



Swedenborgian Church Youth League

Teens Explore the Universal Human at the SCYL Memorial Day Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

Fourteen SCYL teens, along with fourteen young adult Transitions group members, gathered at Almont retreat center over Memorial Day weekend to attend the annual spring retreat. The teens stayed in Heritage Hall, while the young adults resided in the dormitory. The teens attend spiritual sessions while, the young adults primarily spent their time improving the retreat facility. They did extensive work weeding and clearing out the firepit area, along with numerous other tasks around the grounds of the camp. Teens and young adults gathered for meals in the dining hall.

The teen group really connected at this retreat. The teens seemed to feel more comfortable sharing personal experiences and expressing their concerns and troubles. I felt that they really supported each other. We had four new teens who had never attended a retreat before. Two of those teens had never even met any of the other teens before. They were quite anxious about attending at first, but all it took was a volleyball to welcome them in! Once they started bumping the ball around

in a circle with the other teens, they felt included. I'm so proud of how all the SCYL teens made the newcomers feel like they belonged in this community.



Memorial Day Retreat Teens! Top row (left to right): Lilly C., Nora, Zsa Zsa, Caroline, Trent, Serena, and Elin. Bottom row: Bedo, Charlie, Ellie, Micah, Abby, and Lily S. Grayson in the front.

The Universal Human was our retreat theme. I started the retreat off with a discussion about the afterlife and heaven. We talked about how all of heaven is made up of angels that were people that lived on earth. Then we moved into a conversation on how heaven is organized. We talked about the heavenly and spiritual kingdoms, but quickly jumped into the concept of heaven organized into the form of a human. We read from Emanuel Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* §65

and learned, "In general, the highest or third heaven forms the head down to the neck, the middle or second forms the torso, and the lowest or first forms the feet to the very soles and also the arms all the way to the fingers." Next, from *Heavenly Secrets* §2996, we heard "all things in the human body have a correspondence to those in heaven; insomuch that there is not the smallest particle in the body, to which something spiritual and celestial does not correspond. The universal heaven is also called the Universal Human; and hence one society belongs to one province of the body, another to another,

and so on." We ended the session talking about each of the eleven major systems in the human body and how each of these systems form their own kingdom and have a heavenly use. For example, those spirits in the nervous system control and disseminate information and manage feedback from the other kingdoms. Acting like individual nerve cells, these angels monitor, listen, and respond to other angel's thoughts and intentions throughout

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Editor's Corner



Falling Into October

As usual, I'm finding it hard to believe that it is October already. Enjoying the erratic New Eng-

land weather where you need to be prepared for three seasons in one day—could be forty-nine degrees, or eighty; blazing sun then pouring rain. You just never know. I personally like it. Today is rainy, gloomy, with some thunder which means my house stays dim with some cozy cats. A favorite kind of day.

So I'm snuggling with one of my cats, enjoying my morning coffee with a nice rumbly rain outside, fall YouTube fireplace on my TV, scrolling through the Facebook memories... and a picture from six years ago comes up. My daughter, Serena, was in second grade and I brought her over to the Duxbury SCYL retreat to see the teens who she had made friends with and looked up to at Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA). It was such a happy image to see come through since she right now is counting down the minutes until the



When favorite, timely memories pop-up on Facebook—playing games with Trevor and the SCYL teens of six years ago, now still her friends as teens and young adults!

upcoming Duxbury retreat, which will be her first fall retreat now that she is thirteen. As you will read in this issue of *the Messenger*, she has become very active in the SCYL since turning thirteen in February. This group of kids is so connected and they communicate all the time. And it's so cool to see.

I sound like that *old mom* when I talk to her and tell her how lucky she is because “back in my day” we had to write letters and pay for long distance phone calls to communicate with each other. We (my younger brother and I) lived for attending the retreats with our church friends, most who we only saw at camps (FNCA and Blairhaven). Now, not a day goes by where she isn't texting with one of them, video call (none of the kids just use “the phone”), or group Snapchat. It's awesome. What

the Messenger

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an amazing support system they are all growing up with. Next year, my son will turn thirteen the first night of the fall retreat, and it's already a big topic of conversation in our house.

It's so special that in our small denomination we can continue to get far flung teens together every season. Hopefully, I don't have to pack the bags for three New England seasons in one weekend this time!

—Beki Greenwood
messenger@swedenborg.org



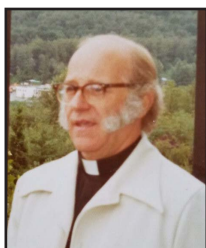
Message from the President

Celebrating Our Chaplains

The Year of the Word: 2024–25

The professional path of chaplaincy gives rise to powerful ministry roles in the Swedenborgian Church of North America—the only branch of worldwide Swedenborgianism that supports chaplaincy as an official category of ordained ministry. Though we may be the only Swedenborgian denomination to honor and support chaplaincy ministry in this way, we nevertheless share this mission with many other Christian denominations and major faith traditions who also support the training and placement of skilled professionals in the crucial ministry spaces chaplains often find themselves.

Chaplains provide pastoral care and support in some of the most challenging places and situations where people need spiritual care, and we have Swedenborgian ministers serving in hospitals, hospice ministries, homeless ministries, and the military as official chaplains. The work of chaplains encompasses the resilient presence of care with those dealing in various levels of crisis and pain. Delivering a thoughtful and loving presence, chaplains are often unseen and unsung rescuers for those most in need of care.



Rev. Dr. Cal Turley

Chaplaincy as a ministry option entered our denomination through the vision and expertise of Rev. Dr. Cal Turley (1924–1984), who taught pastoral care and counseling for fifteen years at the Swedenborg School of Religion. Beginning in the 1970s, he pioneered new

tracks of ministry formation in the seminary curriculum and ministry degree requirements to include chaplaincy and pastoral counseling as possible options for seminarians in training. Certified chaplaincy training offered future ministers the option either of serving as chaplains part-time in addition to serving a congregation or as full-time chaplains in an institutional setting or chaplaincy organization.

Because of Dr. Turley's vision and support, our denomination has now trained approximately twenty ministers who have served or are currently serving as chaplains in various settings, and currently at least three students at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies are showing interest in developing some level of chaplaincy work within their ministry vision and options. This means that chaplaincy is the second most common site of working in ministry after congregational leadership.

