



## *E Pluribus Unum*: Pluralism, not Sameness

BY DAVID J. FEKETE

*Rev. Dr. David Fekete attended the annual convention of the North American Interfaith Network in August, 2017. In the November 2017 Messenger, Rev. Fekete wrote about the proceedings and events there and his participation in them. At the conference, he gave the following address.*

I got to thinking about the theme for this year's NAIN [North American Interfaith Network] conference, "Harmony, the Journey to One Heart." I thought about just what harmony meant. And especially, I thought about what kind of "one" one heart means. I reflected on these issues in the current political climate in the United States today. So it seemed to me that I might discuss the journey to one heart in the light of the motto of the US, "*E Pluribus Unum*"—out of many, one. The kind of "one" I will be talking about is not a one made up of sameness. Rather it is a one made up of variety and difference—pluralism, not sameness. I would like to introduce my approach to the journey to one heart with some citations from my own faith tradition, the Swedenborgian Church:

"A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and yet united" (Emanuel Swedenborg,

*Divine Providence* §4).

"In the Christian world, doctrines are what distinguish the churches; and from them people call themselves Roman Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists, or the Reformed and the Evangelical, and by other names also. It is from doctrine alone that they are so called; which would not be at all, if they would make love of the Lord and charity toward the neighbor the princi-

**But why try to find things we can all agree on? Isn't it better to recognize our differences, and to affirm one another in our differences?**

pal things of faith. The doctrines would then be only varieties of opinion respecting the mysteries of faith, which truly Christian people would leave to everyone according to his [or her] conscience, and would say in their heart that one is truly a Christian when he [or she] lives as a Christian, or as the Lord teaches. Thus from all the differing churches there would become one Church; and all the dissensions which exist from doctrine alone would vanish; yea, the hatreds against one another would be dissipated in a moment,

and the Lord's kingdom would come upon the earth" (*Heavenly Secrets* §1799).

"It is plain that the church of the Lord is not here, nor there, but that it is everywhere, both within those kingdoms where the [Christian] church is, and out of them, where people live according to the precepts of love" (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heavenly Secrets* §8152).

"God flows into every human being with all God's divine love, all God's divine wisdom, and all God's divine life" (Emanuel Swedenborg, *True Christianity* §364).

Often, in interfaith organizations, we look for things we all share in common and, indeed, sometimes even try to force harmony. But why try to find things we can all agree on? Isn't it better to recognize our differences, and to affirm one another in our differences? Isn't it better than forcing commonalities we may not share? It is one thing to say that there are differences among different religions. It is another to tolerate differences. I want to affirm differences. As Emanuel Swedenborg says, "A form makes a unity more perfectly as its constituents are distinguishably different, and

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**For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.**

**The Editor's Desk**

**Christmas— Loving the Neighbor**

On this twenty-fifth day of December, we celebrate the birth of Jesus with prayer, song, contemplation, and gift giving. We recall Christmases past, especially those when we were very young, when we were still capable of awe and wonder. Sometimes we get distracted by all of the baggage that comes with modern Christmases: we focus too much on shopping, going to parties, decorating, and creating a picture-perfect experience. But it is often the simpler experiences, the simpler gifts that stay with us, that remind us of the spirit of Christmas.

Rev. Ron and Val Brugler lost their son, Toby, this past May (June 2017 *Messenger*). I received a note from Ron recently wherein he shared a brief Christmas story that I want to share with *Messenger* readers.

We are going to see Jessie for ten days. [Jessie is Ron and Val's



Ron "Santa" Brugler

daughter, who lives, as Toby did, in New York City.] It will be wonderful to be together. Last year, Toby and I wore Santa hats, plus I have a red and white coat. he was pushing me in my wheelchair thru a park when someone yelled for us to stop. Toby

turned me around, and there were maybe twenty-five kids with parents in a line. For the next hour I listened to their wishes. One girl wanted a puppy. I glanced at the father and he gave me a thumbs up.

I bought a new Santa hat, and after Toby died I couldn't bring myself to open it. I did so last week. Toby loved us wearing those hats. I owe him that.

What a simple and heartwarming story: love in action; being of use in the world; a reminder that it is the children who lead us, who will inherit the earth from us, who we must listen too and care for and cherish.

**Doing Our Part**

And since it is the season of giving, we are reminded with helpful mailings and emails that many worthy charities and institutions depend on our gifts to accomplish their missions. Please read the appeal letter from the president of the Swedenborgian Church, Rev. Jane Siebert, on [page 152](#) and the appeal letter from the faculty of the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS) on [page](#)

158. Religious organizations are not eligible for most foundation grants. The denomination depends on a sustainable income from its invested funds and donations to pay for its operations and services. The only other income for CSS is from tuition and donations. Tuition does not begin to pay for all that the school does, so donations are critical to fund operations.

The funds that the denomination and the school hold were donated by generous supporters over the last 150 years. Let's pitch in, considering all the causes we want to donate to, and do our part to help sustain our missions

—Herb Ziegler

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**Church Calendar**

- **May 12, 2018:** General Council Spring Teleconference
- **June 28–July 5, 2018:** Swedenborgian Church Annual Convention, San Jose, CA.

the Messenger

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## Letter from the President



### *2017–18—The Year of the New Jerusalem: The emergence of a new world*

Dear Friends,

November was a hard month. First, we admitted my 98-year-old mother into a nursing home. Something my sister, brother, and I hoped we would never have to do. Many of you have been in this place and know how hard it is. She fell at home. She didn't break anything, but her back was too sore for her to help with getting up out of her chair and ambulating like she needed to for the home health care aides and my sister to continue to care for her in her home. There is always a precipitating factor.

No matter how good the care is, it just isn't home. And while she is trying very hard not to complain and we are trying very hard to frequently visit, we worry. No one can care for your loved one like you would like them to, as they have so many others like her that need their time and care. So it's hard . . . hard to visit . . . hard to leave her there . . . and hard not to feel like we have failed. After all, she cared for us when we needed it as children. No matter how many times we tell ourselves, "it is the only option" and "it is the best thing for her safety," feelings win out over reality, and we feel sad.

So it with a heavy heart that I am entering this Advent season.

And then, dear Jean Graber died. No one expected this, and right before the holidays. I'm sure she was already reading and looking for ideas for the Pretty Prairie Christmas play. This was her gift to all of us, especially the kids: a Christmas play written with each of the children in mind who would be present on Christmas Eve. She wrote special parts for each person that wanted to be in

the play, children and adults, based on their growing ability to "perform." She was a major player in keeping the church going as she rounded up people to teach adults' and kids' Sunday school each week. She and Curtis cared for one another in their farm home. Her family loved and doted on her. She was active in many groups that depended on her. We miss her greatly.

And so Christmas is upon us, and we need to find the cheer. It is easy to find the cheer when things are going well; when we are healthy and families are together, life is good. I have led many Blue Christmas worship services. This year I am facing the blues at Christmas.

