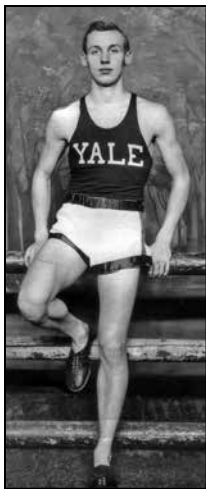




## Creating the George Dole Chair at CSS, A Letter from the Board of Trustees

Dear Members,  
Associates, and Friends,

Chances are that, at some point in your life, Rev. Dr. George Dole has influenced you through his books, talks, sermons, film scripts, and conversations. Perhaps you've been blessed by ministry through one of his many students, or possibly you yourself are a spiritual leader educated by him. Maybe you've been helped by one of his revolutionary translations of Swedenborg's works to grasp new understanding and insight. Possibly, you even were fortunate to have been part of a congregation where Rev. Dole served as minister. You may also be a friend, neighbor, or relative.



*Young George in racing form*

It is challenging to capture the widespread and deep inspiration Rev. Dole has had on our denomination and on so many of us. His presence of thought and vision is alive and working through so many publications and the work of those whom he helped shape. His reach has been so wide as well as deep,



*Rev. George in his early career*

that we wish to create an honor that will be fitting and long-lasting. This humble but spirited leader will soon celebrate sixty years of ordained ministry performed as a scholar at our theological school and as a congregational leader. In recognition of his immeasurable contributions to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), we are establishing a named chair to be launched at the upcoming 2020 Swedenborgian Church Convention in Bridgewater, Massachusetts—the summer of his ninetieth birthday.

### We Need Your Support

For a named chair, we do not have a requirement for the amount of your contribution although, of course, our goal is to raise as much as possible. But since this is a loving tribute to a very important person in our tradition, we need you to join us in the widest possible participation.

For this special purpose, we are putting donations

into a restricted fund for the purpose of funding the George F. Dole Chair, for the long-range future. Using only the prudent growth generated each year, your gift will keep on giving for a very long time.

For those who would prefer to donate to the general fund or other projects, these options are also available.

So please contribute an amount that is feasible for you. If you cannot contribute immediately, please pledge an amount that you can contribute before June 30, 2020. We will be publishing all the names of those giving to the George F. Dole Chair to represent the loving community he has nurtured so well for so long.

—*The CSS Board of Trustees:*  
Robert Carr, Jenny Caughman,  
Terrie Crenshaw, Jim Lawrence,  
Jennifer Lindsay, Gard Perry,  
Lewis Shaw, Jane Siebert,  
John Titus, and Anna Woofenden



*George and his wife, Lois, at their beloved Fryeburg New Church Assembly*



*Professor George Dole in later days*

To donate please send your check to the Center for Swedenborgian Studies, 1798 Scenic Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709, or you can donate online at <https://center-for-swedenborgian-studies.webflow.io/support-the-center-for-swedenborgian-studies>.

**The Editor's Desk**



**The Spirit of Christmas**

*I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.*  
—Acts 20:35 (King James Version)

As we know from experience and as Swedenborg reminds us, as children we are interested solely in ourselves—our own needs and desires. Childhood is the beginning of a lifelong journey of becoming—becoming an adult and, we hope, becoming a more spiritual being, replacing our childhood love of self with love of the neighbor and love of the Lord.

For most of those who celebrate Christmas, it has become common to shower children with gifts. We love them and want to give to them, to see

them experience joy: a joy of material gifts, yes, but also a joy in receiving love. As children grow, the gifts they receive gradually shift from toys to games as their intellect increases, and from games to adult gifts. At the same time, children begin more and more to feel joy in giving gifts as much as receiving. This is a material expression of burgeoning spiritual growth.

I can attest, as a senior citizen, that, with age, one's gift focus becomes giving more than receiving. With spiritual growth comes the realization that joy flows from giving, and that, as Rev.

Rich Tafel writes in "How to Experience Joy" (p. 158), that joy of giving is best expressed by loving God in being of use to our neighbor.

In the natural world, the material gift of money helps our beloved institutions continue to be of use. The end of the year brings many requests for material support, and we must, of course, make our own choices of to whom to give and how much to give, but please give thoughtful consideration to supporting your own church community, the denomination (p 164), and the new George F. Dole Chair at the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (p. 153).

—Herb Ziegler

**Letters to the Editor**

**Faith Statement**

Thanks to Rev. Jim Lawrence for his excellent take on the Adoramus (November 2019 *Messenger*). I am one who fondly remembers reciting this weekly with my fellow congregants, a familiar, unifying moment in which all of our differences were harmonized—not eclipsed.