Today, the vision and need for this ministry path continues to evolve. In the present tense of our seminary, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies has become a major player shaping a new chapter for The Chaplaincy Institute in Berkeley, which has long been associated with

the Graduate Theological Union of which we are a part. Our Dean, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, has been foundational in recent planning and is currently co-teaching "Death Theologies and Rituals in Chaplaincy" with Rev. Kamal Abu-Shamsieh, Director



Dr. Rebecca Esterson

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Memorial Day Retreat

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all of heaven.

Rev. Renée Machiniak and Rev. Kit Billings led the teens on a trip through the digestive tract! We discovered that the way food enters the human body and is transformed into energy is a magnificent illustration of how new souls are birthed into the spiritual world and taken up into a heavenly community. In the first contact of the lips and mouth, we are lovingly and warmly received into the afterlife. Those new spirits that are exceptionally sweet and good are ready for heaven and are immediately absorbed into the heavenly bloodstream of love and wisdom. Most spirits travel on to the stomach and small intestines, entering the world of spirits, where the interiors of these newcomers are opened while their exteriors are broken down and removed. Many angels are digested into heaven here. Some more hardened souls make their way all the way through the large intestines to the rectum, where at that point, there is

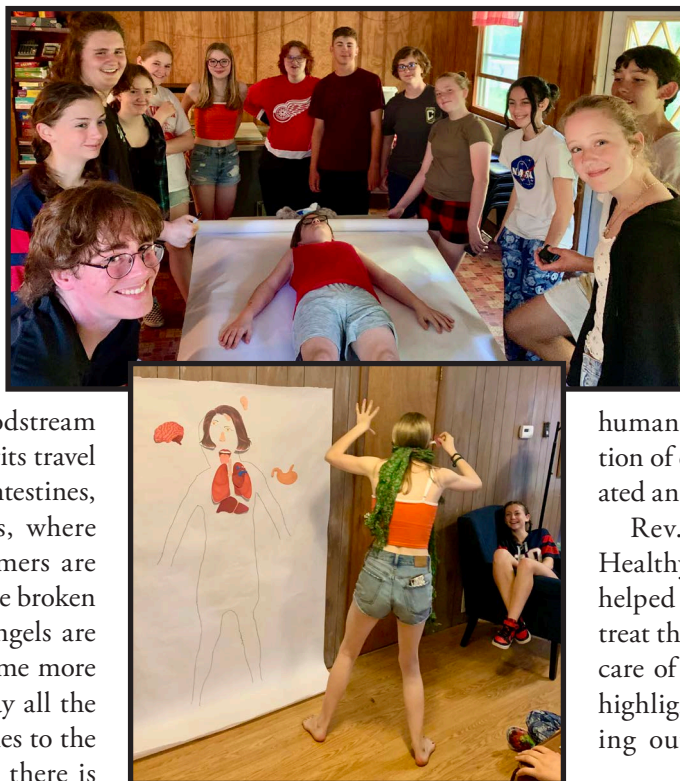
little remaining love of goodness and truth. These spirits enjoy vile pleasures and offenses and are unfortunately expelled into the hells. Learning about traversing the digestive system helped us better understand how to tenderize the tough, rougher side of ourselves and gave us insights into what areas we might try to adopt sweeter, healthier,

and more satisfying life choices.

Heather Oelker and I led a fun activity where we learned about the functions of the major bodily organs and what activities angels in that community perform. We traced the youngest teen, Grayson, (hence tracin' Grayson, image center) on a roll of paper. Then, we hid paper images of the organs, and the teens hunted for them. Next, we blindfolded the teens, and one by one, they took turns trying to pin the paper organ on the traced human (image below). Thankfully, when our silly mixed-up human was complete, Katie Carson, a certified nurse practitioner, rearranged the organs into a more anatomically correct human. Lastly, we reviewed the function of each organ and what the associated angels do in that region of heaven.

Rev. Renée led a session titled Healthy Mind, Body, and Spirit. She helped the teens understand how to treat their bodies right and how taking care of your body helps your spirit. A highlight from her session was a calming outside meditation on blankets

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Fall SCYL Teen Retreat

"Buried Treasure, Hidden Gems, and Heavenly Secrets"

Duxbury, Massachusetts, October 11 – 14

The SCYL is thrilled to announce an upcoming retreat. The retreat will run from 7:00 PM, Friday, October 11, to 10:00 AM, Monday, October 14, at the [Cedar Hill Retreat Center](#) in Duxbury, Massachusetts. All teenagers ages 13 – 18 are invited. Cost is \$50 (scholarships are available) with a family maximum of \$100.

At this retreat, we will uncover divine truths and messages that help us on our path. It's an opportunity to share collected wisdom that feels spiritually resident to you throughout your life. Emanuel Swedenborg has his heavenly secrets, so let's start expanding our own personal journey (or journal) of heavenly secrets. This is a retreat where we will encourage looking a little harder to find the hidden gems or divine omens that steer our way. In short, how providence works in our lives for the best possible outcome. Of course, there will be plenty of time for recreation, relaxing, and hanging out with friends. To register, visit swedenborg.org. For more information, please contact Youth Director Kurt Fekete, kfekete@hotmail.com or 802-345-0169.

The SCYL Winter Retreat will be held at [Almont Retreat Center](#) in Allenton, Michigan from December 27 – 30.

Memorial Day Retreat

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under the morning sunshine.

Rev. Kit completed our spiritual discussions with a presentation on the five senses. We learned that sight represents an affection for intelligence, wisdom, and clarity; hearing corresponds to an affection for learning and obedience; smelling is an affection for perceiving; tasting represents an affection for knowing and experience; and lastly, touching is an affection for goodness and emotional connection.

Rev. Machiniak and Rev. Billings also provided our closing communion worship service (image right). Kit's message was heartfelt as he expressed the pain and the hardship that comes when the body is broken and needs the Lord's healing.