As I step back this season, I am reminded that Christmas is not just the warm, fuzzy feelings it brings that we call Christmas cheer. It is much more than that, and we do not have to be on top of all that is going on in our lives to be a part of Christmas. It is OK to be sad at Christmas. God is very near to us when we are sad. We don't always feel it, but God is holding us up much of the time and picking us up when we fall.

The world was in a terrible state when God chose to be born as a baby. God took on this lowly state so we could relate to a personal God and have the example of living a life of love. The Lord chose to be born in a filthy manger. We sanitize it with white swaddling clothes and clean hay, but mangers are messy and birth is messy and life is sometimes messy. God knows this all too well. Jesus' life was not easy. It was hard, just like I and many others are feeling this season.

In the midst of that first difficult "Christmas," a child was born, a precious beautiful baby in the middle of the darkness. And that is what we can hold onto. The birth of hope that by holding onto our trust in God, things will get better. The birth of light that shines into our dark world. The birth of love that can overpower the negativity and dis-sension in our country today.

So maybe this season, we can let ourselves be sad, be real. We don't need to feel guilty for not being happy at Christmas. We just need to remember

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# The Everett K. Bray Visiting Lecturer Program at Fryeburg New Church Assembly

BY NANCY LITTLE & TREVOR

The Everett K. Bray (EKB) visiting lecture program was established in 2015 to honor Rev. Everett K. Bray, one of the core lecturers at the Fryeburg New Church Assembly (FNCA) from the 1930s to the 1960s. Rev. Bray was pastor of the Cambridge Church (Massachusetts) and on the faculty of the Swedenborg School of Religion from the 1940s to the 1960s. Rev. Bray's grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren still actively attend the FNCA every summer. The Bray Cabin at the Assembly was named for his wife, Leonora "Orah" Hutchins Bray, who passed on to the spiritual world at camp during the 1955 session. Previous EKB lecturers have been Curtis Childs, host of "Off the Left Eye" YouTube channel and digital media producer at the Swedenborg Foundation and Ian Thompson, Swedenborgian scholar and nuclear physicist.

This year we were thrilled to have Dr. Devin Zuber as the EKB lecturer. Dr. Zuber is on the faculty at our theological school, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies (CSS), which is part of the Graduate Theological Union (GTU) in Berkeley, California. At the GTU and CSS, Dr. Zuber teaches courses in Art and Religion, New Religious Movements, and Religion & Literature.



Rev. Everett K. Bray



Dr. Devin Zuber

As our EKB Lecturer, he gave three presentations, two during the regular morning lecture series, and one as a special evening program. The first lecture was titled, "Caring for Creation: Swedenborgian Ecology"; the second was titled, "A Bird's Life: Sarah Orne Jewett, George Inness, and the Art of (Swedenborgian) Ornithological Conservation—The Fifth Day of Creation." The evening program, was titled "Swedenborg at the Cinema: Ingmar Bergman and Swedenborgian Spirituality."

In "Caring for Creation: Swedenborgian Ecology," Dr. Zuber began by reading from his forthcoming book, *A Language of Things: Swedenborg and the American Environmental Imagination*, which explores the dynamics between religious ideology and environmental aesthetics in nineteenth- and early twentieth-century American nature writing. Dr. Zuber challenged us to think about ways that we can "green" Swedenborg. He talked about the work of John Chapman, a.k.a. Johnny Appleseed, as an early environmentalist. Dr. Zuber proposed that Chapman, in planting apple trees in the American frontier, was "an important early nineteenth-century precursor to modern ecological sustainability."

Dr. Zuber asked us to think about how to read Genesis in light of environmental disaster and climate change and gave examples of the huge amounts of plastics swirling in the ocean and the sixth great mass



Sarah Orne Jewett

extinction going on right now, which is different from previous mass extinctions because it is caused by humans. He asked, "What could a post-apocalyptic theology do with the creation story through a Swedenborgian lens in light of the environment?"

He offered four suggestions:

1. When we contextualize Swedenborg, pay attention to the garden as a metaphor.
2. Pay more attention to influx.
3. Acknowledge that Swedenborg had some bad eighteenth-century science.
4. Read Swedenborg for wonderful ways in which the category of the Human is expanded in interesting ways.

Dr. Zuber, of course, had more extensive explanations about these, but we won't get into them here.

In his second lecture, "A Bird's Life: Sarah Orne Jewett, George Inness, and the Art of (Swedenborgian) Ornithological Conservation—The Fifth Day of Creation," Dr. Zuber discussed Maine writer Sarah Orne Jewett and New Jersey painter George Inness, both of whom had enormous interest in birds and a particularly Swedenborgian way of representation. Using these two people and their work, as well as John Muir, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Samson Reed, and others, as a springboard for viewing conservation from a Swedenborgian perspective, Dr. Zuber

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## FNCA Everett Bray Lecturer

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discussed how these early Americans used Nature as “sacred text.”

Because of the millinery industry’s heavy use of feathers in the extremely popular women’s hat of the time, some species of long-legged water birds were driven to the edge of extinction. It was chiefly through the actions against this trend by early conservationists, including the first Audubon Society group, that these species were preserved. Many of these people were readers of Swedenborg.

Dr. Zuber spoke about the effect reading Swedenborg had on Sarah Orne Jewett’s writing, particularly as it related to Nature. Her most famous story, “A White Heron,” is set in Maine and is a tale of opening environmental consciousness on the part of the heroine of the story. Dr. Zuber referred to Swedenborgian correspondence theory that is deeply imbedded in this and other of Jewett’s stories.

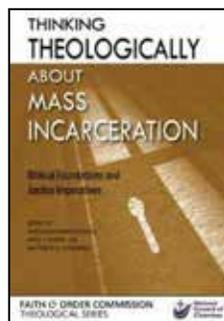
He also spoke briefly about George Inness’ conversion to the New Church and how he then began to paint accordingly in new and different ways. In the second half of his career, he spent a lot of time painting in and near what is now Everglades National Park at a time when the push to preserve this space began.

These and other lectures can be listened to in full on the FNCA website’s “Listen to the Lectures!” page, <http://tinyurl.com/FNCAlectrs>. They were also streamed live on Facebook and are available for viewing at <http://tinyurl.com/fbFNCAlec>.

Dr. Zuber’s evening program on “Swedenborg at the Cinema: Ingmar Bergman and Swedenborgian Spirituality” was a significantly less formal presentation with a fascinating introduction to Bergman’s deep interest in Swedenborg and its effects on his work, followed by a viewing of parts of his

## Thinking Theologically about Mass Incarceration

American prisons show a markedly disproportionate rate of incarceration for minority groups. “A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance; and a white boy a 1 in 17 chance” (*Thinking Theologically about Mass Incarceration*, p. 346). These are just some of the alarming facts about mass incarceration in the US brought out in a new book by the National Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission, *Thinking Theologically about Mass Incarceration: Biblical Foundations and Justice Imperatives*, Antonios Kireopoulos, Mitzi J. Budde,



and Matthew D. Lundberg, eds. (New York: Paulist Press, 2017).

Rev. Dr. David J. Fekete’s article, “An Introductory Prophetic Cry against Inequities in the American Mass Incarceration System,” is the concluding piece in this collection of twenty-two articles. The articles range from academic to pastoral in approach.