Although it is brief, it is not simple, nor should it be. It is essentially our Christology—our shared understanding, drawn from Swedenborg's theology, of what the Christ

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**Church Calendar**

- **December 27–30:** SCYL (ages 13–18) Winter Retreat, Almont New Church Assembly, Almont, MI
- **March, 2020:** Palestine and Israel Trip, CSS January term
- **August 28–31, 2020:** Gathering Leaves, Purley Chase, England

the Messenger

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Editor, design and production: Herbert Ziegler

Copy editing and proofing: Robert Leith & Trevor

Standing Committee for Communication and Information: Kevin Baxter, Elizabeth Blair, & Val Brugler

Printing: Gnomon Copy, Cambridge MA

Editorial Address:

Herb Ziegler, *the Messenger*  
2 Hancock Place  
Cambridge MA 02139

Tel: 617.388.0252

Email: [messenger@swedenborg.org](mailto:messenger@swedenborg.org)

Business and Subscription Address:

*The Messenger*, Central Office  
50 Quincy Street  
Cambridge MA 02138

Tel: 617.969.4240

Email: [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org)

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## Letter from the President



### *The Year of the Lord: 2019–20* *—The Primacy of Spirit*

*The Lord's presence is perpetual with everyone both evil and good . . . but His advent is only with those who receive Him, who . . . believe in Him and do His commandments. The perpetual presence of the Lord causes one to become rational, and to have the ability to become spiritual. One becomes spiritual by the light proceeding from the Lord as a sun, which one receives in the understanding. But the advent of the Lord is with those who conjoin heat to that light . . . The mere presence of the Lord, and consequent enlightenment of the understanding may be compared to the presence of the solar light in the world . . . [while] the advent of the Lord may be compared to the advent of heat in the springtime.*

—Emanuel Swedenborg *True Christianity* §774

Dear Friends and Members of the  
Swedenborgian Church,

Do we need to celebrate Christmas every year? Does it get a bit routine? Does it seem to come around sooner and sooner each year? And why do we keep celebrating the birth of Jesus as a baby? When we celebrate our own and others' birthdays, we acknowledge how old we are—how many years have passed since birth. We really don't keep celebrating one another as babies.

I've been thinking about this, and I think the time of Advent helps to explain these questions. Advent is all about waiting, waiting and preparing our hearts to receive Jesus. No one is sure when

it started. It even varies in length—it seems very short this year.

We do need Christmas and Advent every year? We probably need it even more than yearly. Look back with me on your memories of previous Christmases. Who was God to you? Who was Jesus? Has your understanding of God changed?

I remember when I accepted Jesus into my heart, as my Baptist upbringing called it. I was at a Billy Graham crusade in Nebraska, and about ten or eleven years old. My idea of God was the size of my childhood world. I expected Jesus to give me what I wanted when I prayed. I thought of God as up there, a heaven in the sky, watching over me and yet also getting angry when I did something wrong. I was pretty much afraid of God.

Then as I grew older, my image of God changed and grew with me. God became more loving in my sight. I realized God did not punish people for doing wrong. We were pretty good at doing that ourselves. God became all about love, unconditional love that I could depend on. Through the years, God outgrew the box I had used to try to understand God. I let God be God, and I did not have to define the Divine. God is everywhere and in everything . . . even in me . . . and especially in you.

Every year, when Christmas comes, I am in a different place in relation to God, depending on what has happened in my world during that year and how I responded.

This is the uniqueness and value of a time of Advent. From the first Sunday of Advent, right up to Christmas, we have the opportunity to prepare our hearts to receive the Christ child. We are even given candles to light to guide us to hope, love, joy, peace and finally the Christ child candle. Christmas is about receiving God in our hearts as the Baby Jesus, every year.

By celebrating the birth of Jesus, we

*Continues on page 163*

# The Philadelphia Bible Christians: Early Swedenborgian Vegetarians

BY GAIL R. MCCORMICK

Vegetarian movements in Great Britain and America long have acknowledged the influence of an obscure, early nineteenth-century sect known as Bible Christians, an offshoot of Swedenborgianism that embraced vegetarianism and abstinence from alcohol. In the late 1780s, the group's founder, Anglican minister Rev. William Cowherd, had been curate to Rev. John Clowes, rector of St. John's Church in Manchester. Clowes was already notorious for openly preaching, translating, and publishing Swedenborg's writings while continuing to serve as St. John's pastor. Clowes also routinely visited many rural, working class communities within a several mile radius of Manchester, leading small groups of Swedenborg "readers and receivers," many of whom still maintained family ties to ancient parish churches. Clowes' intermingling of old and "New Church" doctrine was anathema to Rev. Richard Hindmarsh and his Swedenborgian congregation in London, who believed the only proper goal was to completely separate from old traditions and define the ecclesiastical structure, form of worship, and doctrinal foundation of an entirely new denomination. Rustlings for this change were beginning to appear in Clowes' church. Rev. Cowherd, who had embraced Swedenborg while in Manchester, established a separate "New Jerusalem" congregation on Peter Street in 1793.