It was fun seeing so many friends and meeting new people. The sessions were very good and always had something entertaining to them. –Serena, 13

One of the teens at the retreat has type 1 diabetes. They were particularly interested in the pancreas, as theirs does not function properly. They said something like, "me and my stupid broken pancreas." The pancreas, you

may know, produces enzymes and hormones, like insulin. It also works with the spleen to refine and purify the blood. This teen was fascinated to learn more about the pancreas and hear that angels in the pancreas help spirits who are too engaged in small talk and idleness become more intelligent and hone their heavenly use. After spirits exit their time in the pancreas, they feel renewed and purer and wiser.

Our diabetic teen felt like they belonged in the pancreatic society. Learning about the Universal Human and the pancreas specifically helped them feel a bit better about themselves and their condition. That is what teen retreats are all about: learning and growing in an inviting, open, and accepting community who nurture and support each other.



We were blessed with beautiful weather, and aside from the many afternoon volleyball circles, we went on our annual Sunday outing to Lake Nepessing Golf and Country Club for a fun round of mini golf and go-karting! It is always a joy to watch and sometimes join in with the teens excitedly racing their go-karts around the track.

Thank you to all our wonderful staff at this retreat. Thank you to Tammara Mounce for cooking and leading the Transitions group, and to Almont facility manager Lori Patana for hosting the two groups. Thank you to all the parents and families for trusting us to care for your teens. And lastly, thank you to the teens for attending this retreat and for being so incredibly caring, kind, and supportive of the retreat leaders, and most importantly, to each other. 🙏

Kurt Fekete has been the Youth Director for the Swedenborgian Church of North America for over twenty years. He also currently serves as Vice President of the denomination.



Above: Lily putts with her mini-golf teammates, Zsa Zsa, Lilly, Serena, and Charlie.

Right: Nora takes the lead with Abby, Jeff, and Zsa Zsa close behind!



A Swedenborgian Attorney Launched the Slavery Trial of the Century: The Dred Scott Case and Francis Butter Murdoch

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

The American attorney and newspaper publisher Francis Butter Murdoch (1808–1882), who helped organize the first Swedenborgian congregation in St. Louis, also saved Harriet and Dred Scott's slavery freedom case from never happening. Due to their lack of funds, the Scotts had several attorneys drop their case, reports Lea VanderVelde, a professor at the University of Iowa College of Law, in *Mrs. Dred Scott: A Life on Slavery's Frontier* (Oxford University Press, 2009). Murdoch, at the same time he was organizing the first Swedenborgian church in that city, was the most active attorney filing freedom cases for African Americans, and he took the Scotts' case essentially pro bono. Here's what we know.

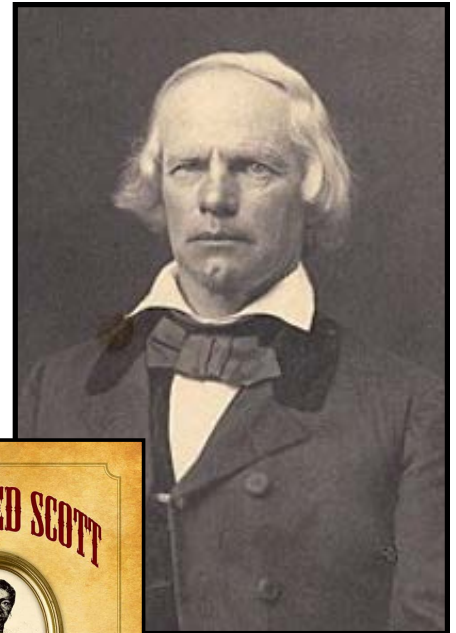
Religion Played a Part

It appears Christian faith did play a role in the Scotts connecting with Murdoch. Of the two Scotts, Harriet became much more active in a Black Baptist church in St. Louis and had many more social connections beyond that through her work as a laundress. The spiritual leader of her church was Rev. John Meachum, who worked together with his sons in a profitable barrel-making business through whose profits they would buy slaves so they could work off the debt into freedom. Meachum believed buying freedom was a better route to liberty than suing or escaping, but nevertheless, his church was a hotbed of lawsuit activities, and Harriet was one of several church members who sought their freedom through the work of St. Louis lawyer Francis B. Murdoch. He had already successfully represented at least

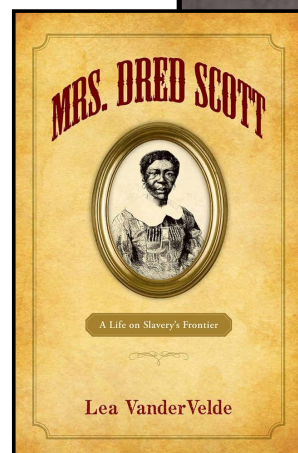
sixteen other plaintiffs in freedom suits. The Scotts, however, had tried several other attorneys who all quit on them because they could pay little to no money.

At this time, Murdoch was also busy organizing a new religious group in the region—the Swedenborgians—and hosting outreach discussion meetings in his home. That fledgling group would go on to become the First Society of The New Jerusalem in that city. In J. Thomas Scharf's 1883 book, *History of Saint Louis City and County, from the Earliest Periods to the Present Day including Biographical Sketches of Representative Men* (v. 2, p. 1,741), Francis B. Murdoch is listed as a member of the First New Jerusalem Society of St. Louis, the same church that still exists today as Church of the Open Word in the suburb of Creve Coeur under the leadership of Pastor Paul Deming.

Murdoch was known to work without much or any pay because, both as an attorney and as a writer, he worked fervently for civil rights and dismantling the detestable institution of slavery. It was his special cause, and he is now known by legal historians precisely for his inordinately large number of freedom lawsuit filings—a business approach that ultimately left him destitute enough that he needed to foreclose on all his local interests and leave the area and move to Berrien Springs, Michigan to start over. However, he is



Above: Francis Butter Murdoch
Left: Cover image of Lea VanderVelde's book.



the one who saved the case, pushing through all the proper legal

groundwork for the filing and maintaining its standing. He filed one-third of all freedom lawsuits in the federal court of St. Louis up until his financial failure in the summer of 1846. In the historical archives of Berrien Springs, a lot assigned to Francis Butter Murdoch was designated for a New Jerusalem church.