This is an issue that cries out for action. The book will inform, enlighten, and outrage readers. For those interested in this issue, for those unaware of these issues, and for those who want to take action, this book is a must. It can be ordered from [Amazon.com](http://Amazon.com) 🌐

films with appropriate comments inserted by Dr. Zuber here and there.

As for next year, the 2018 Everett K. Bray Visiting Lecturer will be Dr. Soni Werner, assistant professor emerita at Bryn Athyn College, where she guides students as they write their senior essays in business, psychology, or interdisciplinary studies. She is also an adjunct instructor at Elmira College, Corning Community College, and Alfred University. She holds a B.A. in Psychology and Art from Western Connecticut State University, and a M.S. and Ph.D. in Child Development from Iowa State University. Dr. Werner’s specialties include developmental psychology, organizational psychology, forensic psychology, and conflict management. She has recently authored several books, including *The Growth of the Female Mind*, *The Search for Mary Magdalene*, and *Altruism: Many Kinds of Kindness*. She will be leading the 2018 Opening Weekend Program as

well as lecturing during the first week of camp.

See you there! 🌐

Nancy Little is a librarian at American International College in Springfield, Massachusetts. She lives in bucolic Western Massachusetts with her husband, Trevor, and her tuxedo cat, Whitney. She currently is on the FNCA’s Buildings & Grounds, Outreach, and Facilities Rental Committees. She also serves our national denomination on the Board of Trustees for CSS and as the chair of the Library and Documents Committee.



Trevor is a full-time entertainer and has served on the Board and staff of the FNCA continuously since 1972, and is also the chair of the FNCA Outreach Committee, camp historian, and webmaster.



# A Dog Named Butters

BY CHRISTINE CAMPBELL

As the pastor and community director of Temenos (the Swedishborgian Church and retreat center near Philadelphia: <http://www.temenoscommunity.org/>), I sometimes become weary and worried. I wonder what are we offering, who are we serving, how can we offer more; are we offering the right things and how do we sustain ourselves in a time where funds are tight and the country is in the midst of struggle? On Sunday I was fortunate enough to have Spirit make it perfectly clear as to why we are here at Temenos and why Temenos is a Light in a difficult world.

I wish to share a heart-opening, very short story and video with you. We had an unusual visitor this Sunday. A dog named Butters and his loving mom, Kimberly. Kimberly had contacted me a few weeks ago and wanted to come visit on a Sunday. She was drawn by what she described as a “place of heart” and people who were like-minded.

At the retreat on Sunday, we had a short service of gratitude and then moved into a community barbecue with games, food, and time to just “be.” Kimberly told us she was coming and wanted to know if she could bring her very aged dog—Butters. Of course, I said “yes.” We often have people bring animals. She explained that Butters was in a stroller as he was mostly on dog “hospice.” She also said Butters was a therapy dog and healer in his own right.

The service ended, the games began, and lunch was served. Soon it was after 1:00 PM, and no Kimberly or message. I was a little concerned

but figured something had come up. As people were finishing up, I heard a car down in the Farm House parking lot. I had a feeling it was Kimberly. I went to the path that comes from the Farm House and sure enough, up came a woman pushing a stroller with a tiny dog in it. (She had gone to the wrong location.)



She was so glad to make it. It had been a bad night for Butters, but Kimberly felt she and he needed to be at Temenos. She was welcomed with

open arms; people bustled to get lunch for her and Butters.

Everyone was moved, and Butters received much love and attention. One little girl was entranced and wanted to take care of Butters. (She has a difficult life herself.) Kimberly graciously answered all her questions and let her help with Butters. Many people stayed and helped take care of Butters. Kimberly herself is an animal rescuer and extremely knowledgeable about dogs on hospice and related issues.

As we were sitting there with Butters, I received a frantic text from one of our yoga instructors saying she had to cancel class for a while. She said she needed time to be with her beloved dog who had just been diagnosed with advanced bladder cancer. She was frantic, and I told her to bring her dog by in the morning, and I would give him some Reiki. I also told her about Butters and Kimberly. She called me right away and asked if she could come right away. Her dog was in pain, and she could not get him to calm down.

She brought her two dogs over, and everyone helped calm her, her husband, and her dogs. Butters touched noses with “Raz,” and Raz seemed

to calm down. Kimberly told her all about what she could do to help her dog and how to go about it. Meanwhile some of us gave Reiki to Raz.

Soon everyone calmed down. Peace prevailed beyond our understanding.

Our Sunday service ended up going from 10:00 to 3:30. All were happy. Divine Synchronicity—Divine Providence.

Kimberly made a short video and posted to my facebook page.

Here is what she said.

Welcomed with open arms by the beautiful Rev. Christine Campbell & friends of Temenos Community BBQ. It was peaceful, beautiful & welcoming to all friends, especially the animals. What a wonderful day!

And the link to watch it is <http://tinyurl.com/y72gfhxe>.

This is why I and everyone here are committed to sustaining Temenos’s light in the world. . . . It is a retreat and refuge for all beings.

In the Peace that Passes All our Understanding, ☸

Christine Campbell is minister of the Temenos Church and Retreat Center in West Chester, Pennsylvania.

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## La Porte Sunflower Fair

The La Porte New Church held their annual rummage and bake sale in September. Many church members and friends worked countless hours before, during, and after the sale to help make them a success. Like last year, the Church was blessed to have beautiful weather.

The entire proceeds (\$1400) from this day’s sales were sent to UMCOR, United Methodist Committee on Relief, to help aid the victims of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma in Texas and Florida. ☸

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## Fall General Council-Cabinet Joint Meeting

The General Council (GC) and Cabinet of the Swedenborgian Church (General Convention) met at the Cenacle Center, in Chicago, November 10–11, 2017.

Present were Rev. Jane Siebert, president; Tom Neuenfeldt, vice-president; Karen Conger, recording secretary; Jennifer Lindsay, treasurer; council members Barb Halle, Rev. Betsy Coffman, Debbie Dolley, Carl Helm, Stan Conger, and Rev. Dick Tafel.

Cabinet members present were Karen Feil, Education Support Unit (EDSU); Sharon Williams, Ministries Support Unit (MINSU); Val Brugler, Information Support Unit (IMSU); Katie Pruiett, Communications Support Unit (COMSU); BJ Neuenfeldt, Augmentation Fund Committee (AFC); and Kurt Fekete, youth director. (Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay represented the Financial and Physical Resources Support Unit [FPRSU].)

The participants engaged in a process called Appreciative Inquiry to build relationships and teamwork for this important meeting. The process begins with emphasizing and appreciating what is working within the denomination rather than what isn't. The two groups (GC and Cabinet) formulated a Core Principal that they appreciate within Convention: providing an inclusive, loving, accepting environment that supports people on their individual spiritual journeys. The Appreciative Inquiry process opened visions for the future of Convention:

- Spend time, money, and energy on people and their spiritual journeys, not buildings.
- Hold regular retreats as social/spiritual outreach.
- Coordinate funding processes to improve accessibility to all and transparency.
- Resist staying tied to the past.

