



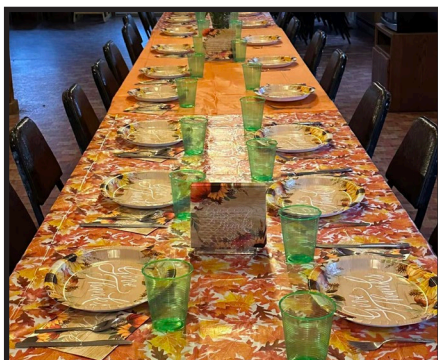
Friendsgiving and Winterizing

BY RONNIE VIGES

The Transitions (young adults ages 18–30) group met once again in November for the second annual Friendsgiving and third camp winterizing using the wisdom passed down from Tom Neuenfeldt. This gathering brought together twelve young adults and seven facility supervisors (and two little helpers!) to put camp to rest for the winter, the young adults successfully shut down unused buildings at Almont New Church Assembly. With three major buildings going into hibernation, it becomes very important to ensure they are shut down correctly so, come opening, pipes are still

intact and able to handle summer rentals. With the many dedicated hands that arrived Friday night, it took just a couple of hours of work to accomplish the desired goals. Jeff Oelker and Craig Carson walked in and showed up just in time to inspect our work. Teen Lilly C. joined us to help with childcare so those in our age group with small children could assist and enjoy a deserved rest. This left the rest of Saturday and Sunday morning to enjoy the love that

Almont brings when we are together. With the free time afterwards, a trip to the local store in town was made to grab winter apparel, hygiene needs, and food



The Blessing Box, which started in 2020 as just a simple tote on a table, is now a beautiful fixture filled with a variety of items that help fill local needs.

items to offer towards the new and improved “blessing box” that Facility Manager Lori Patana had acquired just prior to our group arriving with photos showing our contributions on the Almont Facebook page. After we returned, we sat down to have a delicious meal with many yummy dishes, such as an Italian wedding soup and Ramen salad made by Heather Oelker, and other popular Thanksgiving staples made by Tammara Mounce and others. We sat down and gave thanks to our ability to give back and enjoyed the time we had together. ☪

Ronnie Vigés is the Assistant Camp Director of the Almont New Church Assembly Summer School. He lives in Michigan.



Top: Beautiful table setting for dear friends to celebrate being together and getting the facility ready for a cold winter. **Lower Left:** Brothers Nathan and Oliver Hamilton get the hot cider ready to share. **Lower Right:** Kristofer Lange get the antifreeze ready to keep toilets safe from damage over the cold winter months.

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Church
Calendar

- **May 23–May 26, 2025:** [SCYL Spring Retreat](#), Almont, Michigan
- **June 26–27, 2025:** [Council of Ministers Meeting](#), Portland, Oregon
- **June 27–July 1, 2025:** [Annual Convention](#), Portland, Oregon
- **July 12–20, 2025:** [Almont Summer School](#), Allenton, Michigan
- **July 26–August 2, 2025:** [SCYL International Camp](#), Atherstone, England
- **July 26–August 10, 2025:** [Fryeburg New Church Assembly](#), Fryeburg, Maine
- **September 25–28, 2025:** [Gathering Leaves](#), Temenos, Pennsylvania
- **October 10–13, 2025:** [SCYL Fall Retreat](#), Duxbury, Massachusetts

Editor's Corner

Changes
Are Afoot

Dearest readers, I have had to make some difficult decisions lately. The biggest one is giving up my role as Editor of *the Messenger*. It was not an easy choice, but necessary for many reasons in my personal life. I love this job and know that it was not a simple decision deciding to let it go. I am positive, however, that this will open me up in other ways to better serve our beloved denomination. Letting go of this role doesn't mean anything but that. I think you all are stuck with me in many other ways for a long time—I look forward to whatever is next!

The next issue of *the Messenger* (April/May—Get Ready for Convention 2025) will be my last as editor. The June issue will have a special guest interim editor, who I am sure all will be happy to hear from. I am looking forward to a summer full of our church events, first up Convention in Portland, Oregon. I will see you all there.

—Beki Greenwood
Messenger@swedenborg.org

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Letters to the Editor

Great Nov./Dec. Messenger

I was caught by the congruence of the DC church closing with Rich's sermon giving his sound reasoning for the "Why" and Shada's sharing of the amazing grant they received to restore and maintain the Wilmington Church, including and the "Why" the National Fund for Sacred Places exists and the work of the local church which shows the value of maintaining their beloved sanctuary. I hope convention

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the Messenger

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Published monthly except two combined issues by the Standing Committee for Communication and Information of the Swedenborgian Church of North America (founded 1817, incorporated 1861 as the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America), Rev. Dr. James Lawrence, president.

January 2025

Volume 249, No. 1 Whole Number 5493

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Printing: FenwayGroup, Boston, MA

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Cambridge, MA 02138

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Subscriptions: free online subscription at <https://swedenborg.org/subscribe/>. Printed and mailed to US address, \$25/year; to Canada address, \$30/year; to all other addresses, \$40/year; single copies, \$3.00, libraries & prisoners, free. Send check made out to "Swedenborgian Church" with "Messenger" on the memo line. Other requests, write or call Central Office.

Submissions are accepted at any time. Submissions must be received by the 15th of the month to be considered for the next issue.

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



Message from the President

Swedenborg was a Realist, Politically Speaking

The Year of the Word: 2024–25

Intense emotions concerning public affairs in the past few months have soared to an extent I've rarely seen in four decades of ministry. Swedenborg does have something to say to us in our current moment. A message can be heard from Swedenborg in his basis as a "realist" because from his theology he speaks to us about politics on planet earth.