After a few years in Berrien Springs, he moved to San Jose, California, where he would live for the last thirty-six years of his life—notably, editing and publishing the *San Jose Telegraph*, which is today *The San Jose Mercury News*, San Jose's major daily. He also founded the *San Jose Patriot*, his

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Francis Butter Murdoch

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own daily that ran from 1867 to 1876. While we don't know his religious thoughts after leaving Missouri, we do know he was avid enough about the Swedenborgian movement at the time of taking on Harriet and Dred Scott's case that he was on the ground floor of organizing what is today our church ministry in that city.

Murdoch's Scathing Critique of the Supreme Court's Dred Scott Decision

The Dred and Harriet Scott case in St. Louis that Murdoch saved and launched ultimately went to the Supreme Court with another attorney and resulted in the infamous [Dred Scott decision issued on March 6, 1857](#), and penned by the Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger B. Taney in a 7–2 decision (Justices McLean and Curtis delivered dissenting opinions). Citing several Constitutional and statutory case laws, the highest court declared African descent people whether free or slave, are not and cannot be citizens of the United States within the meaning of the Constitution, and that holding citizenship in a free state does not automatically render a person a citizen of the United States.

The next month in the *San Jose Telegraph* in its April 28, 1857, issue, Murdoch decimated the majority opinion point-by-point in a fashion now widely seen as correct. After listing the primary legal arguments made by Taney, Murdoch concludes,

This decision is adverse to and reverses a whole host of legal decisions not only in the Supreme Court of the United States, but also innumerable decisions made by Courts in the Slave States. It is adverse to the opinions of the great array of great and good men who have controlled this Government in political operation

from its foundation to the present time. It, in fact, inaugurates a Revolution, which will be more potent in its consequences than that which ever arms have affected. Henceforth, Republicans, be a Minute Man. The battle has but begun. Your leaders in the great States are in council. The banner of Freedom is yet borne aloft in the Republican ranks, and accursed be the traitor who ever trails it before the Juggernaut of Slavery.

This case became the most important legal battle leading up to the Civil War. While the South gloated that its position had become the law of the land, the Dred Scott decision fueled fury among freedom forces and dramatically pushed the country closer toward the outbreak of the American Civil War. The case demolished the delicate agreement between slave and free states and produced a national rage. Another Midwest attorney, Abraham Lincoln, vehemently protested the Dred Scott ruling and would be running for president. He believed the Dred Scott ruling immorally stripped enslaved people of their humanity and validated evil. Today the Dred Scott case is taught as the legal line in the sand marking a point of no return from what became a Civil War.

Murdoch Has Never Appeared in Our Archives... Until Now

This Swedenborgian lawyer, Francis Butter Murdoch, could not be found in our archives either in Berkeley or Urbana. The reason seems clear: Murdoch's activity organizing the first Swedenborgian ministry in St.



Dred and Harriet Scott circa 1857.

Louis occurred before records or histories were being attempted in that city. Murdoch grew up in Bedford, Pennsylvania, where a New Church Society sprouted during Murdoch's youth, but other than mentions in early documents, no actual records survive from that community. Murdoch's final thirty-six years in San Jose put him a day's trip by stagecoach to two Swedenborgian churches, and it will be worth taking a little time to explore the archives there for any mention or connection.

Dewey Murdick, a local historian in Berrien Springs, Michigan, first unearthed this story by researching the earliest plat owners of the fledgling town of Berrien Springs and finding one plat originally owned by Francis Butter Murdoch that was specifically dedicated "for a Christian church of the New Jerusalem denomination." Intrigued, Mr. Murdick began communicating with historians in our church that, in addition to me, include Sue Ditmire and Pastor Robbin Ferriman, who are both currently involved in administering our denominational archives that last year were moved from Boston, Massachusetts, to Urbana, Ohio. Their further research uncovered Francis's close connection to the Murdoch clan that was active in the

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The Year of the Word

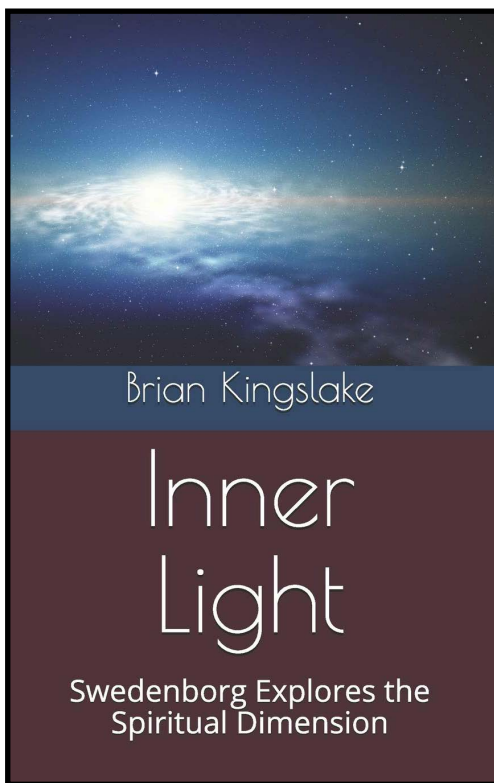
The Word and the Bible Are Not Identical

BY BRIAN KINGSLAKE

ADAPTED BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

Swedenborg's eyes were opened into the spiritual world so that he could tell us about life after death. But an even more important purpose was that he should reveal for us the spiritual sense of the Word of God. Most people recognize that the sacred scriptures are intensely symbolic and allegorical, but nobody seems to have had a clear understanding of a consecutive internal sense, giving life to the literal sense as a soul gives life to its body. Only after death do we become fully conscious of this deeper sense, but Swedenborg, with his unique insight into the spiritual world, was able to bring to us the basic structure of spiritual thought in the divine Word.

The inner sense of the literal text deals exclusively with spiritual concepts and is primarily intended for the angels in Heaven; thus, it is far beyond the capacity of any one of us on earth to comprehend it fully; but Swedenborg has demonstrated the existence of a spiritual sense and has given us a foretaste of it, which is like sunlight shining through clouds. The many volumes he wrote touching on the spiritual meaning of Genesis, Exodus, and Revelation, with thousands of cross-references to other parts of the



Word, demonstrate the consistency of the inner sense of the Word throughout sacred scripture.