- Let go of or repurpose buildings.

The Finance Committee recommended financial priorities: the denomination's online presence and retreat ministry. New grant forms will be developed that will simplify the application process and require submission of the requesting body's dissolution clause.

The committee recommended restructuring the Building Fund by appointing the Treasurer to the Fund and requiring loans or modifications of loans be approved by GC. They further recommended creating a single application for Augmentation Fund, MINSU, and Lungerich Fund grants to coordinate funding and reduce duplicate grants. FPRSU would review and direct grant requests to the appropriate funding body.

The Digital Presence Group presented a working PDF of the new Convention website. The target launch date is January 29, 2018.

On Saturday morning, the group traveled to the Swedenborg Library, located in the Chicago Temple, also known as the First United Methodist Church of Chicago: a beautiful, historic skyscraper, where Karen Feil, the director of the Library, generously hosted.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay reported on the year-to-date financial statements, which are looking positive, although there are many expenses that come in at the end of the year.

President Jane Siebert reported that Wayfarers Chapel needs major repairs, including ministers' offices, which are no longer on stable ground, and the chapel itself, which needs major restorative work after almost seventy years since its completion. The Wayfarers Board of Directors is working as three teams: restoration, fund raising, and transition. These issues will necessitate

a capital campaign to restore Wayfarers Chapel for future generations. Rob Lawson has stepped down from the Board; Bette McDonnell, of the San Francisco Society, was appointed to the open seat.

Annual Convention 2018 will be held at San Jose University, in the San Francisco Bay area. Convention 2019 will be hosted by the Midwest Association (formerly the Illinois Association) at Valparaiso University, in Valparaiso, Indiana. Council and cabinet members donated to help fund the convention in San Jose, as costs on the West Coast are higher than most areas.

Treasurer Jennifer Lindsay explained that her process for developing a budget includes looking at previous years' cost centers and asking owners if there would be anything different this year. Jennifer advised that in the future she will be reporting on the financial statements for each support unit on a quarterly basis.

The Council approved the 2018 budget and voted to eliminate maintenance fees on agency funds held by the denomination. Agency funds are those held by Convention, with the income distributed to the designated church-related entities.

The work of the Structure Review Committee was thoroughly discussed, and changes were recommended that will require constitution and bylaw changes. They will be published in a later edition of the *Messenger* after the Amendment Committee reviews them.

This was a very successful and streamlined meeting that included three committees: Finance, Ministry and Outreach, and Structure Review and Bylaws. Everyone entered into the work of Convention governance with care and willingness to look for new ways to plan for the future of General Convention. ☪

### Appeal Letter from the President of the Swedenborgian Church

*May you feel the love of our Lord enter your heart in a new way this Advent. May you welcome the new year with assurance that our Lord is present in our lives and in our world.*

Dear Friends of Convention,

Last week as I was dining with friends of my daughter in Bloomington, Indiana, I was asked about our church. What does it stand for? What are our core beliefs? Are we inclusive? As I answered these questions, I realized again how proud I am of Our Church and how proud I am to be president of this denomination. I can honestly answer with assurance that we are inclusive. Our core beliefs are centered around a loving God. And we stand for living our faith. It is not about what we say we believe, it is about living what we believe.

Today I am asking you to give to General Convention. What we do is important to the world, and there is more we need to be doing than we can afford to do. I give a portion of my salary back to Convention each month, as I believe in the value of a strong central core that supports our churches, ministries, youth programs, outreach, and more. The General Council and Cabinet took up a special collection at our last meeting to support our annual denominational convention meeting this next year in California. Many, many volunteers give of their time and talent to invest in the ongoing work of Convention through serving on boards and committees, driving youth to retreats, and providing leadership and governance. We would appreciate your financial support as we move ahead together.

#### There are several new initiatives we would like to offer.

- Trained retreat leaders that would travel around the US and Canada and offer regional Swedenborgian retreats.
- More support for families to attend our yearly conventions, with a special program to attract children and youth.
- Completion of our new website to improve outreach and accessibility to our theology and ministries.

Please consider a financial gift to General Convention this year to express your support for the work that is being done. We are a unique denomination with special gifts that we need to share with this hurting and searching world. We thank you for your consideration in making a donation to the General Convention of the New Jerusalem in the U.S.A. (d/b/a The Swedenborgian Church), a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible in the United States.

There is more to be done.

—Thank you. Rev. Jane Siebert,  
President, The Swedenborgian Church of North America

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### *E Pluribus Unum*

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yet united" (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Divine Providence* §4). In interfaith relations, our "constituents" are indeed "distinguishably different." The constituents would be our various religions, and the way we believe and practice is "distinguishably different." But Swedenborg's important claim is that a form makes a unity more perfectly when the constituents are distinguishably different.

In this talk, I will be affirming differences, rather than commonalities. Moving beyond mere toleration, I will be celebrating and honoring differences as a best practice in interfaith relations. In celebrating one another's faiths, I affirm each individual's belief system and practice. You can't have interfaith without distinct faiths. Interfaith is more perfect when individuals feel free to bring their own distinguishably different religious practices and beliefs to the whole.

**Spiritually:** How often have I heard, "All religions say the same thing." "All religions are the same." "There are so many commonalities we share." "We believe that, too."

I think back to my days in divinity school. When I was in divinity school, we tried to come up with a prayer that everyone could participate in. In order to do so, particularities were eroded. For instance, Jesus' name was taken out of the prayer, in order to include non-Christians in the interfaith prayer. Given the goal of the prayer, this is understandable. But why make something with which we can all agree? Isn't it better to recognize our differences, and to affirm one another in our differences? True listening, in an I-Thou relationship, will hear and honor the other with all the differences between self and other, will not be actively waiting for something they can both agree

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### A Request

I am looking for Vol 5 of the Swedenborg Library series by B. F. Barrett. The books are about 4x6 inches,

reddish brown. If anyone can send me one, I will love you forever. Ron Bruggler, 5676 Broadview Rd., Apt 529, Parma, Ohio 44134. Thanks!

## ***E Pluribus Unum***

*Continued from page 152*

on. As I will show below, diversity in religion is a good thing. *E Pluribus Unum*—even in religion, out of many we can be one.

**Socially:** “Why don’t they adopt our ways?” “They all stay in their own communities.” “It is in their own best interests for minorities to adopt the ways of the majority race and culture.” I spent most of my life in my birth Country, the United States of America. When I was growing up, I was taught that the US is a “melting pot.” Differences will meld into a lukewarm kind of sameness. Words I heard were, “assimilation,” “enculturation,” “adjusting.”

I now live in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada. The catch-word in Canada is “pluralism.” The social ideal in Edmonton is affirmation of the different cultures that have immigrated to the city. We pride ourselves on being open, inclusive, and accepting of other cultures. So in Edmonton, the American motto, *E Pluribus Unum* still applies well—out of many, one.

### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

So how much do we share? Can we say that there is an overarching principal that we all hold in common? Can we say that there is one God, the same God we all believe in, with different names? I’m not so sure.

