around the way we "do convention."

Our convention at Bridgewater State University deepened two further trends of summer gatherings that seem paramount: the increasing popularity of our spiritual education program (our Mini Courses) and our commitment to virtual participation at a full level with high-level tech support. Emphasizing these two foundations will ensure that our summer conventions are useful, meaningful, and fun for the largest number possible whether hanging out in an entertaining local setting or from the comfort of one's living room.

But there's still the challenge of quality control for

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all of our material lives depend today. Think of The Lord's Prayer. As descendants of those foreigners, and as a denomination founded and led by them, it is time for each of us to acknowledge the debt we owe to those original inhabitants and their descendants. Recognition and acknowledgement of our truths is essential to the first step of regeneration.

How did the San Francisco Swedenborgians come to acknowledge this? How did our process begin?

It began within an anniversary celebration of our church's own founding on that very land. Many months of planning for two full weekends of planned events, speakers, engaging activities, and dramatizations planned for the 125th anniversary celebrations scheduled for March 2020—themed and titled Nature & Spirit—but was shut down by the recent pandemic just at the moment the celebration was scheduled to begin. Everything was cancelled. As the key organizer and promoter, having to inform the participants (some traveling thousands of miles), contributors, media, and the public at large that all events had been canceled was more than disappointing. But the health and safety of everyone was clearly the paramount concern. No one knew what was to come nor how long the cessation of normal life would last.

Adaptations had to be made to our Sunday Church services, moving to a live stream format on social media combining Reverend Lee's service and live message in the church with prerecorded multi-media. Our music director, Jonathan Dimmock, innovated by recording the music for the services, even coordinating the contributions of our home-bound choir member's vocal parts shared with me to merge into the live stream. Operations Manager Dana

Owens and I collaborated on creating visual components for the choral audio. For our monthly Meditation Sunday Service, Jonathan suggested a musician acquaintance, the Native American flute player Blue, to play the music for that service. This could be done live in the church with the minister leading the service, the two of them keeping socially distanced. This effect on our services was very well received by those who attended online.

Recognition and acknowledgement of our truths is essential to the first step of Regeneration.

As familiarity with this worship format became routine, questions arose about reviving the Nature & Spirit symposium as an online event. In reformulating the anniversary for an online audience, I imagined music being an important aspect as it was in our online services. I included a classical guitarist playing a piece composed by a Japanese composer on Muir Woods National Monument. As a balance to Muir's writings about indigenous people (misconstrued according to the Sierra Club) I thought of including a speaker on indigenous history and culture for a section themed on the roots of conflicts stemming from our lack of proper relation to nature, highlighting the correspondence of Nature & Spirit.

Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber, associate professor at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, suggested a local renowned indigenous leader to offer that perspective: Corinna Gould of the Lisjan-Ohlone village of Huichol across the bay in Oakland. Her presentation in the newly revived eight-part weekly series had a profound impact on those who watched, including on those in the church council. She graphically illustrated what life was like for the Ohlone all around the Bay Area, what an extensive network of interconnected

tribes, their ancestors, and languages with similar rituals. There was a reverence for the plants, animals, and sacred places that made up their everyday lives. California, as a flourishing ecosystem of diverse climates and habitats for all manner of life, was an idyllic home to one of the largest concentrated populations of diverse indigenous people in North America. Corinna detailed how the lives of all the villages and the sophisticated political and cultural network of the California in general, and the bay region particularly, were quickly overturned when the Spanish missions were established, imposing an oppressive cultural and political regime that was diametrically opposed to the ways that enabled the tribes to flourish over thousands of years. Within a lifetime the newcomers who had preached to the original inhabitants of a loving God who urged love towards neighbors, changed to putting them in bondage for forced labor, banishing their customs, occupying their sacred places, looting their graves, chasing them from the resources they relied on to live. Eventually our own governing institutions treated them as an infestation to be exterminated in what's come to be known as the California Genocide.

Now the survivors of this history are working to reawaken us, and each other, to their heritage and to those who have survived, how they are hopeful of reuniting and preserving what cultural heritage they can reclaim, and to establish respect and value for their people and their precious heritage and traditions. Part of Corinna's address to us included suggestions of what we newcomers could do now to change our understanding of and relationship to the indigenous community. The first suggestion that had begun being implemented by cities and organizations was to publicly post and publicize a statement acknowledging the original

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inhabitants, their history and legacy, crediting them as caretakers of the land that our cities and businesses were occupying, whose few descendants are still living amongst us. The next step is to become allies in their efforts to reclaim with respect some revered space in our midst on which to revive cultural communities and practices to pass on that legacy, the life and memory of their people to the next seven generations. A simple and meaningful commitment to that alliance could be the regular contribution to local indigenous organizations of a “shuumi” or land tax, confirming the authentic intent of the land acknowledgement and making it material.

Since then, the topic of a statement of land acknowledgement repeated-ly came up in our Stewardship Ministry and then in our Church Council discussions. A chord was struck, and a seed planted. We began to research what a land acknowledgement statement would sound like. We looked into who were the specific people that resided on the land of San Francisco where our church stands. Then we reached out to them and began a dialogue about their identity and history, the nature of our interest in them, our intent, our questions, and they guided Council Secretary Laurie Carlson on the wording of a land acknowledgement statement. She drafted and revised it, and the approved statement has been regularly included in our Sunday bulletin ever since.

Last year our church hosted the annual meeting of the Pacific Coast

Association (PCA) of our denomination. Those of us involved in planning decided to develop its theme around acknowledging our debt to those who came before us, taking inspiration from Corinna’s powerful presentation, and with roots in The Lord’s Prayer’s request for forgiveness of our debts, and Swedenborg’s idea of spiritual regeneration. For the event theme’s title, I borrowed the original title from Corinna’s Nature & Spirit presentation “On Indigenous Land.” I added this Swedenborgian theme as subtitle:



Left: Corinna Gould of the Lisjan-Ohlone village of Huichol.
Right: Gregg Castro of the Ramaytush Ohlone

“Finding a Path to Regeneration,” suggesting a path forward, which can also reference our spiritual relation to each other and the natural world, recognizing God as source, and our responsibility to respect and care for that gift. Rev. Lee, reached out to Gregg Castro of the Salinan/Rumsien-Ramaytush, the cultural director of the tribe that inhabited San Francisco (who advised us on our land-acknowledgement statement) and engaged his participation in the PCA proceedings by offering a public presentation of local indigenous story. Gregg spoke very movingly and eloquently from his own personal and family history, a survivor’s legacy of his people being chased down, slaughtered, driven into hiding, the untold, unspeakably cruel past that no family wants to pass on to their children, and

his journey of discovering his roots, his ancestors stories, sacred place names, social structures, and then deciding to accept the role of a cultural leader for his few surviving people. It was a very moving public event, well attended and received, attended largely by our neighbors and community members. So intrigued and moved was the audience that Gregg, very patiently, was answering questions long after the scheduled time.

Also, at the PCA meeting, Professor Zuber gave a presentation on the indig-

enous Sami people of northern Sweden, who for centuries were systematically treated with disdain, suffered dislocation, abuse, confinement, and reculturation efforts at the hands of the Swedish government, a cruelty known to Emanuel Swedenborg. Devin discovered that Swedenborg himself, had become fa-

miliar with the Sami, and at home regularly wore a traditional Sami cloak, presumably out of affection for them. Swedenborg, a privileged member of Sweden’s nobility, knew full well what his society was doing.