The Nordic sage certainly believed in staying active in civic affairs for the good of society, and he was probably more active than 95% of us since he sat in the House of Nobles in the Swedish parliament. Far from being but a dreamer, Swedenborg cared greatly for social affairs and saw such caring as absolutely required in the spectrum of loving the neighbor. But at the same time, his participation in what might be called the larger government of heaven rendered him quite immune to doom, and he was too clear-eyed for superficial optimism about earthly politics.

His worldview radically depended upon an understanding of divine providence that would never allow evil to "take over" fully, but which also prevented a cockeyed optimism about human utopias in the natural world. This position is called "realism" in political theology, and Swedenborg can not only be placed in the category of political Christian realism, but he somewhat radically evolved what "realism" means in earthly current affairs.

An author with whom Swedenborg differed on many points but for whom he professed much

affection was the original Christian realist. That's St. Augustine who watched Rome burn to the ground in 410 CE. Luther was an Augustinian, and Augustine functioned as a patron saint in the Lutheranism of Swedenborg's upbringing. We know Swedenborg took great interest in Augustine in his later years, too, because his notebooks reveal notes on twenty-seven different works by the great early church theologian! In the ensuing crisis of the collapse of the Roman empire, Augustine penned his most famous book of all: *The City of God*. Rome might burn, but the true city is a spiritual one that can never be destroyed.

Augustine shaped a deeply spiritual view about the catastrophe of a collapsing political culture, which he developed by describing a heavenly city that earthly political events cannot destabilize or demoralize. The city of God operates via three biblical truths: the sinfulness of humanity, the freedom of humanity, and the call to living faithfully no matter what is going on. Swedenborg thus stepped into an old Christian realism and added more explicit understanding of the spiritual physics in play for our lives as we move through the natural world for our journey toward eternal life.

Swedenborg clarifies the necessity of facing evil here and the impossibility of evil ever defeating good, and he describes the ever-present dynamic in our living called the equilibrium. Equilibrium is the struggle between evil and good forces within

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Welcome Back to the Boston Church

BY KEVIN BAXTER

With joy, the Church on the Hill (Boston Society of the New Jerusalem) is pleased to announce that on November 24, 2024, the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem rejoined the Massachusetts New Church Union, and with it the General Convention of the New Jerusalem!

The church left the denomination twenty years ago due to internal struggles, which ultimately led to the FBI and the Treasury Department raiding the church in 2013. After the raid, the church was not sure how it was going to survive. A dedicated group of people kept the ship afloat and it endured. It took four years to stabilize and deal with the fallout of the raid, and in 2017 they called new clergy leadership.

Rev. Colin Leitch, who had been preaching at the Boston Church, was called as the senior pastor. Rev. Kevin Baxter was called as the assistant pastor. While Rev. Leitch was not a Swedenborgian, there was an odd agreement made from the start. Rev. Leitch would serve as senior pastor for two and a half years, after which Rev. Baxter would assume the senior pastor

role as its new settled pastor. Rev. Leitch would then continue for a period after the transition.

Over those years, the pastors and the congregation worked together to plot a new course forward and fix some of the issues that had arisen



Swedenborg was a guest on his birthday.

en during difficult times. While they are not all fixed yet, the church has made great headway! Creating new Swedenborgian handouts, bible studies, and talks has been a key aspect of the church's re-affiliation.

Rev. Baxter also used opportunities to introduce the members of the church to the larger Swedenborgian world. Restarting the tradition of Swedenborg's Birthday Party, Rev. Baxter invited people to come and talk about Swedenborg and his influence and to attend events like concerts and Christmas Eve services at other area Swedenborgian Churches. The church even managed to make a couple of



trips up to the Fryeburg New Church Assembly, where it was able to meet and hear Rev. George McCurdy—who was a former pastor of the church! A handful of folks attended the Massachusetts Convention 2023, and even the president of the congregation ventured out to Michigan in 2024.

One of the greatest events was hosting a SPLATz (Super Powered Lovable Almost Teens) retreat in downtown Boston ([Fall 2022](#)). Kurt Fekete and the kids were introduced to the congregation before the retreat ended. President Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence attended recently to speak and meet folks. And at the end of January 2025, we will be hosting the Center for Swedenborgian Studies winter intercession class.

We look forward to becoming more and more active with the denomination. Over the past few years, we have tried to help both Almont New Church Assembly and the Fryeburg New Church Assembly. Even the Boston Society Wesley N. Gray Trust (a fund formed from Convention's Gray Trust) has supported the Johnny Appleseed Museum and the Historic Preservation of the Wilmington Church. Great strides have been made, and there is more to come. 🍷



Inside the Boston Church sanctuary.

Ethical and Spiritual Considerations (ESG) in Investment Decisions for the Swedenborgian Church of North America

BY PAUL MARTIN AND HOLLY GOTTSCHALK

What is ESG?

ESG refers to a wide variety of criteria that is used by socially responsible investors to look at environmental, social, and governance practices in the companies in which they invest. Environmental concerns would include how the company impacts the environment, for instance whether it contributes to climate change. Social concerns would include, among other things, how they treat their employees, for instance whether they have a diverse work force with fair wages and safe working conditions. It could also include what they produce and how that impacts society, such as armaments, alcohol, tobacco, unhealthy foods, for-profit prisons, or gambling opportunities. Governance would include things like whether their governing board is diverse with respect to racial, gender, and other criteria. Governance also tracks whether a company prioritizes that its operations are meeting ethical, legal, and regulatory standards.

