



2025 Swedenborgian International Summer Camp Teens at Warwick Castle.

## International Summer Camp 2025: Fun, Faith, and Friendship

BY KURT FEKETE

**W**ow. What an adventure! Fifteen Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) teenagers from the United States joined teens from the UK, Germany, and the Czech Republic for the 2025 International Summer Camp (ISC25) at Purley Chase Retreat Centre. Thirty-eight teens in total! Is it crazy to take two big groups of teenagers departing from two different airports on red-eye flights to Heathrow and then spend an entire day touring

London? For many people, perhaps yes, but not us! And even with challenging flight delays for the Midwest crew that led to a lost day and rebooked tickets, for most of this trip, Purley was spectacular. Albeit sometimes a bit crazy, but also quite spectacular.

Our first day overseas began with a tour of London. As leader of the Northeast group, this was Saturday, but the Midwest group that experienced travel delays was able to do a very similar tour

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**EVERYONE**  
is welcome here



### Created in the Image of God: Imago Dei and DEI

Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Dean of CSS, reflects on how being made in God's image is a call for diversity, equality, and inclusion.

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### Celebrating Milestones

#### Fifty Years of Ordination

A personal reflection on the first woman ordained in the Swedenborgian Church of North America in 1975, Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey written by Chris Laitner.

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#### Ten Years in the Garden

The Garden Church celebrates ten years of worship, breaking bread, and community.

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### Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

The San Francisco Church is the featured ministry on [swedenborg.org](https://swedenborg.org). Their pastor, Rev. Junchol Lee, contemplates the question, "What is a religion?" and the Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber shares his Juneteenth sermon from when he guest pastored this summer.

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### A Swedenborgian Summer

Have you ever wanted to attend summer camp at either Almont or Fryeburg? Hear from those who have figured out how to swing both!

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## Editor's Corner

### Past Perfect, Future Present



I've spent a considerable amount of time over the last few months looking through past issues of *the Messenger*, which can be found on our website, [swedenborg.org](https://swedenborg.org). I was looking at them for inspiration and to prepare for editing both this and the June issue. There was something that appealed to me from the 1980s issues and their version of the logo, and, with the help of my daughter Calliope, I took inspiration from that, and created the new banner and logo that you see in this issue!

In keeping with the Swedenborgian need for three, I retained the Swedenborgian Cross from the most recent publication's banner, in honor of the present. There is something truly beautiful and unique about this cross, and I hope to have the opportunity to explore that further in a future issue of *the Messenger*. Finally (for those who get a digital copy of this publication), the color scheme you see matches the color scheme of the future: our website. The internet is how our content will reach more and more people for years to come, and where I see *the Messenger* further developing (in addition to keeping the print alive)! Ultimately, a logo is only the surface cover; the essence and purpose of *the Messenger* remains the same. It is the publication that connects all of the Swedenborgian Church's communities together and preserves their stories for future historians.

I have thoroughly enjoyed reaching out to all of my old friends, catching up on what has been going on in the denomination this summer, and having the opportunity to share with you some of the events, musings, and community gatherings happening throughout the continent (and even across the pond!). I decided to feature several of these submissions on the cover page, rather than a single story. It is my hope that all members of the denomination, who are from diverse backgrounds, will find something that interests them right from the beginning. Even so, the cover page only scratches the surface.

In addition to the stories highlighted there, I am sure you will enjoy delving deeper into the issue to see what one of the Nunc Licet fellows (<https://www.swedenborgianstudies.org/fellowship/>) with the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), Tirah Keal, has to say. You'll read about new and upcoming publications, about Paulhaven's first summer back since COVID, important updates from denominational

## the Messenger

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groups, about how Memorial Day kicked off the summer, and enjoy several poems, authored by several young people, peppered throughout the issue.

Thank you again for this opportunity!

—Brittany Price, Guest Editor

## Submission Deadline Reminder

Time-sensitive articles submitted to *the Messenger* must be received by the **10<sup>th</sup> of each month** to be considered for print in the following issue.



*Message from the President*

## Spiritual Conscience and Speaking Truth to Power

*The Year of the New Jerusalem: 2025–26*



One of Swedenborg's most careful nineteenth-century readers, Major General Ethan Allen Hitchcock, brought a stirring challenge to unethical behavior by the American government that I find myself contemplating about a lot these days. Together with CSS

board member Rev. Dr. Lewis Shaw and CSS student Michael Goos, we are working on an enhanced scholarly edition of Hitchcock's remarkable 1858 book, *Swedenborg, a Hermetic Philosopher*.

Named after his famous grandfather, the Revolutionary War hero, Ethan Allen, Hitchcock after his West Point graduation performed a long career that included serving in Abraham Lincoln's White House cabinet as chief advisor to the Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, where he was a favorite of Lincoln and one of two people who stayed with the president's dead body for two days after the assassination. They had shared an interest in spiritual ethics, and in fact, Hitchcock was quite principled about spiritual ethics in his career, which often put him in challenging circumstances from a moral point of view.

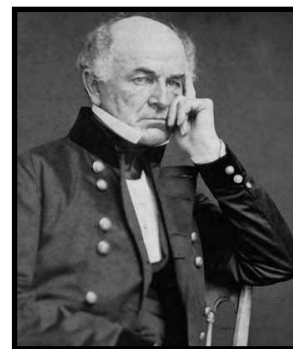
As history now reads Hitchcock, his hallmark is the role given him after the infamous Indian Removal Act of 1830 that authorized the U.S. government to negotiate treaties with Native American tribes east of the Mississippi River for their removal to federal territory west of the river. Put in charge of overseeing the removals and treaties, Hitchcock increasingly burned with fury over the actions of the federal government in carrying out the new law. Keeping reams of notes and records as he attempted to correct errors, obvious deceptions, and crimes by the U.S. government and to protect Native American Indians from horrible abuses, he attempted to deliver a brutal report to Congress.

He concluded "the air is full of scandals" and promised "the foul transactions shall be probed to the bottom and the thieves punished." But his report was suppressed. He accused many in Washington of hiding dirt to protect themselves and their friends. He was never able to get any proper response to his official report, and nothing was ever done.

In writing on Swedenborg nearly fifteen years later, Hitchcock consistently notes the importance of honoring the spiritual conscience that is implanted by God in every human being. He reflects that our conscience is the special place where the Divine often seeks to trouble us around our poor intentions and actions that violate spiritual integrity and sabotage spiritual formation. The very purpose of good religion is to awaken the conscience since it is so often buried—

not dead, however, but only sleeping. He writes, "In whomsoever the conscience is properly awakened, a fire is raised which burns and consumes everything opposed to its own nature. If anyone doubts this, let him study the nature of the conscience, and see how uncompromising it is; that it can neither be bribed nor hoodwinked; that it is ubiquitous, and is everywhere present with its subject."

It is worth noting that in Swedenborg's famed four "Rules of Life," one of them is "to keep the conscience clear." Hitchcock certainly tried to do that. Native American communities and historians still celebrate Hitchcock's courage of conscience. His book on Swedenborg elevates the word "conscience"



*Gen. Ethan Allen Hitchcock*

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## International Summer Camp 2025: Fun, Faith, and Friendship

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of London on Sunday. As tired as we were and despite missing our friends from the Midwest, our self-guided tour was fantastic. We traversed London by Underground (the Tube) as well as the classic red double-decker buses. We soaked up as many sights and as much culture as we could during our brief but intensive London visit.

Our first stop after we dropped our luggage at Euston station was Covent Garden. This open-air market was a delight of bustling activity with its many shoppes, street performers, bakeries, and souvenir booths. After lunch, we carried on to St. Paul's Cathedral. The original cathedral church was founded on this site in A.D. 604.

The high-domed present structure was completed in 1710. We explored the beautiful interior, and many of our group traversed the 528 steps up to the Golden Gallery for the amazing view of the London skyline. We even had the opportunity to join in a unison community prayer at the top of the hour.

Next, we hopped over to the London Eye to peer across the Thames River at Westminster and Elizabeth Tower (Big Ben). Then we were off to the Graffiti Tunnel to gaze upon the street art and spray artists at work. We even had the chance to leave our own marks on the graffiti-covered walls.

Finally, as evening approached,

we sleepily dragged ourselves back to Euston, where we ate a quick dinner and boarded our exhausted legs onto the train to Atherstone. A short ninety-minute nap later, we arrived at Atherstone station, where we piled into a taxi van to finish the remaining three miles of our journey through the English countryside to Purley Chase Retreat Centre. Our Purley hosts, Anne and Rev. David Gaffney, were there to warmly greet us with biscuits and tea. After a little conversation, we each found our way to our rooms for some much-needed rest.

After a sound and solid twelve to fifteen hours of sleep, we awoke to a

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Teens from the Midwest (top left) and Northeast (top right) meet up at the airport to travel to the UK. On the day they arrived, they went sightseeing around London: St. Paul's Cathedral (bottom left), London skyline (bottom middle), and Tube surfing on the London Underground (bottom right).





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bright, sunny Sunday marking the starting day of ISC25. Teens and staff leaders drifted in throughout the afternoon, with our own group from the Midwest wearily arriving from London at the dinner hour. Once everyone was settled in, our evening began with a review of the rules, along with some icebreaker games to help us begin to meet our new friends. We closed Sunday night with a Vespers service before heading off to bed.

Our ISC25 theme for the week was **The Four Essential Elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air**. These four elements are not only material, but deeply spiritual. Religious and sacred texts focused on these four essential elements. They are the tools of the mystic, and they still speak to us and guide us on our journey. Each day of ISC25 featured a different element with sessions, crafts, activities, and discussions focused on that element.



Every morning opened with a brief Matins chapel service followed by two sessions with a tea break at 11:00 AM, separating the class time. Activities, games, and outings were held in the afternoon. After dinner, we gathered for a special evening event. The evening closed with Vespers. Matins and Vespers services were mostly led by teen groups.

Monday's theme, led by Jenny Jones, was **Earth**. Jenny focused mainly on two stories, Mark 4:1–9, the Parable of the Sower, and the Clay and the Potter from Jeremiah 18. Jenny reminded us that on earth, we are a work in progress, being formed and reformed over and over. When we die, we are set and dried as the pot we have created. We are glazed in the spiritual world, then fired as a completed pot in heaven. In the second half of Jenny's session, after eleven o'clock tea, we each got to work with earthen clay to form our own pots and unique creations.

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Boy, the teens packed a lot in on that first day! Riding a double-decker bus (top left), Camryn adding to the Graffiti Tunnel (top right), tea with the Moomins (middle left), and exhaustion finally taking over on the train (middle right). After an epic journey cursed with cancellations and delays, the Midwest teens (left) finally arrived on Sunday, in London, ready for their adventure!



## Fun, Faith, and Friendship

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For the Monday afternoon activity, the teens formed into teams, chose a country to represent, and played zany Olympic games on the lawn. It was fun to see the teens dress up and paint themselves in the colors of the different flags of the nations. In the evening, we played games like Cereal Box and Find the Peas (that one might have been a bit too loud) before heading off to bed.

Tuesday, **Water** day, was led by Andy Leather. He discussed Noah and the Flood (Genesis 6–8) and led breakout discussion groups about water. We learned that water, in general, corresponds to truth. The story of Noah and the ark teaches us that a flood of falsity can come over us, and we can feel like we are drowning. But with God's help and the help of your friends and people you trust, you can build an ark to keep you afloat.

In spiritual terms, just as water is essential for natural life, truth is essential for spiritual life. Truth, especially as derived from the Word of God, nourishes the soul, supports growth in wisdom, and aids in the process of spiritual regeneration. It acts as a medium for

understanding divine principles and applying them to life, leading to spiritual purification and enlightenment.

The teens broke into groups and performed skits that demonstrated the correspondence of water.

In the afternoon, we strolled to the nearby village of Atherstone for shopping and swimming at the town's recreation center. The visit to the local candy store is always a sweet treat. For the evening activity, Meg Delderfield hosted a fun quiz night (trivia). Is a bat really faster than a salmon?

Wednesday was our outing day. This was a big highlight of the ISC25 week. We took a break from our element theme and after morning Matins, we took a chartered bus to Warwick,

where we enjoyed a beautiful afternoon at Warwick Castle. The castle was originally the site where William the Conqueror established a motte and bailey fort in 1068. The existing stone castle has endured sieges, fires, and rebellions and has undergone many restoration projects. It now is the home to wonderful exhibits, displays, and activities including three

highlights that we witnessed: the War of the Roses, which depicted the famous 1455 conflict between the House of Lancaster and the House of York with jousting, stunt horse riding, and



*The International Summer Camp theme of 2025 was the four elements. Top element, earth, meant working clay. Left element, water, meant preparing and performing skits. Right and bottom element, fire, meant understanding and respecting this force. The center element, air, led to an afternoon of kite flying!*

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sword fighting; the Falconer's Quest, which included a display of numerous birds of prey swooping and soaring above and around us; and a show

featuring the mighty trebuchet, Britain's largest siege machine, that Jenny dubbed the "throwy thingy."

Our group had ample time to explore the castle grounds, view the many English historical exhibits inside the castle, and climb the castle towers. More than a few of us enjoyed proper English fish and chips and various ice cream desserts.

After returning to Purley and eating dinner, Andy organized many of the staff members to present a murder mystery to the teens. Costumes were fully engaged, and after much delightful banter and deliberation, it was discovered to be Brigadier Balderdash, with the sword, in the billiard room.

Thursday was the day for **Fire!** Steve

Jones, a veteran firefighter, and I lead the two morning sessions. Steve talked about his work as a firefighter and showed his fire-fighting gear and what he carried. He made a point to mention that he always carried a prayer in his pocket. One brave teen put on all of Steve's equipment. She was surprised by how much it weighed, even without the additional air tank and mask. Steve explained the three elements of the fire triangle and how they need to be in perfect balance for fire to occur (heat, fuel, and oxygen). The absence of any of the three elements or the three elements in the wrong balance prevents fire from starting.

Then I discussed the spiritual aspects of fire. Fire corresponds to love or desire, both positive (loving/heavenly) and negative (evil/hellish). The specific nature of the love or desire depends on the context in which the fire is mentioned. To understand the specific meaning in any given passage, context is crucial. Whether a fire is beneficial, representing warmth and enlightenment, or harmful, representing consumption and destruction, aligns with the nature of the love or desire depicted in the scripture passage. I talked about maintaining a balance of the four loves: love to the Lord, the



neighbor, the world, and self, and related it to the balance of the fire triangle.

I went on to discuss in detail the inner meaning of the Bible story of Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3). In this story, a bush on fire is like an idea we have acquired that has developed in our minds over a period of time, but has not yet become big enough to seem very important. The fire is the divine love that inspires the idea and moves us to go out and do something great for someone else. The idea is suddenly on fire!

In the second part of our session, Steve took us outside and demonstrated some fire activities. Teens got the opportunity to hold fire in their hands!

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*Every day was filled with social activities as well! On the first day, the teens participated in lawn Olympics (bottom left). The teens, including Derek (upper left), were assigned countries and dressed up and painted themselves in the country's colors. The next day, the teens walked to town (upper right) to enjoy the local community.*



## Fun, Faith, and Friendship

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Fire can be scary, but Steve taught us that with the proper guidance and control, it can be beautiful, useful, and exciting too. Both physically and spiritually, we need not fear fire but instead recognize it for what it is and ensure that we use it to our benefit, not our demise. The staff decided to give the teens a free afternoon off from our busy schedule to rest, paint their clay pieces that they made, and play frisbee, football (soccer), volleyball, and rounders on the lawn.

Thursday night, Rev. David Gaffney led a meaningful outdoor Holy Communion service. This was followed by a bonfire where we shared campfire songs and enjoyed roasted marshmallows. We closed out the evening with a game of Lost Potato, a capture-the-flag-type game that Steve made up that involves finding, trading, and delivering potatoes to your home base.

Friday, our last full day at ISC25, was all about **Air**. I read a few stories from the Bible about breath and wind, the words in scripture most akin to air. Air corresponds to thoughts and the intellectual aspects of the mind. Just as air provides the atmosphere needed for physical life, truth provides the intellectual and spiritual atmosphere necessary for the life of the mind and spirit. Wind can represent both the positive influx from heaven and the negative influx (aflux) from hell. For instance, when Scripture mentions Jesus calming the wind and sea (Mark 4:35–41), the wind symbolizes a turbulent, hellish influx that is subdued by Divine intervention.