Imagine that your family now, or ancestors past, know the terror of oppression, of repeated cruelty and threats, constantly in fear of your life, a frightful escape seeking safety, or forced deportation tearing you suddenly from all you’ve known, or worse—witnessing the violent death of loved ones, the destruction of the land, community, all depend upon, and all that is your world by a powerful mob, army, or government—wouldn’t you want those who displaced your loved ones to at least acknowledge how their

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lives were made possible? Wouldn't you want their descendants who flourished in your place and profited from that theft to know how their privilege was obtained? For those of us who came after, this is part of the foundation of our society, how our daily lives and communities are possible.

Many ethnic minorities living in America today experience threats and worse, yet they still come in hope of sanctuary, of survival, of a better life through whatever hardship awaits them here. But few experience the horrific legacy of genocide in their own lands as the first nations of the Americas. This is the legacy of America today.

An important point about pursuing an authentic act of indigenous acknowledgement is that it must begin with listening deeply, and with empathy, to the stories of those who do live with this history and its consequences, the circumstances that our neighbors live with every day. Acknowledgement is not an act of publicity, like an achievement to check off. To undertake the journey towards the acknowledgement of indigenous lands is to strive to love one's neighbors as ourselves, to honor and respect their ancestors and descendants as we honor our own, and as they wish. When the act of acknowledgement is informed, sincere, and of practical use and service, then is the gesture meaningful and the act fruitful.

This past fall our church council proposed, and our members approved, a budget that included a monetary annual donation to the Ramaytush tribe as a token of respect and in acknowledgement of our debt for living and worshipping on the unceded land of these people.

Also, in the fall, due to the work of Corinna Gould and others, the City of

Oakland returned approximately five acres of land owned by the city to Indigenous stewardship, a small but significant step toward healing. In November the Oakland City Council voted to grant a cultural conservation easement at Sequoia Point in Joaquin Miller Park to the non-profit, women led, Sogorea Te' Land Trust and the Confederated Villages of Lisjan Nation. The City granted the cultural conservation easement in perpetuity to the Land Trust, allowing them to immediately use the land for natural resource restoration, cultural practices, public education, and to plan for additional future uses, what any community in our country expects to be able to thrive as a community.

On this result Corinna remarked, *"This agreement with the City of Oakland will restore our access to this important area, allowing a return of our sacred relationship with our ancestral lands in the Oakland hills. The easement allows us to begin to heal the land and heal the scars that have been created by colonization for the next seven generations."*

Regeneration is a process that may take a lifetime, but the fruits it can bring inwardly through service to others is essential to our purpose in life, bringing us more aligned with heaven. Often it starts by listening with an open heart to the story of a stranger. Perhaps by creating a space to listen, even as small as a plaque, more of us can start our own regeneration. Let us dedicate the next 500 years to that process. 📍

Here are some resource references to start your own journey with land acknowledgement and local indigenous tribes in your area:

Whose land you live on: interactive map <https://native-land.ca>

Guides to Land Acknowledgement <https://usdac.us/nativeland/> • <https://native-land.ca/resources/territory-acknowledgement/> • <https://nativegov.org/news/a-guide-to-indigenous-land-acknowledgment> • <https://www.teenvogue.com/story/indigenous-land-acknowledgement-explained>

Social Justice Committee

200+ Faith Leaders Issue Letter to President Biden to Establish Reparations Commission by Executive Order

The National Council of Churches USA (NCC), Faith for Black Lives, and more than 200 faith leaders from across the United States issued a letter on March 1, 2023, to President Biden to establish a commission to study reparations by executive order on or before Juneteenth (June 19th) 2023.

The President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, was proud to be included in the signatories of this letter.

From the NCC press release: "The National Council of Churches historically has stood on the frontlines in advancing a vision of racial justice in America to build a beloved community," said Bishop Vashti M. McKenzie, Interim President and General Secretary, NCC. "This historic letter to President Biden from a diverse coalition of faith leaders speaks to the fierce urgency to preserve American democracy through reparative justice," she added.

President Biden has yet to act on this request. The White House has previously noted that Congress needs to act on H.R. 40, the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, which has been introduced in every legislative session since 1989, without a vote. There were more than 200 cosponsors for H.R. 40 during the 117th Congress in 2021-2022, the largest number of cosponsors of the bill since its introduction.

You can read the National Council of Churches press release here: <http://tinyurl.com/NCCreparations> 📍

Saint Martin's Robe

BY JAY BARRY

Our story begins with a soldier. He was on horseback, entering the city during a time of war. It was a winter day, and he saw a man who appeared desperate, and cold.

The soldier approached him; he took off his own coat, and ripped it in half. He wrapped this around the man's shoulders so he would be warm.

This is the beginning of the legendary story of St. Martin. This story is not from the Bible, for it originates three centuries after the Lord's birth. However, if we look at the story through the lens of Swedenborg it has great depth.

We'll finish the story in a minute, but first let's look at the symbolism of the coat in Swedenborg's theology. In Hebrew, the word for coat, garment or robe is *kutonet*.¹

In the Word, the first time *kutonet* appears is early in Genesis in the story of Adam and Eve. After they ate of the *Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil*, Adam and Eve realized they were naked. "And the Lord God made them garments...and clothed them."² He covered them with a *kutonet*, a robe to protect them.

Clothing takes many forms in the Word, whether it be a dazzling white robe, or humble swaddling clothes. Clothing of any kind represents a covering of love and wisdom that protects the essence of who and what we are. This can spark a personal reflection: what aspects of love and wisdom protect you, and keep you whole when facing the harsh realities of life?

Swedenborg's theology identifies all the places where clothing is mentioned in the Word. For example, there is Joseph's coat of many colors, and also the

shining robe the Lord wore when he was transfigured: "His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light."³ One of the most subtle and evocative symbols of clothing is *the seamless robe*, Jesus' inner tunic that He wore at the crucifixion.

Clothing of any kind represents a covering of love and wisdom that protects the essence of who and what we are.

In another example, do you remember the woman who reached out and touched the robe of the Lord as he passed by in the marketplace? The robe she touched signifies *divine truth in its inward form*.⁴

Like us, the woman was a seeker, reaching out for a certainty that she did not believe that she possessed. Her act of touching the Lord's robe reminds us of this promise: if we seek, we will find what we are looking for.⁵ She sought, reached out, and she touched the truth in Divine human form.

So, *the truths we internalize, and follow, and the integrity we live are the spiritual garments we wear*.

Going back to the story, the soldier had a dream during the night after he divided his coat. In the dream he was back on the road and saw the same man freezing in the cold. He approached him, ripped his warm coat in half, and placed it around the man's shoulder. Then, he looked into his eyes; *the man was Jesus*.

The soldier woke up from the dream and looked for his coat. What he found was miraculous: his coat was whole, intact, not ripped in half but in one

piece, ready for use again.

St. Martin became the patron saint of chaplains, and the Swedenborgian Church is a church of many chaplains. Perhaps this is because we are called to reach out to humanity with comfort, reassuring them throughout the cold realities of illness and uncertainty.

Like St. Martin, we have a special connection with the vulnerable: sojourners, the ill, the forgotten, the lonely, the marginalized, and the homeless. Our common values as a church ask us to help heal the world, one relationship at a time.

We cannot heal the brokenness of the world, but we can give of ourselves. And when we do, what we give is restored—like St. Martin's robe—so we may give again.



Rev. Jay Barry is a hospital chaplain in Philadelphia, and married to Barbara Barry.