Cowherd's association with the Peter Street church was short-lived, likely due to both theological and personality issues. In 1800, he started his own congregation, Christ Church, in Salford,



across the Irwell River from Manchester. Before the end of the decade, Cowherd was preaching his own version of Swedenborgianism.

He demanded that his congregants abstain from consuming meat and alco-

hol, restrictions he believed were supported by both the Bible and Swedenborg's writings. An inveterate reformer, Cowherd saw dietary restraint as essential for a healthy body and spirit, a means of elevating humanity beyond the behavior of animals. Cowherd and his adherents called themselves Bible Christians, but argued that they were not forming a new sect. Believing they could be in perfect union with other Christians, the Bible Christians espoused "no creed but the Bible." Yet, like their brethren in the New Jerusalem Church, they were not literalists, but rather embraced a spiritual understanding of Scripture and the Bible's compatibility with rational, scientific thought.

Cowherd's radical defection was one more signal to London's Swedenborgians that Manchester was out of control. In 1813, Hindmarsh, whose London chapel had closed a few years earlier, moved to Salford and established a New Jerusalem congregation on Bolton Street. Hindmarsh was adamant that the "pernicious tenets" of Cowherd's beliefs were "by no means in agreement with those of the New Church." After Cowherd's death in 1816, some of his adherents even circulated the idea that Swedenborg himself had practiced their dietary restrictions, a position that Hindmarsh dismissed as totally unsupported by either Swedenborg's writings or by witnesses to his personal practices. In

short, Hindmarsh hoped that the Bible Christians would soon be forgotten, a warning "against the indulgence of vain and delusive speculations."

The death of Cowherd and the increasingly tense religious and political climate in Manchester led some within the Bible Christian congregation to plan their emigration to Philadelphia, the legendary beacon of religious toleration in the New World. The group's leader, Rev. William Metcalfe, had studied in Cowherd's Academy of Science and was ordained by the Bible Christian founder in 1811. In 1817, Metcalfe and about forty other Bible Christians arrived in Philadelphia. By the early 1820s, they had established a congregation in the Kensington district of Philadelphia County and were publishing tracts on abstinence from alcohol and meat. In his memoir, Metcalfe acknowledged that many of his poor flock, finding themselves "isolated from one another, in a strange country, among a people who had no sympathy with their habits," abandoned their unique lifestyle.

Marguerite Block, in her landmark history, *The New Church in the New World*,<sup>1</sup> also emphasizes the estrangement of the Bible Christians, citing the disapproval and annoyance of members of Philadelphia's nascent Swedenborgian community. Yet, in the three decades between the Bible Christians' arrival in Philadelphia and William Metcalfe's leadership of the new American Vegetarian Society in 1850, members of his congregation established themselves as leaders in science,

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<sup>1</sup> Marguerite Beck Block. *The New Church in the New World: A Study of Swedenborgianism in America*. West Chester, PA: Swedenborg Foundation, 1932.

## Philadelphia Bible Christians

*Continued from page 156*

technology, and social reform in the rural outskirts of the city. Prior to his death, Rev. Cowherd had encouraged his flock to pursue agriculture in America, but Jeremiah Horrocks, one of the 1817 immigrants, used his family's industrial expertise in Salford to establish the first textile dyeing operation along Frankford Creek, an important local waterway about four miles northeast of the Kensington church.

By the early 1820s, the village of Frankford was becoming a haven for Lancashire working men with experience in various aspects of the textile trade who brought

ancient traditions and new technology from their homeland to the Delaware Valley. In this setting, the experience of the Lancashire immigrants reflects that of many immigrants before and since, focusing on the commonalities of their culture and heritage rather than differences in religious tradition. Many of the members and leaders of the New Jerusalem Society of Frankford, reorganized in 1823 from its origin as a Free-Will Baptist congregation, were Lancashire immigrants. They would have recognized in their Bible Christian neighbors their native county's familiar broad dialect; shared affinities for art, nature, and music; and the unique vocabulary of their historic textile trades. Both groups shared Swedenborg's focus on charity and desired to elevate the lives of their fellow working men.

In Lancashire, Swedenborgians and

Bible Christians had been at the forefront of local community efforts to educate working men and improve their standard of living through cooperative efforts. In 1831, Jeremiah Horrocks and his neighbor on Frankford Creek, Lancashire-born bleacher Samuel Pilling, led the formation of the Oxford Provident Building Association. The



*The New Jerusalem Church in Frankford in 1922 (from the Collections of the Historical Society of Frankford, image S348)*

first such institution in America, Oxford Provident was established on the principles of a similar society created by Salford's Bible Christians. The subscription savings cooperative supported the goal of working-class families to own their own homes. Meetings were held in Pilling's Hotel in Frankford, managed by his friend Thomas Sidebotham, Lancashire-born tape weaver and a member of the New Jerusalem Society. Early subscribers included not only the Lancashire-born Bible Christians and Swedenborgians, but also local Quakers and Presbyterians, whose English, German, and Swiss ancestors had been living in Pennsylvania since the colonial era. The effort exemplified the Bible Christians' tenet that they could find union with those of other religious beliefs.