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*A fun day was experienced at Warwick Castle! Falconers Quest (top), Warwick Castle (second to top), English Countryside (middle left), Charlie locked in the stocks (middle right), and a joust between the Yorks and Lancasters (bottom).*

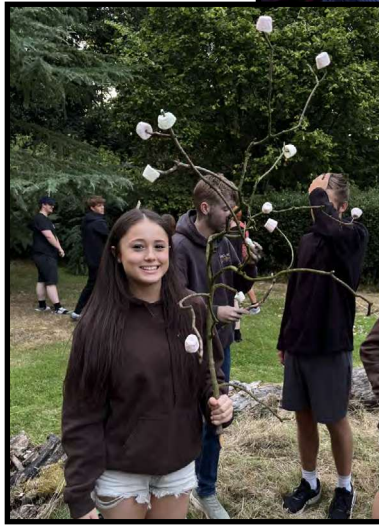




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Thus, wind in spiritual terms can denote the powerful influence of both Divine truth and evil falsities, depending on the context in which it appears in the Word. I discussed how we are not our thoughts, but rather our actions. We give influxes from heaven and hell “life” when we act on them and make them our own. When we choose to act on the heavenly or hellish thoughts in our mind, they become a part of us and lead us down a chosen path. Our collective choices ultimately determine where our soul finds its domain and takes up eternal residence. I also led a short four-square breathing exercise that Charlie previously recorded for me.



*Nothing says camp like a traditional campfire! Rosie (left) makes the ultimate marshmallow stick!*

to the States. The Midwest group had more travel troubles, and our own group from the East managed overcrowded trains and closed Underground routes to Heathrow. Nevertheless, we all managed to get back home by Sunday evening.

Now, as I reflect back on my time at Purley, I think of the amazing time we had together. I think about all the laughter and silly times we had. You see, the focus of this trip was never much about seeing London. Not that that wasn't a grand experience. It wasn't about visiting a magnificent castle, as exciting as that was. It wasn't even about listening to Bible stories, learning about our church teachings, or discussing the correspondence of the four essential elements. Important as those things were, there was much more to this experience than sightseeing and learning. This event was about finding community, friendship, and love for one another. It was the actions of the teenagers and the young adults

that stirred me to truly appreciate the ISC25.

When I look back, I see dining room tables filled with campers from different countries mixing and talking together. I see teens, young and old, prancing about the lawn, playing and laughing. I see small groups of youth planning, building, learning, growing, debating, and pondering.

What I saw was a thriving community living in love and service to one another. I witnessed the heartfelt care of staff members Holly Bauer, Erika Dearing, Heather Oelker, Kathy Tafel, Jenny, Steve, Andy, Rob, and Meg for the teens. I saw David and Anne coming out of retirement to serve Purley Chase and make this event possible. I watched Anne and her dedicated kitchen crew generously and graciously preparing three meals each day, always friendly, and always with fresh hot coffee every morning. I saw the care, mentoring, and leadership that the young adults showed to the younger teens. It didn't matter what country they came from or how well or how

The second section of the session on air was led by Andy. The teens paired up, built, and decorated homemade kites. Later that afternoon, we walked to a local park high above a quarry and flew our kites! More than one round of Let's Go Fly a Kite was sung during this activity.

For our ISC25 closing evening, a party was organized. We cleared the dining room of tables and chairs, decorated, brought in snacks, and set up for a barn dance! Everyone danced, swung, and circled around the room to Harriet's selections played by DJ Steve. The teens played a round of musical chairs, too. The party went on for quite some time.

Saturday morning, we said our goodbyes and began our long trek back

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long they knew them. It was beautiful to watch the young adults help and guide the younger campers. There are some amazing and thoughtful young leaders emerging at Purley.

I had the opportunity to speak at the staff-led closing Vespers service on Friday night. Here, I had a chance to personally thank everyone for making ISC25 and Purley not just a camp, but a home. The love, attention, and care that everyone took to welcome in strangers from foreign lands was nothing short of miraculous. I could go on and on with examples of this, but there are just too many memories to list everybody and everything. I also spoke at that closing Vespers service about the need to take the love that we found at ISC25 and bring it out into the world that so desperately needs our love and attention. This is our call and our mission.

All the teens, young adults, and staff members at Purley now have a place in my heart. I emerge from ISC25 a different person. A better person. I pray that everyone who came to ISC25

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*On the final night, the teens enjoyed an evening gala (above right) followed by an after-gala party (right)! On Thursday night, Rev. David Gaffney led an outdoor Holy Communion Service (below).*





# Created in the Image of God: Imago Dei and DEI

BY DR. REBECCA ESTERSON

## Preamble: On Wordplay

Biblical interpreters from ancient times to today have delighted in wordplay as a method for meaning-making. An example of biblical wordplay for Swedenborgians might be found in Genesis 2:23, whereby the first human created turns to the second human created and announces that she is “bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh.” In a Swedenborgian interpretation, via correspondences, Eve signifies the sense of autonomy, or the sense of selfhood that every person is given by God so that they can have the full range of human, embodied experience. The fact that the Hebrew word for “bone” has the same root as the word for “self” (etzem/atsemi) is a play on words that can be used to discover aspects of these correspondences that might resonate in our own interpretations (see *Secrets of Heaven* §156).

## Imago Dei and DEI

Some theologians in our present moment are exploring the wordplay available between our contemporary discourses about Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) and the ancient notion of Imago Dei (Dei being the genitive form of the Latin word for God, Deus). Christian theologians have historically used Genesis 1:27 as a starting point for understanding the nature of divinity in relation to humanity. That “God created humankind in His own image” became known by the Latin shorthand Imago Dei and used this as a framework for discerning ways that the human form—in body and spirit—reflects God’s form.

“You can’t take DEI out of Imago Dei,” writes religious scholar and therapist Naomi Ruth, “The concept of Imago Dei—the belief that all humans are made in the image of God—provides



*Rebecca Esterson attending a recent public demonstration with signs inspired by Idaho elementary school teacher Sarah Inama. Inama resisted anti-DEI efforts in her district that required her to remove messages of inclusion from her classroom.*

a deep theological grounding for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. If every person reflects God’s image, then every individual has inherent dignity, worth, and value. This understanding naturally calls for justice, respect, and inclusion in all aspects of society.”

“DEI” is a new phrase for an idea that has a long history in the United States: that people who are not otherwise included in our institutions should be included, for the sake of equality and diversity. It is an idea that can be traced, for example, through laws enacted for the inclusion of women’s votes (19<sup>th</sup> Amendment, 1920) for the hiring of veterans (Veterans Preference Act, 1944), for the outlawing of racial and other forms of discrimination in public places, employment, and federally assisted programs (Civil Rights Act, 1964), for the rights of immigrants (Immigration and Nationality Act), and for the rights of people

with disabilities (Americans with Disabilities Act), among others.

In our present moment in the United States, we are witnessing a shift away from policies that support Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Executive orders made by the president and countless efforts at the state and local levels are removing protections for those who are otherwise excluded. Such orders have been aimed at, for example, the Smithsonian Museums, the Arlington National Cemetery, the Library of Congress, elementary school classrooms, universities, etc. As we witness such a shift in our national discourse and in our laws, it will be necessary for people of faith to ground their efforts of resistance in the simple truths of their faith.

Our Swedenborgian theology celebrates the diversity of human forms in light of Imago Dei, paving the way for an embrace of the fullest possible inclusion in our communities and institutions.

## Imago Dei and DEI in the Writings of Swedenborg

Firstly, it is worth noting that the Latin phrase Imago Dei appears frequently in the writings, and not just in reference to the form of human beings. All of creation, the whole universe, including every plant and animal and even the soil of the earth, is created in God’s Image. We find the phrase Imago Dei used this way, for instance, in *Divine Love and Wisdom* §55: “The universe, therefore, which is God’s image, and hence full of God, could only be created in God from God.” Quare Universum, quod est imago Dei, et inde plenum Deo, non potuit nisi quam in Deo a Deo creari (See also *Divine Love and Wisdom* §326). Every

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## Created In the Image of God

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created thing reflects the form of the Creator, and the extraordinary variety on display in the world around us reflects God's form "as in a mirror" (*Heaven and Hell* §56).

**Our Swedenborgian theology celebrates the diversity of human forms in light of Imago Dei, paving the way for an embrace of the fullest possible inclusion in our communities and institutions.**

The human body is just one example of God's image, then, but it is a useful one. If we seek a model for how the form of God's image requires the harmony of diverse parts, we need look no further than our own bodies.

We know that there are within us not only the parts formed as organs from blood vessels and nerve fibers—the forms we call our viscera. There are also skin, membranes, tendons, cartilage, bones, nails, and teeth. They are less intensely alive than the organic forms, which they serve as ligaments, coverings, and supports. If there are to be all these elements in that heavenly person who is heaven, it cannot

be made up of the people of one religion only. It needs people from many religions; so all the people who make these two universal principles of the church central to their own lives have a place in that heavenly person, that is, in heaven (*Divine Providence* §326 [10])

A healthy community will function like a body, with various members fulfilling different functions, and the whole will be more harmonious if its members are valued for what makes them unique, rather than for what makes them the same. The face is another useful model for understanding this principle precisely because no two are the same.

For this reason no one has a face exactly like that of any other; for each one's face is an image of his mind; and in the spiritual world it is an image of their ruling love. In particular, everyone's delights are of infinite variety. It is impossible for any one delight to be exactly like another, or the same as another, either those that follow one after another or those that exist together at the same time, no one ever being the same as another (*Heaven and Hell* §486).

Finally, the whole of the spiritual world operates like the body, with various different parts working together harmoniously. And here we find the most provocative idea in this collection of ideas: that heaven is made more perfect the more diverse parts it has. "Perfection comes from variety even in heaven" (*Heaven and Hell* §56, also *Secrets of Heaven* §690). This is an idea of heaven



"No Kings" protest in Oakland, California.

that rejects notions of a single ideal form, or of souls merging into an indistinguishable unit. Rather, heaven is an ecosystem, like earth, whose health depends on the participation of countless different species. This is a model of Divine inclusion that can inspire new ways of thinking about our communities and our country. What would it mean to imagine that our country is made more perfect, not by unison, but by the harmony of different parts?

I believe that we, as Swedenborgians, are called to do what we can to create communities that include those not otherwise included, to create societies where all people are able to participate and contribute, for the sake of the full expression of God's creation.

God gave our souls flesh and bones, God gave each of us a sense of self, so that we can be sub-creators, in God's image. We must, in-turn, honor the dignity and selfhood of all who walk the planet with us, who are also created Imago Dei. We are created in God's image, not to be and look all the same. God's form is as diverse and as beautiful as the cosmos. ☩



Dr. Rebecca K. Esterson is the dean of CSS and the Dorothea Harvey Professor of Swedenborgian Studies. She teaches in the Department of Sacred Texts and Their Interpretation at the GTU in Berkeley, California and is a member of the Swedenborg Society of the East Bay.



"No Kings" protest in Oakland, California on June 14, 2025. One of the largest days of protest in U.S. history.



## Celebrating Milestones

## Fifty Years of Women In Ministry: Rev. Dr. Dorothea Ward Harvey

BY CHRIS LAITNER

**D**uring the last week of June 1975, I was at Urbana College in Urbana, Ohio, attending my first full annual Convention of the General Convention of the Swedenborgian Church as a registered, voting delegate of the Michigan Association. I had been a Church member all of my life, so this convention process was fascinating. This particular annual Convention was potentially a pivotal point in the life of the Church, as the delegates would cast the final vote to determine whether or not to ordain the first female minister in the Church's history.

Constitutionally, it had been determined that there was no prohibition; however, history listed only male ministers since the Church began. This new possibility generated a major study by the Council of Ministers, with much discussion and written material, shared with all members of the Church throughout the United States and Canada. Debates and delegate discussions were held at recent annual conventions. At this 1975 convention, by its majority vote, the Council of Ministers voted to recommend the ordination of Dr. Dorothea Harvey, professor of Biblical Studies at Urbana College, for ordination into the ministry of the General Convention. This year's delegates were being asked to cast the final vote. It was a pivotal moment.

The delegate vote, with 134 votes

cast, was 103 for, 23 against, with 8 abstentions. Dorothea's ordination would take place on Sunday, June 29, 1975.

Dorothea's background and credentials were impeccable. Her father

Semitic languages. She attended Columbia, gaining her Ph.D. in Literature of Religion in 1960. She continued to teach and travel. In 1968, she became Professor of Bible Studies at Urbana College. Decades later, she retired from Urbana University with Honor Roll status for her work and, later, a chapel named in her honor. After her 1975 ordination, Rev. Dr. Harvey was appointed Chaplain for Urbana College and was called as the parish minister by the Urbana Swedenborgian Church. She was truly "home" in her teaching, counselling, and ministry.

Over several years, I had the pleasure of working and meeting with Rev. Dr. Har-

vey. She became a friend and mentor, but I didn't experience her as a professor or parish minister, so I asked friends for input.

Rev. Ron Brugler attended Urbana College. During his time there, Dorothea Harvey assisted in getting his draft status changed, provided classes that contained scholarly information delivered in a warm, friendly, and conversational manner, and presented him with a completed application to the Swedenborg School of Religion, telling him that he "only had to write an essay." She had a great impact on his life.

Sue Ditmire recalls being a member of the Ohio Association in the 1970s

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*Dorothea Harvey in Jordan in 1966.  
She started working at Urbana University shortly after this.*

was the minister of the denomination's Philadelphia church, and Dorothea's schooling through high school was at Friends Schools. She entered Wellesley College, graduating in 1943. Then she entered the Navy's WAVES program and for three years worked in the area of communications. Leaving the Navy, she became an adjunct instructor at Wellesley and also began a Master's of Divinity at Union Theological Seminary. Her interest in Biblical archaeology led her to the Near East to visit museums and to participate in various research projects. After earning her Master's in Divinity, she taught at Milwaukee-Downer College and Lawrence University. She continued to travel and became proficient in



## Celebrating Milestones

## Fifty Years of Women In Ministry

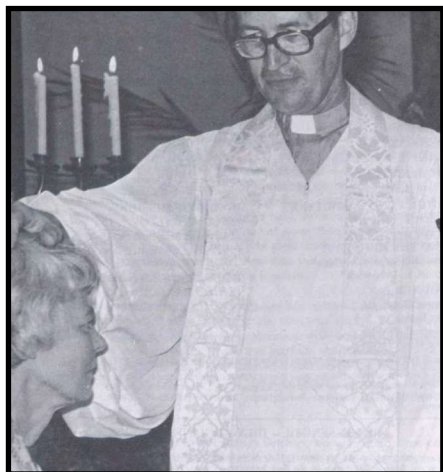
Continued from page 93

and being part of a group of women who were drawn to Dorothea's wisdom. Dorothea led weekend free-flowing gatherings for these progressive women who benefited from her knowledge, social concern, and spiritual guidance.

Mary Ann Fischer, also an Ohio Association member, spent several years as our denomination's lay representative to the National Council of Churches during the years that Dorothea Harvey served as a representative minister serving in areas of ecumenism and social justice. They often roomed together in the hosting hotels and became good friends. Mary Ann spent one year at Urbana College, and Dorothea officiated at Mary Ann's wedding.