Message from the President

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our physical gathering space. With General Council's support, I'm working with Central Office manager, Britany Price, in researching and creative alternative options, such as hotels, camps, retreat centers, and university campuses with hotels on campus adjacent to their conference centers, like this summer. We're confident enjoyable options will continue to emerge for future conventions. So, stay tuned: a new half-century trend is about to emerge. ☸

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence
President@Swedenborg.org

1 Strong's H3801

2 Genesis 3:21

3 Matthew 17:2

4 Arcana Coelestia 9911.

5 Matthew 7:7–8.

Be Love, Be Honest, Be Useful

Reflection on the Keynote Address

BY SAGE COLE

At Convention this past July, I offered a keynote address titled *“Being Everyday Mystics: Helen Keller and the Inner Call of the New Church.”* Standing before our denomination’s representative body, my intended address got lost in an exposed vulnerable panic as I spoke hardly a word at all. Thankfully (after a proper self-pity party), my intended words successfully came out several weeks later while lecturing at the Almont New Church Assembly. This annual Swedenborgian church camp, gathering around daily chapel services, theological discussions, flag raising, and banana hunts, has known me and loved me as a human for decades. At Almont, that familiarity and love helped me overcome my panic, providing a warm venue to speak about the inner call of the New Church, the essence of the church that I am coming to know beyond traditional church forms.

We all know as Swedenborgians that the church exists beyond its external forms. This is one of Swedenborg’s central teachings, that the church in its essence is the connection point between the Divine and the human, between that which is real and lasting and eternal, and the wild ups and downs of human life. We also know that several hundred years ago Emanuel Swedenborg spotted the arrival of a new church. He saw it starting to make its way from the Divine to the human realm bringing with it the promise of a full and complete paradigm shift in us.

A paradigm shift. A new way of being. A new connection point between the Divine and the human. A new church. A new way of being human.

It is this promise of newness that helped me find my home in the Swedenborgian church. This promise that I am being made new, that the world is being made new, and that there is much to be hopeful for, excited by, wondering about and imagining into being. This newness is one of promise and possibility, never of threat or demand. When I first walked into the circles of Swedenborgian community as a teenager, I felt an immediate welcome of who I am, without any pressure to conform to any particular beliefs or practices of the church. I was welcomed in and loved, appreciated, listened to, and engaged in conversation about the most important things in life, and given freedom and space to play and enjoy and make friends without any hidden agenda beyond the joy of being together.

The paradigm shift that Swedenborg declared, the new church that is on its way, is in fact here, here now and everywhere and in everyone.

This is the new church that I was first formed in. I then bounded off to seminary wondering how I could be a part of making this kind of joyful, open, loving community manifest in the world for others, as the Rev. Steve Pults and others had done for me.

Like any good and earnest twenty-five-year-old, I took on the work of becoming a Swedenborgian minister seriously. While newness and welcome and love and play still formed my highest intentions, in my work of preparation and training, I was now formed by a tradition, an organization, with a

full course of expectations for learning and practice that I was set to *succeed* at.

My training was good and overall, my eighteen years of ordained ministry have been a *success*. I’ve been blessed to serve in a variety of venues, our denominations first online ministry, urban and rural congregational settings, in chaplaincy both in hospitals and hospice, and for a time in a large progressive Episcopal Church. I learned to preach and prepare bulletins and lead liturgy and offer many prayers at meetings and to kick-off small-town Veteran’s Day parades. I learned how to be the one in the clergy garb. I learned the benefit and the drawback of wearing the collar and robes. Clergy garb can open up some people to share their deepest fears and longings, but it can also close others down as they apologize for swearing and assume a Pollyanna stance towards me.

I’ve been a good minister, finding in it a role that suits me and that I feel grateful to perform in the world. And now, after the tumult of the pandemic years, after entering mid-life, and after struggling to serve a tiny urban congregation of too few members to sustain our community, I have been jostled awake, a reawakening to my initial call to seek love, openness, play, and curiosity. This is the call that brought me to seminary in the first place, and I am sure, sure as I’ve ever been sure of anything before in my life, that as beautiful and loved as the forms of our current denomination might be, the theology we pour over, the liturgies we practice, the statements of faith we profess, and the identity that we carry around, that all this external structure

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Be Love, Be Honest, Be Useful

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is not the fullness of the new church. The paradigm shift that Swedenborg declared, the new church that is on its way, is in fact here, here now and everywhere and in everyone. It can manifest within our external structure of church, sure, as it did for me in my time in the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL), as it continues to for those still participating in the forms that are left, but I feel the new church longing to manifest in a myriad of other forms, forms not yet imagined.

The Helen Keller Center for Spiritual Life is one such new form that I, along with others have been imagining into being. Long before I awoke to the much bigger reality of the new church, Helen Keller did, living her faith in a myriad of creative ways that broke the traditional sectarian model of religion.

Instinctively, I found my greatest satisfaction in working with men and women everywhere who ask not, "Shall I labor among Christians or Jews or Buddhists?" But say rather, "God, in thy wisdom help me to decrease the sorrows of thy children and increase their advantages and joys. Helen Keller, *My Luminous Universe*

Helen knew what I am only now coming to know, that there really isn't such a thing on an essential level, as a Jew or a Christian or a Buddhist or a Swedenborgian. That on an essential level we are all human beings inextricably linked to one another, with different ideas about things, different stories, different ways of doing things, but following the same course of life and growth, joy and sorrow, as all other beings.

I have come to experience this essential level of my own being. This essential level has of course always been there in me, always been in operation in me at times of rest and in

the beautiful, best moments of my life. And I am now aware that my human machinations have kept me at odds with this essential level, alienating me from myself and from others, *much* too much of the time. Now that I have become conscious of this real essential space in me, and experience that it is the same as the essential space in all other life, I am committed to spending the rest of my life living more fully in and from this space. This space can be called by so many names, and one of the names that I love the most for it, that you might like to, is the Holy City, the Church of the New Jerusalem within me.

That on an essential level we are all human beings inextricably linked to one another, with different ideas about things, different stories, different ways of doing things, but following the same course of life and growth, joy and sorrow, as all other beings.

That's where the new church ultimately resides, within me and within you. Not in a building. Not in a denomination. Not in a liturgy or a doctrine. It resides in us. In all of us. It is descending, it has been for some time, and it is as always making all things new.

So, friends, in honor of this descending, I would like to announce that this fall the Helen Keller Center for Spiritual Life will be beginning a new initiative to gather people of all faiths and stripes, Swedenborgian and otherwise, interested in gathering together as our most essential selves. I am calling this initiative,

Be Love, Be Honest, Be Useful.


Gatherings will be held on Zoom. They will begin with a time to *Be Love* together. What does that look like?

While I'll offer a quiet meditation to ground us, you may *Be Love* in the freedom that comes from being in your own home by making a sandwich or looking at the faces of those gathered with love or participating in your own devotional practice.

Then we will take time to *Be Honest* with each other. For many of us this may be the hardest part. We are so used to speaking to fulfill some external expectation, like when people behave differently in my presence because I am wearing a clergy collar. We speak to impress, to amuse, to argue, or to obfuscate. We rarely if ever speak honestly to share our inner experiences, avoiding uncomfortable vulnerability. But it's time to start. Honesty and vulnerability are the path to wisdom. It's how we get at the lived experience that we are all sharing. We can use the language of our traditions to express our experience, and this will bring our traditions alive and help us to understand one another and ourselves better.