There was a philosopher of language by the name of Jean-Francois Lyotard whose discussion about meta-narratives seems germane to my talk today (*The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester University Press, 1984). A meta-narrative is an overarching narrative, or shared story, or world-view, or shared belief system. Lyotard asserts that today, society has fragmented so much that there is no shared world-view, or meta-narrative.

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## **Common Fund Continues to Show Strong Performance**

**T**he Common Fund (the Fund) is a pooled investment vehicle that allows groups affiliated with the General Convention to invest their funds into a diversified investment portfolio. Given its size, the Fund gives affiliated groups several advantages. It affords access to more investment opportunities and lower costs than are generally available to smaller investors, it provides lower costs from professional investment advisors and portfolio management, and it provides a generally-accepted (for non-profits) level of payout in quarterly installments, which simplifies budgeting for participants while balancing current expenditures with growth of investments. The Fund is meant to be a long-term investment vehicle and is not intended for short-term investing.

The Fund investments are well diversified, the present allocation being 43.2% in U.S. equity, 16.4% in international equity, 12.4% in global equity (allows U.S. and international equities), 19.7% in U.S. fixed income and 8.2% in real estate, with all categories falling within the investment policy limits approved by the Investment Committee. The Fund’s total value is affected by several factors each year, including investment returns, new contributions, and the quarterly payouts.

The Common Fund continues to provide strong performance, with an investment return of 12.5% (net of fees) resulting in a total value of \$44.8 million (the sum of the investment value of all twenty investing entities in the Fund for the year ending September 30, 2017. This performance ranks the Fund in the top half of a national database of institutional investment funds of all sizes. Longer-term results are also very strong as the Fund has

posted annualized net returns of 7.3% and 9.3% over the past three and seven years, respectively, as of September 30, 2017. The three- and seven-year returns rank in the top ten percent compared to a national database of endowment peers.

Given recent performance, the Investment Committee approved an 2.6% increase in the 2018 payout rate from its 2017 level. The Fund distributed approximately \$1.7 million to participants in the twelve months ending September 2017. Over the past five years, the Fund has generated an investment gain of \$17.7 million while distributing nearly \$8 million to participants. The investment appreciation in excess of this distribution is retained in the Fund so it can grow and support future generations.

The Common Fund Investment Committee, General Convention treasurer Jennifer Lindsay (California) serving as chair, Barb Boxwell (Michigan), Dan Dyer (Maine), Bob Perry (Massachusetts), Pete Toot (Ohio), and Herb Ziegler (Massachusetts), recently met with Michael Shone and Pat Wing, of Marquette Associates, to review the Common Fund Investment Performance Report for Third Quarter 2017. Also present were President Jane Siebert and General Convention accounting manager Gina Peracchi. ☪

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### **Letter from the President**

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that we are not in this alone. God is very, very near, and we need to call and look for signs of the birth of the baby this Christmas.

With love to all of you.

—Rev. Jane Siebert

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## *E Pluribus Unum*

*Continued from page 153*

In Lyotard's language, unifying meta-narratives have fragmented into "pragmatic valences specific to its kind" (xxiv). So we all know only a specific world-view, or narrative. We are so fragmented from one another, that Lyotard even says in some places that, "to speak is to fight" (10).

This understanding of fragmentation is true of nationalities, social structures, and interfaith gatherings.

I am claiming that we do not share much, as far as religions go, nor as far as our cultures go. And again, turning to Lyotard's system, we do violence

to our differences when we try to force commonalities that may not be there. Lyotard writes,

Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion, as Jürgen Habermas thinks? Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games (xxv).

What I take from this quote is that in our discussions with one another, we need not look for commonalities. Put a little stronger, we should not try to look for commonalities.

As in science, religious tenets tend to claim universality, or what Lyotard calls the "pretention to universality" (30). And they should. Religion is supposed to be ontological; it is supposed to explain the whole created order. Religions describe the way the universe is and how it came to be; what our place is in it; and other grand ideas that are true for everyone. Religion is supposed to describe God, and God is about as universal as you can get.

It's the same God—right? There's only one God. Well, I'm not so sure we can say even that. I'm not so sure we would want to say that. As an example,

my God is Jesus Christ. But in my understanding of Judaism, and, I think, Islam, there can be no image of God. And as a Human form, Jesus is an image of God for Christians. Further, the Greek Orthodox Church goes so far as to say that if God is incarnated in Jesus, and has a Human form, then we can paint pictures of Jesus. So we have the tradition of those beautiful Orthodox ikons. This could never be the case in Judaism or Islam. Don't we do violence to our unique valences, our particular belief systems, if we claim that

**I believe that dialogue needs to take place in what Martin Buber calls an I-Thou relationship, where the other is treasured in a loving relationship.**

my Jesus is the same God as the Muslim Allah?

I don't mean to suggest that we must be divided as a result of diversity.

What joins us is a willingness to enter into dialogue. In interfaith relations, I think that dialogue plays a central role. But not dialogue that seeks consensus. How will I learn about Islam, for instance, if I listen only for similarities between my religion and Islam? Won't both of our interests best be served if we honor one another in our differences, as we dialogue?

But for dialogue to happen, a safe space will be important. I believe that dialogue needs to take place in what Martin Buber calls an I-Thou relationship, where the other is treasured in a loving relationship. The willingness to engage the other, to enter into an I-Thou relationship with the other, to use Buber's term, may be a way to maintain constructive relationships in the failure of an overarching meta-narrative. I can honor and respect a Muslim prayer and a Muslim praying without myself becoming a Muslim.

### Theological Sources

#### The Tribal League Period

There are Biblical references

that affirm *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one. I think of the Tribal League Period in ancient Israel. There is that one line from Judges, "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). In the Tribal League Period, there was no central power, such as a king. There were tribal clans—each distinguishably different one from another—who were united by ancestry and by shared worship of Yahweh. In the Tribal League Period, the binding force socially was also the binding force theologically. That binding force was the laws of Yahweh, especially as we find them in the Covenant Code (Exodus 21–23:9).

The twelve tribal units were distinct one from another, yet united by their common adherence to the God Yahweh and Yahweh's Laws. But the distinctness of each tribal unit and, indeed, of each individual who "did what was right in their own eyes" was remembered throughout Israelite history. This loose confederation of tribes was considered by some to be a kind of golden age for Israelite governance politically, and for Israelite *theopraxis*. They didn't need a central organizing power like a king, didn't want a king. From the point of view of the elders in Israel, when kingship did arise, it was seen as a departure from the ideal society. In fact, it was even seen as a rejection of Yahweh himself as king over the tribes, "The LORD said to Samuel . . . they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them" (1 Samuel 8:7). When King David assumed the throne, he was careful to receive a blessing from the elders of all twelve tribes. In fact, he was anointed twice—once by the ten northern tribes (2 Samuel 4:3) and once by the southern tribes (2 Samuel 2:7). The memory of the pluralistic period of the twelve tribes remained even during the time of the kings. The ideal government for

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***E Pluribus Unum****Continued from page 154*

ancient Israel was the pluralism of the Tribal League period—not that of Israel’s great kings, not King David nor King Solomon.