Ron, Sue, and Mary Ann have fond memories of Dorothea's ministerial presence and preaching in the Urbana Swedenborgian Church. Loaded with

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The cover of the 1975 July/August issue of the Messenger. The caption read: "Retiring President Ernest Martin conducts Rite of Ordination of Dr. Dorothea Harvey into the Ministry"



## Almont Women's Auxiliary

BY KATIE BROWN

The Almont Women's Auxiliary meets each July during Almont Summer School. Don't be fooled, the group is "auxiliary" in name only. It has been a foundation of support for a wide variety of needs at camp over many decades. A long-time favorite fundraising tradition of ours is the birthday party, originated by our sterling friends of blessed memory, Ruth Brandau and Dean Trombley. Everyone has a birthday, so teens and adults (it's past the younger ones' bedtime) get to come to the decorated dining hall and celebrate our birthdays together with cake, ice cream, and fizzy sherbet punch! Admission is a very affordable ten cents for every year of your life, but if you'd rather not reveal your true age, simply pay as if you are 100 years old: \$10 even! This year at the meeting, as we reflected on the milestone 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Dorothea Harvey's ordination, we thought of all of the many women of Almont's

history who have made its legacy possible. A genius idea came from Haylee Johnson: why not make the theme of the party "Wonder Women?" We got cakes and decorations in blue, red, and gold, accented with jaunty lassos of truth. Haylee even donated a set of Wonder Woman pajamas for the silent auction table at the party, where they were oo-ed and ah-ed and triumphantly won by Betsy Lau! It would be difficult to list all of the pivotal women from Almont's past without a bit more research, but I can name some of them seen in the display here: Grandma Allan, Eunice Hamilton, Edith Hamilton Ferguson, Elinor Johnson, Dora Pfister (Auntie Dora), Ruth Brandau (DSAR: Dear Sweet Aunt Ruth or just Aunt Ruth), Mary Crenshaw, Marge Locke, Carol Albright, Dean Trombley, Joylyn Ives, Val Lau, and Joyce Fekete. Their lives have been a blessing to many, and we remember them with immense gratitude and love. 🌸



## Celebrating Milestones

## Ten Years Making Church Together

BY REV. DR. AMANDA RILEY

On May first, 2015, Rev. Anna Woofenden, founding pastor of The Garden Church, picked up the keys from the landlord and unlocked the gates to what would be a pop-up garden and the new home of The Garden Church. Rev. Anna details the first years of the church in her book *“This is God’s Table: Finding Church Beyond the Walls.”* At the very beginning, Rev. Anna and a small team cleaned the lot, picking up broken glass and cigarette butts. They stuffed scratchy burlap tubes full of straw to make beds for the pop-up garden, they received soil, and they planted. Ten years later, we are still planting.

On Thursday, May first, 2025, we opened our gates for the monthly first Thursday Community Art Walk, as we always do, and we invited community leaders who have supported us over the years to hold one of ten candles and say a few words. Our first lead gardener came, along with our landlord, a member of the United Methodist Church where our church offices are located, and our dear friend and neighbor across the street, who opens her space to us when it rains or for the annual Pacific Coast Association meeting last fall. It was such a blessing to be surrounded by members of the wider San Pedro Community. Our “house band,” the Harbor Jazz Ensemble, played while we projected a slideshow

with images of the first ten years of The Garden Church (The slideshow is available on our website at <https://tinyurl.com/4bvzk632>).



*City of Los Angeles Councilmember, Tim McOsker (left), presenting a plaque to Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley (right) which will be installed on the garden wall.*

After two and a half years, in the fall of 2017, Rev. Anna formed a transition team. She was now married to the love of her life, David, and since they did not find success securing a professorial job here in Los Angeles, they made preparations to settle in western Massachusetts. Three of us were trained to replace her because not one of us was fully brave enough to try to fill Rev. Anna’s shoes alone. That group was Rev. Jonathan Mitchell, Rev. Asher O’Callaghan, and me. By December, Rev. Anna was living in Massachusetts and commuting here, and Rev. Asher was relocating to Colorado. That left two of us, and so the members of the Garden Church graciously welcomed two transitional pastors, thanking Rev.

Anna and Rev. Asher for their commitment to the church and blessing them on the next step in their journey. Also in 2017, Feed and be Fed, the start-up non-profit championed by The Garden Church, formally separated from The Garden Church with a separate board, bank account, and non-profit status. It was an eventful year.

Rev. Jonathan and I were co-pastors for five years, weathering COVID and the additional re-imagining that came with that period of time. We were blessed to continue to nurture the seed of calling that Rev. Anna helped plant in our now Licensed Pastor, Connie McOsker. Rev. Jonathan and I supported her through her Swedenborgian education, which led to her consecration here in 2023. At Rev. Jonathan’s retirement and transition service, he handed his keys and the stole sewn by Rev. Anna Woofenden to Rev. Dr. David C. Brown. Rev. Dave had also been ministering here for three years. Today, the ministry team of The Garden Church consists of: Pastor Connie, Rev. Dave, and me.

We are only able to do what we do thanks to our Music Director, Dr. Linda O’Brien Rothe, the leadership and volunteers of Feed and be Fed, who tend this beautiful garden, and a dedicated board of directors composed of members of the church who take turns

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## Celebrating Milestones

### Ten Years Making Church

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in various positions and provide countless hours, expertise, and spiritual support to the clergy, one another, our church, the Swedenborgian Church of North America and the larger San Pedro community. I am grateful daily for everyone who shows up to make church together, and to those who hold us in prayer from so many places around this world.

We are all part of something amazing. Something miraculous. 95% of new churches close in the first five years. In year five, we were in a global pandemic, gathering online instead of in-person. We were able to continue to grow the garden and provide weekly meals for those who came to our gates in search of food and company. We are blessed each Sunday to worship in a church that is a garden, and a garden that is a church. Each Sunday, when we open the gates, we are witnessing the miracle and blessing of community and the Lord's creation. All of this is thanks to God and for God's glory.

The planning team for our ten-year anniversary planned to celebrate the first of May with the larger San Pedro community, and then a second celebration focused on our congregation and

our faith community connections. On Sunday, May 4, we gathered for our Sunday rhythm: 3:00 PM Work Together, 4:00 PM Worship Together, 5:00 PM Eat Together. Our worship service opened with the consecration of a new stump, or altar table. Our first altar had begun to lose its bark and had termites. Our new altar came from one of the redwoods that once surrounded Wayfarers Chapel.

Rev. Dave opened our worship service with these words:

On that first day, in addition to opening the gates of The Garden Church for the first time, Rev. Anna also rolled a cedar stump down the street from a tree lot on the corner of Sixth and Pacific. For the last ten years, that stump has served as our altar, as our communion table. Today, we are blessed to initiate a new table, this piece of redwood. This particular stump came from the grounds of Wayfarers Chapel and was once part of a tall tree that surrounded the glass chapel. Today, as Rev. Anna did for our first altar, I will anoint the altar with oil and ask God's blessing.

On that first day, Rev. Anna said these words:

We consecrate this table with the anointing of oil, the oil that runs over the head of those who are prophets and priests of God's message in the world. We anoint our table with oil as it, in itself, at the center of our worship space and of our life together as a community, bears God's prophetic message to the world. All are welcome at this table. All people, in all expressions of humanity, are welcome at this table to feed and be fed. This is God's table, all are welcome here. And so we anoint and consecrate this as God's Table.



*Rev. Dr. David Brown anoints the new altar with oil.*

Rev. Dave poured oil on the stump and prayed:

Holy Lord, Blessed are you, Lord our God, who loved your son through the cross, and into new life you do offer this same love for us, calling us to celebrate the memory of Jesus' last meal with his disciples gathered around a table. May this table, which we are anointing this day, be the center of our praise, thanksgiving, and effort to bring more heaven here to earth. May it be the table at which we break bread that gives us life, and drink the cup which makes us one with you and with all who share this feast. May this table be the foundation of the unfailing waters of baptism. Here, may we draw close to Christ Jesus, the cornerstone of our faith, that as we make church together, as we re-imagine church, we remain firmly planted in you, and in the shared mission to bring more heaven here to earth. Amen.

Later in the service, Rev. Jonathan officiated Communion on our new altar table. As part of the service, we also commissioned a new baptismal font/



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## Celebrating Milestones

### Ten Years Making Church

*Continued from page 96*

bee bowl. We used these words:

Today, we give thanks to God, and we seek God's blessing, as we set apart this new baptismal bowl for God's glory. Re-merging the words of the Psalmist "The voice of the Lord is upon the mighty waters" (Psalm 29:3) and second Corinthians "If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Corinthians 5:17) Through the waters of Baptism we are joined to Christ, clothed with God's mercy and forgiveness. We give thanks for the gift of baptism.

And we prayed:

Holy God, merciful and mighty, you are the river of life, you are the everlasting wellspring, you are the font of rebirth. We glorify you for oceans and lakes, for rivers and streams. We honor you for clouds and rain, for dew and marine layer. Your waters are below us, around us, above us: our life is born in you. You, Lord, are the fountain of resurrection; we praise you for your saving waters. Amen.

Our scripture readings for the day came from Isaiah 58:6–11 and 2 Corinthians 3:5–9, reminding us of our calling and our role in that calling. At The Garden Church, at the beginning of all of our services, we take out the image of the tree of life and remind ourselves of our shared mission—to bring heaven here to earth. In heaven, God's people will be free, food will be shared, and everyone will have the clothing and shelter they need.

Following communion, we shared a community meal made with salad from the garden, herb-encrusted chicken, spring vegetable quinoa, home-made bread, and carrot cake, all made



*The garden dinosaur is ready to party!*

from vegetables grown by Feed and be Fed and local chefs and bakers who know and love our ministry.

Our tenth anniversary planning team also created a book for those in our community to share memories of the church and asked those from far away who know us well to send us video greetings for our anniversary. That video is also on our website (<https://tinyurl.com/2tjmvye5>).

We are grateful to all who helped us celebrate from near and far, those who made a special gift in honor of our birthday, and those who left messages for us. If you'd like to offer a memory for us, you are welcome to complete this online form (<https://tinyurl.com/bdckadax>). 📧



Rev. Dr. Amanda Riley has served numerous Presbyterian churches, and is pastor at The Garden Church. She fell in love with the vision, work, and mission of the church, and became involved in 2016.

### A Garden Made With Pride

Pride is like a garden  
Each flower and tree stands out  
Each petal and leaf is different  
The rose shines brightly with her ruby petals  
She stands proud and strong  
Dazzling dew drops decorate her bright red dress  
The orange tree spreads his arms  
Juicy orange fruits dangle around him  
He waves his arms welcoming the sun to the garden  
The sun flower sways in the wind  
Her yellow petals spread wide  
She towers over all the other flowers  
The peaceful tree fern hugs the trees  
He reaches out his pointed green leaves  
Stretching from a good night's sleep  
The humble blueberry bush spreads out kind hands  
They welcome animals to eat their sweet blue treats  
The lavender bursts out a sweet smell  
Her purple stands out  
But her smell is what makes her the star of the garden  
Together these plants come together to make a rainbow  
Many colors come to one community  
A garden made with pride

—Miriam Esterson, age 10

### Message from the President

*Continued from page 83*

138 times, and he knew his Swedenborg well: "People who have conscience are enabled by the Lord to think good thoughts about their neighbors consistently and are held back from thinking evil thoughts about them. Accordingly, conscience cannot possibly exist except in those who love their neighbor as themselves and think affirmatively about religious truth" (*Secrets of Heaven*, §1919).

—Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence  
[president@swedenborg.org](mailto:president@swedenborg.org)

## Community News

## “Love Wins ” as Wilmington Church Rallies in Wake of Pride Flag Vandalism

BY AUSTIN CASSIDY

In the early hours of Monday, January 20, a vandal climbed over a chain-link fence and into the backyard of Wilmington’s Church of the Holy City. They proceeded to slash the church’s Pride Flag nearly in half, leaving evidence of their work via footprints in the freshly fallen snow.

These actors likely expected to silence a message of inclusion. Instead, they inspired an even more powerful statement of defiance and love.

“This hateful and cowardly act will not deter us from supporting our LGBTQ+ siblings and their rights to dignity and community. LGBTQ+ people will continue to be welcomed into our church with their whole selves,” Rev. Shada Sullivan told her congregation in the wake of the hate crime. “The flag will be replaced as soon as possible, but for the immediate moment, we are leaving the damaged flag up as a signal of our resolve.”

Rather than being intimidated, Rev. Sullivan led the congregation in a response that would transform an act of

hatred into a beacon of hope. Under her guidance, the church replaced the flag in the same location and embarked on a meaningful journey of healing and outreach.

One crafty member of the congregation, Andrea Cassidy, took on the task of mending the damaged flag. Rather than hiding the slash marks, she made them more visible, using rainbow paracord and grommets to lace the mangled flag back together.

At Rev. Sullivan’s direction, the repaired flag was then given a place of honor. During Pride month in June, it was re-hung on the front of the church’s historic granite building, just feet from the main entrance—the most visible spot possible.



*The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware.*

“Too often, we have to hide our scars when we are hurt, but not this time,” Cassidy explained. “The flag now says, ‘You can cut me, but I’ll keep flying.’”

The church’s powerful response to this hateful act garnered significant regional media attention, with the story being covered by NBC and ABC television affiliates in Philadelphia, WDEL radio in Wilmington, and The News-Journal newspaper. The widespread coverage amplified the church’s message of inclusion far beyond the small congregation.

“We wanted to be clear that it wouldn’t dissuade us from being a welcoming community,” Rev. Sullivan told reporters. “Our faith calls us to love our neighbor. However, that love cannot be a disembodied sentimentality. Love is an action. The actions we choose today are to stand in solidarity with the LGBTQ+ community, to honor their experience and their gifts, and to pursue a more just and inclusive world.”



*The pride flag hanging up at the church was vandalized (left), but then was mended with paracord and re-hung (right), stronger than before.*



## Featured Community: The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

## A Personal Reflection: What Is a Religion?

BY REV. JUNCHOL LEE

*Throughout the year various communities are spotlighted on the home page of [swedenborg.org](http://swedenborg.org). This month, it is the Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco. The following is a reprint of a reflection authored by their pastor, Rev. Junchol Lee, published in 2017 on [sfswedenborgian.org](http://sfswedenborgian.org). Please visit either website for more information on their Sunday services and other offerings.*

I have no scholarly authority to give a proper definition of what religion is or what it is not. Thus, my purpose here is simply to contemplate the question, “What is a religion?” and share my personal reflections.

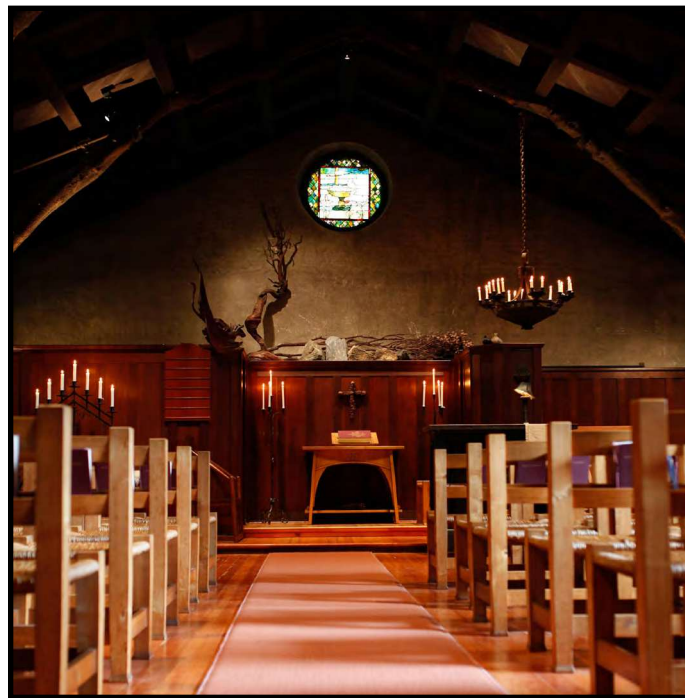
The way that I found my own definition of religion was not an easy journey. Whenever asked, I introduce myself as a Buddhist, Confucianist, Daoist, and Swedenborgian Christian. This itself shows that I have traveled some rough roads in finding my truth. Also, these days, this background of mine serves me very well in initiating spiritually intriguing conversations. One of the most common questions that I hear is, “How does it really work for you to have and live with multiple religions?” My answer to them is usually, “I have one religion with three philosophies of life.” This usually leads to another interesting conversation about the difference between religion and life philosophy.