Then lastly, we will *Be Useful*. We will offer each other support. We will commit to actions we are ready to take. We will invite each other into creative endeavors. We will start to articulate together what we need, what we want, what we dream of, and what forms of this new church we might like to create together.

While the new church is growing in me how much more joyful will it be to experience this growing new church together in community! Who knows what we might learn about ourselves, each other, and this great mystery of being alive. Stay tuned for more info about this initiative and please email me directly (revsagecole@gmail.com)

if you know you want to be involved in some way. 

Rev. Sage Cole is the Pastor of the Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, Massachusetts.



Swedenborgian Church Youth League

Teens Look to the Heavens at Cedar Hill Retreat Center

BY KURT FEKETE

Six enthusiastic teenagers from five different states came to Duxbury, Massachusetts, to attend the annual fall retreat at Cedar Hill Retreat Center. Our theme was “Look to the Heavens,” and we explored celestial bodies, both natural and spiritual, through art, religion, science, creative projects, and the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg.

We have lived in awe of objects in outer space for thousands of years and we are still captivated by their fascinating beauty and inspiring mystery. It was wonderful to have discussions about these astronomical wonders that we so often take for granted.

Rev. Sage Cole led our Saturday morning opening session on the sun. Sage discussed how vital the sun is to our existence and explained how God is very much the same. God is at the center of all that we are. God’s love permeates all that we do and all that we are. Like the sun, we can choose to distant ourselves from the God and hide

in the darkness, but God is still close to us shining love and wisdom no matter where we are. God is always there. This really resonated with us, as it was an overcast, rainy day. We knew that

we are finding our way out of the darkness and starting to move towards a better enlightened state.

I led the Saturday evening session and presented a slideshow on Swedenborg’s theological work *Other Planets (Earths in the Universe)*. I explained how this is not a book that Swedenborgians often discuss as it contains some content that does not align with our more advanced scientific understanding of the planets in our solar system. For instance, in *Other Planets 3*, Swedenborg writes, “We can determine on rational grounds that bodies as large as the planets—and some of them are significantly larger than our own—are not uninhabited lumps created only to be

carried along on a wandering course around the Sun and shed their feeble light for the benefit of just one planet. Their function must be more worthwhile than this.” Nonetheless, I presented the information as Swedenborg wrote it and we all had fun considering the alien inhabitants and spirits and talking about their appearances, beliefs, and lifestyle. I explained to the teens that they should look at these described planetary inhabitants as possible reflections of their own personal qualities and characteristics. Instead of focusing on their unlikelihood, consider what we might learn from these alien beings that Swedenborg wrote about. It was an entertaining session to present, and I think the teens, and some of the staff as well, enjoyed this session.

Sunday morning, we woke to sunshine and blue skies. I was extremely

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Sunset on the beach!

(Kevin, Jeff, Heather, Bill, Athena, Caroline, Charlie, Ethan, and Julien)

the sun was above us, but we could not see it. Sage closed her session with an art project where we colored pictures representing how we feel when we are basking in the sunshine of God love.

Sage’s afternoon session was focused on the moon. Specifically, Sage discussed the phases of the moon and how the phases relate to our faith. Our confidence and beliefs continually wax and wane like the moon, sometimes gaining in strength and other times declining. The teens talked about each phase in the lunar cycle and how it relates to us, from the new moon to full moon and back to new moon. I particularly liked the conversations about the visually beautiful waxing crescent moon and how it corresponds to times in our life when hope and faith are just birthing. This is when



Charlie observes North Plymouth across the Bay with Kurt’s Telescope

SCYL Fall Retreat

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The teens pile on the carousel (Athena, Ethan, Julien, Caroline, Zsa Zsa, Charlie)

grateful as this was to be our star-gazing evening. My morning session was presented as a creative workshop. The teens were given the challenge to create their own planet where they would like to live. First, they reflected on some questions about what the geography of their planet and what people and animals on their planet were like. Then, they were given blank round sheets of cardstock and instructed to write key words about their planetary dwelling on one side and artistically represent their planet on the other side. After they finished, each teen presented their planet to the rest of the group. I explained how this activity was like what Swedenborg wrote in his book *Heaven and Hell* §41, “The angels of any given heaven are not all together in one place, but are separated into larger and smaller communities depending on differences in the good effects of the love and faith they are engaged in. Angels engaged in similar activities form a single community. There is an infinite variety of good activities in heaven, and each individual angel is, so to speak, his or her own activity.” Making your own planet is like discovering your own heavenly community.

Rev. Kevin Baxter arrived Sunday afternoon with his son Ephraim. It was a joy to see both of them! Kevin led the afternoon session on the stars. Stars,

Kevin said, are like little lights to guide our way in times of darkness. The Ten Commandments are a great correspondential example of stars. Swedenborg calls these stars our “remains.” Kevin showed us the brass sextant that his mother Polly gave him as a present when he was ordained as a minister. She told him it was a gift to remind him to never forget where he came from and to use his “remains” to guide his path. Then, Kevin had the teens work together to write their own set of “teen commandments.”

Kevin laid out a grid on easel paper with feelings and thoughts on one axis and God and the neighbor on the other axis. The teens and Kevin plotted the teen commandment “stars” on the grid with magnitude related to importance of the commandment and position related to whether the commandment dealt more with thoughts/feeling (x-axis) or God/neighbor (y-axis). This activity created a paper teen commandment constellation! These stars were redrawn on cardstock with holes in the place of stars so it could be illuminated to show the constellation on the ceiling! This was such a meaningful and entertaining activity.

In the evening, after dinner, Kevin and I led a closing communion service where we reviewed all our celestial discoveries and read the Bible passage that this entire retreat was based on. In Isaiah 40:26 we read, “Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one and calls forth each of them by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.”

After the worship service, we went outside and looked up at the galaxy of beautiful stars. The Milky Way was clearly visible, and we observed quite a few constellations. I set up my telescope, and we got a nice view of both Jupiter and Saturn (unfortunately, we did not see any of Swedenborg’s planetary aliens). We ended the evening with our traditional ice cream sundae dessert while we played some games including our favorites, Quiplash and Catchphrase.

We dragged ourselves off to bed at midnight and the Midwest van departed only a few hours later. The remaining retreaters worked hard cleaning up Cedar Hill, and we all departed the retreat by the late morning after a last visit to the beach. I am so very grateful to our session facilitators, Sage and Kevin, along with drivers and support staff, Heather and Jeff Oelker. A very special thank you to Lori Phinney who helped shop for the groceries before the retreat and then came back Monday morning to help with the retreat center clean-up. We all learned so much and grew so much closer together in our little heavenly retreat community. Hopefully after this retreat, both teens and adults will all take more notice of the sky, and let the heavenly light of the sun, moon, stars, planets, and the galaxy shine through just a bit brighter for all of us to see. ☸

Kurt Fekete is the youth director for the Swedenborgian Church of North America (SCNA). He also currently serves as vice president of the SCNA. Visit swedenborg.org for information on upcoming youth retreats.



Retreat staff: Kurt, Jeff, Heather, Bill, and Sage

Consciousness is the Heart and Soul of Everything

BY GORDON MEYER

Ed Kelly of the University of Virginia (UVA) Department of Perpetual Studies said that Max Plank held that consciousness is the heart and soul of everything. This fits with Swedenborg's idea that God is Love and Love comes forth to create everything as Wisdom, which is, by another name, consciousness in as much as we experience it. The only real difference between Swedenborg's description and Kelly's is the words they use to describe Divine Wisdom or Consciousness. In God the Creator consciousness *is* Divine Wisdom, and when it reaches our level of existence in the most general way, we experience it as consciousness or awareness which is central to our sense of being.