ESG is often referred to as what you do with the other 95% of your assets because organizations typically spend about 5% of their assets each year and invest the other 95%. It doesn't make sense to spend 5% trying to make the world a better place while investing 95% in companies that are damaging the world.

ESG and the Common Fund

For the past two years, the Common Fund Investment Committee has looked at whether ESG should be taken into consideration in investment decisions. More investors, especially religious organizations and non-profit organizations, are taking ESG into

account in their decision making, and we wanted to know whether we should as well.

Since the Common Fund has many investing partners—primarily Swedenborgian Societies, Associations, and the Theological School—our first step was taking a survey of our investors to see what their desires were. A vast majority of our investing bodies reported that they did think it was appropriate to take ESG into consideration when making investment decisions. Our survey indicated that many of our investors would even be willing to risk a little less in return in order to take these factors into consideration.

We also asked our investing partners which ESG factors were most important to them. The survey showed the highest priorities were: Environment, specifically climate change, Governance, specifically the ethics of the company, and Social, specifically offering fair wages and safe working conditions.

We then looked at how investments that do take ESG into account perform in relation to those that do not. There appeared to be little, if any, difference in expected return. In fact, there may be reason to believe that companies that are socially responsible should perform better in the future, as more people want to support such companies.

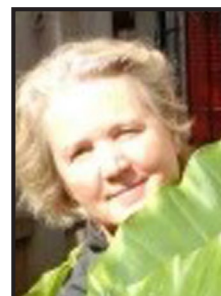
After careful study and deliberation, the Investment Committee voted at a special meeting in January 2024, to include ESG in our updated Investment Policy Statement (IPS). That same month, we invested 3.4% of our assets with ESG friendly funds. In the short life of our holding these funds, we find that they are performing similarly to

their benchmarks. This is a trial period, and we intend to continue to consider and monitor ESG investments in our future investment decisions.

Rev. Paul Martin and Holly Gottschalk are appointed members serving a term on the Investment Committee of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.

Holly Gottschalk is a former professional dancer and choreographer who flipped the sides of her brain in retirement and is now a part-time bookkeeper, including Hillside, the Garden

Church and Feed and be Fed among her clients. She lives in San Rafael, California, with her husband Peter. Holly enjoys attending services at the Hillside Sanctuary, moonlights as a Venue Coordinator for weddings at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church, and serves on the Investment Committee.



Rev. Paul Martin is the former pastor of the [Swedenborgian Spiritual Community of the Puget Sound](#), and founder and manager of the [Mosswood Hollow Retreat Center](#).



Annual Convention

Appeal for the 2025 Annual Convention

A Message from the Executive Committee

Dear Members and Organizations of the SCNA,

We are reaching out to our wonderful benefactors, both individuals and organizations, to consider a contribution helping us provide this significant annual experience for all of our members and friends. We are thrilled to be hosting our 201st annual convention in another exciting and beautiful setting this summer at University Place Conference Center & Hotel, associated with Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. This lovely setting provides delightful meeting spaces and lodging accommodations, while at the same time we continue with robust technology support so people can also attend our business meetings and our popular Mini Courses from the virtual comforts of home, so that overall, we are building a terrific design for widespread participation. Our theme is “Spiritual Innovation for a Changing World.” The keynote address by Rev. Rich Tafel is on this theme, and in addition to wonderful Mini Courses and worship experiences for all ages, we will hold important business sessions and receive hopeful reports of positive developments in many aspects of our denominational life.

Targeted contributions can be denoted for youth activities, hospitality, need-based scholarships, technology for virtual participation, music programs, the mini courses, or simply for general cost support. Modest gifts are richly welcomed, and all gifts will be acknowledged!

To make a donation online visit www.swedenborg.org/donate and please remember to indicate what this



June 27 – July 1, 2025

Located at the University Place Hotel & Conference Center at
Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

Registration opens April 15 on swedenborg.org!

donation is intended for. If you would like to send a check please make it out to “Swedenborgian Church of North America” and mail it to:

General Convention
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PO Box 380270
Cambridge, MA 02238-0270, USA

The Year of the Word

A Vanished Ancient Word Transformed into the Current Word

BY JIM LAWRENCE

The Swedish seer in his mature theosophy claims that before the current “Word” came to be there was an earlier “Word” in the world that maintained the crucial nexus between heaven and earth. Abiding among peoples in “Greater Tartary,” a region in his time understood to encompass the eastern third of the Asian continent, Swedenborg claims to have spoken with spirits from that long ago context, and he reports an intriguing tale about an ancient lost Word that predates the texts we have today.

This “Ancient Word” that abided with these primordial civilizations, Swedenborg identifies as the “Ancient Church,” and he seemed to believe this “Ancient Word” in some form still existed among those living in “Greater Tartary.” More than one Swedenborgian enthusiast in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries went looking for it, but to no avail. Though lost to us, Swedenborg says the Ancient Word provides the basis for the first eleven chapters of Genesis—those mythic tales of the Creation, the Garden of Eden, the Great Flood, and the Tower of Babel.

Swedenborg students will know that there was a “Church” before the Ancient Church that he called the “Most Ancient Church.” The “Word,” however, in the Most Ancient Church was not a written Word, according to Swedenborg, but instead was “revealed” to everyone who was of the church (see *Secrets of Heaven*, §2896). Swedenborg likened these peoples to having such close connections to the spiritual world that the Word was

essentially “inscribed on their hearts.”


The Ancient Word, however, was a written Word, and as with the current Word it apparently carried its spiritual themes through the correspondence of its mythic tales. The chronicles were not factual in a literal way but instead profoundly true through their transcendental symbolism. Spiritual world angels carefully preserved and guarded these ancient scriptures and religious practices predating the Hebrew Bible, according to Swedenborg, such that this so-called “Ancient Word” provided the basis for later Judaism and Christianity.