The Bible Christians' vegetarian lifestyle was credited with maintaining their congregation's health through Philadelphia's cholera epidemics in 1832 and 1849, and their advocacy of temperance was applauded by evangelicals, despite their disavowal of the sect's theology. Vegetarianism was also the foundation of the Bible Christians' peace and abolition initiatives. In an 1842 lecture to the Kensington

chapter of the American Physiological Society, James Wright, the Bible Christian congregation's secretary, Oxford Provident subscriber, and master dyer, stated bluntly, "Abstinence from murdered animals as food, is the first step in reform."

Vegetarianism did not become the norm in the wider society, but the Bible Christians' community involvement and social activism helped erase the sect's otherness, at least in the religiously tolerant villages on the fringes of the city. By 1850, several Bible Christian families had left Kensington to join Frankford's Swedenborgian congregation, bringing new vitality to the educational and social programs already established by the Rev. James Seddon and his parishioners. Seddon, whose father, Thomas, had embraced Swedenborg through the influence of Rev. Clowes in Lancashire, mentored his successor, Rev. John W. Lever, who had been baptized in the Bible Christian Church in Salford. Lever was pastor during the tumultuous 1860s and 1870s. The influence of the Levers and other Bible Christians on the dietary habits of their fellow parishioners is unknown, but the Frankford Society likely accommodated vegetarianism at their numerous nineteenth century tea parties, where cranberries appear to have been a popular item, even in the spring.

The Bible Christians survived as an independent congregation in Philadelphia only into the early twentieth century, but their influence surely informed the direction of the New Jerusalem Society of Frankford. Rev. John MacPherson, a former Presbyterian, led the society from 1881 to about 1902, during the schism that transformed the Pennsylvania Association it had helped found in the 1840s into the new General Church of Pennsylvania.

Rev. John Stockwell arrived in Philadelphia from Chicago at the height of

*Continues on page 162*

# How to Experience Joy

BY RICH TAFEL

The theme of the third Sunday of Advent is joy. Some churches use the name *Gaudete* Sunday, from the Latin to rejoice. What is joy? How do we get it? There's not a lot to be joyful about in the Gospel verse that starts,

"When John heard in prison what the Messiah was doing . . . (Matthew 11:2)" Not exactly a fun way to start a Bible passage about joy, as John sits in prison. And truth be told, there doesn't seem to be a lot to be joyful about in our world sometimes. We sing "Joy to the World, our Lord Has Come." Joy adorns everything from Christmas ornaments to wrapping paper.

But what exactly is joy? And why does it often seem illusive? In all of my spiritual coaching exercises with clients over the years I've asked a simple question: what do you want more than anything? The most common answer from everyone over many years, genders, and nationalities is, "I want to be happy." When I ask, "What does that mean to you?" the answers often start with money or status or being loved or a new car, but they often end up with the word *peace*. "I want to be at peace." "I want to be calm." "I want to have enough, be enough, feel enough." "I am not happy because I'm not at peace." "There is no joy."

Our consumer culture tells us that the answer is easy. Buy what you need and you will be happy. We've all tried it and we've all felt wanting from it. Our pop psychology teaches a version of do whatever makes you feel good. The idea here is that if you do what you want, you will be happy. We teach our kids that getting into the right school will bring joy. Yet, we live in a time where we have more access to more



creature comforts than our great-grandparents could imagine. And, at the same time, we are the most clinically depressed.

I recently spoke with the director of a nonprofit at the University of Pennsylvania that provides a space for college students to meet with other students who are suffering from depression. His simple solution is to get a space, provide food, and place signs on the tables for themes. He explained that students suffered from "Penn face." He spoke as if I knew what Penn face was. I asked, and he explained that it meant students learning to achieve at Penn were all putting up fake faces of happiness and success to their peers, while

**We all know that Christmastime is supposed to be about joy but is often the toughest time for depression.**

they were in deep pain from loneliness and suffering from imposter syndrome inside. Colleges, he explained, especially the more prestigious ones, were suffering an epidemic of suicide, students appeared to have everything and then, one day, they take their life.

The happiness through achievement we've been selling our kids isn't true. This experiment in our culture is failing. This isn't the case for college students only. I have had many highly successful people at the top of their game share with me their realization. "I climbed this ladder of success that everyone told me would get me to happiness only to find when I got to the top, nothing was there."