What Kelly is saying is that what's causing all the trouble in this world is the selfishness that stems from a materialistic view of being. Swedenborg sees the greed and corruption rampant in society as stemming from love of the self. There is a feud going on between scientists, like Ed Kelly, and the more materialist or physicalist scientists. The materialists go to great lengths to deny the results of studies of people's consciousness, especially in terms of near-death experiences, out of body experiences and reincarnation.

Let me start by saying the obvious: one way we differ from other animals is that we have abstract thought and understanding, and we can express these in highly developed language, both spoken and written. These are essential to change or progress, especially to what Swedenborg referred to as regeneration, the most important purpose of life on this earth.

In the first chapter of Genesis, it says "...and God blessed them. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply

and fill the Earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the Earth.'" That's a tall order! It means correspondentially that we are intended to be spiritual beings, not just physical beings. The fish of the sea are truths and falsities from the physical realm, while birds of the air correspond with perceptions and thought leading to faith in God.

Given this command from God to have dominion over the earth, we might want to ask, "How are we doing?" How is our dominion over every living thing affecting every living thing? We don't have to look far to find the answer. Watch the evening news. What are the headlines? Floods, tornadoes, fires, too much rain, not enough rain, and heat killing people around the globe. So, the question is not how we are doing, but why we are doing it and what effect it has?

The central idea that Swedenborg describes at great length is that what exists comes not from a material or physical source but originates from consciousness

Why are those who are charged with leading our country failing to take the steps that are so obviously needed to save this world? The answer is simple—greed! Greed disguised as a belief in prosperity. One of the candidates for President of the United States was recently in the evening news saying that what we need in this country is to get back to the prosperity we once had. In America, becoming prosperous is our goal in life, leaving our children

with more than we had. The American Dream!

But what if we replaced the word prosperity with the word selfishness. Then, instead of valuing being prosperous, we could understand that the American Dream is really selfishness. We define success primarily as acquiring more things and more power to get even more things. For ourselves.

The main force behind resistance to change is the concern over profits from the very products that are destroying the environment, and we ordinary folks keep buying and using those products. They have become our necessities. So, we must ask, why has this happened?

Some of our scientists like Ed Kelly and Rupert Sheldrake have suggested an answer to that question, but they are being held at arm's length by the mainstream scientists who are opposing and ridiculing their ideas and their research results because that research is demonstrating an entirely different explanation for our existence than has been commonly held.

Based on his research, Kelly has come to the same conclusion proposed by Max Plank many years ago, and reinforced by Albert Einstein and others that at the root of everything is consciousness. But we need to go back in the world of science to a couple of centuries ago, to the research and writings of a scientist named Emanuel Swedenborg.

Swedenborg recognized the true source of everything in this world, and scientists like Ed Kelly, while not mentioning Swedenborg, are talking about the same ideas that Swedenborg set forth.

The central idea that Swedenborg

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Consciousness is the Heart

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describes at great length is that what exists comes not from a material or physical source but originates from consciousness. Simply put, everything consists ultimately of Divine Love, which comes forth in the process of creation as Divine Wisdom, which we experience as our consciousness.

Before we toss this aside as being ridiculous, let's look at it more closely. The studies being done around the world show that our true self, our real being, does not depend on the material body we live in. In thousands of near-death-experiences studied at UVA and other institutions around the world, it is abundantly clear that we people can and do live without our bodies. Because our medical abilities have made it more possible for people who have died to be revived, more and more cases of people experiencing life in a spiritual form are being reported. Netflix has a six-part series dealing with the subject, and YouTube is full of interviews with those who have come to be called "experiencers."

Sometimes those experiences include a spiritual body similar to the one the subject had in the physical realm, but sometimes they don't. Whether with or without a spiritual body, these people are clearly conscious in a different world, or perhaps a different level of existence than we can normally experience while we are in these physical bodies. Based on this, Ed Kelly maintains that the universe is not essentially physical, but is essentially consciousness.

Isn't this what Emanuel Swedenborg is saying to us when he writes that God is Divine Love and Divine Love comes forth or takes form as Divine Wisdom. Isn't Divine Wisdom what we experience as thought, and thought is based in consciousness?

Ed Kelly goes on to say that he

believes that at the core of our problems on this Earth is the belief in materialism that started many centuries ago when materialistic philosophers like Rene Descartes began touting the idea that everything could be discovered in the physical sciences.

Rupert Sheldrake, a biologist himself, somewhat humorously points out that what this boils down to is that these materialists make a ridiculous request of us. They ask us to believe everything can be explained by materialism. They ask only one thing of us. They say, "Give us one original miracle and we will explain everything else." That one miracle is that anything exists at all. If we will conveniently disregard the question of how material things ever came to exist in the first place, they will explain to us and prove everything else that follows. They will answer all our questions, except for that first one. Not very scientific. We should ignore that first one, because it tends to slow the process of discovery.

It may be that the higher angels have been shown even how God exists, but that is one question human beings will never be able to answer by scientific research, and of course, it is at the root of everything else. However, it is only our ability to ignore that unanswerable question that makes our materialism defensible, and now we are seeing the results of this deliberate ignorance.

Emanuel Swedenborg believed that Divine Love coming forth as Divine Wisdom was behind everything, and he completely gave up scientific research after the Lord asked him to reveal the inner, spiritual meaning of the Holy Word. He had been trying to find the seat of the soul in the material human body. The Lord's revelation of Himself and His kingdom to Swedenborg quickly made him realize the futility of such a search. The soul of a human being is not in the body. The body is simply the vehicle the soul uses to exist in the material realm. But

the soul lives on in the spiritual world after the body dies. Modern research is clearly demonstrating the truth of what Emanuel Swedenborg discovered over two-hundred fifty years ago.

The human mind has higher levels than we ordinarily experience. If we focus on being loving and caring of our neighbor, we can raise our awareness above our normal materialistic state.

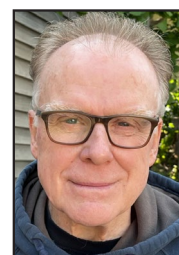
We can begin to experience the consciousness available to us above our material, brain-centered awareness. The regular exercise of prayer and meditation can help us to raise our level of consciousness, but we must try to remember throughout our busy days to focus our minds higher, remember our goals, and remember to resist our inherent selfishness actively and consciously. We must remember to love our neighbor. We need to make this our normal practice, not something we just talk about but something we do.

I said at the beginning that change is the most important aspect of life on this earth. Swedenborg calls that change regeneration. These are the things that change us, that bring about our maturation into beings that are fit to live in a heavenly community. It is rather paradoxical that the only way to truly love and care for ourselves is to give ourselves up to love and care for others. That's what heaven is based on, community and caring. That's what Swedenborg means by charity. Of necessity, we are born into self-centeredness, but we have the ability to change, to overcome our childish selfishness, our inherent materialism, and become loving beings, fit to live in heaven, and in the process contribute to saving the

earth, this wonderful home that Lord has blessed us with.



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



Bread, Olive Oil, and the Hope for Peace

BY YUNG ME MORRIS



On Sunday, October 1, Temenos joined as guests of Unionville Presbyterian Church for a delicious and joyous celebration of World Communion Sunday. I shopped with Rev. Annalie for a variety of breads from as many different parts of the world as were available in our local stores. During worship, all the different breads were displayed, and we were all encouraged to take as much as we wanted, even to return for seconds. After worship, we enjoyed at least a dozen different soups and chilis to eat with the leftover breads.