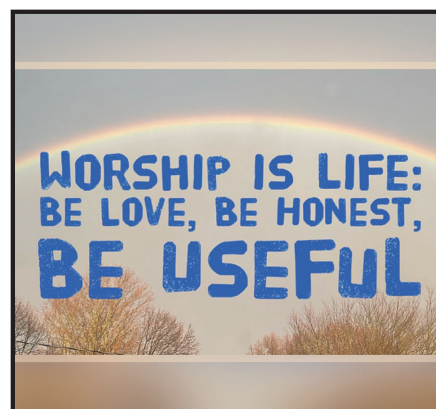
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In *True Christianity* §265, Swedenborg describes conversations he had with these spirit beings:

Of that ancient Word which existed in Asia before the Israelitish Word, I am permitted to state this new thing, namely, that it is still preserved there among the people who dwell in Great Tartary. In the spiritual world I have talked with spirits and angels from that country, who said that they have a Word, and have had it from ancient times; and that they conduct their Divine worship according to this Word, and that it consists solely of correspondences. They said, that in it also is the Book of Jasher, which is mentioned in Joshua (10:12, 13), and in

2 Samuel (1:17, 18); and that they have also among them the books called the Wars of Jehovah and Enunciations, which are mentioned by Moses (Numbers 21:14, 15, and 27–30); and when I read to them the words that Moses had quoted therefrom, they searched to see if they were there, and found them; from which it was evident to me that the ancient Word is still among that people. While talking with them they said that they worshiped Jehovah, some as an invisible God, and some as visible.

Swedenborg constructed a large overview of history consisting of five epochs if the defining characteristic is a spiritual one according to the ability to connect with the divine and live out spiritual precepts. He believed his own work on revealing the Word in the Judeo-Christian scriptures preparatory for New Church. He gave us considerable information on how to understand the true Word, whose only message is regeneration. We honor the Word when we do the work, and sometimes getting the big picture of history helps to re-center our living. 



Fall General Council Meeting Report

BY KAREN CONGER

The General Council of the Swedenborgian Church of North America met in a hybrid format Friday and Saturday, November 15 and 16, 2024, at the Sonesta Select hotel in Torrance, California.

The business undertaken included hearing reports from the officers and others, such as the Chair of the Council of Ministers.

Rev. Shada Sullivan joined the meeting virtually to present a proposal for new support structures, suggested by the Council of Ministers, outlining all the many ways in which our wonderful clergy are being called upon to step outside of traditional roles with less time to actually minister as they deal with tech issues regarding virtual worship; the constant need for fundraising around maintenance and upkeep of buildings; necessity to be community organizers and innovators; adjustment

of ministries to new needs that are outside of traditional funding structures; in effect, pastors having to become CEOs. The General Council agreed to the creation of a strategic task force to assess the needs of our ministers/

General Council members continue to check in once or twice a year with their own set of ministries in the Swedenborgian Church of North America, and this meeting saw the presentation of those reports and the discussion that followed.

At the time of the meeting the sale of the National Church in Washington, D.C. was still pending, as escrow had not yet closed. Escrow subsequently closed (November 21, 2024) and the property is now in the hands of a church in the Christian tradition.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay presented the proposed budget for 2025. The budget reflects a deficit of \$38,025 in unrestricted funds and \$79,734 in restricted funds. These amounts constitute a tiny percentage of the corpus

currently invested in the Common Fund.

The General Council will meet in a virtual format for its Spring 2025 meeting on Saturday, March 1 at 10:00 AM PT. The 2025 Annual Convention of the Swedenborgian Church of North America will be held at Portland State University in Portland, Oregon. The Council of Ministers (COM) travel date is June 26, 2025. COM meets and convention opens on June 27, 2025, and convention closes July 1, 2025.

Karen Conger serves as the recording secretary of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



Back row, (left to right): Rudy Caseres, Jackie Shihadeh, Rev. Thom Muller, Rev. Renee Machiniak, Karen Conger, Rev. Sage Cole. **Front Row:** Herb Ziegler, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence, Pastor Paul Deming, and Jennifer Lindsay.

ministries and determine the best path forward to offer them additional support, with the results to be presented at the spring meeting of the General Council.

The General Council voted to proceed with a conservancy agreement involving the Church of the Open Word in St. Louis. The funds have already been raised to cover the estimated devaluation of the property (which along with several other Swedenborgian churches is owned by the denomination) in the event of a future sale.

As in past years,



Members of the General Council that couldn't make it in person were able to participate in the meeting virtually. Kurt Fekete, Rev. Rich Tafel, Kei Pang, and Tom Murphy shown joining here.



Swedenborgian Church Youth League

Teens Uncover Buried Treasure, Hidden Gems, and Heavenly Secrets at the 2024 Fall Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

The annual Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Fall Retreat took place in October 2024 at the beautiful Cedar Hill Retreat Center in Duxbury, Massachusetts. This year's theme, "Buried Treasure, Hidden Gems, and Heavenly Secrets," set the stage for a weekend of spiritual exploration and personal growth.

Twelve ecstatic, borderline hysterical, teens burst into Cedar Hill Retreat Center at sunset on a Friday evening to kick off the retreat. They immediately raced down to the beach to watch the sun sink into Kingston Bay. For our evening icebreaker, we discussed where we would bury a treasure chest so that it wouldn't be disturbed for a hundred years. Answers varied from the bottom of the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean to Almont New Church Assembly, and even in a cemetery. This fun activity got us thinking about literal buried treasure, setting the stage for later explorations for more figurative hidden treasures.