Not all books in our English Bible, however, encompass an inner spiritual sense placed within them. Some books of the standard Bible are more thoroughly human writings—good and useful, no doubt, but not actually part of what Swedenborg calls The Word (as

a subset within the Bible). In *Arcana Coelestia* §10325, Swedenborg writes, “The books of the Word are all those that have an internal sense; and those that do not have an internal sense are not the Word. The Word in the Old Testament include Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, I Samuel, II Samuel, I Kings, II Kings, Psalms, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi, and in the New Testament include Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Revelation.”

Rev. Brian Kingslake (1907–1995) traveled the world, often vagabond style as young man, to experience many cultures before he settled down to training in theological school for ministry and ultimately serving churches on three continents and also for

publishing several books ranging from children's books to serious theology. This column has been adapted from his book, *Inner Light: Swedenborg Explores the Spiritual Dimension*.



The spiritual meaning is the primary thing that makes the Word spiritual, not only for people but also for angels. The Word communicates with the heavens through that meaning. Because the Word is inwardly spiritual, it was written entirely in correspondences. Anything that is written in correspondences has an outermost meaning that is written in a style like the one used by the prophets, by the Gospel writers, and in the Book of Revelation. Although that style appears poor, nevertheless it conceals within itself divine wisdom and all angelic wisdom. —Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity*, §194

Employment Opportunities

Bath New Church Seeks Minister

The Bath Church of the New Jerusalem seeks a part-time minister who would like to relocate to the picturesque coast of Maine.



The historic City of Bath is located on the pristine Kennebec River, thirty miles north of Portland, Maine. The beautiful four-mile sands of Popham Beach are but a few miles east of Bath on the Atlantic Ocean.

Bath is proud of its long history of shipbuilding. "Bath Built Is Best Built" is the slogan of Bath Iron Works (BIW), builder of hundreds of destroyers that have protected America since 1884 and Maine's largest private employer, providing a livelihood for more than 5,000 men and women. BIW was founded by a Swedenborgian, Thomas W. Hyde.

The Bath New Church building has been in continuous use by Swedenborgians since it was built in 1843. With the writings of Emanuel Swedenborg as our guide, we offer

spiritual seekers a unique perspective to better understand the Bible and to better live useful lives.

The ideal candidate will officiate and guide weekly scheduled worship services; provide pastoral visits to the church community; officiate at weddings, baptisms, and resurrection services; and oversee religious and educational programs.

Compensation is negotiable depending on experience and the particular skills and interests the candidate has to offer.

Please forward your cover letter, resume, a brief statement of your approach to growing the church, and a sample sermon no later than December 1, 2024 to:

**Bath Church of the
New Jerusalem
Pastoral Search
Committee**

P.O. Box 1139
Bath, Maine 04530

Or email our secretary:
Gretchen Goodine
mggoodine@msn.com
207-841-5070



Message from the President

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Rev. Jay Barry

of Interreligious Chaplaincy Program and Assistant Professor of Practical Theology. Rev. Jay Barry, inducted into our ministry this past summer and Staff Chaplain

at Thomas Jefferson University Hospital in Philadelphia, is collaborating and working with CSS and our denomination in strengthening the chaplaincy options for ministry for Swedenborgian clergy.

I celebrate the effort and vision that our beloved church has given to train and support such caregivers in our hurting world. All these caregivers serve as Swedenborgian trained helpers for many dealing with the most trying of circumstances. We serve in these vital moments not to make a name for our church but to serve God in providing divine love and wisdom as best we can to those in great need for it. So, I celebrate all our chaplains for their compassion and applaud them for their hard work.

—Jim Lawrence
president@swedenborg.org

Francis Butter Murdoch

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Urbana area and at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. Francis Murdoch's niece, [Florence Murdoch](#), was a long-time participant at the Fryeburg summer camp and funded the Murdoch Cabin still in loving use there.

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence is the president of the Swedenborgian Church of North America. Prior to serving as president, he was the dean of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies for over twenty years.

A Very Churchy Summer

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

As we settle back into school and our busy fall schedule, I keep finding myself reflecting on our summer. For the first time, my kids and I attended not only convention, but both Almont and Fryeburg camps too. The extended time we get to spend with our Swedenborgian community is so important to us—it forms bonds that will last a lifetime. It was a crazy busy summer of travel and adventure and it flew by. It was totally worth the exhaustion.

We (my husband, Jason, and I) are lucky that both our kids are great travellers. My daughter, Serena, having recently traveled to Detroit for the Memorial Day retreat, was already an expert at the Massachusetts to Michigan journey. We planned an early flight to get to Michigan State University at a reasonable time in the afternoon. Lucky for us both, Rev. Kevin Baxter and his two sons, Ephraim and Zeb, were on the same early flight as us. It was so nice to be able to travel together and handle "kids in an airport" together.

After an easy flight and a snooze on the Michigan Flyer bus, we arrived at the Kellogg Hotel. Serena immediately connected with Office Manager

Brittany's daughter Calliope, who had never attended Convention before—and off they went. My son, Nate, was thrilled to be in a hotel room with TV and internet where he could unwind while I went to work. It was really great for us as a family to be in a hotel at convention.

As more and more people arrived, the kids quickly found their groups to reconnect with. Many of the teens had just been together at the SCYL retreat, and it was like they had never been apart. Nate and the younger kids remembered being together at the Bridgewater Convention and had a wonderful time being back with each other.

I love watching all the kids connect with one another and put together their worship services. But I also love reconnecting with my friends and co-workers. There's nothing like bonding over executing a huge event. Working closely with Brittany, Rudy, Jennifer, and Emily the past couple years has made Convention not just work, but fun. And some of my favorite Convention moments happen in the free time after the day is over. There truly is no better way to end the day than with snacks and a good laugh with your spiritual family—and boy did we have some good laughs! What a blessing our Swedenborgian connections are.