As I reflect on that day, one of the elements during worship that stood out the most to me, was the homemade Challah bread dipped in Palestinian olive oil. Rev. Annalie has a Rabbi friend who bakes Challah bread every year for World Communion Sunday and she has a Palestinian friend who sends her olive oil from Palestine. We dipped the bread in the olive oil as a prayer for peace. Little did we know that war would break out between Israel and Palestine with thousands of innocent lives killed in attacks and retaliations the following Sunday.

I am not an expert on the history of the region, and I am not educated enough to speak on behalf of either

side. What I don't know could fill volumes, and I have been guilty of keeping silent because I have felt inadequate to speak. However, that may just be the problem. Yes, I need more education, but I also need to speak out more about what I do know. And what I know is that extremist groups do not represent, speak, or act for the entirety of a people.

Just like Fundamentalist Right Wing Evangelical Christians do not represent me or the whole of us, Hamas does not represent the whole of the Palestinian people and Zionist extremists do not represent the whole of Israel. I know that using dehumanizing language to describe any group of people makes all manner of atrocities against them permissible. I know that regardless of the



depth and breadth of the conflict, acts of revenge against innocents turns you into the same kind of monsters you fight against. I also know that regardless of which side you are on, people want to live in peace.

Maybe dipping Israeli Challah bread in Palestinian olive oil is too small and insignificant a thing for such a big geo-political problem, but it is so much more than staying silent and doing nothing at all. And maybe if we can imagine peace, we can work together to accomplish it.

May you live into the title of Peace Makers today and every day.

When My Heart Comes Home Again

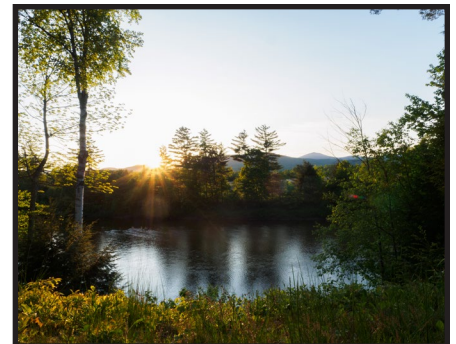
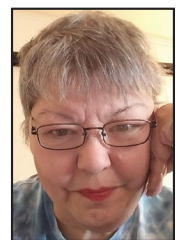
BY LINDA CALLANDER

When my heart comes home again
Dry and tattered, seeking solace
And weary with its wandering
I will hold it tenderly
and sing to it.
Love songs.
Lullabies.
Now there is only an aching,
raw place where it used to beat.
Not an inch for comfort.

When my heart comes home again
And it must, it must, or
I will remain this husk rattling in the
wind
I will feed it with soft, sweet things
And sips of tea
Made from blossoms and berries
So it will know it's safe here now.

When my heart comes home again
I will tell it stories, and
Read poems and we will spend time
together
sitting under trees
remembering.

Pastor Linda Callander is the Licensed Pastor at the Church of the South West Desert in Silver City, New Mexico. She wrote this poem shortly after losing her partner, Jim Larsen to cancer.



Saco River—Photo by Christiaan Kandel

Gun Violence: Myths vs. Facts

BY ROBERT MCCLUSKEY

In 2019 the Swedenborgian Church voted to endorse the National Council of Churches' Resolution and Call to Action on Gun Violence. The original resolution was created in 2010 and reaffirmed in 2017.¹ The line that still stands out for me is, "We have become a nation at war with ourselves and numbed to the sacredness of human life."

It is in the spirit of our endorsement—our commitment to address the issue of gun violence—that I share with readers the following points from the Brady Campaign.² Of course, simply knowing these facts will do little to prevent gun violence; but being clear on the issue is a critical first step for those interested in moving forward.

Myth: We have a mental health problem, not a gun problem.

Fact: We have an access to lethal means problem.

Comment: Far too many people have access to guns. And statistically, those with mental health issues are more likely to be *victims* than perpetrators of a lot of crimes.

Myth: Prohibited purchasers don't follow laws, so more gun laws won't help.

Fact: Statistics and evidence prove that gun laws work.

Comment: Gun deaths are extremely rare in countries that have implemented incentives or passed legislation to decrease the number of firearms in circulation.

Myth: More guns equal less crime—we need more good guys with guns.

Fact: If more guns equaled less crime, the U.S. would have one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

Comment: There are more guns than people in this country and yet the U.S. has the second-highest total gun deaths in the world, second only to Brazil.

Myth: Violence in video games, rap music and all kinds of media are to blame for gun violence

Fact: Studies have proven that media, music, and games do not cause gun violence.

Comment: People consume the same media around the world, but no other country in the world has the gun violence problem we do.

Myth: It's my Second Amendment right to own a gun, and any attempt to regulation leads to a destruction of my rights.

Fact: The Second Amendment has always allowed for sensible gun laws and regulations.

Comment: Public safety laws are an important part of the American way of life and common-sense gun violence prevention laws are *allowable* under the Second Amendment.³



Rev. Robert E. McCluskey was ordained into the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 1984. He currently administers rites and sacraments at Wayfarers Chapel near Los Angeles, California.

³ In 2021, I explored the issue of the Second Amendment in light of the NCC resolution. (See "Self Defense? – or Second Amendment Gone Awry?" *Messenger*, March 2021)

¹ <https://nationalcouncilofchurches.us/ncc-reaffirms-its-2010-resolution-on-gun-violence/>

² *The Brady Report*, Fall 2023. *Brady: United Against Gun Violence* is an American nonprofit organization that advocates for gun control and against gun violence. www.bradyunited.org

The 200th Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church

Swedenborg: Envisioning the Future

June 28 – July 2, 2024

We hope you can join us for the 200th Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention in East Lansing, Michigan this year!

- Convention will be June 28 – July 2 (this includes travel dates)
- Located at the Kellogg Hotel and Conference Center and Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan
- Event will utilize a mix of Hotel and University facilities
- Sail down the Grand River on the Michigan Princess riverboat for an outing where you can connect with old and new friends
- Join us for a post-convention celebration banquet the last night after our outing!
- Stay tuned for more details coming this winter!

More information will be shared on swedenborg.org!



The Michigan Princess Riverboat

Jesus Even Loves Latecomers

BY MICHAEL ROBBINS

Salvation through faith alone is discussed frequently among Christian organizations such as Swedenborgians, who wonder how some Christians testify that this faith must be obtained during life on earth. The controversy is centered around whether one can *only* access heaven by accepting (or saying they accept) a deity while living on this planet, and is addressed in my short, satire video, *Heaven Crashers* (<https://bit.ly/430rcmD>).

Stories from Beyond

For context and potential evidence, I reviewed dozens of near-death experiences (NDEs), which are more prevalent with modern life saving technology. We did not have such easy access to accounts of NDEs thirty years ago—just a few books in rare mystic stores down cobblestone streets. Today we can access thousands of NDE testimonials on nderf.org and YouTube. Many accounts of near-death experiences say that the way we treat one another is far more telling than the belief in Jesus in advance of meeting him.

The [National Library of Medicine](https://www.nlm.nih.gov/) (NLM) says 83% of people who nearly (permanently) died report nothing. Some of the 17% who have an experience share enlightening discoveries! The 2014 study says nine out of fourteen *blind from birth* subjects had detailed vision. “This is also further evidence that NDEs are not a product of what NDErs would have expected to occur during a life-threatening event.”