We all know that Christmastime is supposed to be about joy but is often

the toughest time for depression. Our pop psychology, business schools, and new age teachers seem to have missed the point.

And the answer to real joy and true happiness doesn't come from chasing our wants. It comes from being useful. It comes in being of service to others. It comes from knowing that God loves us, no matter what. John might be in prison, about to face execution, but he's excited to hear how Jesus is doing. He's lived a life of incredible usefulness. We read in the Word his story of preparation for Jesus forever. Jesus answers John's and the other disciple's questions, not with a theology of the Trinity or tenets for a new faith. He tells them to look how he has been useful. His actions have been in service.

There's a spiritual quality to joy that seems to me to move beyond just happiness. One of my great teachers at Harvard Divinity School was Henri Nouwen, who summed this up better than anyone when he said:

Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think of or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God's love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away. Joy is not the same as happiness. We can be unhappy about many things, but joy can still be there because it comes from the knowledge of God's love for us. Joy does not simply happen to us. We have to choose joy and keep choosing it every day. It is a choice based on the knowledge that we belong to God and have found in God our

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## How to Experience Joy

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refuge and our safety and that nothing, not even death, can take God away from us.

Joy is our choice and we must keep choosing it. Joy comes through being useful, and we must keep doing that. One of the most profound insights in our tradition is the concept of “uses”—being useful to others as your life purpose. Swedenborg described it as follows:

Angelic life consists in usefulness and acts of neighborly kindness. Nothing makes angels happier than giving information to spirits newly arrived from the world and teaching them; serving people on earth, making sure that the evil spirits present with them do not go too far, and inspiring them with good;

and reviving the dead as they enter eternal life, and eventually taking them to heaven, if the condition of their souls allows it. Angels find more happiness from these activities than could ever be described. In performing them they become images of the Lord. In performing them they love their neighbor more than themselves. This makes heaven.<sup>1</sup>

That’s the joy that we celebrate in Advent, as the Psalmist so beautifully tells us, “Happy are they who have the God of Jacob for their help! whose hope is in the Lord their God.”<sup>2</sup>

We are unconditionally loved by God. We love God when we are serving others. That is true joy. ☩

Rev. Richard L. Tafel is pastor of the Church of the Holy City (Swedenborgian) in Washington, D.C.

<sup>1</sup> *Secrets from Heaven* §452

<sup>2</sup> Psalm 146:4

## Resources for Worship Music and Meditation

Ken Turley, after retiring from active ministry, with help from his wife, Laurie, has been developing an extensive catalogue of original compositions for worship, including a growing number of Psalm settings and sacred songs, songs from his oratorio on the Book of Revelation, and three musical plays for Sunday school. His secular compositions include chamber music for piano solo; string duets and trios; trios and quartets with piano and classical guitar; sonatas for piano



or guitar and soloist; and a number of larger works for chamber orchestra.

A number of Psalms and other works are already available at the website [SheetMusicPlus.com](http://SheetMusicPlus.com). When you arrive at the site, type “Ken Turley” in the search field and when you come to his page, change “Sort by” to “a–z”. All available pieces will be listed alphabetically.

To preview all of his music, CD recordings, and music videos, please visit his website at: [www.turleymusic.com](http://www.turleymusic.com)

If you are interested in anything not yet available online, contact him directly at: [kenandlauriemusic@gmail.com](mailto:kenandlauriemusic@gmail.com).

Ken and Laurie’s music is also available on Spotify. There, you will find their two CDs of original songs, “Woman of the Land” and “Tales of Wonder,” as well as “Meditations on the Seven Angels of Revelation.” ☩

## Sunday School Activity Books Back in Print

I am happy to report that the *Sunday School Activity Books* to accompany the *Dole Bible Study Notes* are now back in print in four paperback volumes, available to purchase on Amazon and via other bookselling channels at a price of \$9.95 per volume.

You can see listings on Amazon at these links:

- Series 1: <https://amzn.to/2p2lqTh>
- Series 2: <https://amzn.to/2p5s7nC>
- Series 3: <https://amzn.to/2pa3ExB>
- Series 4: <https://amzn.to/2omyH8O>

General Convention will receive royalties from sales of these books. In addition, if they are purchased using these links, Convention will receive a commission for the sales.

—Best blessings,  
Rev. Lee Woofenden

P.S. Also available: a new edition of *Inner Light: Swedenborg Explores the Spiritual Dimension*, by Brian Kingslake:

Paperback:

<https://amzn.to/2pbOhVz>

Kindle:

<https://amzn.to/2ntztB9>

Convention will receive royalties and commissions from these sales. ☩

## Free\* Hosanna Hymnals

Does your church, camp, or retreat center need more *Hosanna* hymnals? Central Office has a surplus (400) of the beloved hymnal at its remote storage facility, Iron Mountain. Contact Central Office email at [manager@swedenborg.org](mailto:manager@swedenborg.org) or phone 617-969-4240.