For many people, Buddhism, Daoism, and even Confucianism are

religions on their own. But to me, they are not religions, but philosophies of life. My reasoning is very simply that all three were taught by wise humans to explain how our reality came into being. Personally, I believe that a religion must answer or explain how it began and why. Therefore, I believe the true purpose of a religion has to be revelatory, meaning it must enlighten the

a chick before they hatch, and caterpillars cannot know their destiny to be beautiful butterflies before building their cocoons, it is impossible for humans to perceive and comprehend the possibility of their destiny after their life on Earth. This truth, if it were to be true, has to come from a being or force that is beyond human reality and capable of seeing the whole process all together and at once.

Certainly, human history is full of sadness and pain in both the East and the West when it comes to religious institutions and their abuse of authority and knowledge. A great deal of abuse still happens today, and there are tens of millions of people, if not more, who are the victims. I am a clergy ordained by a denomination that is a member of the National Council of Christian Churches in North America. Thus, I might be qualified to share my frustration that Christianity has done as much, if not more, damage to human minds than the sum of all damage done by all other regions on Earth. Yet, I



*The altar in The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco.  
(Credit: Laurie Passey)*

minds of humanity to a truth that is difficult to perceive and comprehend without going through some special process.

Furthermore, the core message of a religion—the notion of life and purpose beyond our present, physical reality—has to come from what is non-human in origin. Just as eggs cannot teach each other what it is like to be

have accepted my ordination from a liberal Protestant Christian denomination. Why? In a way, that is very hard to explain. I perceived that there was something very unique about the message carried throughout the Bible from the Divine Being whose name is “I AM WHO I AM.” And, it deeply inspires and enlightens me whenever I read this

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## Featured Community: The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

### What Is a Religion?

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message, especially when and where the Divine Being emphasizes that “I am not made by human hands like other gods you worship!” and as in Isaiah 55:8–9: “As the heavens are higher than the Earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.” The message came to my heart as one that is from a being who is non-human, yet loves humans deeply.

So, how did this conflicted practice and perception of religion as we know it come to be? Linguistically, the word religion is derived from the Latin *religio*. However, the origin of *religio* was obscure even in ancient times. There are a few classical interpretations which have been accepted as definitions of the word *religio*, such as “proper performance of rites in veneration of the gods” by Cicero, or “to reconnect” by St. Augustine. Yet, there is no one definition of religion that satisfies all scholars and practitioners of religions in the world. In other words, defining

religion is a very hard, if not impossible, task!

In whichever way we desire to define religion or being religious, as soon as it is defined, it will only be valid to a person or a group of people who agree with the definition.

So, I would like to begin with a somewhat conventional understanding of what it means to be religious: one has a strong conviction/faith in something/some being that neither can be proven or disproven by human logic and/or the natural law. Yet, religion or being religious is ultimately about the human experiences of something/some being who is not of human origin. Herein lies the paradox: religion has to be defined and systematized by



*Rev. Junchol Lee welcomes members of the congregation.  
(Credit Kara Gwynn)*

humans based on their experiences of something/someone that is non-human. Here, non-human does not mean just a different species, such as how a dog is non-human, but rather a difference in the realm of existence and reality itself. For instance, humans live and dwell in the physical

reality, while the objects of religion are often beings whose main domain is in the spiritual reality, the existence of which itself is debatable. A religion or being religious can be understood by means of two methodologies: 1. An institutionalized system of rituals and faith imposed on people, promising that they will be part of something bigger than their life; 2. An individual and personal conviction, assured by means of what one believes to be true, that serves as strong personal faith.

During my past twenty-four years of parish ministry, I have encountered many individuals who seem to sincerely pursue their spiritual cultivation, but seriously reject any idea of being involved in religion or religious practices. To them, anything that comes with the adjective “religious” is either poisonous or dangerous to their spiritual well-being. After having a number of conversations with them, I realized that what they mean by religion is often the institutionalized set of dogmas and rituals that were imposed on them or their ancestors by others. In a



*Rev. Junchol Lee addressing the congregation.  
(Credit Kara Gwynn)*

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## Featured Community: The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

### What Is a Religion?

*Continued from page 100*

way, what those people are rejecting, to my mind, is not so much the religious elements themselves, but the fact that a way of life was imposed upon them harshly and judgmentally without giving them a choice or asking their willing consent to participate. This learning led me to contemplate a fundamental characteristic of humanity: no one likes to be told what to do!

In my understanding, to be religious, to have a religion, or to be an active participant of a religious organization are all different matters. To be religious, one simply needs to have a certain awareness of the Creator or Creating Force and/or to acknowledge a spiritual aspect to human existence. To have a religion, one actually has to accept a pre-set system of beliefs, a way of life, and a certain purpose of life as it is taught by that particular religion. To be an active participant of a religious organization, one not only has to accept what a certain religion teaches, but also has to join a community of people who share the same set of beliefs. In other words, anyone can be religious as long as they have an understanding and conscious awareness of the inner depth within their apparent reality. But having a religion or actively participating in one is often a matter of choosing to accept an institutionalized system of beliefs and rituals—systems that are typically human-made and subject to change.

Regarding religion/being religious, perhaps the first question one has to ask is, “Is being religious a matter of choice?” (The question is concerned not about being part of a specific religion, such as being a Christian or a Muslim or a Hindu, but about being religious by itself.) This is the most

important question, at least to me, because the answer clearly demonstrates where one stands on the matter of religion. If one were to believe that being religious or not is a simple matter of human choice, then one is acknowledging that all religions are ultimately mere inventions of human minds to improve their way of life and to promote harmonious environments. However, if one were to believe that a Creator or Supernatural Being is real, and all humans are spirits living temporarily on Earth, then being religious cannot be a matter of choice because seeking and acquiring truth and living in such a way as to promote our true being should be the highest purpose of our life on Earth. Clearly, I am standing on the side of the second option.

Yet, I have struggled and still am struggling when it comes to my faith in the living God. On one hand, I feel, perceive, and communicate with my God who is fully present and real in my life. Yet on the other hand, I suffer the absence, silence, and intangibility of my God. Sometimes, I feel so stifled by the limitations of my human mind that I am not even sure about having faith in anything that is outside this physical reality. But time after time, I am assured both by messages in the Scriptures and by my own personal experience that I am more than just a bio-organic body, and that there is a Super-Consciousness that is present in all.

The comforting truth is that religion is made by humans, for humans,



Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco.  
(Credit Dana Owens)

and is designed to create a community in which we can share the same values and experience of the non-human. Therefore, the purpose of religion cannot be and should not be commanding people to do this or that. If we were to take the example of caterpillars and butterflies again, the truth to caterpillars is not about the particulars of becoming a butterfly — what food to eat, where to build a cocoon, how to build the cocoon — but simply the fact that they are all destined to become butterflies in the end! If we were to take it seriously, the greatest truth for humanity from all religions is quite simple: we are spirits having human experiences during a temporary existence on Earth. And, religion is a shared expression of our personal experiences of a deeper and truer reality! ☸



After his ordination in July, 2000, Rev. Junchol Lee served on many committees of the General Convention including Executive Committee of Council of Ministers, Committee of Admission

into Ministry, the General Council, and SCYL Youth Chaplain. Currently, Junchol is serving the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church as their Senior Pastor.

## Featured Community: The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

## Juneteenth!

*Originally delivered on June 22, 2025 at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church*

BY REV. DR. DEVIN ZUBER

*In the summer of 2025 Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber guest pastored at the San Francisco Swedenborgian Church while Rev. Junchol Lee was on sabbatical. You can find recordings of past sermons on the church's YouTube page (<https://www.youtube.com/@sfswedenborgianchurch>).*

On this Sunday, many Swedenborgians around the world celebrate a holiday of spiritual liberation, so-called “New Church Day.” There have been June 19<sup>th</sup> commemorations among Swedenborgian communities for over two hundred years now; some church organizations in the 19<sup>th</sup> century even chose to dedicate or auspiciously open their church buildings on this day, and there were even early attempts to develop a distinctive calendar which began with this date. It all comes from a vision that Emanuel Swedenborg had towards the close of his life, in 1770, where he witnessed the Lord calling together his twelve apostles, and then sending them out through the entirety of the spiritual world to “preach the Gospel, that the Lord God Jesus Christ is king, and His kingdom shall be for ever and ever, as foretold by Daniel.” Within two years, Swedenborg would permanently transition to the spiritual world himself at the ripe age of eighty-four. Perhaps it is no coincidence that Swedenborg’s vision falls so close—on June 19<sup>th</sup>—to the summer solstice, a special, cherished holiday in Sweden—*Midsommar*—when the long light of day is at its apogee. As several have observed, Swedenborg’s descriptions of heaven as a realm where it never becomes fully night, but is only varying

degrees of sunlight, comes close to what it feels like to be in Scandinavia around the Midsommar, with its almost perpetual, ever-presence of silvery light.

**Swedenborg’s descriptions of heaven as a realm where it never becomes fully night, but is only varying degrees of sunlight, comes close to what it feels like to be in Scandinavia around the Midsommar...**

This vision anchors Swedenborg’s mystical Christianity in an apostolic line, securely placing his theology within a Christian tradition (this is important, as Swedenborg has also been an equally important force on the formation of alternative, non-Christian spiritualities, and is an important forerunner of the so-called New Age).

We should be wary, careful, about taking Swedenborg’s words literally here, that this spiritual evangelizing heralds a kind of Christian supremacy—that this somehow is a kind of template for Christian nationalism, a call for Christianity to be anchored within a political system that triumphantly “reigns.” A similar mistake is often made when ancient Jewish texts about the people of Israel are equated with the modern nation state of Israel, and misread as a pretext for justifying the seizure of land and territory and, it must be said, the present, ongoing genocide in Gaza. We must be extremely cautious whenever God’s name becomes invoked to justify war

and violence of any kind.

After Swedenborg died, a piece of paper was found amongst his papers, in his handwriting, which was titled “a List of Valuables.” It reads like a found poem, numbered and sequenced, including the following:

- something precious which cannot be seen by spirits but only by angels.
- a little crown with five small diamonds, which is worn in heaven on one side of the head.
- a beautiful little rose containing a very brilliant diamond which later was set in a golden ring.
- a box in a wooden casket wherein are shining crystals, signifying regeneration to eternity.

And so on and so forth. Apparently, several of Swedenborg’s relatives—his cousins and nieces and nephews—then looked in vain, ransacking his property, looking for these various treasures. These greedy relatives made the mistake of literalism, of correlating these poetic words into actual, material things. It’s a quaint and charming story, even with its perhaps dubious provenance, but I believe there is a deeper lesson here for us all in learning how he wrote, and his way of interpreting scripture as powerful allegory and symbol, and not a one-to-one correlation with places and political powers. Or earthly gems and precious metals.

Also among the papers on Swedenborg’s desk in London, where he died, were several unfinished manuscripts. One of these includes “Invitation to the New Church,” with bullet points,

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## Featured Community: The Swedenborgian Church of San Francisco

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a work meant to accompany his last large work, the *True Christianity* (also sometimes called *True Christian Religion*), the work where he publicly articulated and published his June 19th vision. In this “Invitation,” we can see Swedenborg contemplating what this new Christianity unfolding is to look like and be. One of the points listed in the bulletin says the following: “This is an invitation to the new church, that men should go and meet the Lord. *Hereafter, we are not to be called the Evangelical, the Reformed, and still less Lutherans and Calvinists, but Christians.*” In this remarkable, pithy statement, we see that whatever Swedenborg’s “new Christianity” was to be, it was certainly an end of sectarian divisions.

**"Hereafter, we are not to be called the Evangelical, the Reformed, and still less Lutherans and Calvinists, but Christians."**

These lines were written by a mystic who had lived his life still very much under the remnant, violent shadows unleashed by Reformation—Swedenborg’s own dad, Jesper, had been born when Europe was still embroiled in a hideous international conflict that we now call the “thirty years war,” where different Europeans were slaughtering one another over differing beliefs about baptism, holy supper, and the church. Swedenborg’s vision here, this invitation, is the opposite: a wish for Christian unity in spite of difference.

By and large, Swedenborg did not have a lot of nice things to say about Christianity or the Europeans of his day—primarily because he felt they

tended to not practice what they preached. In fact, he felt like the best humans of his day were not white Western Christian Europeans, but Africans, in “the interior of the continent,” who were receiving a direct spiritual revelation, independent of a scripture or the Word. This unusual pronouncement—a position which overturns at a stroke the emerging racial hierarchies of the Enlightenment, its hubris which privileged white Europeans (especially men) as the pinnacle of civilization and cultural development. Such statements galvanized the work of early important Abolitionists in Scandinavia, such as Carl Bernhard Wadström and the Nordenskjöld brothers.

With an eye towards Swedenborg’s position on Africa and Africans, it is also appropriate to recall today that June 19<sup>th</sup> is not only something linked to our tradition of esoteric Christianity, but here in the United States, it crucially commemorates the abolition of slavery. It is the anniversary of the final enforcement of President Abraham Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation, made in Texas by an advancing Union general, towards the end of our bloody Civil War. It is so important to remember that this freedom, this moment of liberation, was not some gift bestowed on Black people by White liberators from the north, but came out of generations of Black self-determination and activism. As the American historian Heather Cox Richardson reminds us, in addition to the critical work and advocacy of Black abolitionists and orators like Frederick Douglass:

Emancipation was not a gift from White Americans. Black Americans had fought and died for the United States. They had worked as soldiers, as nurses, and as day laborers throughout the Union army. Those who could had demonstrated their

hatred of enslavement and the Confederacy by leaving their homes for the northern lines, sometimes delivering valuable information or matériel to the Union, while those unable to leave had hidden wounded U.S. soldiers and helped them get back to Union lines.

Thus, Juneteenth is not just “independence day for Black Americans,” as one of our current politicians has regretfully put it—it is a moment for all Americans to recall, regardless of skin color or ethnicity, when higher goodness and truth prevailed over horrible conditions and the darkness of White supremacist lies, and for a brief moment, hope and history could rhyme, to paraphrase the Seamus Heaney poem that I talked about last Sunday.

**Juneteenth... is a moment for all Americans to recall, regardless of skin color or ethnicity, when higher goodness and truth prevailed over horrible conditions and the darkness of white supremacist lies, and for a brief moment, hope and history could rhyme...**

Perhaps it is no surprise that in our current cultural darkness and political turmoil, our nation finds itself entangled in the shadows and legacy of that nineteenth-century conflict, mirrored by, among other things, ongoing attempts to restore White supremacist monuments in the renaming of army bases for Confederate generals. What are we to do, as Christians, as Swedenborgians, who carry this particular legacy of spiritual freedom, and find ourselves witnessing this contemporary moment? This nostalgia for a

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racist past, the haunted violence of slavery and all its depredations?

Well, we must remember, we are not alone. Look around you, in this church right now. Perhaps also, if you close your eyes and reflect on where you have come from, the love and hands that brought you to this place today, you might feel the ancestors at your back. And I mean here ancestors of all kinds—mentors, not just blood kin. I think of my own paternal grandfather, who had served in WWII as an airplane mechanic in the European theater, fighting the Nazis. I am told that he had memorized Psalm 23 to aid him in times of fear—to remember that the Lord is our shepherd. When I think of those well-known lines, I am reminded that the Lord was my grandfather's shepherd, and is my shepherd, too, and that this links us through time and space in powerful ways.

One of our collective spiritual ancestors—kin in the larger Swedenborgian orbit—a courageous figure who is related to our tradition, is the great German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a man who was tragically executed by the Nazis for speaking out against the moral atrocities of his day—designated by the Nazi regime as an enemy of the state. Bonhoeffer's life was most remarkable. He came from a long line of Protestant ministers and theologians. His grandmother, Julie Tafel, with whom he was very close, came from the great Tafel clan of German Swedenborgians, and it was through his Oma that Bonhoeffer likely first encountered the ideas of Swedenborg.

Besides this peripheral, side encounter with Swedenborg and Swedenborgians, what is less well known or noted is how Bonhoeffer was

critically shaped by a formative year he spent in America, in 1930, taking a sabbatical at Union Theological Seminary (during this time, he also visited with American Swedenborgian relatives in communities like Bryn Athyn, Pennsylvania). Bonhoeffer's meeting with black American theologians and ministers fundamentally transformed his theology and views on everything. He became deeply committed to social justice. He wandered the streets of Harlem, listened to jazz and blues, bought records, a collection of what W. E. Dubois would call the "Sorrow Songs" of Black people, which he later brought with him back to Berlin. Shortly after returning to Germany, in 1933, Hitler was elected into power, and thus began Germany's descent into a dark nightmare of history.