Life Review

Many NDEs involve life reviews, which are typically described more elaborately than a flashing before the eyes. Emanuel Swedenborg and NDEs teach that life reviews are uncomfortable but necessary to purify us. The

prevalence of life reviews in NDEs suggest that it is not enough to believe in the existence of something – one must repent. Said otherwise, our capacity to acknowledge the universal connection may require the life review.

We did not have such easy access to accounts of NDEs thirty years ago—just a few books in rare mystic stores down cobblestone streets.

Former atheist Nancy Rynes on *Megyn Kelly TODAY* reported being educated for some time in a glorious pre-heaven. Initially Rynes thought, “If I died, then why am I here (heaven) because I don’t believe any of this?” Arguably she may not have been in Heaven proper, but it was a place of love, beauty, and included a life review. Another former atheist, Betty Guadagno, reported initially being mad that she was wrong, before being overcome with the feeling of wholeness.

The way these life reviews occur is more consistent than other parts of NDEs. Life reviews in NDEs are usually described as self-judgment in the company of compassionate beings, where humbly asking for and accepting forgiveness is necessary, but not all agree.

NDE Denial

NDEs are not 100% consistent, and NLM reported 4% of subjects encountered beings in the “after life” who were alive at the time of the NDEs, consistent with the findings of the [Kelly study](#).

A frequently cited research report to disprove NDEs is based on the drug DMT, which is related to Ayahuasca, a psychedelic. The study excluded dark NDEs, and the placebo group

had a higher prevalence of a “life review” than those subject to DMT. Allen O. wrote in May 2023 on NDERF, “I’ve used every psychedelic out there. I don’t [know] why people say DMT is like a near death experience. It’s not. Nothing comes close to what I experienced.” A review of a dozen Ayahuasca trips did not demonstrate the same consistency among documented NDEs.

A 2014 study at Michigan Medicine monitored the brain activity of four patients being pulled from life support. A May 2023 review of the data by the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences described a three-minute surge in gamma wave brain activity in two of the four subjects. It not only speaks to the inconsistency that exists, but also to the small number of subjects necessary to make headlines on this topic.

If NDEs were just the misfirings of the mind due to oxygen deprivation, wouldn’t there be some NDEs that go from euphoria to blackness to awakening? Those who briefly entered heaven are frequently told, “It’s not your time; you have more work to do,” *just prior* to them awakening in their resurrected bodies. Such consistency encouraging being of *use* is more Swedenborgian than indicative of mental malfunctions. There was no explanation for how detailed thoughts occur for a half hour after brain-death or numerous reports of activities outside of the room.

Some churches have taken the time to warn against books and movies suggesting that near-death experiences prove anything, possibly because the evidence contradicts some of their interpretations of scripture. Such a contradiction includes the notion that good souls are cast down to

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Even Loves Latecomers

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hell for their late patronage to Jesus, discounting the love and compassion of the Lord. Those that attempt to recruit through the falsity that corporeal acceptance of Jesus is a necessity may ironically drive some away. The number of Americans who claimed membership in a religious organization contracted by about 14% from 2012–2017, while those who meditated tripled during that time period.

A more sinister outcome of preaching salvation through faith alone, without genuinely embracing repentance, is that one gains entitlement to cruelty and selfishness because they have said the magic words of “I accept Jesus.” The exaltation of faith above charity is discussed in AC I: 329 and elsewhere in Swedenborg. It would seem from NDE testimonials that if one loves charity to the neighbor while on the earth, it is not too late to have a “coming to Jesus moment” after crossing over. God is good.

Escaping from Hell

The NDE experiences on YouTube frequently describe extreme states of bliss or sometimes torture. It is reported that about 15% of NDEs are dark and include hellish experiences. Some of them include the individual going from hell to heaven before their earthly resurrection. Many whose NDE began in hell will transition to heaven upon calling out to God or Jesus. In the case of M.K. McDaniel who presented at the International Association for Near Death Studies (IANDS) in Seattle, Washington, in October 2022, it was singing “Away in a Manger.” When this happens to self-proclaimed atheists, it dismantles the notion that accepting Jesus while on earth is the *only* way to reach the Lord. Notwithstanding the beauty and power of faith, even in its mortal definition, there may be

limits to how much a human can consistently believe or not believe in any one thing.

Such a contradiction includes the notion that good souls are cast down to hell for their late patronage to Jesus, discounting the love and compassion of the Lord.

Still Growing

The top, most relevant near-death experience YouTube video has only 20 million views. The next most popular has had six million views. This isn't much considering the importance of their collective message. Life after death?!?! Those of us who have indulged in these testimonials not only enjoy the ability to push forward along the *continuum of faith*, but it can start to feel like *knowledge from evidence*.

So why is the U.S. Christian church shrinking with increasing access to evidence? Is it that the Christian brand has become too associated with exclusion and judgment? Is it because the masses associate the brand with “salvation through faith alone,” and know it doesn't make sense? Or maybe those who weaponize faith for recruitment or judgment are yet to learn a more loving way to express themselves?


The real experts could be the exorcists, who say their power manifests through faith or confidence. Father Vincent Lampert, exorcist, said, “We're all going to struggle. Nobody's faith is 100% firm all the time...people will go through some periods of doubt. The point is they go *through*.”

Discovery

There are plenty of accounts of non-Christians who only discovered Jesus during their short deaths, and experienced heavenly delights. They often say His presence was so intense,

no introduction was needed. A Hindu man who met Jesus during an NDE begged to know what church, synagogue, or mosque he should go to before returning to earth, and Jesus told him it didn't matter and to love your family, don't lie, among other directives. This Hindu man, among others who also got a view of the dark side have commented on the despair in hell. They frequently describe *despair* as most undesirable emotion, which interestingly is opposite of *hope* and *faith*.

NDE survivor Michelle Clare said there is “a difference from believing in something and then experiencing it,” and described her NDE was an amplification process. Even if I call it knowledge, and someone else calls it faith, I suspect both of these words will seem inadequate in the afterlife.

Eighteenth century mystic Emanuel Swedenborg wrote about how the most enlightened angels think about faith. “[Angels of the innermost heaven] do not know what it is to believe or have faith, but say, ‘What is faith?’ and said, ‘It would be like someone seeing a garden with trees and fruit in it and telling someone that she should have faith that it was a garden and that those were trees and fruit when she could see them plainly with her own eyes.’ So, these angels never call ‘faith’ by name and in fact have no concept of it. This is why they do not try to figure out divine truths, much less argue whether any particular truth is true or not” (Heaven and Hell §270). 



Michaels Robbins lives in Washington state and currently serves as president of the Swedenborgian Spiritual Community of Puget Sound and serves on the Wayfarers Chapel board of directors.