**In the Epistles of Paul**

*E Pluribus Unum* is in the Christian Scriptures, too. We have a powerful image of it in Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians. In an extended metaphor, Paul uses the image of the human body to show diversity in unity. The human body is a unity. But the body is made up of distinguishably different parts. There are the foot and the hand, the ear and the eye. So, for Paul, we all have distinct, different gifts that we bring to the whole. Some are healers, some possess wisdom, some have strong faith, some can work miracles, some speak different languages, some translate. There are many gifts that the Spirit of Christ gives to individuals. But there is only one Spirit—that of Christ. There are many different gifts, but each gift holds an important place in the Body of Christ.

Paul wrote this letter to plead for church harmony. The threats of squabbling, factions, and dissensions were real in early Christianity. That is the other side of pluralism. For by affirming diversity, the threat of fragmentation and even fighting and war are real possibilities. But as I suggested above, an I-Thou relationship in which differences are celebrated, the other is honored and respected, can hold us together in unity despite our diversity. Or, as in Paul’s time, the unifying Spirit of Christ can hold together different expressions of Christianity.

**Swedenborg’s Idea of Heaven:  
The Greatest Human Form**

Swedenborg builds on Paul’s imagery of the body—the one body made up of diverse parts. For Swedenborg,

**Paul’s First Epistle to the Corinthians, 12:1–31**

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses. For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit. Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to

the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many members, yet one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” . . . If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance, forms of leadership, various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak in tongues? Do all interpret? But strive for the greater gifts.

heaven is arranged in “the Greatest Human Form.” Our individual human bodies take their form from the Greatest Human Form, or heaven. It is heaven, the Greatest Human Form, that holds our atoms and cells together and inspires our minds with truth and our hearts with love. For instance, angels who live as the heart are loving; angels who live as the eyes are brilliant, or wise; angels who discern spiritual qualities are as the nose; those who are as the ears are obedient; and so on with all the organs of the body.

So Paul’s metaphor of different parts in the body of Christ becomes a spiritual reality in Swedenborg’s vision of heaven. By means of symbolism, heavenly affections and world-views are given a place in the Greatest Human Form

*E Pluribus Unum* for Swedenborg is seen in the countless individual societies in heaven that correspond to parts of the human body. And for Swedenborg, the variety and diversity of heavenly affections and ideas

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## ***E Pluribus Unum***

*Continued from page 155*

make for a perfect whole. Pluralism of emotions and thoughts make for a better whole than sameness ever could—if it were even possible.

Since heaven in its entirety does reflect a single individual, and is in fact the Divine Spiritual Person in its greatest form and image, heaven is therefore differentiated into members and parts like a person, and these are given similar names. Angels know what member one community or another is in and say that this community is in the member or province of the head, that one in the member or province of the chest, that one in the member or province of the genitals, and so on (Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, §65).

Further still, heaven is where the Lord is recognized, trusted, and loved. The different ways he is worshiped . . . —do not cause harm but bring benefit, because they are a source of heaven’s perfection. . . . a perfect whole is formed from a variety of elements . . . when a whole does arise from a variety of elements, and the elements are in a perfected form in which each associates with the next in the series like a sympathetic friend, then it has a perfect quality. Heaven is, then, a single whole composed of a variety of elements arranged in the most perfect form; for of all forms, the form of heaven is the most perfect (*Heaven and Hell* §56).

### **Jain Parable and Theological Reflection**

Three blind men encountered an elephant for the first time. Each man felt only one part of the elephant. When they asked one another what the elephant was like, each had a different description. The man at the trunk said, “This creature is like a thick hose.” The man at a leg said, “This creature is like a tree trunk.” The one at the elephant’s

stomach said, “No, it is flat like a wall.”

All three men were right. The elephant trunk is like a hose; the leg is like a tree trunk; the stomach is like a wall. The only problem is that each man didn’t have the whole picture of the elephant.

It seems to me that this story captures the place we all are in our differing religions. We are all of us finite. Since we are all finite, our religious systems are finite. But God is infinite. No one of us has the whole infinite story about God.

And reflecting on the elephant story, our differing articulations of religion can all be right. In the religious sphere, we can indeed claim that our religion is right. And simultaneously, we can affirm that other religions are right, too.

No one of us has the whole elephant. And this pluralistic understanding of religions holds for the practice of religion as much as it does for belief systems. For instance, from what I have learned about Hinduism, ritual has

**Thus, interfaith works best when there are strong articulations of different faiths. It does not work as well when participants in interfaith profess a kind of hybrid faith made up of many faiths.**

a more prominent place in it than it does in my religion, as does the power of language. Regarding ritual, in Hinduism, worship can take the form of lighting a fire for Agni, or smearing clarified butter on a Shiva linga, or bringing sweets or flowers to a temple and receiving back other sweets. And regarding the place of sacred language, in some forms of Hinduism, passages or phrases or even a single word from the Vedas are chanted over and over as worship. This is because the universe was created by the very same poetic

meters that the Vedas were written in. So reciting phrases or words from the Vedas brings the very power that created all things into the worship experience. In my own Swedenborgian religion, understanding theology and expressing our understanding through healthy emotions, true thinking, and ethical behavior are primary modes of worship for Swedenborgians. So cognition, emotion, and service to our fellows are the main means of worship for Swedenborgians. We have little ritual and no real mantras. And these days, we don’t follow much of a religious calendar, which does play a significant role in religions such as Judaism. Some of the most significant aspects of Judaism are festivals, which are to be observed according to the sacred calendar. If I am not mistaken, even readings from the Hebrew Scriptures follow the sacred calendar. As a Protestant, I think that belief plays a vital role in religion. But for other religions, ritual, chants, and the sacred calendar may matter more than belief—or at least as much. We may indeed have different beliefs, but belief itself may not play as vital a role in some religions than it does for others.

This leads up to the point I am making about perfection consisting in variety. Since no one of us feels the whole elephant, we have a better picture of the whole elephant when we have multiple perspectives. The greater the diversity we have among different faith traditions, the greater vision of the whole elephant we will know.

Thus, interfaith works best when there are strong articulations of different faiths. It does not work as well when participants in interfaith profess a kind of hybrid faith made up of many faiths. I am not sort of Buddhist, sort of Hindu, sort of Muslim, sort of Jewish, sort of Swedenborgian. Over the years, I encountered all the different religions that I have encountered as a

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## ***E Pluribus Unum***

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Swedenborgian. I come to interfaith gatherings as a Swedenborgian. An open-minded Swedenborgian, certainly. A Swedenborgian who is a seeker, certainly. A Swedenborgian who is a life-long learner, certainly. But a Swedenborgian.