After breakfast, I opened the Saturday morning session with a brief introduction to how Divine Providence operates in our lives. Emanuel Swedenborg describes Providence as a continuous, all-encompassing flow of God's love and wisdom guiding creation toward good ends. It considers

humanity's eternal spiritual welfare rather than just temporary earthly happiness. Although usually invisible and behind the scenes, I believe that sometimes we can detect providential omens if we look very carefully for them or if they are critically im-

portant for us to observe. I have witnessed Providence directly and I told the teens a story involving a situation where I got a peek behind the curtain to reveal a hidden gem which gave me vital direction on a critical decision in my life. (It involved spearmint leaves jelly candy—ask me about it if you get a chance!)

Rev. Kevin Baxter led the remainder of the morning session, focusing on the life of Emanuel Swedenborg. He began by asking, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" Kevin explained how Swedenborg initially preferred poetry and science over following his

father's religious path. The unifying gem of Swedenborg's life was not the what, but the why—the question that drove him to excel in his research and ultimately discover the spiritual world.

In the afternoon, Kevin divided the teens into pairs and sent them outside

to collect three items from nature. They returned with branches, berries, feathers, shells, stones, leaves, and even a large stray spider that caused quite a commotion. They talked about the correspondence of the items that they found. All of nature is linked and has a meaning. Cedar trees are spiritual understanding. Birds are spiritual thoughts. Birds nesting in cedar trees are affections for thoughts that are grounded in spir-

itual understanding. If an item helps people get closer to God or closer to the neighbor, it is a good correspondence. If it is contrary to this, it is evil. Next, the objects were placed in a bowl of water to see if they would float or sink. They talked about whether they feel like they are floating upon a sea of truth or sinking in an ocean of falsity. What's the baggage that you are bringing into your life? How are you living? Why are you living?

How wonderful to have Rev. Sage Cole join us for dinner Saturday evening and lead us in three interrelated



Teens basking in the golden hour on the Plymouth Bay beach: Leah, Maudie, Athena, Grayson, Zoe, Abby, Caroline, Zsa Zsa, Serena, Lily, Charlie, and Bram.

portant for us to observe. I have witnessed Providence directly and I told the teens a story involving a situation where I got a peek behind the curtain to reveal a hidden gem which gave me vital direction on a critical decision in my life. (It involved spearmint leaves jelly candy—ask me about it if you get a chance!)

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SCYL Fall Retreat

Continued from page 9

sessions, *Communion: Be Love, Baptism: Be Honest*, and *Anointing: Be Useful*. But first, the group rushed down to the bay to catch the sunset. We saw that Sunday was going to be a cloudy day, and we wanted to get a picture of the entire group at golden hour on the beach. In Sage's evening session, *Communion: Be Love*, she asked the teens when and where they felt loved. Sage explained that our very substance is love. Love is a uniting force. Then, we shared communion together. Sage said, "As we share Holy Supper together and are nurtured in community we are fed by love and truth."

Sunday morning after breakfast, Sage led *Baptism: Be Honest*. She described how vital these religious sacraments are. Sage went on to say, "Water moves and changes. There are flow states where you are fluid and productive. Flow states exist when you are creatively inspired to create. E(motions) are what move us through life." She asked, "What emotions move us?" Happiness, fear, anger, even confusion and anxiety can be useful experiences that contribute to our movement. A teen asked about depression. Sage commented that depression is a very real thing. We must seek help when we are truly depressed. However, she added that depression often comes when we are ready to change. "We are at a threshold to become something adventurous and new. We are called to grow. The world is painful, but it is also a ripe opportunity." Her session ended with an activity of pouring of water onto the hands of the teens. As water streamed over their hands, Sage pronounced, "Remember your baptism: Your perfect child within."

Sage's last session on Sunday afternoon was titled, *Anointing: Be Useful*. Sage explained, "Being useful isn't always about doing. You can be busy,

but not useful. It's understanding that there are cycles, and we continually move through them. We need to be attentive to our needs. We should move and act when we are ready and able." Sage then asked the teens how they are helpful? The teens responded with answers that included, being emotionally supportive, teaching dance, making other people happy, physically assisting others, and gifting others with art. Sage inquired, "Are there places where it is easier to be useful?" In closing, she pointed out that when love and truth are happening at the same time, it births usefulness. Sage then anointed the foreheads of each of us with oil. She exclaimed, "Oil is the essence of a thing. It is distilled. When we are anointed, we are distilling the essence of our core. All the potential for greatness and joy is already inside you!"

I led the last session of the retreat Sunday evening. My inspiration for my session was [Matthew 5:14–16](#), "You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. People do not light a lamp and put it under the basket; rather, they put it on the lamp stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works." I lit a candle to demonstrate how dimly the light shines when it is placed under a basket. We do not want our talents and passions to be concealed from the world. During my session the teens filled out a hidden gem worksheet that asked questions like, "What talent or interest do you have that you might sometimes hide? What is something that you love that others might not know? And What do you treasure in your life right now?" After



Sage anoints Maudie at her *Anointing: Be Useful* session.

these worksheets were collected, they were folded up and a crystal was hidden inside each one. When they selected a worksheet to read, they received a special hidden gem, such as, amethyst, moonstone, citrine, tiger eye, or obsidian. It was amazing to see how well each crystal seemed to match the individual even though they had no idea what was hidden within the folded paper. We closed with a special meditation that included a reading from *The Alchemist* about living your personal legend and discovering omens.