After months of planning leading up to Convention, in the blink of an eye, it is time to go home. As we are packing up, Nate realized he left his

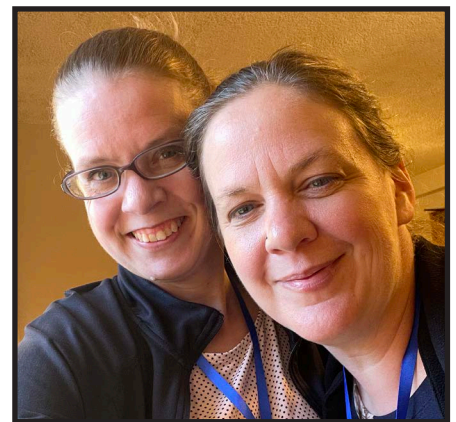
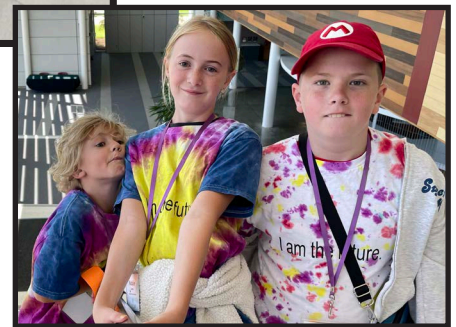


Above: Calliope (left) and Serena had never met before Convention and became instant friends.

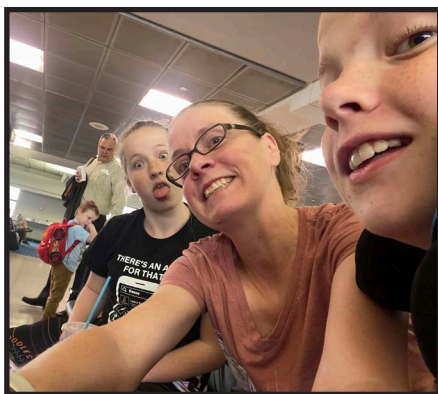


Left: Charlie, Serena, Calliope, and Micah were the early arrival teens and had a great day together.

Below: Aiden, Natalie, and Nate had so much fun and were looking forward to seeing each other again at Almont.



Working with Brittany the past four years has been one of my favorite things about Convention. So thankful for our time as co-workers and forever friendship.



Waiting at the airport excited for Convention! We were on the same flight as the Baxter family (Kevin and Zeb behind us).

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A Churchy Summer

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backpack on this Michigan Princess, as he had been distracted by a nosebleed and finishing a game of hide and seek. After much strife and many emails, the bag was found by the Michigan Princess staff and retrieved by Ronnie, an Almont regular, who generously offered to bring it to Almont for us, where we would be in just a few short weeks.

I have wanted to go to Almont for years. But the circumstances were never quite right. This year with the way our schedules worked out, and my responsibility shift at the FNCA, we were able to make it happen. So back to the airport we went.

This time, joined by my niece Caroline, we met up on the same flight as Rev. Sage Cole and her sons, Theo and Zach. Another smooth flight to Detroit and we were picked up by Heather Oelker, and we were on our way.

It was kind of surreal for me to arrive at Almont. I've heard about it my whole life, have many friends who always talk about how much they love it. And there we were. We were greeted with open arms, dinner, and a full property tour. (The church camp junkie that I am, I was pretty excited for the tour.)

For all three of us, we all had friends already there, so it wasn't like we were completely walking into an unknown. For me, seeing so many young adults



Above: Back at the same airport, same gate, this time with my niece Caroline, and the Cole family. **Below:** My Middle Boys Dorm squad: Nando, Matt, Ben, Theo, and Nate, with Zeus and Charlie in the front.



Jim Lawrence helps Nate light the candles for morning chapel.



Ivy and Serena have been friends from FNCA since they were little. They were so excited to be together at Almont for the first time.

who had come to Fryeburg as teens, and how thrilled they were to see me there, fulfilling the promise I made to them—that I would eventually make it to Almont—was so heartwarming.

It was really nice to be at an event that I didn't have to help plan. But also, knowing how difficult it is to fill dorm parent staff positions at camp, I volunteered to be the Middle Boys (9–12 year olds) dorm mom. What a crew of characters! One of my favorite parts about being a dorm parent was getting to know my Little Boys dorm mom counterpart, Mckenna. I love when I meet new people at our Swedenborgian gatherings and it feels like we've always known one another. Mckenna was one of those for me, and so was Tirah Keal.

Though I had met Tirah and her husband Solomon at Convention, I didn't have the time there to get to know them. What a treat to get to spend a week at Almont together and discover what amazing humans they are. Sometimes you just get that, "I knew you in a past life" feeling—and it is amazing.

Being experts at "camp life," having attended FNCA their whole lives, the kids took right to the daily schedule. They had things to do all day long, and I was able to attend sessions and learn how to play Bridge (another highlight of my summer). Before we knew it, it was towards the end of camp, and we had made it to Survivor Day. Serena, being thirteen, was initiated into the



Getting to know Tirah and Soloman Keal this summer was definitely one of my highlights.

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group along with seven others who either turned thirteen in the past year or were new to camp. What a fun day full of costumes, silliness, and water balloons ending with a beautiful candlelight service in the Almont chapel.

And just like that, our week was over and we were getting ready to drive to FNCA with Katie and Ben. Katie called us the "New Margie and BJ" as we ferried kids overnight across the eastern time zone.

We arrived at FNCA just in time for a delicious turkey dinner for Sunday lunch—a welcome treat after a night of gas station snacks. It was another surreal arrival for me. It had probably been at least twenty years or so since I had arrived to FNCA after it had already started. Definitely a different feeling, but certainly not a bad one.

It was really fun to be at both camps with some of the same people. It was



Left: Though neither of us are "Almont Survivors," Rev. Jane and I shared a special moment popping balloons over Serena and Jane's granddaughter, Cam. **Lower Left:** Nothing like a good porch sit—we enjoyed the water balloon fight from a safe distance!

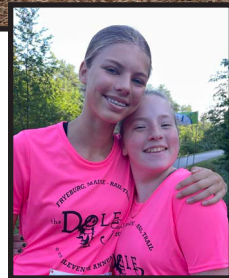


Right: Camp Director Craig gets pelted with water balloons by the young adults.



Above: Teamwork makes the dream work! Kurt and Zsa Zsa pick up Catherine and Sophia at the airport and Serena, Caroline and I meet them halfway to FNCA.

Below: Fryeburg teens take advantage of a rainy night and play Jackbox games online with the Almont teens.