\* You will receive an invoice for the cost of shipping and handling. Central Office will pay for the cost of retrieving the boxes from Iron Mountain.

## What's in a Name? The SCYL Fall Retreat

BY KURT FEKETE

Eighteen of us (twelve teens, six staff (and even teenager Gil on Skype, for a bit) gathered from eight different states at Cedar Hill Retreat Center in South Duxbury, Massachusetts, for the Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL) Fall Retreat 2019. Our theme was "What's in a Name?" Rev. Kevin Baxter, Rev. Susannah Currie, and I led sessions exploring our names, names and name changes in the Bible, names for God, and what Swedenborg has to say about names.

Rev. Kevin started us off by having us research our own names and where our names originated. In the



Kurt watches Wyatt, Ivy, Miranda, Julia, and Jack enjoy an exciting game of Uno with staff member Holly (center).

afternoon, he had us make collages representing the meaning behind our names and who we are.

I led sessions on taking the Lord's name in vain and the root of God's and Jesus' names.

Susannah led a workshop on envisioning our spiritual mission statement, or name, from our qualities. In *True Christianity* \$300, we read that angels in heaven do not retain their

earthly names but rather receive a name to suit their character. Angels have names that reflect their moral and spiritual lives. From Sari to Sarah, Abram to Abraham, and Jacob to Israel, God is present in our names.

We learned that our names and nicknames, both given and chosen, are to be respected and revered. This holiday season, perhaps take a moment to consider the names of the people you meet and gather with. Consider what their names mean to you. And think about the name of Jesus, our loving Prince of Peace, and what a gift his name is to us all. ☩

Kurt Fekete is the youth director of the Swedenborgian Church.



The teens work on their collages with Rev. Kevin.



Oliver, Miranda, and Nathan engaged in a game



Leaguers appreciate a sunset over Kingston Bay.



Youth leader Holly (with hat) supervises (L to R) Jillian, Ivy, and Ronnie in the kitchen.

[More SCYL photos on page 161](#)



The Year of the Lord

# Understanding Jesus Christ as a Process

BY REV. DR. ROBERT H. KIRVEN

*Adapted from A Concise Overview of Swedenborg's Theology (J. Appleseed & Co., 2003)*

First heard attributed to Paul Lehman (professor of theology at Harvard Divinity School) the aphorism that it is impossible to formulate a Christological statement without erring on the side of Arianism or Docetism, unless the statement is in narrative form. Arianism, like Socinianism and a few other factions from the history of theology, do not take seriously enough the divine side of the Lord, while Docetism, Patripassionism, and a few other similar movements do not take the Lord's Human seriously enough.

Swedenborg avoided this problem by his conception of process. In that conception, the sense in which Jesus's soul was divine cannot be separated from the struggle and development of Jesus the human. Swedenborg saw no omniscient *logos* simply inhabiting a body that went through the motions of an apparently human life. He saw the *logos* uniquely present in the potential of the infant Jesus and becoming fully actual and conscious only after a life-long process. That process is called "glorification."

Thus, nothing Swedenborg says about the nature or the person of Jesus



as the Christ—the Lord as he lived on earth—can be understood outside the context of the process of glorification. Briefly, that process began with the intersection of two poles: divine nature and initiative on one hand, and human nature and response on the

other. Through experiences of struggle with temptation, the divine inner potential became successively more and more actual and conscious, while human nature—including habits and inclinations as well as physical form—was successively transformed in accordance with its divine potential.

This process of glorification was not a linear progression, but fluctuated in and between each experience of struggle, from more-human-and-less-divine to more-divine-and-less-human (in the sense of "merely human"). The nadirs of this alternating progression were states of divine self-limitation or "self-emptying" (Greek *kenosis*, Latin *exinanitio*), and the peaks were states of human self-emptying, or divine self-awareness (glorification). The former was characterized by separation of Jesus's human nature from its divine essence and potential, and the latter by a more complete union of the two. Swedenborg referred to both the low points of the process and the entire period of incarnation as the state of exinanition. The peaks of the process, as well as the final outcome after the Resurrection, are called the state of glorification. ☩

Rev. Dr. Robert H. Kirven (1927–2004) was professor of theology and church history for thirty years at the Swedenborg School of Religion.

More SCYL Retreat Photos



Rev. Kevin Baxter engages Ava in a lively discussion while Heather and Jeff Oelker enjoy the conversation.



Power staff selfie: Holly Bauer, Heather Oelker, Kurt Fekete, and Jeff Oelker.



Holly Bauer enjoys her mulled cider at sunset on the beach.