While not in session, the SCYL teens had a great time bumping the volleyball around in a circle (thank you, Jill, for buying them a nice volleyball), throwing the frisbee, and beach combing for treasures. Our rock n' bowl outing to Alley Kat Lane was fun for everyone (will I ever get another candlepin strike again?) and we returned to Cedar Hill for homemade apple crisp that was still warm from the oven and served with French vanilla ice cream—yum! Our last night brownie sundae party was delicious, and we stayed up extra late playing Catchphrase and a circle game called Psychiatrist. Everyone left on Monday morning feeling exhausted but fulfilled as we take our hidden treasures home to share with our families, friends, and neighbors. 🍪

clear blue sky

SCYL 2024 Winter Retreat

BY NORA BARNABY, SCYL Clear Blue Sky *Editor*

This Winter Retreat we got to explore the topic of Heaven and Hell: Here and Now. I personally thought this was very cool and sparked a lot of interesting discussions between the adults and teens. We had a packed house with nineteen teens! Everyone had a lot of fun playing Werewolf, Catchphrase, as well as putting together a few puzzles that were out for people to work on whenever they wanted. Kurt, Rev. Renee, and Rev. Kit led some amazing sessions. We talked about Emanuel Swedenborg, the organization of Heaven, realistic Angels, the World of Spirits, and so much more. Our new officers for 2025 were elected and I am so excited to get to work closely with them all this year. There was a beautiful Exodus service led by Renée and Kit. We ended the weekend with bowling at Hideaway Lanes. This is always a highlight for everyone. We get pizza and have so much fun bowling with our friends. The teens all stayed up really late the last night to savor the moments spent with our favorite people. However, it has to come to an end eventually. Monday morning bright and early we clean everything up to make sure it's ready for the next group, and we say goodbye to our friends. This was a great retreat, and I can't wait for the next one. 🙏



Everyone is ready for bowling night! **Top row:** Leah, Micah, Trent, Isaiah, Bedo, Charlie and Athena. **Middle row:** Ellie, Ben, Grayson, Abby, and Maudie. **Front row:** Nora, Zsa Zsa, Lilly, Serena, Caroline, Lilly, and Val.



Top: Puzzle fun for everyone! Caroline photo bombs Ben and Ellie. The teens tie on their worries to the Yule log to be purged in the fire. **Middle:** Exodus service with Rev. Renée and Rev. Kit. **Bottom:** Can't have a great retreat without staff: Beki, Renée, Kurt, Lori, Kit, and Heather.

2025 SCYL Officer Elections

BY KURT FEKETE

The 2025 Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Officer and Chaplain elections took place at the winter retreat this past December. I was excited to see that some new younger members of the SCYL were elected.

Zsa Zsa Dolley, former 2024 East Officer was elected to the position of 2025 President in her last year in the SCYL. Congratulations Zsa Zsa! Lilly Carson was elected to the West Officer/Ambassador and Treasurer position. Nora Barnaby continues for her third year as our Clear Blue Sky editor. We welcome two newcomers to SCYL leadership roles. Caroline Phinney was elected to East Officer and is our new Activities coordinator. Abby Lau joins us as our elected Midwest and Service Officer. Rev. Renée Billings-Machiniak returns as our

elected 2025 League Chaplain. Renée has served as our League Chaplain for numerous years and has attended countless retreats at Almont. Renée presents thought-provoking and interesting sessions and does a wonderful job caring for all of our youth. We are blessed to have her! We say goodbye to 2024 President Ellie Barnaby and Officer Trent Carson and thank them for their service.

Please join me in congratulating and welcoming our new officers and our chaplain. I know these officers will do fantastic work this year as they represent a nice blend of seasoned leaders along with a couple of new and energized young teens. They are a dedicated and diligent team of teens possessing remarkable talent. I am very excited to work with them in 2025. 🙌

Meet Your 2025 SCYL Officers

Anastasia Dolley

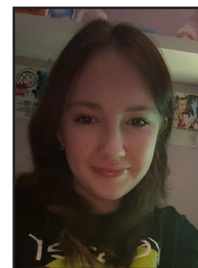


Hi, I am Anastasia—also known as Zsa Zsa—Dolley, the former 2023 and current 2025 SCYL President. I live in Maine and am a senior at Gorham

High School. When I'm not working hard at school, I am either doing art or sleeping. I love to draw and hope to do oil paintings and even sculpture soon. One of my favorite classes this year was my psychology course that I took at our local university. I find it thrilling to learn how people think and the reasons behind their behavior, which I believe helps me communicate with and lead my peers more effectively. Living and learning in the SCYL has expanded my spirituality and given me

many forever friends. I am very excited to lead us through this busy upcoming year and teach our newer members the values of the SCYL so that they will continue to represent our organization with kindness and love. I have had some of my best memories with these teens and am so glad to be a representative and leader for them during my last year in the SCYL.

Abby Lau



My name is Abby Lau, and I ran for and was elected as the SCYL Midwest officer because I really care about everyone at Almont. I like to read and

write. I really enjoy playing hockey and play music like guitar, singing, and viola. My favorite subject in school is math. I love everyone at Almont and everyone in the SCYL so much, and they are my favorite people!

Caroline Phinney



Hello, I'm Caroline Phinney and I will be your 2025 East Coast officer! I have been going to Almont and SCYL retreats for almost three years now and Fryeburg

most of my life. I love this community so much, and I am excited to be more involved in it. I live in Massachusetts and am currently a sophomore in high school. Some hobbies of mine include talking about Taylor Swift, reading, listening to music, sleeping, painting, and playing with my cats.