Right: Serena and Genevieve only see each other a couple days a year, and always quickly reconnect.

especially nice for Nate to be able to spend so much time with two of his favorite people, Theo and Ben, both at Almont and the first week of Fryeburg. They have built nice friendships over the past several years at FNCA and had the best time spending two weeks together.

The first week of FNCA always flies right by. Great people, good lectures and discussions, beautiful weather, and of course lots of fun and laughs, make time just cruise on by. Oh, and more Bridge! There's nothing like playing cards at camp—one of my favorite camp activities. There is always a

shift of energy from week one to week two. It's neither good nor bad, but just a change. There were a lot fewer kids and teens week two, but we had some returning kids who had not been to camp in several years. But that is another beautiful thing about camp—it doesn't matter if you were there last year, two years ago, or twenty. You're always welcomed back, and it is like you never left.

Even though there were only seven kids in our combined group of ages 11–17, we had a great time. At the FNCA we've established a "Senior Spark" program that on sessions like this the Flames (teens) invite the older Sparks (kids twelve and under) on



Top Left: Katie and I arrive at the FNCA with a car full of people and things after a sixteen hour journey from Michigan to Maine! **Top Right:** A welcome FNCA porch sit with my spiritual sisters, Emily, Miriam, and Nancy.



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The Pearl of Great Price

BY DONNA KEANE

The “twelve gates” symbolize the knowledge of truth and good seen as a whole, which introduce us into the church. The “twelve pearls” also symbolize the knowledge of truth and good seen as a whole. This is why the gates were pearls. “Each of the gates was of one pearl” because all the knowledge of truth and good, which is symbolized by gates and pearls, relate to one piece of knowledge that contains them: the knowledge of the Lord (from Matthew 13:44–46, and *Apocalypse Revealed* §916).

Here is a very short but very beautiful parable that illustrates in a striking manner one of the essential truths of the Kingdom and its coming in human hearts. A merchant of pearls; some pearls; a pearl of great price. It is enough, for in these three portrayals an admirable lesson is given to us. Who among us has never seen a fine pearl? Its beauty, splendor, and worth seduces us at once. The spiritual truth of this parable is not only placed in the form, beauty, and richness of the pearl, but also in the manner with which it is fashioned by the oyster—that well-known mollusk which is so prized by many gourmets.

The oyster passes its life closely attached to a rock located near the coast. It withstands the tides of the sea twice a day—an existence that at first may seem monotonous. However that may be, this mollusk possesses an infallible instinct that correctly indicates to it the moment when the waves approach with its nourishment. When this happens, the oyster opens the powerful muscles that command its two strong jaws, and it lets the food enter.

This system is very practical and is very satisfactory in theory, but not always in practice, because one day something else besides food enters: a big or little grain of sand penetrates, and lodges between the two jaws. This grain of sand wounds the oyster and does it harm. The oyster struggles against this undesirable guest; and around this grain of sand slowly, patiently, it builds... a pearl.



The oyster secretes nacre, which little-by-little surrounds the grain of sand and covers the sharp parts that continue to wound the oyster. It becomes something round, brilliant; something that doesn't hurt the oyster any longer. The grain of sand becomes something shining and beautiful, attracting attention—something rare and full of value: a fine pearl.

Now, let us think what applies to us in this parable. Do we not have in our lives one or more grains of sand? One day there may enter into our lives something that irritates us! It may be an emotional deception or a misunderstanding in our family or with friends, or maybe a time of emptiness—perhaps from sickness, perhaps from an ambition that is not realized, perhaps from surroundings that are not suitable and that we must bear for a time,

perhaps from old age and its infirmities—perhaps many other things. Isn't it necessary then to have a lot of patience, many prayers, great faith, and a lot of love to get through these times? We must hold fast to the rock, manufacture our own brand of nacre, and make a pearl!

And if the Lord has put in the oyster what is necessary to form the nacre and to be able to struggle against what does harm, let us be sure that he has equally put in human beings that which we use to form a protective envelope that little by little will serve as a shelter through many trials and temptations.

To form our nacre, to form our pearl is to regenerate. It is to apply in our lives the successive truths that the Lord gives us to know through his revelation. To form the nacre is to put into practice a truth that is learned, understood and recognized; that permits us in turn to learn, understand, and apply new truth to our life, and so forth. Strata by strata the nacre is formed; strata by strata the new human being is formed.

To form the nacre, to form the pearl, is to read the Word of God and meditate on it each day, to pray to be able to understand it, and to draw on its indispensable truths for our education—not for reputation or personal glory, for that would be to build a false pearl (Tom DeLay).

The pearl's size depends on the size of the grain of sand. The larger the grain, the larger the pearl. And the larger the pearl, the more precious and beautiful it is. This means that in this world and the conditions of life

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Passages

Deaths

We are sad to announce the passing of **Rev. Dr. Sheron (Sherrie) Connelly.**



On the first of June, 2024, Rev. Dr. Connelly passed peacefully into the Spiritual World. She was ordained in 2010 and pursued her ministry “Spirit

in Transitions” in many ways, including serving for the Cincinnati Church for two years to assist them in their future organizational development. After retiring, she continued to perform eight to ten services a year for Cincinnati. A helping and pastoral presence, she was loved. Her parting was sudden and she will be missed. Inquisitive and intelligent, she was a lifelong learner and dedicated servant of God. Her thirst for knowledge and spirit is being filled by the divine in the spiritual world. Well done good and faithful servant. ☪



Above: On of the best parts about FNCA is being there with family. Here are cousins Brendan, Nate, Caroline, and Serena right before the Dole Three Miler road race.

Right: Two sets of sisters on top of Jockey Cap—my sister Dawn and I (coincidentally wearing the same shirt) and Elise and Erin Richardson brought the tweens and teens up a short hike right in Fryeburg that has a great view.

A Churchy Summer

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some of their outings and activities. It worked out really well with this group. We took them hiking, thrifting, swimming, bowling, and out to the local cafe. One night the teens even played online games with Almont teens. So fun for all of them.

The other aspect we all love about FNCA is spending time with our extended family (image below). My sister Dawn and her family live just a town over from Fryeburg. My kids love every minute of time they get to spend with their “Maine Cousins,” and it’s great that we can see them at camp. My brother Ben also lives in Maine and comes over to spend time with us too.