**...[Bonhoeffer's] courage under the Nazis is where we might see these two different Juneteenths—the esoteric Swedenborgian and the African-American freedom song of liberation—converging into the stream of a single voice, opposed to the Nazis.**

From the onset of the Nazis, Bonhoeffer was an outspoken critic of the regime, drawing deeply on Christian theology to publicly call out and condemn the injustices he saw unfolding—the people snatched off the streets and detained by secret police, the erosion of the judiciary and weakening of due process, the failure of the press to call the administration into accountability. This public witnessing as a Christian would have been unthinkable without Bonhoeffer having learned from his Black friends and

colleagues in America; his courage under the Nazis is where we might see these two different Juneteenths—the esoteric Swedenborgian and the African-American freedom song of liberation—converging into the stream of a single voice, opposed to the Nazis.

I would like to end our Juneteenth worship service by sharing some words from Bonhoeffer, from both his sermons and his later writings from prison and the concentration camp, before he was executed. Some theologians have even beautifully argued that these prison writings are like the fragmentary signatures and wailing refrains of blues music, the "Sorrow Songs" of the African American tradition that Bonhoeffer brought from Harlem with him back to Berlin. So, here are a few traces of these Berlin blues, to commemorate Juneteenth—three refrains—and it is my hope that these words from the 1930s and 40s might give us all courage in our moment of 2025:

"God requires your 'no' to all injustice, to all evil, to all lies, to all oppression and violation of the weak and poor, to all ungodliness, and to all mockery of what is holy."

"Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act."

"We are not to simply bandage the wounds of victims beneath the wheels of injustice, we are to drive a spoke into the wheel itself." ☒

Rev. Dr. Devin Zuber is the Associate Professor of American Studies, Religion, and Literature at GTU in Berkeley, California and the George F. Dole Professor of Swedenborgian Studies.





## Summer Camps

## A Swedenborgian Summer

BY KATIE BROWN, REV. SAGE COLE, AND BEKI GREENWOOD

*As Convention starts to wind down, you begin to hear the murmurs. “Will you be at Almont this year?” “Are you making it to Fryeburg?” “Who still needs a chaperone?” “Will everyone be there from last year?” The buzz around meeting up at either [Almont New Church Assembly](#) in Michigan or [Fryeburg New Church Assembly](#) in Maine begins! It’s easy to see that these camps breed tight friendships and community. This can be a little intimidating for someone who has never attended either one. But one of the things that makes both of these communities so wonderful is how absolutely welcoming they both are! They are truly hoping you will join them, no matter who you are or where you come from. I am excited to bring you three different perspectives on the same theme: what is it like to attend both camps, and why do you do it?*



*There is nothing like an FNCA sunset... Ben views one of the good ones of 2025.*

## In Two Camps

By Katie Brown

I step out of my car and breathe in the scent of pine needles. The cool northern air softens the edges of our long drive, seven hours today and seven plus the day before. The view from where I stand is, as always, a perfect postcard of trees, clouds, river, and mountains. It is 2021, and I have finally, at long last, found my way back to a home I have come to know from stays in early childhood, youth, and then young adulthood. Of course, I felt I belonged at Fryeburg even before I learned how to spell it. In my Michigan home, it was a household name, and I contextualized it sort of like another Almont, but in Maine. My mom, Marjie, and her siblings and their parents (Betty and Jack) had pilgrimaged to this hallowed ground for Swedenborgians (Mom remembers her trip here at age six strongly, partially because of having to get stitches at the doctor’s in town after hitting her eyebrow on a tent stake!). Aunt Carolyn Judson, my Grandma Betty’s sister, has made Fryeburg her place going back almost eight decades, with countless drawings, paintings, and beloved friends to show for it. This trip is an extension of the camp experience for me and my son; we’ve just come from a very full week at Almont New Church Assembly in Michigan, a permanent fixture in both our lives. The two camps are similar enough, but they contrast in ways that probably must be experienced to be fully understood.

I haven’t even finished unloading the car, and Ben, nine at the time, runs up to me and entreats, “Are we



*Ben, Nate, and Theo at Almont in 2024, looking forward to another week together at FNCA!*

coming back next year?!” He has already made a friend, and says, “This guy gets me.” That seals the deal. “Yes. Of course we can. Yes. I will have to make that happen.” Within a mere ten minutes, it seems that Ben has experienced profound welcome, a seamless transfer of the deep acceptance he has come to know at Almont, but in this new place. But why wouldn’t he? Though he has yet to experience the wonderful week that’s in store: chilly polar-bear swims in the Saco River at the crack of 7:00 AM, delicious meals in an historic building that has scarcely changed since it was built in 1921 (check the photos at [fryeburg.org](http://fryeburg.org)), the ever-changing but constantly breathtaking postcard surroundings, there are some things that ring true in both Assemblies. The comforting routine of worship and fellowship, work and play, spiritual insights with time to savor them, togetherness in a community of people of all ages, building bonds that last a lifetime. In other words, the good life! These aspects of camp that have been precious to me in different ratios at different stages of life are the same

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## Summer Camps

### Swedenborgian Summer

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*Last summer, Katie and Beki deemed themselves the “New Marjie and BJ” after they drove a car of kids from Almont to FNCA. Nothing like the bonds you make after a fifteen hour drive!*

things that make Almont so deeply important to us, and I am thrilled to see that my son apparently sees it, too. So we did come back, for five years in a row: Me, Ben, my partner, Jay. It is well worth the miles to bring our gifts of treasure, work, and care, and take part in this little slice of heaven.

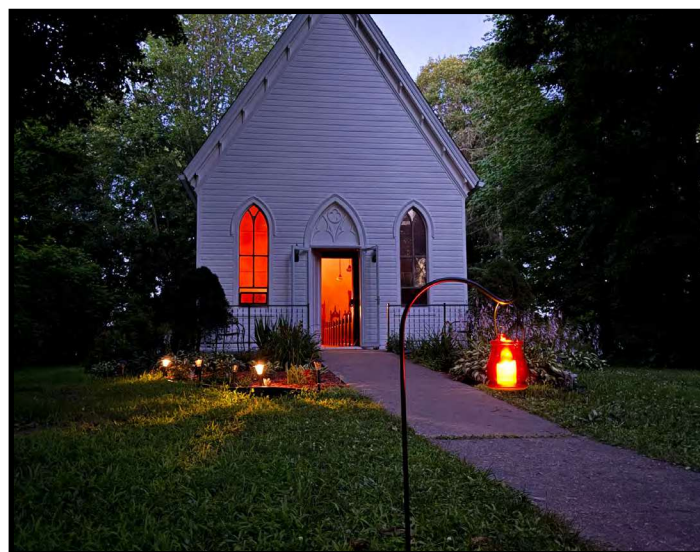
“We’re on the grabbel road! We’re on the grabbel road!” was my chant as a preschooler every time we turned onto Cameron Road, the gravel road which leads to Almont. I still say it today when I’m approaching this time capsule of heaven nestled in the farmland of Michigan’s thumb. The Almont experience, like Fryeburg, I consider a wonderful gift of my life. Almont was passed down four matrilineal generations, starting with Great-Grandma Charity and Grandpa Vincent Bergman. They are the reason my family can’t help singing our own special lyrics to the verse of Onward Christian Soldiers as we walk to the chapel: “One

in hope and doctrine, Grandma Charity (and Vincent!)” Now my niece Molly, nephew Josh, and son Ben make up the fifth generation. Although Great-Grandma Charity was homesick when her older brothers brought her to Summer School, and Grandma Betty didn’t much care for rustic living, though she devotedly attended to be present for her six grandchildren in those years, it became very much an integral way of life for the succeeding generations. Since my camp baptism at one month old in the 1870 chapel (performed by George Dole, fun fact!), I have missed only two sessions of Almont Summer School. For me, the year just doesn’t feel right without it; at every job interview, I made sure this one week in July was protected! Retreats, work days, and family celebrations in all seasons yielded many more treasured hours at Almont. My home away from home was, and is, my primary Swedenborgian church experience, as it is for many who live in places lacking a Swedenborgian church. The teachings, bolstered by real-life daily practice “learning to live the golden rule,” make it all the more of a spiritual home.

The palpable history of the place is part of Almont’s charm. 1851, when Scottish immigrants formed a society of the New Church in the locale, is fairly old by Michigan/Midwest standards pertaining to European settler history in

the region. We no longer have to send youngsters with pitchers running to the pump for our wash water as was done in the not-too-distant past, but, when your walls don’t go all the way up and open rafters are your shared ceiling at night (as residents of historic Big House and Little Rec know) it gives a rare and privileged perspective on what it means to love your neighbor as yourself. The good life! That is, daily routine, shared work tasks of many kinds, passing the deep water test in spring-fed Brandau Bay and having a conversation while treading water, the smell of pancakes for breakfast wafting from the dining hall, many hours as a child spent playing and swinging on the tall swings, holding hands in a big circle to sing Fling to the Breeze for flag raising and Softly Now at flag lowering, milestones of moving up through the dorms, radical acceptance among teens like I’ve never seen outside of the SCYL (perhaps the truest testament to our forward-looking denomination!), basically watching a real-life version of “it takes a village” unfold out on the field all day long. In community living

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*The historic chapel at Almont.*



## Summer Camps

### Swedenborgian Summer

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such as this, it doesn't take long to realize that the true worship we practice is enhanced by, but not confined to, morning and evening chapel services. Unlike any other type of camp or vacation you could share as a family, our family is greatly extended by all of the people who have come through our life over the decades here. It is a priceless privilege. I heartily recommend that you give the double Camp/Assembly summer a try!

### Assembly Required: A Tale of Two Camps

**By Sage Cole**

I have for some time been a part of the select group of Swedenborgians who spend some time each summer at both the Almont and Fryeburg New Church Assemblies. I spent my teen years attending the FNCA each summer, dropped in again as an occasional lecturer and porch sitter when I became the pastor of the Fryeburg New Church, and then for the past seven years or so have returned as a regular again now with my two sons and husband Ted who appreciates the scenery and solitude offered in our cabin overlooking the river. I first attended the Almont New Church Assembly when I was twenty years old, after moving to Urbana, Ohio, to attend college and falling in with the Almonters there. That first year, I was initiated with a couple of thirteen-year-olds, not wanting to miss the full Almont experience, and have been attending on and off ever since, not faithfully enough to have my own dedicated room at camp, but regularly enough to feel known and loved. And I went so far as to load my new husband, Ted, into a van the



*A favorite tradition of everyone at Almont!  
Holding hands and singing around the flagpole.*

morning after our wedding to make our way to Almont for an unorthodox honeymoon of sorts. He was a good sport.

Upon reflecting on each camp experience, three locations have emerged at each place that encapsulate a bit of what I love about the ANCA and the FNCA:



*Some of the best conversations happen on the porches of our camps. Here are Rev. Kevin Baxter and Rev. Sage Cole having a good one at Almont.*

### Circling around the Flagpole, the Chapel, and the Little Boys Dorm

Each morning and each evening at Almont, a bell is rung and all campers make their way to circle up, hold hands, and sing around the flagpole as the flag is either raised or lowered. We then all count the number of campers, one at a time. Quiet children's voices who have to be told their number, adults, elders, everyone is counted, including some taking the time to add to the count, whoever may still be working in the kitchen or preparing for chapel. Somehow, this sweet ritual creates a cohesion, a rhythm, and a sense of belonging that I treasure.

The Almont Chapel seems to be always overfilled, which can be a bit uncomfortable on hot days, but is also delightful as we pile in together and feel the fullness of this camp community. Luckily, chapel services are usually kept brief and range from traditional offerings by ministers to full-fledged creative opuses put on by the children and teen classes. During lecture, there is more room to spread out, and the pews are well situated so that you might just luck out and sit in front of someone offering a back rub.

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## Summer Camps

### Swedenborgian Summer

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I'm sure the Little Girls Dorm is lovely too, but as the mom of two boys, it is the Little Boys Dorm I've spent the most time in. It was quite a thing to be able to go to camp for the first time and have my sons in the dorm. I love the ANCA's commitment to children and families, to creating the opportunity for little kids to have a dorm experience with their parents still close by. The adults who serve as dorm parents are really in my estimation, the heart of the camp, and I feel so grateful to them.



*Katie Brown and Rev. Sage Cole, on an outing from FNCA, hang out on the beach in Denmark, Maine, where Sage has a family cabin.*

### The Porch, the Puzzle Table, and the Saco River

FNCA has a quiet vibe. Porch sitting is one of its most iconic offerings. With mountains in the distance, forest, field, and the Saco River in the foreground, the view is incredible. Evening porch sitting includes the delightful spectacle of 7:00 PM Sparks (the FNCA name for children under thirteen) Games with Trevor. For especially appreciative tired parents, the chance to watch

our children run about, laugh, and play, and hopefully get tired out for bedtime, is very sweet. The porch encourages an interweaving of solitude and community. Readers are respected and given space, and when two or three porch sitters converge and the book is set down, conversations flow and ping between the profound and the mundane.

The Puzzle Table might top my list of FNCA locations. I don't often take on the challenge of a 1000-piece puzzle on my own. But with others in the leisurely space of camp, we can complete two or three of those bad boys in the span of a week (especially if there isn't too much blue sky). The Puzzle Table draws people of all ages, it allows for people to enter in and then step away, and something about the shared focus and task of the puzzle makes space for those subtle, sweet moments of connection and conversation that I don't know would emerge otherwise. I love the triviality of it. The play. And doing it together.

The Saco River, swimming, floating, polar bearing, or just sitting at the shallow edge as the water flows over your feet, is a sacred experience. While the waterfront at the FNCA was closed this year due to a lack of lifeguards, it's only a short drive up the road to the town beach, and I made sure to head up on swimming outings each day it was warm enough. This year, the Sparks invented a new River adventure as we walked upstream to the bridge overpass, and they competed to find



*On the banks of the Saco River with Jackie Shihadeh, Katie Brown, and Beki Greenwood.*

the largest piece of driftwood to be the most impressive Bridge Troll. The Saco River is my favorite place to swim, and to enjoy it with other campers of all ages is a special treat.

### Two Camps in One Summer? Yes, Please!

**By Beki Greenwood**

I don't know a summer without a Swedenborgian Church camp. I have been attending the Fryeburg New Church Assembly my entire life—I can't imagine a summer without it. When I was little, from the age of nine to thirteen, I also went to Blairhaven Kids Camp in Duxbury, Massachusetts, until it stopped in 1994. (Though we continued to go there for retreats for several years until the property was sold about fourteen years ago.) Loving these events so much is what has kept me involved in our greater church community for so long.

Every few years, a van of teens from Almont New Church Assembly would arrive at camp in the middle of the night, and the energy of the whole session would change. When you have

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## Summer Camps

### Swedenborgian Summer

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these huge teen groups at the camps, it just makes the community better and the future brighter. I never had the opportunity to attend Almont Summer Camp as a teen. A few of my fellow Flames (teens ages 13–18) did get to, and I always wondered what it was about. It wasn't until last year that I finally was able to get there and bring my kids with me. Now I am not sure I would be able to miss either camp again! We've found ourselves in a place in our lives where we are able to have the time to do both camps (among other Church related events), and they both bring light and joy into our summer that we can't imagine not having, and here's why—life-long connections and friendships.

I return to the FNCA every year for a spiritual recharge. It is a respite from real life that my family has been utilizing for years. The long-term friendships have gone from having to send letters in the mail, to multiple text messages a day, to having the best friendships anyone could ask for. And I want my kids to experience this same

thing. Fryeburg has time for growing community as a large group, but also the time to spend together one-on-one or in smaller groups to really deepen those connections in one of the most stunning settings one could ever ask for. The kids are given an opportunity to form friendships with people they will be connected to for the rest of their lives. One of my favorite things is when people return after many years away, and it's like they never left. This is why it is so important to bring the kids to as many of these events as possible. They are forming the spiritual support system they will have throughout their difficult teen and young adult years. And many relationships will survive many years later. This is the beauty and strength of our small church. I am so thankful to have the FNCA in my life, and even more so to have added the Almont Summer School to our spiritual family.