Continues on page 13

The 2025 Swedenborgian Church Youth League Officers

President

Zsa Zsa Dolley

Clear Blue Sky (CBS) Editor

Nora Barnaby

East Coast and Activities Officer

Caroline Phinney

Midwest and Service Officer

Abby Lau

West Coast Ambassador and Treasurer

Lilly Carson

Canada Officer

Open

League Chaplain

Rev. Renée Machiniak

SCYL 2025 Officers*Continued from page 12***Lilly Carson**

Hi, my name is Lilly, and I am excited to serve as the West Coast officer and Treasurer for the SCYL! I am a Freshman in high school and am involved in advanced classes, marching band, and theater. I enjoy knitting, sewing, reading, baking, cycling, swimming, and spending time with my family, friends, and kittens. My hope and goal as an officer are to help Swedenborgian youth connect in a meaningful way and raise funds to support bridging those connections and experiences.

Nora Barnaby

Hey! My name is Nora Barnaby, and I was re-elected Clear Blue Sky editor this year. I'm from Alma Michigan. In my free time I like to read, play volleyball, and draw. I am involved in many things at my school including student council, and I am a drum major for my marching band. I have been on the SCYL executive board for three years, and I hope to stay on in the ones to come. Let's make it a great year! 🌟

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

**Upcoming Retreats****UK International Teen Summer Camp 2025**

Six years ago, a six-day International Camp for SCYL teenagers was held at Purley Chase, England and for those who came along, amazing memories were made, and lasting friendships were formed.

We feel it is time to do it again and want to invite you!

Where? The camp will be held at Purley Chase Centre which is deep in the middle of the English countryside, a couple of hours northwest of London, east of Birmingham, and near the quaint little town of Atherstone.

Who? Anyone aged 13-19 is invited.

What? The camp will be led by qualified youth leaders and ministers from the UK and the USA. Our overall theme for the week will be to explore the Four Essential Elements: Earth, Air, Fire, and Water and their relevance in our lives. We will also be doing a huge variety of activities such as day trips and walks in the local area, campfire, table tennis, game evenings, "Olympic" sports on the lawn and a talent show to name a few. A whirlwind tour of London will occur during the day of Saturday, July 26th. Please understand that this trip is not a sightseeing vacation. Although opportunities to see sites in England will occur, the primary mission of this trip is to make friends from around the world, relax in beautiful surroundings, take part in

new and fun activities and renew your excitement in being part of an incredible faith and church organization.

Cost? Only \$400 per person which includes airfare, ground transportation, accommodations, outings, attractions, and meals while at camp. This is a remarkable opportunity made possible by generous donations from Michigan Association, Massachusetts New Church Union, the Tafel Fund, the Gray Fund, as well as Swedenborgian Church Youth League fundraising efforts. We want all teens to be able to attend this exciting adventure. If the cost presents an unmanageable financial burden, please contact Kurt at kfekete@hotmail.com to arrange additional scholarship support. Each teen should also plan on \$100 for travel meals and more if you want to include souvenirs/gifts.

Family Trip? Some families may wish to join their teen(s) before or after the camp for a family vacation. If this is something that you plan on doing then you must contact Kurt at kfekete@hotmail.com before the registration deadline to make special travel arrangements.

Registration Deadline? Unless other arrangements are made with Kurt, you must register and make payment by Monday, April 28. Register at swedenborg.org. 🌟



Passages

Births

Emmett Bian Phinney was welcomed into the world on March 22, 2025 by his adoring parents, Benjamin Phinney and his wife Jessica Bian. Born in Portland, Maine, he weighed in at



seven pounds, four ounces, and eighteen and a half inches long. Emmett is also the eighth grandchild of Merrilee Phinney. Welcome Emmett! ☪

Letters to the Editor

Continued from page 2

members and friends will be inspired to give to enable the necessary matching grant.

Interspersed with these articles was the successful Spiritual Sunshine. I was surprised to be reminded it had been going on for twenty years. And Sage's virtual Helen Keller Collaborative making changes and evolving. Next throw in the conjunction of serving the community through the Fryeburg Fair while raising money to sustain the Fryeburg Church by Lee Dyer and the Pacific Coast Association meetings in the unique Garden Church with discussion of the future of the New Jerusalem. Excellent Messenger capped off with the PCA's sunset sail together on a tall ship, the Exy Johnson, thanks to Nancy Richardson, representing preserving tradition and sailing on the tradition into the future. (I would like to see pictures.)

I felt appreciation for the past and hope for the future within the Swedenborgian Church of North America. Thanks Beki for your dedication to keep us informed and for all of

Message from the President

Continued from page 3

our own souls: one from above and one from below. This intense spiritual exercise room is persistently providentially maintained for the very purpose of spiritual formation, and the way it works is that the tension of equilibrium is maintained at exactly equal forces because in the precise middle of those opposing forces is what in physics would be called perfect rest. In spirituality, it is called human freedom. Maintaining this freedom requires God to preserve a ceiling and a floor for the spiritual gym.

Forget about paradise here, and the same goes for hell, too. We abide in a protected median state of equilibrium where we are constantly dealing with influences toward a higher love for God in healthy communal relationships or away from God toward more aggressive self-serving loves.

It is called realism because it avoids giddy highs or despairing hopelessness. Swedenborg proves the most audacious of the "realist" theologians due to his renowned Big Picture of spiritual worlds superseding and interacting with this natural world. We are encouraged to strive toward loving all levels of the neighbor the best that we can see it and to trust always in the active providence of God. Theologically, that's as real as it gets.

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence

Do you write poetry?

Send it along to:

Messenger@Swedenborg.org.

the loyal Swedenborgians securing the future in a variety of formats. Strong work beloved servants.