By the end of camp, we are ready to be home with Jason and the cats Almont felt like a month ago, and Convention felt like it had been a year. But, we’re already talking about next summer and where that adventure will take us. ☪



Pearl of Great Price

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we have been given, no true faith, no shining love can blossom without trials, without temptations, without periodically calling into question the conditions of our lives. The more we can endure the big temptations, and the more we permit the Lord to overcome them in us, the more magnificent the pearl will be!

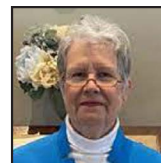
Thus, it is that all the pearls, all the truths, all the spiritual knowledge accumulated in our life, we direct one day to find the pearl of great price. The pearl of pearls, the mother of all pearls, the greatest pearl of all—the truth of truths—the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, the only living God, incarnate and Glorified Lord.

“The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant who looks for some beautiful pearls. He found a pearl of great price; and he went to sell all that he had and bought it.”

Let us follow, today and tomorrow, the merchant’s example, and find what he found.

Oh God of all the earth, we have searched land and sea for great riches, for great wealth. We are discovering that neither wealth nor the search for it gives us any lasting satisfaction, let alone joy and peace. And so, Lord, turn our minds and hearts to the discovery of the pearl of great price that exists not in this world, but in your divine being. And when we have found you, may it be with joy that we sell all we have, that we let go of all our attachments to worldly wealth and fame, and center our entire life on your spiritual wisdom. Then, rich or poor, or in-between, we hold in our hands the one Pearl that will give us lasting joy and delight. ☪

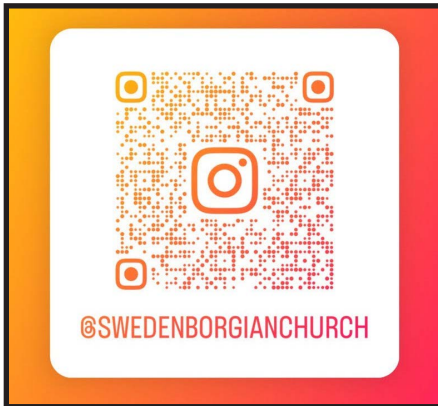
Rev. Dr. Donna Keane is the pastor of the Elmwood New Church in East Bridgewater, Massachusetts.





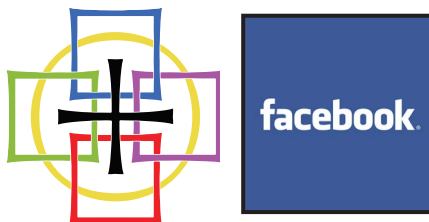
SwedenborgianCommunity.org

With broadcasts and written messages most weeks, *Spiritual Sunshine: A Swedenborgian Community Online* is your interfaith-Swedenborgian community—with a presence on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, and your favorite podcasting platform. Join us as we seek to empower awareness of and connection to the spiritual sunlight from Divinity within all of us.

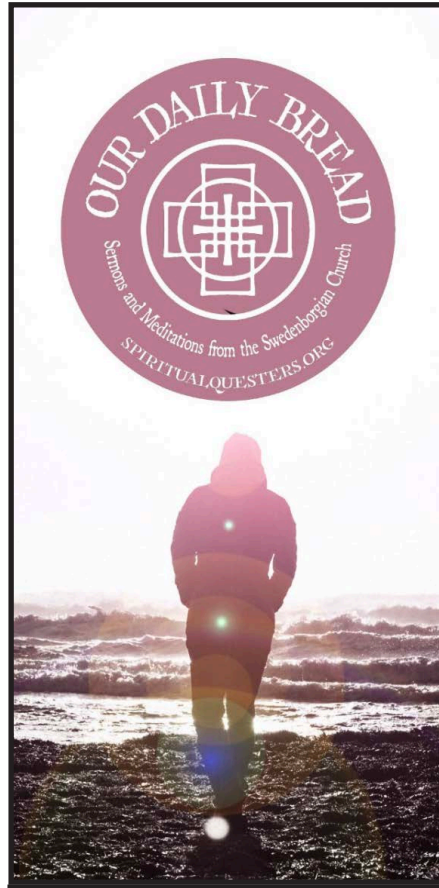


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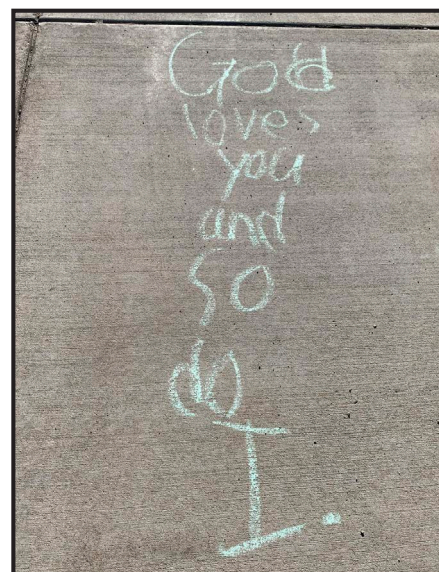
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SWEDENBORGIANS IN ACTION



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](mailto: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/

About the Swedenborgian Church

Emanuel Swedenborg was born on 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.

New Central Office Operations Manager: Welcome Jackie Shihadeh

We have entered into a transitional period for the changing of the guard in the Central Office of the Swedenborgian Church.

Brittany Price, who has been anchoring the central office since 2020, will be leaving at the end of September—her family has the exciting opportunity to live in New Zealand for the next few years.

The incoming manager, whose technical title is Operations Manager and Event Coordinator, is Jackie Shihadeh (image right).

Jackie spent her teen years in Bryn Athyn and attended Bryn Athyn College for a year before heading to the Tisch School of the Arts at New York University, to complete her BFA in fine arts, and has been working in the arts

and event planning for the past several years. Jackie was recently accepted at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies to pursue the online Certificate

of Swedenborgian Studies and began coursework this month. She says, "I have always felt drawn to contributing to an organization that helps people on their spiritual journeys and engages with the teachings of Emanuel Swedenborg."

We are looking forward to celebrating the outstanding work that Brittany has consistently delivered and wish for

her to reap exciting benefits in her new journey as we welcome Jackie Shihadeh to the hub of our denominational community.

—Jim Lawrence,
President