## Letters to the Editor

*Continued from page 154*

event means—then, now, and always. Its comprehensive clarity should make us all feel grateful to those who crafted this important statement and encourage us to explore its many levels of meaning.

Admittedly, it can appear somewhat dense. So I would like to lift up another “faith statement” from our *Book of Worship* found in our ritual of confirmation and sacrament of adult baptism. It’s a bit longer, but offers a practical counterweight to the somewhat theologically heavy Adoramus. While the Adoramus tells us what’s going on beneath the surface, this faith statement speaks to how we should live together on that surface.

Our Faith is this:

The Lord God, the Savior Jesus Christ, Creator, Redeemer and Regenerator, is the supreme object of our worship and life. He brought us into being. He sets us free from our evils. For as we shun them as sins against him, and do good, we attain, by his power, the true humanity for which we were created.

Today he comes to us anew. In the spirit and truth of his Word he discloses himself to us in his Divine

Humanity as the only God of heaven and earth, seeking to unite us with himself and with all in whom he lives. This disclosure, with its enlightenment and renewal of life is his Second Coming among people.

The larger life this now makes possible consists in loving him and the good which comes from him in each other. The neighbor to be loved is not only individual people, but people in their group relations. The larger the group, the greater our obligation to it. Our community, our country, the brotherhood of nations are larger neighbors; also our church and all other churches constituting the Lord’s kingdom on earth. So again is the Lord’s kingdom in heaven; and our highest neighbor is the Lord himself.

The Holy City New Jerusalem, in the light of which we walk, is the Christian Church made new, so far as it approaches him in worship and life, as the visible God in whom is the invisible.

For those who sometimes wonder what this church is all about, I know of no better starting point from which to gain clarity than these two statements.

—Robert McCluskey  
*San Pedro, California*

(Rev. McCluskey leads religious rites at the Wayfarers Chapel, in California.)

## Philadelphia Bible Christians

*Continued from page 157*

the Progressive Movement, in 1910, and the church spearheaded a variety of positive social initiatives under his leadership. In 1926, Rev. Leonard I. Tafel, M.D., took over the pastorate of the Frankford Society, navigating the challenges of the Great Depression, World War II, and the postwar drain of the city’s population to the suburbs. Outreach to veterans was among the most significant community programs of the congregation at that time. Rev. Tafel, along with members having generations-long connections to Frankford, helped preserve the society’s unique history. The society’s music director for the first sixty years of the twentieth century was prolific composer Edna Randolph Worrell, whose grandfather Isaac, a descendent of colonial Quakers, was the society’s first minister. The Frankford New Jerusalem Society formally dissolved in June, 1971, just two months after Rev. Tafel’s death. The congregation sold the building to American Legion Police Post 937 in 1977, with the assets going to General Convention. A long history had concluded, but the positive impact of the 150-year-old “Little Church Around the Corner” would resonate in Frankford for years to come. ☩

Gail R. McCormick, a retired archivist and librarian, is writing a history of the New Jerusalem Society of Frankford, ca. 1819–1971. (Both Kensington and Frankford were consolidated into the City of Philadelphia in 1854.) Her maternal grandmother, Marian Lever Smith (1903–1971), a fourth-generation member of the church, was a descendant of both Thomas Sidebotham and Bible Christian William Lever, Sr., Rev. John W. Lever’s uncle.

## Changes at Central Office

On December 6, we bade farewell to our wonderful Central Office operations and website manager, Samantha Johanson. She left to take on a new challenge. She has met many Swedenborgians, at the office, at annual conventions, and on the phone. We thank her for her tireless and excellent work and wish her well.

Angela Piereski has stepped up to function as interim administrator while the Executive Committee

conducts a search for a permanent operations manager. Angela is the musical director and keyboardist for Swedenborg Chapel in Cambridge, the site of the Swedenborgian Church Central Office. She is both a performer and a teacher of piano and organ, and with her husband, Kevin, competes in ballroom dance on the amateur level. She is a well-organized and personable presence in the office and on the phone, and we thank her for helping us in this time of need.

Gina Peracchi, our accounting manager is pitching in, as always, to help with administrative tasks and handling communications. ☩

# Position Statement Regarding the Interface of Swedenborgian Faith and Politics

## From The Social Justice Committee

The Swedenborgian Church takes note of the continuing political upheavals and divisions and seeks to offer a word of clarity and support to its members and the larger society. We too are deeply concerned by the tone, direction, and likely impact of the policies coming from the government of the United States. We note that certain policies have an impact on nations throughout the world.

We appreciate the limits placed upon religion in the United States by the First Amendment, as well as the freedom it grants to the church to influence society at large. And as students of history, we understand the responsibility imposed by that freedom, the temptation to remain silent, and our duty to respond to all those who cry out for justice. By rising above the fray of the partisan politics of personalities and parties, we are free to address issues of social justice (the undeniable intersection of politics and religion) and empowered to assert our prophetic role in times of national crisis and uncertainty.