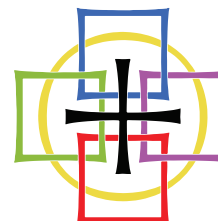
—Rev. Jane Siebert
Wichita, Kansas

Update on Our National Fund for Sacred Places Challenge Grant

Thanks to support from a variety of generous donors, we are already 43% of the way towards fully matching our \$100,000 grant! Can you help us get the rest of the way there?

Support for this match will give us the opportunity to repaint degrading masonry that is allowing for water infiltration and endangering our stained-glass windows. Help us honor Swedenborgian history in the United States, while also creating welcoming sacred space for ongoing and innovative ministries in Wilmington! To donate, visit <https://www.churchoftheholycity.org/donate.html>. We thank you! ☪

The Swedenborgian Church of North America



Alchemy

BY BETTE MCDONNELL

Underneath, underneath
the gold is forming, hidden
beneath the grassy ground,
the alchemy of petrichor, time and trust

I see March, believe in Spring!
The daffodils, those coiled bulbs of
captive sun yellow light will shine and
I'll remember this late December day
crouched by the bare cherry blossom
boughs,
on my way to Blue Heron Lake,
this day when I trust in winter's
promise. ☪

What's Happening

A New Committee on Ministry Development

Ministries and ministers frequently find themselves grappling with challenges of growth and considering ideas for new endeavors or for strategic changes. It can be good to have dialog partners to help the thinking move beyond the loop that's been happening inside one's personal thought world. To have an organizational home for brainstorming and dreaming, the Swedenborgian Church of North America by a vote of the General Council established this year a Committee on Ministry Development "whose central focus shall be facilitating ministries within the Swedenborgian Church. The Committee shall serve as a sounding board for ministries and programs in the denomination and shall be concerned with resources, counsel, and spiritual support for ministry visioning and ministry efforts throughout the church."

Established by vote of the General Council in 2024, "There shall be a Committee on Ministry Development whose central focus shall be facilitating ministries within the Swedenborgian Church. The Committee shall serve as a sounding board for ministries and programs in the denomination and shall be concerned with resources, counsel, and spiritual support for ministry visioning and ministry efforts throughout the church. As part of its scope, the Committee on Ministry shall help as desired in assessing ministry grant proposals and offer advice and counsel to the Standing Committee for Financial Accountability for decisions on grant applications. The Committee on Ministry Development shall consist of three to five members, the number to be determined annually by the President of the Swedenborgian

Current Status of Archival Documents

In 2023, the boxes of material stored by Central Office at an Iron Mountain facility were retrieved. The more identifiable boxes (133) were sent to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies Theological School Library in Berkeley, California. The less identifiable boxes (130) were sent to an accessible climate-controlled storage unit near Urbana, Ohio.

Progress is being made in identifying the boxes that are stored in Urbana. We have been through fifty of the boxes and assigned general titles to their contents. Robbin Ferriman is the Archivist at the Johnny Appleseed Museum that reopened this year in Urbana. I have been finishing a book about the Black Ministers ordained in Convention, that will be available this winter. The title is *Missional and Marginalized*. We are setting aside Mondays to work on going through more boxes.

After we have a general label for each box, we will begin more detailed work on the contents. At that point, we will be looking to sort and catalog them into archival folders and boxes and make an inventory available to be shared online. There is still a lot of work to be done, but it is underway. Over the winter, we expect to have a working overview of all the boxes that are here in Ohio. We are, also, working



on a possible better place for working, storing, and setting up archival access.

We have also been working on locating and gathering the Ohio Association Records and the records from the three existing groups in Cincinnati, Cleveland, and Urbana.

We would like to remind Associations and Societies to do their best to locate your records and those of former Societies. We would very much like to create a list of where they are located. Whether it is in a Church building or at a local or state historical association or library. If there is anything we can do to help you in your efforts, please contact the Library and Documents Committee via [Robbin Ferriman](#) or [Sue Ditmire](#), and we would be happy to help or just give advice as needed. Contact information is available in the 2024 Journal of the Swedenborgian Church. 📧

Church based on the needs of the church at that time but shall always include at least two ministers with five or more years of professional leadership in a denominational ministry as well as Licensed Pastors and laypersons." 📧

Serving in 2025: Rev. Rich Tafel, Rev. Catharine Lauber, Dr. Rebecca Esterson, and Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence



Convention videos, the Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism program, and virtual content that has been created, can be found here for viewing at anytime!

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.

Save the Date for Gathering Leaves 2025

Gathering Leaves 2025, the international retreat for all Swedenborgian/New Church women! It will be an in-person and online event, held September 25–28, 2025, at the Temenos Retreat Center, a Swedenborgian facility and church, in West Chester, Pennsylvania, USA. The theme this year is "Remaining Rooted Through Adversity." This theme was chosen because there is so much turmoil, anger, and divisiveness in the world today, as well as our own stresses, challenges, turmoil and despair. How do we stay balanced? How do we do self-care? How do we set boundaries? How do we negotiate conflict? How do we stay rooted in our faith and trust in God? How do our Swedenborgian teachings guide us in these times and in our lives? What wisdom do we carry as women that might bring solutions and healing? Consider

participating as a workshop presenter or plenary speaker (remotely or in person), worship leader, music coordinator, musician or activity leader. We hope to offer a small honorarium. There are so many ways to delve into this theme! Help us to make this a special retreat from which we can bring useful knowledge and skills back into our communities and world. Please contact: [Rev. Renée Machiniak](#) or [Gloria Toot](#).

In Faith and Love,
—Gathering Leaves
Steering Committee 2025
www.GatheringLeaves.net