Having been registrar or camp director at the FNCA for so long, there were several times when we would organize with parents getting their teens to camp from the Midwest, Mid-Atlantic areas, or California. I would always tell the groups of kids that would come

from Almont that I promised to make it there someday. But being so involved in the planning of Fryeburg made that difficult. In 2021, a large group of campers who would normally attend Almont made it to FNCA instead due to the pandemic



*The rumors are true—even Rev. Kevin Baxter makes it to both camps!*

keeping Almont closed for an extra year. My son, Nate, became instantly close with Ben, who had never made it to FNCA before, from that group that joined us. Ben's mom, Katie, had come for FNCA on and off every several years (sometimes in that van!) since the early eighties, and it was so cool to have the kids make an instant connection. Nate has also been close pals with Rev. Sage Cole's son, Theo, since they were maybe four or five from being at FNCA together, so it made me think, "Maybe he would want to go to Almont to see them both there, too."

My daughter, Serena, loved going to Convention in 2023 and went to her first SCYL retreat over Memorial Day weekend in 2024. She made instant friends and was now thirteen and able to become an Almont Survivor (teens ages 13–17) that summer. I knew we needed to figure out how to get all these kids to spend more time together, regardless of the location. So, we made the plans to attend camp in Michigan

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*Nate Greenwood and Scout Steinhiser recreate a photo taken at FNCA in 2014 (right) and Almont in 2024 (left).*

## Summer Camps

## Paulhaven Children's Summer Camp

BY DAWNA EPP

**W**e were pleased to recommence with Paulhaven Children's Summer Camp this summer. It had been cancelled due to COVID since 2019. Unfortunately, after that many years, we lost numerous returning campers and were starting at square one. Hence, a large amount of work was required to restart, including work on all the structures and facilities. All dorms and the lodge had to be cleaned and prepared following six years of closure. However, we were blessed with staff who dug in and worked hard to make the camp ready.

As we were starting a new beginning at Paulhaven, our Bible study correlated with this, and we started at the very beginning, Genesis 1 Days of Creation, combined with the camp theme, "The Amazing Race—Paulhaven Edition." Amazing Race was used to emphasize that there is a purpose for everything in life. We all go through challenges, failures, sadness, disappointment, and hardships; however, we can make it through with our faith, hope, and love. In addition, we incorporated the word "pause," reminding us to pause for a moment before reacting, pause before making negative comments, judging, or before sending that text or saying words that you will regret. In essence, pause long enough to consider and ask yourself, "Is it kind, is it helpful, and does it reflect who I want to be?"

We had anticipated fourteen to sixteen children; however, in the end, we had eight children, all girls, aged 8–11 years old. On the bright side, there were no big age disparities. In the past years, the ages ranged from 8–18 years.

It appeared that despite the small number of children, we were a bit

short-staffed. We ended up overlapping on positions, and everyone pitched in and got everything done. We had a Director, Dawna Epp who worked half-time in the kitchen as well, and two full-time kitchen staff, Amanda Runka and Denise McMullan. Recreations Staff included Kurtis Schrieber and Leah Flemming. Aurora McBeath was the teacher for the classes and assisted with Recreation, Candy Store, and Crafts. As we were unable to obtain a minister, Dianne Rosinger stepped up to the plate as she had delivered services in Calgary. She organized the material for services and classes as well as the Amazing Race and crafts. Her husband Steve Roesinger, assisted with wood, fire duty, and general maintenance.

Recreational staff were constantly busy, despite the fact that there were only eight children. The children were entertained with games of volleyball, soccer, tug of war, tag, human hungry hippo, a slip and slide, numerous other games, and a beach afternoon. They also participated in teams like on the Amazing Race, where they competed in different challenges and had to meet Phil on the mat. Leah also had the children paint a beautiful mural of the solar system on the side of one of the dorms. They painted the planets, and all used their handprints to make the sun. Turned out beautifully.

In accordance with the Amazing Race, the kitchen staff themed the suppers, Ukrainian, Mexican, Canadian and Italian, and Western BBQ. The children seemed to enjoy this and particularly on spaghetti night when they had to pick from a bag of utensils to eat their supper, including: wooden spoon, flippers, whisk, ladle, etc. They

all were good sports, and we had a lot of laughter looking at their spaghetti-filled faces. One of the campers, Kinley, had her birthday that day, so everyone contributed to making her feel special.

Each day, we had a morning service, followed by classes that pertained to the message of the service. As noted above, this year the focus was on the Days of Creation. The staff and the children conducted the evening service.

One evening, we had a skit night, which the staff and children participated in, and they worked hard. Their skits were hilarious, most of them had never done anything like it. I am sure they will be fully prepared for next year! Campfire time is always a favorite when the children have hot chocolate and cookies around the fire. They then all participate in singing old-time campfire songs.

On the last night of camp, the girls were all treated to an hour of pampering, with facials and doing their nails, and the staff helped them get ready for the dance, do their hair, etc. Justin Runka graciously drove up for the night with all his DJ equipment including strobing lights, and the children danced to all of their favorite music (he did throw in a few for us older adults). Once it was dark they were treated to a beautiful sky filled with fireworks and then off to bed.

Overall, I believe that we had a very successful camp week. All of the children had fun and are excited to come next year and bring their friends. While it was a small camp, we have laid the foundation for the upcoming years with the hopes that it will once again grow to what it was before. ☸



## The Year of the New Jerusalem

## Which Way to the Holy City?

BY REV. DR. JIM LAWRENCE

In his theological period from 1749 to 1771, Swedenborg took to press seven major and eleven minor works. Three of these organize and present theological topics. The very first one he titled *New Jerusalem and Its Heavenly Doctrine* (1758). It is worth noting that in George Dole's newest translation (2016) in the New Century Edition that is being published over many years by the Swedenborg Foundation, this work is titled simply *New Jerusalem*. Though very brief, *New Jerusalem* is nevertheless something of a systematic overview of the new theology shaped succinctly in twenty-three topics.

In *New Jerusalem*, Swedenborg strives to shape an overall spiritual practice theology drawn from ideas and principles that emerged through his first published work—*Secrets of Heaven* (original Latin title being *Arcana Coelestia*)—that ran to eight very thick volumes originally and to twelve volumes in what became known as the American Standard Edition. *Secrets of Heaven* is a verse-by-verse, often lengthy interpretation of the first two books of the Christian Bible canon.

Though Swedenborg originally intended to produce the inner sense meanings of the thirty-four biblical books he called the Word, he slowly realized the impracticality of that plan. It had taken him eight years to produce the inner sense of only two books. Nearing the end of Exodus, he was sixty-eight years old, and quite importantly, he had become convinced through his voluminous lists of other verses in the Bible supporting the correspondences of the inner meaning of Genesis and Exodus that the spiritual meaning of scripture *always* reveals a New Church theology. He felt freed to move into writings that explored the important topics of New Church theology.

Also importantly, as Swedenborg was nearing the end of Exodus, he found himself more often contemplating the Book of Revelation at the end of the canon. Captivated by the prophet John's pronouncement, "And I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband" (Rev. 21:2), Swedenborg began focusing on New Jerusalem as

the image holding the future. He chose the subject of a New Jerusalem as the first of his short topical 1758 works, and significantly, all branches of Swedenborgianism worldwide choose New Jerusalem as the central concept in their incorporated and legal name.

***The New Jerusalem focuses on how we can aspire to good through process, in particular through our actions.***

In *New Jerusalem*, Swedenborg treats twenty-three topics in short compass. George Dole writes in his translator's preface that *New Jerusalem* "focuses on how we can aspire to good through process, in particular through our actions." In subsequent offerings this upcoming Year of New Jerusalem, various writers will help unpack how *New Jerusalem* provides us with potent insights for our own pilgrimage to the Holy City. ☞

Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence has pastored three congregations, been dean of our church's seminary, and is currently the President of the Swedenborgian Church of North America.



### Fun, Faith, and Friendship

*Continued from page 90*

left as a better person, too. For all of this, I thank each and every person at Purley. You have all made a little nest in my soul, and I am extremely grateful for the gift of being able to spend time with you. Until we meet again. ☞

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.

## Nunc Licet Fellow

## What Tree Am I Eating From?

BY TIRAH KEAL

Let me tell you about the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

In Genesis, we first hear about the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden. It's described as one of many trees that are "good for food." Then there's the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, also in the garden—but this one comes with a warning: do not eat from it. That's a bit confusing. Eating from a tree that gives life—clearly good! Eating from a tree that lets you know what is good and what is evil—seems like it would be useful!

The Tree of Life in Eden symbolizes the perception of good and truth. Perception is a kind of effortless knowing, like how we can tell if we like a smell or not, without having to think about it. It's instinctual, immediate. In the Garden, people could perceive good and truth directly from the Divine. This was the paradise: a state of harmony, of connection to God, of knowing without having to learn through effort.

The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil represents our desire to control, to dominate, and to manipulate. Eating from this tree symbolizes the moment when we start saying, *"I'll decide what's good, I'll decide what's*

*right,"* we sever ourselves from that Divine perception. Paradise isn't taken away as punishment—it's the natural consequence of disconnecting from the source of goodness and truth.

Let's jump to the end of the Bible—Revelation chapter twenty-two. The Tree of Life appears again, now in the center, with the River of the Water of Life on one side, and the golden street of the city on the other. The Tree of Life here is sustenance from the Lord, tailored to our needs. Its twelve fruits represent all the different seasons of our lives—the highs, the lows, the in-betweens. Whatever state we are in, there is spiritual nourishment for that.

On one side of the Tree is the River of the Water of Life, or Living Water, which represents Divine Truth. On the other side is the golden street, symbolizing truth from the teachings of the Church, or put another way, truth we learn in community.

And that brings us to the leaves. As the text says so beautifully, "the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Swedenborg describes this as rational truth—the kind of truth accessible even to those who don't read the Bible. For example, we can see cause and effect, and we can see whether our

actions bring harm or healing. Anyone who is paying attention can learn truth using this kind of information.

The Holy City has twelve gates—there are many ways to enter. But to enter, we must leave behind ego, domination, and control. Revelation says: "Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, debauchers, murderers, idolaters, and the deceitful." This passage, in particular, has been used to hurt people. Some have taken these words and claimed it was describing our LGBTQ family and friends. This is a false and deadly use of scripture! In fact, this passage is saying that *all of us* have parts of ourselves that are selfish, egotistical, and vengeful. We can't take those parts of ourselves into the city to be fed by the tree. Those have to stay outside. Revelation says we wash our robes, which stands for the work of being made clean. We must be made clean by our Creator, Redeemer, the Divine, and then we can enter the city.

Try asking yourself: Which tree is sustaining me? Am I feeding my ego, or my spirit? And how can I return to the Tree of Life? ☸

Tirah Echols Keal is a fifth-generation Swedenborgian minister's kid. She is about to begin her third year at United Lutheran Seminary, and she anticipates finishing her MDiv and Certificate in Swedenborgian

Studies in 2027. Tirah has been married to Rev. Solomon Keal for twenty-four years and is the proud mom of five wonderful humans. She has a passion for building spiritual community and creating welcoming spaces for all, with a special awareness of LGBTQIA+ people of all ages.



## A Poem About the Ears

Twinkle twinkle little ear,  
how I wonder how you hear.  
Up above the world so high,  
with ear angels in the sky.  
In our hearts while we pray,  
teaching us how to obey.  
Twinkle twinkle little ear,  
how I wonder how you hear.

—Bram Keal, age 13



## Up and Coming Publications

## Up and Coming Publications

*In case you missed it!**At Convention this year, these up and coming publications were announced at the business meetings.***Spirit, Adventure, and Wonder:  
Stories, Poems, and Essays****By Rev. Eric Allison***Summary by Herb Ziegler*

Several years ago, I was made aware of some writings Rev. Eric Allison had completed over the years before he was compromised by his stroke in 2012. The memory is vague, but perhaps John Titus told me about this, as he had copies. It occurred to me that Eric would enjoy seeing his work in print and that his family and friends, within and outside the church, would enjoy reading it. Thus began my Odyssey of producing a book for Eric.

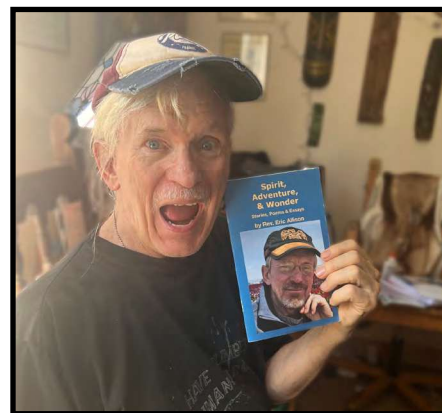
Why an Odyssey? I acquired photocopies of the writings from John, transcribed them to digital files, began to edit them, and told Eric of the project. He was enthusiastic and supportive. For the next few years, my intentions were waylaid by Murphy's Law, beginning with technical problems having mostly to do with my inability to resurrect an old version of the page layout application Adobe InDesign, while avoiding a one-year subscription to the application for over \$500. This process was a long cycle of work-arounds and defeats, but I gradually designed and laid out the entire book, and designed a cover with his photograph on it. I worked sporadically on the project as a cascade of difficulties in my life intervened. The 2025 annual convention was scheduled for Portland, Oregon, and Eric's friends informed me that he would attend. With that goal in mind, I finally got things straightened out just in time to present the completed project to Eric at the annual convention. (I flashed on my college days as I

raced to get it ready for the printer and picked up fifty copies three hours before my flight to Portland.)

After the opening session of the convention, I looked for Eric but did not see him. I asked Michael, a member of the Church of Puget Sound, who brought Eric to the convention, found Eric's room number at our hotel and conference center, grabbed the box of books, and knocked on his door. He was delighted to see me and, when he opened the box, he was surprised and delighted. He thanked me effusively as he leafed through a copy, explaining to me that he couldn't read. He opened his suitcase and showed me all the clay figurines and objects he had made, and we chatted for a while more before I departed.

The next day, Eric set up his clay pieces and his book on a display table at the rear of the meeting room. During breaks, delegates and visitors perused Eric's wares and the book. Eric, being Eric, offered them as gifts to those who wanted them. Most of these people know Eric, many well and for a long time, so they were happy to see Eric and his book and clay creations, and looked forward to reading it. On outing day, Rebecca Esterson took on the role of helper and, at Eric's request, read the contents out loud for a small group of listeners.

The book, titled *Adventure, Spirit, & Wonder*, opens with a preface by John Titus, a close friend through all the years, beginning when they were students at Urbana College in Urbana, Ohio. It was there, through the mentorship of Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey, that they became Swedenborgians,



*Rev. Eric Allison holding a copy of his book, Spirit, Adventure, and Wonder.*

and Eric was inspired to become a Swedenborgian minister. John shares an account he wrote in 2012, after Eric visited him in Michigan, and they spent time visiting meaningful places and people in western Ohio, where he grew up and became an adult, including a visit with his 94-year-old mother at her nursing home.

Although Eric did not write much, his talents are obvious; the pieces are evocative and well-written. He bared his heart and his soul in these far-ranging stories, reflections, and poems without fear of revealing too much of himself. The stories range from a childhood adventure through college and young adult experiences, adventures in the wilderness, and challenging situations. His poems are whimsical, spiritual, loving, and seeking—and always deeply thoughtful and challenging.

Eric's help team is exploring the possibility of printing more copies for Eric to share and sell at craft fairs and to make available through *the Messenger* for a donation to his assistance fund.

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## Up and Coming Publications

## Up and Coming Publications

Continued from page 113

**Missional and Marginalized:  
The Black Ministers Ordained in  
Convention**

By Sue Ditmire

Summary by Sue Ditmire

**T**he book started as a research project for Swedenborgians in Action Against Racism (SAAR), a working group that was started after the murder of George Floyd in May of 2020. At that time, an ecumenical group of Swedenborgians came together for the purpose of learning about anti-racism in thought and action. The group also offered educational programs to improve racial understanding and counteract prejudice.