We call on the elected government representatives of the United States of America to be accountable to the spirit of freedom and democracy in general, and to the Constitution and existing law in particular.

We call on our members to exercise the spirit of charitable discernment as they consider and share their different understandings of these events.

In light of our own biases, prejudices, and limited sight, we acknowledge our need to listen to those on all sides of any issue, and always with an ear

for the Spirit, which guides us to listen with patience, compassion, and an open curiosity to understand each other. At the same time, we acknowledge that even as our understanding is partial, our commitment to the Prince of Peace is absolute.

We recognize this *Kairos* moment as an important opportunity for our churches to explore issues of social justice from a theological perspective; to bring the Word and our Church's teachings to bear on the very real and pressing issues that confront us.

Confident that God moves in and through history, let us be quick to turn to that force for good which transcends all of our individual notions of good and evil. Let us renew our commitment to the divine will, the Lord's unceasing efforts to bring all of creation

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### Letter from the President

*Continued from page 155*

acknowledge that God is born anew in our hearts over and over. This story is our story. Jesus is born in the lowliest place within us. We are shepherds when we search for Jesus with our hearts. We are the Wise Men when we search for Jesus with our minds. Angels are awakening, preparing us and guiding us.

*So my hope and prayer is that during Advent this year, you will pause to think how your understanding of Jesus has changed this year and since you were a child. May you wake up and feel different, because you feel the presence of God even closer after opening your heart to let Jesus be born anew in your heart.*

—Rev. Jane Siebert

to wholeness, salvation, and peace.

May our prayers for justice and peace be a first response, and not a last resort.

“This is his commandment, that we love one another as he has loved us.” ☩

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### Annual Appeal

*Continued from page 164*

Christ-filled service in the messy soil of everyday living, where justice and liturgy unite and the sacred is everywhere. They are evolving with the promise of new land to be planted. They feel richly blessed for 2019 and look forward to the new year. Recently, they celebrated *Dia de los Muertos* (Day of the Dead) and welcomed over 2,200 visitors. Worship service has grown with over twenty in worship and up to ten children, feeding up to fifty each Sunday. (<https://www.gardenchurchsp.org/>)

**Mission Church—The Korean New Church of New York** has been operating for nearly twenty years. Their mission is church and outreach,—to build an active Korean-American Swedenborgian church and meet people's spiritual and social needs through church programs, offering opportunities to learn and practice the love and truth of the Lord guided by Swedenborg's teachings. Recently they added the Taekwondo Leadership Program and Tai-Chi meditation practices.

Please consider supporting these and other Swedenborgian ministries. Send checks to Swedenborgian Church, 50 Quincy St., Cambridge, MA 02138 or call Central Office at 617.969.4240 for other options. We look forward to the future with your gift included!

### About the Swedenborgian Church

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

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

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

## Supporting our Vibrant Church: The Annual Appeal

**M**any encouraging and energizing initiatives are happening in our ministries! We thank our generous donors for making this outreach possible through support of our Annual Appeal. We hope you will consider donating this year so that these efforts can continue.

**The Swedenborgian Church Youth League (SCYL)** continues to grow as it strives to bring Swedenborgian theology to teens and preteens looking for answers to tough life questions by providing a safe space for them to explore their faith and identity. One exciting example of SCYL's ministry happened when fourteen SCYL teenagers traveled to England this past summer to join teens from England at the International Summer Camp at Purley Chase.

**The Swedenborg Online Community** has been revamped and expanded under the direction of Rev. Cory Bradford-Watts. Many isolated Swedenborgians as well as others searching for community are connecting with [SwedenborgianCommunity.org](https://SwedenborgianCommunity.org). The focus is to uplift and reach everyone no matter their location or beliefs. Multiple online media are offered. We have 2900+ followers on Instagram, 450+

YouTube subscribers (with over 1000 views per video), and 700+ Facebook followers, in addition to email distribution and podcasts.

**Mission Church: New Church of the Southwest Desert** has just completed their tenth year and continues to evolve and grow. Their focus is to put Swedenborgian theology to use by demonstrating God's love through community outreach. They recently moved to a storefront on the main street of Silver City, New Mexico. The sanctuary door opens onto a busy farmers market and plaza. The front of the building is the Oasis Coffee & Tea House, used for Sunday fellowship and daily interfaith gatherings like creative incubation, poetry readings, music, plays, and other community activities. They offer shelter to women in freezing weather and offer special needs and elderly people rides through their GoFer program. (<https://tinyurl.com/NCSWD>)

**Mission Church—The Garden Church of San Pedro** is an outdoor sanctuary and urban farm dedicated to feeding the community in mind, body, and spirit. They have just passed the five-year mark! The church offers a

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