So, then, what do I do with other religions? What do *we* do with other religions? What are we doing here? Largely, I dialogue. I want to hear from believers and practitioners of other religions. I did not say, “I hear about other religions.” I want to hear the religions. And I want to hear the religions in their integrity. I do not listen to my Muslim fellows with an ear for doctrines that sound like Swedenborgian doctrines and then celebrate how much we have in common. I want to hear Islam as a Muslim experiences it. And I reflect on Islam as I hear it from a practicing Muslim. One initial reaction is to say, “Now I have heard another facet of the infinite God.” For that, I celebrate the religion and person of the religion that I have been hearing. Sometimes I want to think or practice in the ways I hear. Sometimes I remain in my Swedenborgian mindset and hear the other as a differing friend. And sometimes, I incorporate what I hear into my own religion. Then my own vision of the infinite grows a little greater. So my encounter with the religion of the other can be different and respectful; and it can also be different and mind-expanding.

My own understanding of religion has grown through my exposure to other religions. For instance, I deeply appreciate religious observance that emphasizes ritual, like what I have found in Hindu and Sikh services. I have been moved deeply by the iconography—the vivid colors and the imagery—that I experienced in a Ukrainian Catholic Church in Edmonton. My

own beliefs have expanded through exposure to different faith perspectives—the different doctrines and different emphases and, in fact, foreign concepts. My understanding of what religion can be has grown even when I haven’t incorporated the other into my own world-view.

But I am suspicious when I hear a person say that interfaith is their religion. I’ll say again, I’m not sort of Buddhist, sort of Hindu, sort of Muslim, sort of Jewish. There was a time when I thought I was. But as I look back, I had no living personal faith

**I think that we need to be evangelists. We need to spread our gospel—our good news—that people of different faith traditions, nationalities, and cultures actually benefit from diversity.**

during that time period. I think that Robyn Lebron, the co-presenter with me, will be exploring the ramifications of interfaith in her presentation, so I won’t say much more about it now.

### **Practical Applications**

Never, I think, has the world needed more the kind of approach to *E Pluribus Unum* that I have been talking about. The recent posture of the US president is narrow, uninformed, and xenophobic. And it would seem that the example he sets is spreading in US culture. It seems to me that religious hate crimes or hate language are now more prevalent than they had been in previous administrations. Even up in Canada. May I go so far as to suggest that they are disapproved of less vehemently than they had been in the past? However one feels about the current president, I can’t recall a president who has engendered such division and intolerance. Now, more than ever, we need mutual understanding and the

affirmation of difference. Now, more than ever, we need interfaith gatherings like NAIN, the Parliament of the World’s Religions, and local movements like Poway and the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action.

I think that we need to be evangelists. We need to spread our gospel—our good news—that people of different faith traditions, nationalities, and cultures actually benefit from diversity. That diversity perfects community; it doesn’t weaken our social cohesiveness nor water down our personal religious perspective.

I’ll conclude with a story from my life. I recall my upbringing in an all-white suburb of Detroit. I remember spending our Saturday afternoons mostly leaning against my neighbor Don Range’s car, telling jokes that didn’t even make us laugh. Growing up in this white suburb bored me to no end.

I can contrast that community with the vibrant cosmopolitan city of Edmonton, Canada, where I now live. When I first got there, I noticed different groups of people in a Starbuck’s speaking different languages—Chinese, Lebanese, African languages, and, of course, English. In Edmonton, I have taken classes in Tai Ch’i at Ji Hong Tai Ch’i Academy. I am undergoing acupuncture treatments by a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine. I enjoy eating Vietnamese food, Indian cuisine, perogies, pad tai, burritos, molcajete, lasagna, and hamburgers chez MacDonald’s, among many other options that Edmonton has to offer. We have ethnic festivals like Heritage Days in the summer, or City Centre festivals that honor a different nationality each weekend. City Hall itself celebrates a different faith tradition each month with a launch and display that remains up all month.

My musical interests are also

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## *E Pluribus Unum*

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ecumenical, too, you might say. I first heard Sikh sacred music at a temple to which the Edmonton Interfaith Centre was invited, as one of our bimonthly Interfaith Explorations. And I heard the same genre at a convenience store where a young Sikh was piping his sacred music through the store intercom. Soon after, I downloaded from iTunes some Sikh music, and a friend of mine from India gave me one of her Sikh CDs. Of course, now that I am going to the acupuncture clinic, I downloaded some traditional Chinese music. And from a jazz musician who befriended me in Detroit, I developed an affinity for Latin music, of which I have also downloaded a considerable amount. As good as they are, I wouldn't want a diet of only the Beatles, and certainly not "Yummy, yummy, yummy I got love in my tummy."

Much of my interfaith work has been in the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action. I have been a board member for about seven years, vice president for two, and president for another two. The Edmonton Interfaith Centre will be hosting NAIN 2018 in the wonderfully cosmopolitan city of Edmonton where I now happily reside. From the boring, homogeneous life I knew in the all-white suburb of Livonia, Michigan, I now live an exciting and fulfilling life in the multi-cultural city of Edmonton. And through the interfaith work I have participated in in Edmonton, I discovered NAIN. And it is a delight to be a member of NAIN and an honor to be here with all of you today. ☩

Rev. David J. Fekete, Ph.D., is minister of the Edmonton Church of the Holy City. He represents the Swedenborgian Church at the National Council of Churches.



## Appeal Letter from the Center for Swedenborgian Studies

Dear Members and Friends,

We are reaching out to you to help us keep building an enlivening future for Swedenborgian work in the world. Since arriving on the West Coast, in 2001, the Center for Swedenborgian Studies of the Graduate Theological Union (CSS) has produced forty-three graduates—twenty in Convention ministries, thirteen in entrepreneurial ministries, ten in chaplaincy settings, and two in another denomination. (Several serve in multiple settings.) To that we add fourteen current students and some likely prospective students as well! Many people want to serve in spiritual vocations and have found CSS to be their chosen setting for doing their formation work.

Also, we are working hard to be on the leading edge of Swedenborgian thought in culture and higher education. Devin was the anchor scholar planning and organizing the five-day "Swedenborg and the Arts" conference hosted by Bryn Athyn College in Pennsylvania, which featured thirty-five academics (including Rebecca and Jim) from around the world speaking on the myriad ways that Swedenborg's theology came to catalyze new directions in poetry, painting, architecture, philosophy, and fiction in various global contexts. A truly landmark event, the conference was a first-time collaboration between all the major academic institutions affiliated with Swedenborgianism, as well as the major publishing institutions devoted to disseminating Swedenborg's writings, such as the Swedenborg Foundation in West Chester and the London Swedenborg Society.

This January, Devin will be leading a special immersion course taking our Berkeley-based students (Cory, Rachel, Colin, and Jeffrey) to Sweden for a week of on-site learning about the life and times of Swedenborg in his Scandinavian context. Instead of writing traditional papers for the class, students will be live-blogging the visits to various sites in Sweden that were important for Swedenborg's development as both scientist and visionary seer, including the famous summerhouse in Stockholm, where he came to write much of his theology, and the great copper mine of Falu Grava, where he often served as an assessor. You can follow the course blog here: <https://swedenborgimmersion.blog/>.

Please help us realize the powerful potential of Swedenborgian thought and ministry for bringing meaning and purpose to others. Operating in the world-class environment of the GTU brings very real financial challenges, and we need your support more than ever.