The book project grew from the story of three black ministers that I was aware of at the time: Rev. Gladys Wheaton, ordained in 1980; Rev. William E. Fairfax (Gladys' Stepfather), ordained in 1937; and Rev. Samuel O'Dell Weems (Gladys' Grandfather), ordained in 1917. Also, there were stories that there had been a Black Society in Washington, D.C., at one time.

As I did research, I also came upon the history of the first African American New Church Society in Washington, D. C., active from 1893–1905. The two ministers of the Society were Rev. Peter Carter Louis, ordained in January 1893 by Rev. Chauncey Giles, and Rev. James Edward Thomas, ordained in September 1900, after having studied at the Swedenborgian Theological School for more than two years. This was the most well-documented of all the ministries.

As I went through Convention Journals and *Messengers*, I also found Rev. George Gay Daniel, ordained in 1906; Rev. Abraham Albert Simons, ordained in 1910; Rev. Theodore Stephens, ordained in 1926; and Rev.

Jeremiah Ezekial Jackson, ordained in 1928. The ministers served in multiple locations. Two served in Washington, D.C., two did missionary work in Alabama, one served in North Cambridge, Massachusetts, two in Harlem, New York, and two in Chicago. The longest-lasting ministry was Rev. Simons in Chicago, who maintained a ministry there for more than forty years, but I was only able to find scant information about this long ministry.

I also added a segment on the Black History of the United States, as the ministries were greatly affected by what was going on in society. Two of the ministers were born into slavery. The two doing missionary work in Alabama had connections to the Tuskegee Institute. The two in Alabama and Rev. Simmons in Chicago were all greatly affected by the Red Summer of 1919. Rev. Weems in North Cambridge had at one time 300 Black members in his congregation.

I think you will find this history both amazing and sometimes shocking, but a reflection of the general experience and treatment of Black Americans during the past 150 years. My goal is to have it in print before the end of 2025.

**The Magic Key, 3rd edition**

By Joyce Fekete

Summary by Shelley Dolley

**B**ack in 1993, veteran Sunday School teacher Joyce Fekete sat down at her typewriter and typed a twenty-three page booklet for fellow Sunday School teachers titled "*The Magic Key*." Inside, she wrote:

The Bible means more than the words we read. It has a deeper, inner meaning meant for our heavenly ("angel") selves. If we want to understand this deeper meaning, we have to learn a new language. This

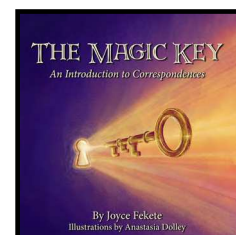
new language is like a magic key. It will unlock the secret meaning of the Word of God.

The new language she was referring to is the language of Biblical correspondences, as Emanuel Swedenborg described in *Heavenly Secrets*. Joyce had learned all about them while growing up in the Detroit Swedenborgian Church.

At the church in Detroit, Joyce learned about the summer camp in Almont, Michigan, and began attending it with her sisters. Joyce became a public school teacher of the earliest grades, got married, and had five children. She continued to teach Sunday School and brought her children to Almont Summer School each year, where she played an integral role in the curriculum for and teaching of the children's daily Bible classes. Joyce and her Detroit church friend, Betty Hill, also created what later became known as the Five Smooth Stones newsletter for Swedenborgian Sunday Schools. As you can see, Joyce simply loved teaching.

Her passion did not go unnoticed. In 2000, J. Appleseed & Co., in cooperation with the American New Church Sunday School Association, published the second edition of *The Magic Key*. This second edition was enjoyed by many Sunday School teachers who were fans of "Five Smooth Stones."

Twenty-five years later, Rev. Dr. Jim Lawrence and Rev. Jane Siebert decided to preserve the simple wisdom shared in that little gem of a booklet. They asked Joyce's youngest son,



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## Up and Coming Publications

## Up and Coming Publications

Continued from page 114

Kurt Fekete, who is the Youth Director of the Swedenborgian Church of North America, and graphic designer Rebekah Greenwood to help them produce a third edition of the book.

We're thrilled to announce that the first print run of the third edition of *The Magic Key* was funded by a grant from the Tafel Fund, published by Almont New Church Assembly, and given to the attendees of this year's Almont summer camp. Lifelong camper, who not coincidentally is also a teacher and the granddaughter of Betty Hill, Becky Shelley Moore, inspired the camp to choose *The Magic Key* as the theme of this year's session.

For this third edition, Jim, Jane, and Kurt have enhanced the book's content by providing Biblical examples and explanations of how to use your own magic key. They carefully matched Joyce's voice. For example, where Joyce lists the correspondences of stones, the new edition includes an excerpt from the story of David and Goliath, where in David chooses five smooth stones to fight Goliath. Their addition goes on to state, in part, "The magic key shows us that stones are the good lessons we learn that help us make better choices. Your stones might be a prayer you like, a song that makes you feel brave, or words from the Bible that you remember."



DAVID AND GOLIATH

One more special note about the third edition of *The Magic Key*. Joyce's son Kurt's whole family was involved in bringing this edition to life. Kurt's daughter, Ava, and wife, Shelley, copy edited, and all the illustrations are original artwork by his daughter, and Joyce's grand-daughter, Anastasia.

Details will be coming soon on how to order your own copy. When you hold it in your hands, keep an eye out for something hidden in the illustrations, and know that it was a labor of love.

**Listening to Eternity: The Music, Spirituality, and Creative World of Composer Tommie Haglund**  
By Aram Yardumian

Summary by the Swedenborg Foundation

On September 5, The Swedenborg Foundation will release our newest book, *Listening to Eternity*, a memoir detailing Tommie Haglund's journey from a painful childhood to international recognition as a deeply expressive and spiritually inspired composer.

In a candid question and answer format through conversations spanning several years, author and scholar Aram Yardumian traces connections between Tommie Haglund's compositions and life experiences. The story ranges from childhood struggles and periods of anxiety and illness to artistic triumphs; from a pivotal encounter with a medium to his love for Monty Python and meeting with John Cleese.

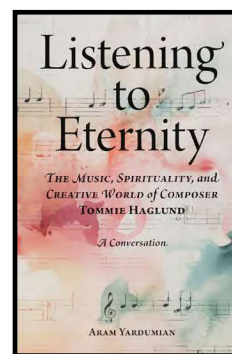
This deeply personal narrative appeals to classical music lovers, spiritual seekers, and anyone curious about the creative process—no technical musical knowledge required.

The Swedenborgian community will appreciate the presence of Swedenborg woven throughout

Tommie's life experience:

ARAM: How did Soldanella's interest in Swedenborg influence your own?

TOMMIE: When Soldanella told me to read Swedenborg, I felt a great relief that I could connect Christianity to this experience with the medium and that we have so little knowledge about what's really going on outside ourselves. Ironically, Swedenborg himself advises not to contact mediums, and yet that was the gateway to Swedenborg and the rest of my life.



This unique book provides yet another example of how Swedenborg's writings continue to live on, shaping lives and culture. Tommie is a living composer of international re-

nown, who has lived a colorful and at times very hard life. We hope readers will benefit from Aram and Tommie's work to share these hard-won insights, and will appreciate the spiritual aspect of Tommie's story and musical creations.

The print book is a paperback with French flaps and thirty-eight images, including twenty-three in color. It includes a complete list of Haglund's works, a Further Listening list, a bibliography, and an extended scholarly epilogue from the author. Also available as an ebook. You can purchase this book online at <https://swedenborg.com/product/listening-to-eternity/>.

**Do you write poetry?  
Send it along to:**

[Messenger@Swedenborg.org](mailto:Messenger@Swedenborg.org).

## Updates from Denominational Groups

### Our Daily Bread to Launch New Video Podcast Series

BY REV. THOM MULLER

**O**ur *Daily Bread* at [spiritualquesters.org](https://spiritualquesters.org) is about to launch a new video podcast called Swedenborg Room, where Rudy Caseres and I will have casual discussions on Swedenborgian topics. This reflects a new direction of our ministry, as we increase our online visibility and original content creation.

The mission of *Our Daily Bread* is to publicly share content that reflects the distinct “flavor” of our particular branch of Swedenborgianism, characterized by open spiritual inquiry, radical inclusiveness, and a willingness to critically engage the treasure that is our tradition. At a time when we see a continuing emergence of excellent outlets of Swedenborgian content on the internet, it is as important as ever that we offer public voices that reflect the kind


of discourse valued by and cultivated within our denomination in particular. Our conversations will not shy away from such issues as a critical interrogation of our own beliefs, addressing topics like sexual ethics, LGBTQ+-inclusion, and other contemporary societal topics, and honoring the many diverse expressions and interpretations of Swedenborgian theology and spirituality present in our movement, focusing on free individual discernment over dogmatism, orthodoxy, or uniformity.

We will begin with a series of “Swedenborgianism 101” episodes, in which we will explore basic Swedenborgian concepts, such as the life and works of Swedenborg, the nature of God, the inner worlds, regeneration, the afterlife, angels etc., which will serve as both an introduction to

newcomers, as well as a platform and impulse for conversation and reflection within our denomination.

The second phase of our video podcast will be focused on engaging a variety of Swedenborgian voices in conversation, with guests from diverse backgrounds sharing their unique experiences, approaches, spiritual practices, and ministries.

We hope you will stay tuned as we roll out this exciting new project. Videos will be shared both on our website, [spiritualquesters.org](https://spiritualquesters.org), and on various social media platforms, including YouTube. We have begun recording and editing, and plan on releasing our first episode in September.

If you have ideas for topics or guests (perhaps even yourself!), please email me at [odb@swedenborg.org](mailto:odb@swedenborg.org). 

## The Social Justice Committee


**T**he Social Justice Committee invites you to explore, join, or enjoy these new initiatives!

- Join our Facebook Group “[The Social Justice Committee of the SCNA](#)” to share and receive resources for incorporating justice work into our lives.
- Join our biweekly support group: *Staying Grounded in Times of Political and Social Upheaval*, where we receive the nurturing presence of community and focus on the small, necessary things that keep us going day-to-day, in the work of justice and the work of life. Mondays 7:00 PM ET/6:00 PM CT/4:00 PM PT on Zoom. The next meeting is on

September 15. Sign up for the Zoom link here: <https://forms.gle/hSrcnnfpNTeKkTA6>

- Enjoy our collaboration with The Helen Keller Spiritual Life Collaborative: the podcast series *Spiritual Ecology: Wisdom for a Changing Planet*
- 1. “[The Garden Was Born Out of Healing](#)” An interview with Jamila Davey of Green for the Greater Good, a partner with The Church of the Holy City in Wilmington, Delaware.
- 2. “[It is time to bring coherence to this place](#)” An interview with Rachel Lyn Rumson, on the interconnectedness of humanity and nature.

3. “[There’s just so much fun in caring for our bodies and the earth](#)” An interview with Kei and Susan Pang, leaders in the creation of a conservation easement at the Garden Chapel in St. Louis.

We welcome new members to the committee! Let us know if you are interested at: <https://swedenborg.org/contact-us/> 





## Updates from Denominational Groups

### Gray Fund Call For Proposals

**T**he Gray Fund was established by the will of Wesley N. Gray, a Reading, Massachusetts, roofing contractor, member of the Boston Society of the New Jerusalem, and dedicated supporter of the knowledge and works of Emanuel Swedenborg. His will, after provisions for his wife, extended family, and workers, left the remainder of his estate to a trust that would distribute funds according to his specifications and under the direction of three trustees. The original three trustees were named in the will with instructions that replacements would be selected by the trustees with the concurrence of the Massachusetts New Church Union and the General Convention of the New Jerusalem.

The key wording in the will (revised in 2005) follows:

“... the Standing Committee of the Massachusetts New Church Union, and the General Council of the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the United States of America, to be held by said Board of Trustees for the following purposes, to wit: To keep safely invested and *to pay over the net income after all expenses and the usual allowance for their services are paid, to such Church and missionary uses, preferably in Massachusetts first, then in the United States of America, and then in the whole world, as shall seem to them most deserving, and most useful toward the growth of the New Jerusalem Church* . . . [italics added]”

The Gray Fund assets are invested in the Common Fund, established by General Convention to invest, manage, and pay out investments by constituent and related entities of the General Convention. The trustees make available for grants the annual payout as determined annually by the

Investment Committee of the General Convention, generally at or close to four percent of funds invested. Given an expected return on investment of about seven percent, averaged over ten years, this allows reinvestment of three percent of the increase in value, thus maintaining the viability of the fund into the future, assuming annual inflation to be close to three percent over a ten-year period.

#### Grant Procedures:

- The trustees make a call for proposals for the next calendar year.
- Churches and organizations can make requests for the next calendar year only or for up to three years, renewable by application annually.
- Grantees must provide a report at the conclusion of the grant project.
- If funds remain to be granted for the following calendar year after awards are made, the Gray Fund will consider requests for funding on a rolling basis.

**The Gray Fund deadline for 2026 requests is October 31.** Please email your grant requests to the Gray Fund secretary, Rebecca Esterson, at [rester-son@gtu.edu](mailto:rester-son@gtu.edu) by this date. ☪

### Fifty Years of Women In Ministry

*Continued from page 94*

insight and information, her presentation was comfortable, conversational, and maintained a worshipful format

Many years ago, Lon Elmer had just finished reading *The Holy Center*, a book written by Dorothea. Attending a meeting at the Swedenborg School of Religion, he ran into her. He thanked her for this wonderful book. Decades later, a new member joined the Wilmington, Delaware, Swedenborgian Church that Lon

attends. Lon learned that this man had attended Urbana University and found Dorothea to be a kind and charismatic instructor who held comfortable student gatherings, forming warm relationships.

Rev. Jane Siebert has a cherished memory of Dorothea laying on hands during Jane's ordination service. This was Dorothea's last act prior to retirement—an extraordinary gift.

In the fall of 2003, I asked for guidance from the Rev. Drs. George Dole and Dorothea Harvey as I struggled with becoming the first woman and first lay person to become President of Convention. Both were exceedingly gracious and helpful. My mantra of support through six years of presidency was Dorothea saying, “Go for it, Chris!”

The Rev. Dr. Dorothea Harvey's work in the Swedenborgian Church was impactful. Self-effacing, brilliant, and discerning, she became a change-maker by bringing her talents, scholarship, deep theological knowledge, and caring wisdom to the Church.

Dorothea loved teaching. Her lasting legacy for the Church was the gift of her home, the proceeds from which the Dorothea Harvey Chair was established at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies. The Chair is currently held by Dr. Rebecca Esterson, Dean of CSS.

After retirement, Dorothea continued writing. A small unpublished piece titled “The Nature of Spirit” begins with “Spirit is the creative Presence in all that is” and closes with “God's will is that I find my deepest joy.”

Dorothea Harvey lived this. With deep gratitude, our Church is the better for it. ☪

Christine (Chris) Laitner, B.A., M Mus, retired educator from Midland, Michigan. She was the first woman to be elected president of the SCNA, and served from 2004–2010.



## Memorial Day

## Teens Ponder Dreams and Visions at the Almont Memorial Weekend Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

Seventeen teens assembled for the 2025 Almont Memorial Weekend Swedenborgian Church Youth League teen retreat to explore the theme “Dreams, Visions, and the Whisperings of Angels.” Over the extended holiday weekend, we presented sessions on dreams and visions from the Bible, created artwork related to biblical visions, and conducted workshops exploring our own personal dreams.

Rev. Renée Machiniak led the first session on Joseph’s dreams. She began by asking a few of the teens to share a recent or significant dream.

Renée related the Bible story of Joseph and the premonition dreams of being a leader that he shared with his brothers. Renée explained the many varieties of dreams and then helped the group understand the difference between dreams and visions. She said, “Visions happen to you when you are aware. They are more real, direct, and crystal clear. Visions are more important and are unforgettable.” Then Renée went on to share the story of the vision quest that she went on when she was a young

adult. Near the end of her vision quest, which involved sitting in a small circle in the forest without food for three days, Renée had a vividly moving vision involving a group of elders. Still today, layers of her vision continue

valley of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14). Several teen girls chose to do paintings of John’s visions from Revelation, such as the River of Life (Revelation 22:1–2), the Beast out of the Sea (Revelation 13:1–3), and the Woman and the

Dragon (Revelation 12:1–4). One teenage girl decided to do a multimedia art piece of Nebuchadnezzar’s Tree Dream (Daniel 4:9–12). The teens listened to inspiring dream-themed music while they worked, and many of them spent several hours working on their artistic creations. After the teens finished their art, some of them



2025 Memorial Day Retreat group.

to be peeled back and revealed to her in significant and profoundly helpful ways. Renée declared, “Visions help expand our awareness. You are being introduced to a previously unknown wisdom or understanding.”