Passages

Deaths

Freeman A. Schrock (1941–2023)



Inducted into the ministry of the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 2006

Freeman was raised in the Anabaptist tradition and enjoyed a long career as a

social worker. From a humble beginning, Freeman and his siblings were supported only through an eighth-grade education. As a young adult, he earned a G.E.D. high school certificate and kept going through a undergraduate college degree followed by a master's degree in Clinical Social Work that led to a long career as a social worker. Late in life he earned a master's in theology due to a late-midlife desire to be in ministry. After completing his theological education, he was ordained in the Orthodox Catholic Church of America (OCCA) in 2002 at the age of 61 and served a church in Michigan. Soon, however, he felt called homeward and returned to his beloved South Bend, Indiana. There he explored ministry work in various ways, one of which involved being a frequent pulpit preacher at the LaPorte New Church during a time when the church was between ministers. This continued for a time due to a difficulty in filling the position, and as the unofficial interim ministry continued a strong bond with the congregation grew in such a way that he began desiring to train for ministry in the Swedenborgian tradition, a goal that the congregation wholeheartedly encouraged. After being accepted into an induction path in 2004, he trained for two years with the Swedenborgian House of Studies, and his ordination was recognized and

Memorial Day

This gathering brought twelve young adults, ages 18–30, known as the Transitions group, together to not only provide service to the beautiful camp of Almont but to live and play with one another. This particular time was the first time Transitions and Teen retreats occurred at the same time and involved little combination with the exception of mealtimes and ultimate frisbee. Teens and transitions were also able to work side by side cleaning up after meals as well getting better acquainted with the future members of the Transitions groups. Our group took on the cleaning of the kindergarten classroom, the Survivor store, as well as the deep cleaning, to best of their ability, of the girls' dormitory. During our sessions, we took time to focus on two lines of the well-known song Building Daily Building, "while the moments fly" and "building for eternity," and what they mean to us as we transition into adulthood. Our outing was to the Armada flea market where we tried various foods that were offered by a main vendor as well as seeing all of the various trinkets that were being sold by local vendors. Many transitions came back with at least one thing they had purchased and the knowledge that they should carry cash to Almont just in case something like this happens again.

—Tammara Mounce,
Transitions Advisor

affirmed by the General Convention in 2006. The LaPorte New Church was the only Swedenborgian church Freeman served before retiring in 2012. Overall, he served the LaPorte church for eight years, counting from the time he first began as an every-Sunday preacher. ☒

Transitions 2023



Friendsgiving

The Transitions group of the SCNA came together for Friendsgiving to celebrate and give thanks for having each other and Almont in their lives. While we coexisted as normal, we took up the torch of winterizing camp which included turning off water and power to several of the buildings that aren't used during the upcoming season. Our group also took on the task of filling a fifteen yard roll off dumpster with items in desperate need of removal. Our leader, Tammara Mounce, put together an amazing feast with the help of many of our group that we were able to enjoy with several members of the church who joined to help us in our other tasks like Rev. Renee, Craig and Katie Carson, Heather and Jeff Oelker, as well as of course our amazing caretaker Lori Patana. Outside of work we enjoyed all the best aspects of camp like the fresh air around the lake, the rock (known from past camp activities) and the warm heat of Pfister lounge. We hope to make an annual practice of Friendsgiving and to have many more years of putting camp into hibernation and are grateful for being allowed to use the space this time around.

—Ronnie Viges,
Elected Scribe ☒

What's Happening

SWEDENBORGIANS IN ACTION



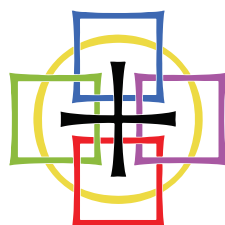
AGAINST RACISM

Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism

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/

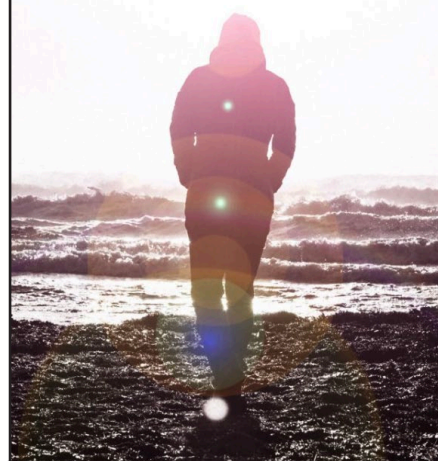
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Our Daily Bread at SpiritualQuesters.org is your resource for recent sermons, meditations, reflections, lessons, interviews, and original content from within and beyond the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



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

**Click the YouTube logo above
to subscribe!**

Editor's Corner

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became a contestant on *RuPaul's Drag Race* and watching this show not only brings me happiness and laughter, but listening to how Mama Ru interacts and talks to his contestants I find emotionally healing. He regularly brings up dealing with one's own "inner saboteur" and boy does that resonate with me. So much is in your head when trying to accomplish things, and when they get tough, you very often listen to that inner saboteur that's in the back of your head saying, "you aren't good enough" or "you can't do that." RuPaul reminds them to "fight her—she's a liar!" I try to listen to Ru, too. The men from *Queer Eye* on Netflix have had a similar effect on me.

I've watched the first iteration of *Queer Eye* and the current one. The first series also held the tagline "for the straight guy" while the newer season takes on all types of people. They not only help makeover people's lives on the outside, but they also take time to work with them on self-care on the inside. They reiterate to all types of people who are going through, or have overcome, great obstacles how important it is to take care of yourself. That, if you can't take care of yourself and manage your own needs in life, you can't truly give and care for others. And boy, is this something I need to hear regularly. I watch episodes from both shows over and over, to keep reminding me how to manage that inner saboteur and self-care, so I can strive to be my best self.

There are other things that bring me joy—books, yarn, and video games—to name a few. But these are the pockets that remind me how to be my best self, that others feel this way too, and that life is good—especially with kids, cats, and queens.

—Beki Greenwood

Messenger@swedenborg.org

Employment Opportunities

Ministerial Call: Church of the Holy City — Edmonton, Alberta

Please accept this as a call for pastoral services for the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian) located in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. Hopefully, this letter will provide you with adequate knowledge to encourage you to consider applying for this ministry opportunity.

Edmonton is the capital of our province of Alberta. It has all the diverse amenities that major cities have. Edmonton is famous for West Edmonton Mall, which was once the world's largest shopping center, the Edmonton Oilers professional hockey team, the Edmonton International Fringe Festival for Theater Arts, the Street Performers festival, the Heritage Days Festival, and numerous musical concerts and venues to name just a few attractions. This northern city has four very distinct seasons which allow people to enjoy a wide range of activities throughout the year, such as hiking, biking, skiing, swimming, golfing, and curling. You are encouraged to google "Edmonton, Alberta" to further appreciate all that it has to offer.

Our Church is located in the Edmonton community of Killarney. The church building was built in 1959 and flourished in the early 60s within a community that was also developing at that time. The church appealed to the local community members as it afforded an opportunity for children to attend a Sunday school nearby. Several years ago, a gentleman by the name of Paul Tremblay donated prime land on the Upper Mann Lake, a few hours north of Edmonton, to develop a Church Camp called Paulhaven. The church has developed camp facilities for summer retreats which in the past proved very popular.

The community has now matured, children have grown up, many have moved away and most of the original members of the church are deceased. We have experienced a significant reduction in our membership. We no longer have a Sunday school, and Sunday services have only a few attendees. The reduced numbers have impacted the church's income, and we have become heavily dependent on support from the Western Canada Conference and our biannual opportunity

to participate in a local casino. There has also been a decline in the use of Paulhaven.

The Church is looking for a pastor with a vision to revitalize and energize our Church. We see this as an opportunity for an individual to reconnect the community and families with the Church. The task will be an arduous one. The person considering this position will need to be blessed with great energy and creativity. This truly will need to be a calling and the kind of challenge that will be fulfilling to the individual and the congregation.

We require an individual who could work in Canada, due to visa and immigration restrictions. Wages will be discussed as to full or part-time services. There is no housing available but there are many rental opportunities in both Edmonton and surrounding communities. ☰

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