Checks can be sent to CSS, 1798 Scenic Ave., Berkeley, CA 94709 or you can give directly online at <http://css.gtu.edu/stripe-payment-terminal/>

—The CSS faculty of Devin Zuber, Rebecca Esterson, and Jim Lawrence

## Swedenborgians in Japan

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in the on-line chat sessions. He is involved also in updating the Tokyo New Church website and is interested in developing a Japan-style online presence for the church there in the future.

As we were leaving to return to our lodging, a group of women were

gathering in the church for a self-help program, so it was nice to see the space being used by the community beyond the congregation. We return home with prayers and greetings for the North American Swedenborgian churches from our good friends in Tokyo. ☩

Pete Toot is a member of the Cincinnati New Church of Montgomery.

## Passages

### Deaths

**Jean Margaret Graber**, 71, passed away suddenly on November 19, 2017. She was born in the Meade, Kansas, area to Alfred Eugene “Gene” and Velma (McCollow) Harris. At the age of six, Jean contracted polio. She was hospitalized in Hutchinson and spent several weeks in an iron lung.

Although she faced life-long medical challenges and physical limitations as a result, Jean always said her parents expected the best from her, so she lived her life to the fullest. After graduating from Meade High School, she wanted to attend college. Her dad and a local mechanic specially equipped a car to enable her to drive like other college students. She attended the Institute of Logopedics and Wichita State University. Jean accepted her first teaching position at Kingman Elementary as a Title I Reading and Math Specialist.

In her first semester of teaching, another teacher introduced her to his cousin, Curtis Graber. They were married on July 25, 1969, and moved to his farm near Pretty Prairie.

For thirty-eight years, she drove each day from Pretty Prairie to Kingman. Following her retirement in 2005, Jean assisted in forming the Central Kansas Post-Polio Survivors Support Group. The group’s mission is to provide support, stay informed, emphasize the importance of vaccination, and to leave a legacy for coming generations—educating them about polio and related disabilities. She was featured in a recent article in the Wichita Eagle that can be found at <https://tinyurl.com/y9yabv63>.

Jean was active in the Pretty Prairie New Jerusalem Church as Sunday school superintendent and a member of the Women’s Study Group. For over twenty-five years she wrote and directed Christmas plays for the children of

the church. Jean is survived by her husband, Curtis; sister Sue Harris; children Debbie Adams and Ron Graber of rural Hutchinson; four grandchildren; and six great-grandchildren. She was preceded in death by: her parents; son, Alan Graber; and brother-in-law, Kenton Graber.

The funeral was held at the Pretty Prairie Middle School Auditorium, Rev. Jane Siebert officiating, on November 25, 2017.

**Jera Sue Lane French** died suddenly November 22, 2017, in Buhler, Kansas. She was born December 18 1962 in Hutchinson, Kansas to Elvin and Ione Lane. Jera’s mom passed away when she was eight years old, and she was then raised by her father Elvin and stepmother, Veneta Lane. After graduating from Buhler High School, Jera attended Kansas State University. She went on to Wichita State University to obtain her M.Ed. She taught at Buhler Grade School for thirty years. Jera met Steve French and his three small children in 1989, and they married February 2, 1990. In 1999, Jera gave birth to twins, Hunter and McKenzie. Jera is survived by her husband, Steve, five children; Matt, Josh, Tiffany, Hunter and McKenzie; her stepmother, Veneta Lane; as well as her brothers Mike and Gary and sisters, Tenley, Hannah, and Alison Lane-Olsen.

It was with sadness that I heard of the passing of **Rev. Doyle Adam Seward, Jr.** I remember Adam from the time we studied together at the Swedenborg School of Religion (SSR) in Newton, Massachusetts. Adam identified as Native American, and one of my most enduring memories of those years is the education I received from him on the native view of history, culture, and religion. After ordination in 1998, Adam briefly served the Pretty Prairie Society but had to resign due to failing health. I lost contact with Adam after that,

but I understand that he served in later years as a pet chaplain in Texarkana, Arkansas.

Adam is a kind and gentle soul with a wry sense of humor. I still have the mug his family gave as ordination presents. Under the Convention logo it reads, “Hold the traditions which ye have been taught.” Ho!

—*Rev. Jonathan Mitchell*

I remember being a faculty member at the Swedenborg School of Religion when Adam was a student. I had many conversations with Adam and Lynn, his wife. During their first Thanksgiving at SSR, I learned about Adam’s commitment to be in Plymouth on Thanksgiving to honor the “National Day of Mourning.” I learned a great deal from him about what the Pilgrims did to the Native Americans, and Thanksgiving has never been the same for me since.

I, too, lost track of Adam for a while after he left Pretty Prairie due to heart problems. I did hear that he and Lynn had divorced, and I also lost track of her. But then I got an email from Adam asking if we could be peer ears. He was a chaplain for pets and knew of my deep love of animals—and the many cats and dogs I’ve loved through the years.

His health was poor, and our peer ear contacts involved occasional emails. I loved hearing about his work with animals. I was pleased one day to hear from Lynn, but sad that she was dying. I was so honored when she came to see me on her trip around the country saying goodbye to friends.

Adam’s emails became less frequent, and then they stopped. And then I learned he had passed on.

I’m happy for Adam—and for Lynn—knowing they are healthy and whole in the next world. I am certain that the pet population of heaven is very happy to have such a fine chaplain arriving to offer them his services.

—*Rev. Wilma Wake*

### 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.

## Japan New Church Visit

BY PETE TOOT

During an extended trip to Japan this past month, Gloria and I and Linda and Rev. Dick Tafel got the opportunity to visit the Tokyo New Church in the Setagaya area of suburban Tokyo. The photo at right shows our "delegation" and our hosts in their sanctuary. Mutoko-san (Muko) is the most senior member of the congregation—she attended Urbana College and knew Corrine and Rev. Dick Tafel Sr. and many other people whose names were familiar. Hiroyuki-san (Yuki) is assisting Kuniyeda-shisai (Rev. Kinichi) and considering entering the ministry.

Our hosts provided a tour of the church, and served tea and snacks in the church while we made introductions and shared our histories with the church. We had great conversations reminiscing about past connections and exchanging stories and ideas.

Afterwards we were treated to lunch at a nearby restaurant and given a tour of the grounds of one of the major Buddhist temples in the region, which was close by in the neighborhood. The fall leaves were close to their peak so we enjoyed the walk



L to R: Mutoko-san (Muko) Linda and Rev. Dick Tafel, Hiroyuki-san (Yuki), Rev. Kinichi, and Gloria and Pete Toot.

and the great colors in the maple trees.

We had a chance to discuss the nature of Japanese people's involvement in Japan's predominant religions, Shinto, Buddhist, and Christian, and the unique difficulties faced by the Tokyo Church in recruiting members from the community. While they were comforted that they were not alone and that many of our churches over here also face difficulties in growing membership, we may not have been able to suggest anything that would actually ease their situation. Yuki-san and I had a discussion about the Swedenborg Foundation's *Off-The-Left-Eye* program, since he is a fan and participates

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