I directed the Saturday afternoon session. The youth read a series of twelve interesting Bible passages about a dream or vision. Then they selected one of particular interest to create a work of art. The boys tended to gravitate to Ezekiel’s startling vision of the

helped around camp by painting the side Heritage porch. It’s always great to have the teens help beautify and protect our camp buildings. Thank you, Katie and Craig Carson, for leading this work project.

Heather Oelker and I led projective group dream work circles late Saturday afternoon. Rev. Ted Cole provided instruction on how to lead a dream circle using resources adapted from Haden Institute Guidelines for Dream

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## Memorial Day

## Teens Ponder Dreams

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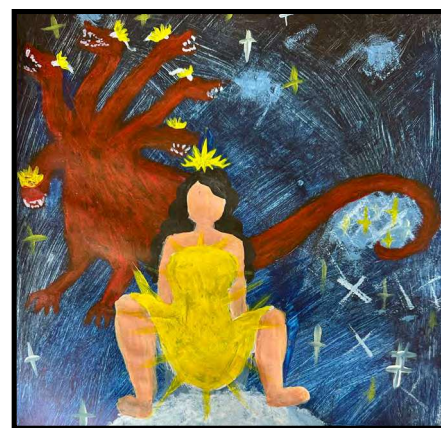
Groups (Bob Haden, May 2009, The Haden Institute. [www.hadeninstitute.com](http://www.hadeninstitute.com), [office@hadeninstitute.com](mailto:office@hadeninstitute.com)). Ted proclaimed, “Dreams are more honest, impactful, and real than real life. Dreams are a real thing. They are a regal thing.” This method of dream work highly respects both the dream and the dreamer. The dream is valuable and sacred. At each dream workshop, a prayer was offered for both the dreamer and the group. The process worked by having the dreamer relate their dream to the circle, then they gave the dream to the group. The group talked without input from the dream sharer, with each person projecting their thoughts about the dream using the phrase “if it were my dream...” or “in my dream...”

Next, the group gave the dream back to the dreamer for their reflection. My group worked on four different dreams shared by four different teens. We ended the dream workshops by thanking them for sharing and told them that it was important to track their dreams over the next few days, because future dreams will repeat what the dreamer did not catch. Everyone thought that this was a very intriguing and useful practice, and the dream

sharers all benefited from the perspectives of the group.

Rev. Kit Billings led the Saturday evening session. Kit’s session was on Joseph and his ability to interpret dreams. Kit told the story from Genesis 41, where Joseph interpreted Pharaoh’s dreams of seven fat and seven skinny cows and seven healthy stalks of grain and seven thin stalks of grain. Kit explained how this dream story of wisdom and spiritual insight can prepare people for the future. He postulated that this was a powerful story of rising from hardship to leadership, which also illustrated resilience through suffering, the importance of trusting Divine timing in life, and using one’s gifts for the good of others.

On Sunday morning, I presented the Jacob’s Ladder dream (Genesis 28:10–22). I read the story to the teens, then I told them the backstory about Jacob’s parents, his twin birth, and the exciting story of how he captured the family birthright and blessing from his brother Esau. Next, we discussed the inner meaning of the Jacob’s Ladder dream. I explained that there were two big themes in this story—the stone and the ladder. Jacob used a stone as a pillow. Stones represent solid truths that we can rely on and trust. The stone was set on the ground, so these represent natural truths. The head is the control center of the body. So, the correspondence of a head resting on a stone on the ground is your command-and-control center, founded on and grounded in natural truth. Natural truths allow spiritual truths to be let in. You can think of this relationship like water in a



The teens create works of art inspired by a passage from the Bible (bottom left). Ezekiel’s vision of dry bones (Ezekiel 37:1–14) by Micah King (above). The Woman and the Dragon (Revelation 12:1–4) by Athena Baxter (below).

glass: the natural truth is the glass (the container), while the spiritual truth is the water (the essence contained within). These truths exist in constant relationship with each other. The ladder is all about the connection between heaven and earth, the bond between God and humankind, or, more personally, the link between you and the spiritual world. The ladder is a promise. It is a holy covenant between heaven and earth. So, when we reside in useful, natural truths—our head on a stone—these truths can get “angelified” via a spiritual ladder into higher spiritual truths. This continuous flow of the angelic truth from the heavens can turn our concrete thoughts and ideas into useful goods and actionable plans for positive change. This is a story that

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## Memorial Day

### Teens Ponder Dreams

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reminds us that we are blessed children of God with continuous and constant access to the heavenly realm. We should remember to thank God for the gifts that we receive and give back whenever we can by sharing our goodness, truth, and useful actions with others.



*Zsa Zsa unleashing her inner Mario Kart racer at the go-kart track*

The last session on Sunday afternoon was my session was on Ezekiel's vision of the four creatures and their associated wheels found in Ezekiel 1. We read and meditated on

the incredible Ezekiel's fantastic vision, then we had some fun creating the creatures with paper masks and sticker eyes. I explained how the story presents both an image of God and an image of the characteristics we need (from God) when we are struggling. I told the youth, "This is a story of how we can trust in divine providence to guide us to a better place when we are

held in captivity or feel imprisoned." We discussed the different ways we can be held captive or imprisoned. I continued, "People can hold us captive to ideas and thoughts that are false or that we don't agree with. We can be bullied or forced to do something we don't want to do. We can also hold ourselves captive, which is often even worse. Divine providence can help us when we are held captive, and Ezekiel's dream helps us understand how." I then went through the different aspects of the dream and explained the inner meaning. I focused on the dream features of the wings, the eye-covered wheels, and the faces of the creatures (human, lion, ox, and eagle). Each of the faces represents a characteristic that we need when we are held captive, and these are the qualities we look for in God at these times. Human represents intelligence; the lion is powerful truth, strong love, and bravery; the ox is useful, good works; and the eagle is rational, spiritual sight to guide us forward. The vision concludes with



*(From left to right) Betsy Aldrich, Bill Baxter, Kurt Fekete, Heather Oekler, and Rev. Kit Billings enjoying a game of mini golf.*

a rainbow, which represents a covenant between God and us. This is a promise from God to continue to guide us and direct us through our struggle by providing us with guiding providence, love, and care. I know this session resonated with the teens, as one of the girls approached me after the session with more questions about how divine providence could help her with her anxiety. It was a blessing to be able to help her navigate her difficult dilemma, and along with providing some helpful tips, I told her how brave she was to reach out for guidance and assistance.

The teens and I also had fun during our free time. We played frisbee with the ten young adults who were concurrently attending the Transitions retreat. We bumped the volleyball around in a circle. We enjoyed beautiful weather for our Sunday afternoon mini golf/go-kart outing. We played board games, Codenames, Catch Phrase, and the Sign Game. We feasted on a wonderful Sunday evening traditional Memorial Day BBQ cooked by Tammara Mounce, Craig Carson, and Katie Carson, followed by our annual evening ice cream social. We had so much fun eating and playing



*Rev. Kit Billings leads the final worship service.*

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## Memorial Day

# Many Hands Make Light Work: FNCA Memorial Day Work Weekend

BY BEKI GREENWOOD

At the end of May every year, the Buildings and Grounds Committee of the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) hosts their annual work weekend. Members and friends are invited to come up to the FNCA and be of use to our community by lending their time and talents to opening the camp for the summer season and working on various new projects, cleaning, or repairs that keep our aging facility alive and well. This year, workers were there from Thursday until the Tuesday after Memorial Day, working hard on our beloved camp property.

We never know what kind of weather we will be treated to at this springtime event. And this year it was cold and wet until the very last day (which of course was a sunny, seventy-seven degrees)! Even with the less-than-preferred working conditions, about twenty-five people came together



*Ross Woofenden and Stephen Dyson keep dry under a tarp and work together on repairs and improvements to the Taft cabin.*

and enjoyed a weekend of service and community. There are projects for all skill sets, and there is something for everyone of any age to help with. Delicious meals were prepared by Chris Tergliafera, with the assistance of Polly Baxter and Christiaan Kandel, to keep all the workers in attendance full and sustained. One of the perks of coming to this event for sure are the meals.

In October of 2024, a huge pine tree fell on our property and left heavy damage to two of our buildings. These two buildings were the highest on our project list. Primarily, prepping the Woofenden cabin for the extensive repairs to the roof and windows. There was quite a bit of debris and broken glass still inside that needed removal,

and many items needed to be disposed of. A lot of time was spent on sorting through all the items that were removed from the cabin, including many books from Pop Woofenden's collection that are now integrated into the main camp library that resides in our lecture hall. This tree also clipped the corner of the adjacent Taft cabin porch, which prompted the long-needed update to the door, and its location was moved to the porch.



*Sometimes it takes a tree falling for needed change. The Taft door was moved to the screen porch (formerly where the white window here is). A much-needed update that made the inside feel so much bigger as well as a beautiful extension to the outside porch!*



*During Work Weekend, we push together tables so that we can all try to sit together at one table. (Here we ran out of space!) Our community meals during these times are full of laughter, joy, and homemade, yummy meals.*

Apart from the cabin damage repairs, many water pipes had to be fixed, new gutters were hung, and plans for an updated ADA-compliant bathroom in our Main Building were established. Thank you to the Tafel Fund for supporting our much-needed bathroom updates that will bring our most-used restroom on campus up to code. We will also be updating our two first-floor accessible rooms with half-bathrooms to meet code within the next year. Fire extinguishers were

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## Memorial Day

### Many Hands Make Light Work

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*The FNCA Buildings and Grounds Committee is tasked with the care, maintenance, and stewardship of the physical plant of the Assembly. The members here are: Beki Greenwood, Colgate Searle, David Richardson, Carol LeBaron, and Dan Dyer.*

serviced and redistributed to all the cabins. There were painting projects, new handrails installed around camp, and so much cleaning—all among the things that got accomplished. We had a successful weekend with many projects started and completed. Special thanks and shout out to Ross Woofenden, who shares his carpentry and building talents with us and plans to stay for much of the summer to complete all these projects and others not even started yet before the camp session begins in late July.

It is a lot of work keeping up an aging facility, but boy, do we have fun together. There is

nothing like working hard, getting your hands dirty (or getting soaked by a surprise water pipe break) to better our camp facility and then enjoying time with one another when the sun goes down and the work ends. Any excuse to spend time with our spiritual family, we will take—it's even better when we are in use and service to our community at the same time. Thank you to everyone who joined us, and we look forward to doing it all again next year! 🏠

Beki Greenwood has served on the FNCA board of directors for over seventeen years. She is currently the FNCA secretary and is on the Buildings and Grounds and Outreach Committees.



### Teens Ponder Dreams

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together as a community of friends.

Kit led the retreat closing worship service on Sunday evening. He returned to the theme of Pharaoh's dreams and explained how we can all lift ourselves up out of our struggles to become important mentors and guides to each other. Then Kit concluded worship with an inspiring holy communion ritual. As we gathered in our worship community and I considered our time together, it was easy to visualize Jacob's ladder connecting heaven and earth. The flow of love rising from our little community to heaven was palpable, and I think we all felt the strong angelic love that heaven returned to us. It makes me incredibly joyful to know that the teens have retreats, camps, and this blessed church community that they can continue to return to, thus gaining awareness and enlightenment of the powerful truth and glorious goodness that emanates

from our Divine Creator.

Thank you to our retreat's wonderful staff, Heather Oelker, Bill Baxter, Betsy Aldrich, Rev. Renée Machiniak, Rev. Kit Billings, and Transitions leader, Tammara Mounce. Additional thanks to Lori Patana and all the caretakers and keepers of the Almont Retreat Center.

In the words of Jacob, "The Lord is surely in this place. How holy this place is! This must be the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. May God be with me. May he watch over me on this journey I'm taking. May he give me food to eat and clothes to wear. Then you, Lord, will be my God." 🏠

### Young Adult (18-30)

#### Transitions Group Update from the Memorial Day Retreat

We gathered together once again to take on the many projects Almont has to offer. After turning on the water and power back to winterized buildings, we tackled some other Almont needs also. Overgrowth along the fence line and wood left behind from DTE Energy were gathered and taken away. The arts and crafts cottage door was sanded down and repainted. Some new furniture was also brought into camp and moved into the Rec Hall. Katie Carson led the project to repaint the side porch. Between projects, we played games and talked about the dreams and visions of Swedenborg and what are dreams might mean to us. We also once again visited the nearby village of Armada twice, once for ice cream and once for the annual flea market. Our next retreat will be for "Friendsgiving" in November. Stay tuned! —Ronnie Vigas, *Transitions Group Scribe*



## Swedenborgian Summer

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and go straight to Maine after. I am so glad we did. By making this a priority, we have increased our personal spiritual communities exponentially. For many years, campers have popped in from Almont to FNCA, and I had made so many connections from being at Convention for the past several years that I walked into a family of fabulous people I already knew. We were welcomed with open arms and got to experience the bonding that our extended-time church events provide us, and not only make new friendships but strengthen existing ones—watching the kids do the same is really what it is all about.

By attending both camps (and other youth events), the kids are forming their own unique version of what “church” is to them. They are building a lasting heavenly community that is like no other. Often, I hear other parents lament about how it is a chore for their kids to attend their own families’ religious obligations, while mine count down the minutes until the next one. We must be doing something right! Our camps are the jewels of our Swedenborgian crown and are surely one of those right things. I love both camps: the picturesque vacationland of the FNCA, and the warmth of the Almont community, they bring the sunshine to our souls that get us through the next year—five out of five stars in the decision to make two camps part of our summer lives, I encourage you and your family to do the same. ☺



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*The Swedenborgian Church of  
North America*



**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.

## Church Calendar

- **September 15, 2025:** Reports are due to [Central Office](#) for inclusion in the *2025 Journal*
- **September 25–28, 2025:** [Gathering Leaves](#), Temenos, Pennsylvania
- **September 26–27, 2025:** [SCFA Annual Meeting](#), Burlingame, California
- **October 10–13, 2025:** [SCYL Fall Retreat](#), Duxbury, Massachusetts
- **November 14–15, 2025:** [General Council Meeting](#), Washington, D.C.

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## A Poem of Heart

The thing that keeps you alive,  
where the angels reside.  
The electrical flow,  
inhabited by the glow of angels.

The way you behave  
determines how you stay  
your heart keeps you going,  
the most important thing about you.

Whether a good or bad heart,  
a messy or tidy heart,  
the angels will accept you.  
No matter the way,  
be true in your stay,  
while you use your heart  
in every way.

—Serena Greenwood, age 14

### 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.

## SCYL Fall Retreat

### SCYL Fall Teen Retreat

A SCYL retreat for ages 13 – 18

**Theme:** The Beautifully Wicked Trap: How Hell Captures Your Soul

**Dates:** Friday, October 10, 7:00 PM – Monday, October 13, 10:00 AM

**Location:** Cedar Hill Retreat Center, Duxbury Massachusetts

**Cost:** \$50 with a household maximum of \$100

At this year's 2025 SCYL Fall Teen Retreat, we'll dive into The Beautifully Wicked Trap: How Hell Captures Your Soul—an eye-opening look at the subtle ways negativity tries to lure us in and how we can rise above it. Together, we'll unpack Hell's "playbook"—from twisted truths to empty pleasures—and discover powerful defenses rooted in love, joy, and service. Through discussions, activities, and reflection, we will learn how to spot the red flags, choose joy that builds, serve without the spotlight, and stay spiritually awake. This retreat isn't about fear—it's about freedom: the freedom to live with clarity, strength, and purpose, creating lives that truly connect and give back. Register at [swedenborg.org](https://swedenborg.org).



SCYL teens enjoying Plymouth Bay beach at the 2024 Fall Teen Retreat.